

(Jean Telfer)

MORLEY INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL

UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

If at any time you should be motoring from Banff to Calgary, Alberta, about half way on your journey your attention will be attracted by a group of light gray buildings with red roofs, clustered along the banks of the Bow River, which lies to your right. Over one of these buildings flies the Union Jack. You will be looking down on the School, Mounted Police Barracks, Hospital, Church and Agency buildings of the Morley Reserve, home of the Stoney Indians.

Roughly, the Stoney Indian Reserve extends from the boundaries of the Rocky Mountain National Park to the Ghost River, a strip of land about eight miles wide and comprising some 100,000 acres. About seven hundred Indians live on this reserve, and their homes lie hidden away in the hills on either side of the river.

The Reserve is beautifully situated in the Foothills, with its panorama of mountain, lake and river, but it has one drawback. The land is so stony - hence the name Stoney Indians - that it is unsuitable for farming, so the Indians must rely on hunting and cattle raising for their livelihood.

The Stoneys are a part of the Sioux Nation. They speak their own Stoney dialect but understand Cree. They pride themselves on being pure blooded Indians - only one family of half breeds being on the reserve. They are divided into three bands - Wesley, Bearspaw, and Chiniki. Each band has its Chief and two Councillors. The Indians elect their own Chiefs, subject to the approval of the Indian

Department at Ottawa. These Chiefs hold office until they die, unless removed for any just reason.

Their homes are cabins scattered here and there on the Reserve. A group of these forms a Village - Bearspaw Village, Chiniki Village. During the summer they live in teepees.

In the fall they leave on their hunting trips returning at Christmas. They bring back venison for their winter food, and from the skins the women make moccasins, gloves, belts and bags, decorated with gay beadwork. This is their chief handicraft. The men also cut and sell wood.

The men wear dress as the white man, but many of them still wear their hair in two braids. The women wear gay shawls and blankets, print dresses and silk handkerchiefs over their heads.

The Stoneys get treaty money once a year - \$5.00 per person. A Chief I believe gets \$25.00 and a Councillor \$15.00. They also get payments from the Calgary Power Company for water rights on the Bow River. The old and sick get rations of flour, meat, etc. from the Indian Department. Treaty Day is a great day for young and old. They crowd into the store and have an orgy of buying.

The high lights of their rather drab life - for they are very poor - are Indian Days at Banff and the Calgary Stampede. For these events they don their ceremonial costumes of deerskin, gaily decorated with beads and eagle plumes. During the winter they have a Singing Festival, when the different bands pick choirs and compete in the singing of hymns and their tribal songs.

The Residential School is operated by the United Church of Canada. Here some hundred children are fed, clothed and housed. The Dominion Government pays a grant towards the education of the children and provides a teacher. There is a well equipped hospital on the reserve and the children get dental and medical attention.

When the children enter the school at the age of six⁶ they become wards of the Government until they graduate from the school at the age of sixteen.

~~I shall now show you a little of their handicraft, which is principally beadwork.~~

Like all primitive people, the Stonies are very quick to notice physical peculiarities and differences. They had the Staff all nicknamed. The teacher of the Senior room - a young man - was known as Bow-legged for obvious reasons. The farm manager, who moved about very quickly, was called Woger, or Grasshopper, and my Indian name meant "the wee woman". The Principal, who was over six feet, was known as "the Big Boss".

If you had a Stoney Indian class you would find your pupils having such names as "Stanley Rolling in the Mud"; "Johnny Powderface", "Georgie Two Young Men"; "Peter Bearspaw", etc.

This is just a brief sketch of life on the Morley Indian Reserve, Alberta.