

# St. Michael's Residential School: A Lament and Legacy



## St. Michael's Residential School: Lament and Legacy

by Shirley Abbott

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting: Enabled

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For over a century, the St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, British Columbia, was a symbol of the systemic oppression and cultural genocide inflicted upon Indigenous children in Canada. Established in 1890, the school was part of a network of residential schools across the country that aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into Western society, often at the expense of their own identities and cultures.

The legacy of St. Michael's Residential School is a painful reminder of the dark period in Canadian history. The school's closure in 1975 marked a watershed moment in the fight for Indigenous rights, but the scars it left behind continue to resonate today.

## **A History of Assimilation**

The residential school system in Canada was born out of a colonial mindset that sought to "civilize" and "Christianize" Indigenous peoples. Children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and placed in these schools, where they were subjected to harsh punishments and their own culture and languages were suppressed.

St. Michael's Residential School was no exception. Students were forced to speak English, forbidden to practice their spiritual traditions, and subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. The aim was to break their spirits and reshape them in the image of the dominant society.

## **The Survivors' Voices**

The horrors experienced at St. Michael's Residential School have been documented by countless survivors over the years. They tell stories of loneliness, hunger, and abuse that have left lasting trauma.

One survivor, Emily Carr, recalls being beaten for speaking her native language. "I was so scared," she says. "I thought I was going to die."

Another survivor, Arthur Manuel, speaks of the cultural genocide that occurred at the school. "They tried to take away our language, our culture, our identity," he says. "But we survived."

### **The Legacy of St. Michael's**

The legacy of St. Michael's Residential School is complex and multifaceted. It is a reminder of the tragic history of Indigenous oppression in Canada, but it is also a testament to the resilience and strength of the survivors.

In recent years, there has been a growing movement for reconciliation and healing between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2008, has played a vital role in documenting the experiences of residential school survivors and raising awareness of the lasting impacts of the system.

The closure of St. Michael's Residential School in 1975 was a major step forward, but there is still more work to be done to address the injustices of the past and build a more just and equitable future for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

As we reflect on the history of St. Michael's Residential School, it is important to remember that the experiences of the survivors are not just a

matter of historical record. They are a living legacy that continues to shape Indigenous lives today.

We must continue to work towards reconciliation and healing, and ensure that the horrors of the past are never forgotten. Only then can we truly move forward and build a future based on respect, understanding, and justice.

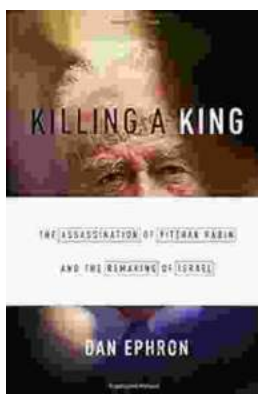


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