

BLM 5 – Historical Voices on Indian Residential Schools – Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce

The following quotations are from Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, who was the Chief Medical Inspector for the Federal Government around the turn of the 20th century. He wrote the first Public Health Code for the province of Ontario. One of Dr. Bryce's roles was inspecting the health conditions at Indian Residential Schools. He visited 35 residential schools and found that the schools were overcrowded and poorly ventilated, conditions known at the time to facilitate the spread of tuberculosis and other diseases among students. In 1907, Dr. Bryce wrote his "Report on the Indian Schools of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories" which is commonly known as "The Bryce Report."

It suffices for us to know... that of a total of 1,537 pupils reported upon, nearly 25 per cent are dead, of one school with an absolutely accurate statement, 69 per cent of ex-pupils are dead, and that everywhere the almost invariable cause of death given is tuberculosis.

It is apparent that...[it is] the old-fashioned buildings, their very varied and imperfect methods of heating, and an almost complete lack of knowledge of the meaning of ventilation and of methods for accomplishing it in the different schools, that are responsible for this most serious condition which has been demonstrated and which demands for immediate remedy.

We have created a situation so dangerous to health that I was often surprised that the results were not even worse than they have been shown statistically to be.

The Bryce Report 1907

[In the schools, a] trail of disease and death has gone almost unchecked by any serious efforts on the part of the Department of Indian Affairs.

"The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada" 1922

For years, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce urged the government and the public to pay attention to this pressing issue. However, Dr. Bryce's recommendations for improvements to residential schools came into direct conflict with Duncan Campbell Scott's work to reduce the spending of the Department of Indian Affairs. In 1913, Duncan Campbell Scott suspended the funding for Bryce's research on child deaths in residential schools and blocked Dr. Bryce's presentations of his research findings at academic conferences. The federal government forced Dr. Bryce out of public service and into retirement in 1921. In 1922, he published his book, *The Story of a National Crime: An Appeal for Justice to the Indians of Canada*. This book can be viewed in its entirety at archive.org/details/storyofnationalc00brycuoft.