

# Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate fonds: Research Guide

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## Introduction

This guide provides an overview to understanding and accessing the records of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate at the BC Archives. It also gives an overview of how this fonds relates to other records created by catholic organizations. The intention is to help staff and researchers understand the records in the context of the catholic church broadly, and to provide resources on how to find related records. Please note that the Government of Canada, the United Church, the Anglican Church, and other organizations all created records relating to residential schools. This guide focuses on records created by catholic organizations.

## The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate: Administrative history

The **Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)** is a Roman Catholic religious congregation that was founded in 1816 by Eugène de Mazenod (1782-1861), an aristocrat and catholic priest from Aix-en-Provence, France. During the French Revolution, Mazenod's family left their wealth behind and fled to Italy, where they travelled around as refugees. At the age of twenty, Mazenod returned to France, where he became more regularly involved in the church and in charity work. Mazenod became ordained as a priest on 21 December 1811, dedicating himself to evangelizing the poor, imprisoned people, and youth.

Officially founded on 25 January 1816 when Mazenod first invited other priests to join him in his work, the OMI congregation was originally called the **Missionaries of Provence**. Although initially starting with four members, the community of priests expanded in number and in location, and on 17 February 1826, they received formal approval from the Pope. Officially a congregation, the Missionaries of Provence changed their name to the **Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée)**. Over time, the OMI expanded their missionary outreach worldwide. Today, Oblates continue to work in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America. Their motto is, "He has sent me to evangelize the poor" (*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me...pauperes evangelizantur*).

The OMI's first foreign mission was established in Canada in 1841, when Ignace Bourget, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Montreal, encouraged Oblates to immigrate and extend the scope of their missionary work. By 1844, ten Oblates were stationed in Canada, and in 1847, five Oblates arrived in what was then the Oregon Country region. Oblate work extended quickly

throughout what would later become known as the Province of British Columbia: in 1849, Timothee Limfrit, OMI, built a chapel and school at Fort Victoria; in 1858, Louis d'Herbomez, OMI, established a mission at Esquimalt; and in 1859, Charles Pandosy, OMI, established the Sandy Cove Mission in the Okanagan. More Oblates arrived in the region throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, and missions were established in New Westminster, the Fraser Valley, Fort Rupert, Williams Lake, North Vancouver, Sechelt, Fort Nelson, Fort St. James, Kamloops, and various other locations. This mission work continued to expand throughout the twentieth century, as Oblates established missions, parishes, schools, colleges, retreat centres, and hospitals throughout British Columbia.

In British Columbia, as in the rest of Canada, a large focus of Oblate missionaries was the evangelization of Indigenous peoples. As part of this focus, the OMI opened and/or administered at least 57 of the Indian Residential Schools in Canada, ten of these in British Columbia. The Oblate-run residential schools in British Columbia included:

- **Cariboo Residential School (1891-1981):** also known as Williams Lake Residential School or St. Joseph's, located just southwest of Williams Lake
- **Christie Residential School (1900-1983):** also known as Kakawis, located on Meare's Island between 1900-1971, then moved to Tofino where it operated from 1971-1983
- **St Eugene's Residential School (1890-1970):** also known as Cranbrook Residential School, located just north of Cranbrook
- **Kamloops Residential School (1890-1978):** also known as St. Louis, located in Kamloops
- **Kuper Island Residential School (1890-1975):** located on Penelakut Island (formerly called Kuper Island), near Chemainus
- **Lejac Residential School (1917-1976):** also known as Fraser Lake School, located at Stuart Lake (1917-1922), and then at Fraser Lake (1922-1976)
- **Lower Post Residential School (1951-1975):** located at Lower Post, on Highway #97, just south of the British Columbia-Yukon border

- **Sechelt Residential School (1904-1975):** also known as St. Augustine's, located in Sechelt
- **St. Mary's Residential School (1867-1984):** also known as Mission Residential School, located in Mission
- **St. Paul's Residential School (1899-1959):** also known as the North Vancouver Residential School and the Squamish School, located in North Vancouver

In addition to these ten residential schools, the Oblates administered the **Anahim Lake Dormitory** (also known as Ulkatcho), funded by the Government of Canada between 1968-1977. The Anahim Lake Dormitory housed children who attended the Anahim Lake Day School.<sup>1</sup>

The OMI Central Government has been located in Rome, Italy, since 1905. Previously, it had been located in France (in Marseilles until 1861, when it was relocated to Paris) and in Liège, Belgium (1903-1905). The central government includes the Superior General, the Vicar General, two Assistant Generals, a number of General Councillors (representing the OMI's different international regions), a Secretary General, and a Treasurer General. Reporting to the central government are the OMI's various provincial governments, each lead by Provincial Superiors, which operate in various locations internationally.

In Canada, there are currently three OMI provinces: **OMI Lacombe Canada** (headquarters located in Ottawa), **Notre-Dame du Cap** (headquarters located in Richelieu), and **Assumption Province** (headquarters located in Toronto). The structure of Oblate provinces in Canada has changed significantly over the years. Some of the administrative changes relevant to the OMI records held at the BC Archives include:

**1926** – St. Peter's Province established

**1963** – Provincial Delegation of Peru attached to St. Peter's Province

**1968** – St. Paul's Vice-Province established

**1973** – St. Paul's Vice-Province becomes **St. Paul's Province**

**1983** – St. Paul's Province is united with the **Vice-Province of Whitehorse**, to form a new St. Paul's Province

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<sup>1</sup> Records in the OMI fonds also contain information on other student dormitories, residences, and hostels. See the section below titled "Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate fonds: Content."

## **2003 – Reformation of Canadian provinces, leading to the establishment of the OMI Lacombe Canada province**

Due to these administrative reorganizations, Oblate missionaries in both British Columbia and the Yukon have reported back to the Provincial Superiors of various provinces: St. Peter's Province, St. Paul's Vice-Province, the Vice-Province of Whitehorse, St. Paul's Province, and OMI Lacombe Canada. For a time, Oblates in British Columbia and the Yukon had their headquarters in Vancouver, at the Oblate Provincial House; this location was the previous administrative home to St. Paul's Province, and later to the **BC/Yukon Community** of OMI Lacombe Province.

## **Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate fonds: Content**

The records within the **Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate fonds** at the BC Archives were mostly created and accumulated by the administrations of the various Oblate provinces that have operated in British Columbia: St. Peter's Province, St. Paul's Vice-Province, St. Paul's Province, and OMI Lacombe Canada. Additionally, the fonds contains some records created by the administration of the Vice-Province of Whitehorse. Other records pre-date the establishment of Oblate provinces in Canada. Materials mostly relate to Oblate missionary work in British Columbia and the Yukon, but the fonds also includes some records pertaining to Oblate work throughout Canada, as well as records pertaining to foreign mission work (such as materials related to the Oblate's Provincial Delegation of Peru).

**Dates of creation:** ca. 1828-2017<sup>2</sup>

**Record types:** The fonds includes textual records (correspondence, reports, Codex Historicus, newsletters, ephemera, etc.), maps, plans, photographs, scrapbooks, art work, audio-visual recordings, objects, and a variety of other materials.

**Records relating to Indian Residential Schools and Dormitories:** Residential school records in the OMI fonds primarily relate to the ten Oblate-administered Catholic residential schools in British Columbia: Cariboo Residential School (St. Joseph's), Christie Residential School (Kakawis), St. Eugene's Residential School (Cranbrook), Kamloops Residential School (St.

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<sup>2</sup> A more exact date range will be determined once the fonds is fully processed.

Louis), Kuper Island Residential School, Lejac Residential School (Fraser Lake), Lower Post Residential School, Sechelt Residential School (St. Augustine's), St. Mary's Residential School (Mission), and St. Paul's Residential School (Squamish School, or North Vancouver). Included in these files may be records relating to day scholars (students that attended a Residential School but did not live at the school).

Information about other residential schools (from different denominations, and in different provinces) may be found in the records, although to significantly lesser degree. References to these other schools are most commonly found in MS-3400: Provincial administrative records (in the Indianescom sub-series), and in MS-3401: Indigenous affairs subject files.<sup>3</sup>

The OMI records also contain information about various Indian Dormitories, Student Residences, and Hostels. Examples represented in the fonds include (but are not necessarily limited to): Anahim Lake Dormitory, Sechelt Student Residence, Caribou Student Residence, St. John's Student Residence, St. Eugene's Student Residence, Christie Student Residence, Lejac Student Residence, Kamloops Student Residence, Kuper Island Student Residence, St. Mary's Student Residence, Yukon Hostel, and Whitehorse Hostel. The degree to which these institutions are represented in the records varies: there may be significant quantities of administrative documents about some, and mentions of others.

**Records relating to Indian Day Schools:** The extent to which Indian Day School records are represented in the OMI fonds is still being determined. Information on the administration of day schools is known to be found in the Indianescom<sup>4</sup> sub-series of MS-3400: Provincial administrative records, although there are likely other related records located throughout the fonds.

Examples of day schools represented in the records include (but are not necessarily limited to): Anahim Lake Day School, Chehalis Day School, Chemainus Day School, Douglas Day School, Fort Babine Day School, Fountain Day School, Ft. St. James Day School, Irish Creek Day School, Kyoquot Day School, Lejac Day School, Moricetown Day School, Nazko Day School, Neskainlith Day School, Nootka Day School, Okanagan Day School, Pemberton Day School, Penticton Day School, Rocher de Boule Day School, Seabird Island Day School, Seton Lake Day School, Sliammon Day School, Songhees Day School, St. Catherine's Day School, Stony Creek Day School, Sugar Cane Day School, Takla Landing Day School, Tsartlip Day

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<sup>3</sup> These series are currently being processed, so descriptions are not yet available in the BC Archives' Catalogue.

<sup>4</sup> Indianescom is the shortened name for the Indian & Eskimo Welfare Oblate Commission / Commission Oblate des Oeuvres Indiennes & Esquimaudes. The Commission was first established in Ottawa in 1936, and it functioned to coordinate Oblate mission work with Indigenous people. Primarily, Indianescom's work informed the administration of Indian Residential Schools, Day Schools, and Hospitals across Canada.

School, and Westholme Day School. The degree to which these schools are represented in the records varies: there may be administrative documents about some, and mentions of others.

**Records relating to Indian Hospitals:** The extent to which Indian Hospital records are represented in the OMI fonds is still being determined, although there seems to be less Hospital records than Day School and Residential School records. Some information on Indian Hospitals is known to be found in the Indianescom sub-series of MS-3400, although there are likely other relevant records throughout the fonds.

It is known that the fonds contains at least a small amount of information on the Coqualeetza Indian Hospital and Miller Bay Hospital. There are also some records that pertain to the Anahim Lake Nursing Station.

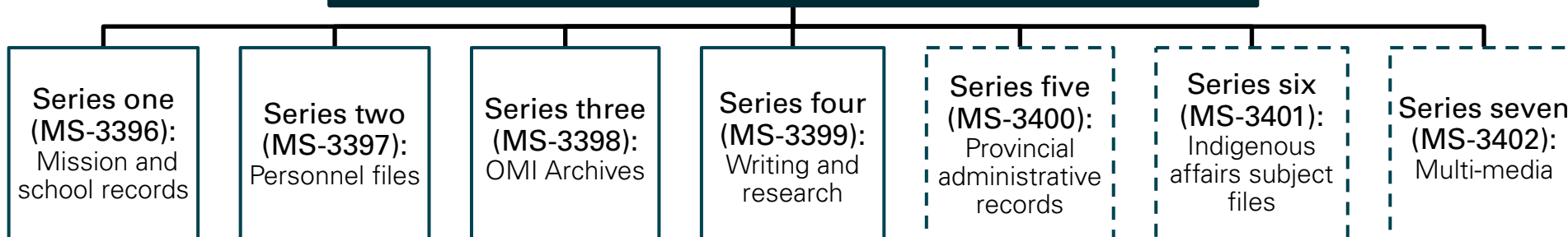
**Records arrangement:** The fonds is divided into six series:

- MS-3396: Mission and school records
- MS-3397: Personnel files
- MS-3398: OMI Archives
- MS-3399: Writing and research
- MS-3400: Provincial administrative records\*
- MS-3401: Indigenous affairs subject files\*
- MS-3402: Multi-media\*

*\*Descriptions for these series will become available as the records are processed.*

## Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate fonds

PR-2400



----- series currently being processed, descriptions not yet available in the BC Archives' Catalogue



## Accessing the records

**Current access status:** The fonds is currently restricted while staff complete privacy reviews. Please contact [access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca](mailto:access@royalbcmuseum.bc.ca) with any inquiries or access requests.

We are working with Indigenous research groups to provide access on a case-by-case basis. Most of the research groups represent one of the “lead nations” identified by the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) that are currently doing research into missing children and unmarked burial sites related to Residential Schools.

We have drafted an MOU that will allow us to disclose unredacted records to researchers working on behalf of Indigenous governing entities under Section 33(2)(x) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Once these agreements are in place, it will simplify the process for sharing these records.

General requests for information and records about Residential Schools can be directed to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) or the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre (IRSHDC). Please note that we **do not have student files**. To access those, researchers should go to the NCTR.

NCTR: <https://nctr.ca/>

IRSHDC: <https://irshdc.ubc.ca/>

Many researchers ask for files about themselves at residential school, or about a relative. Often they are looking for student files, or sacramental records to help trace evidence of their personal or family history. For information on sacramental records, see the final section.

**Language note:** The descriptions of records in this fonds may include content and language that is upsetting or triggering. Records reflect the language and attitudes of the historical period in which they were created. This can include images or language that is racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, and otherwise offensive or discriminatory. Many of these terms are unacceptable.

Original archival records are a product of their time and will not be altered. This is so the records can be maintained as historical evidence – to document events and perspectives of the past, even if they are upsetting. Preserving this history is important to the Archives, so that we can learn from the past and do better in the future.

Original titles provided by an archival record creator may still be maintained on our website to preserve the historical context of how the records were made and used. In this case, a current and appropriate variation in title may be provided as an alternative. Additional contextual information may be included as well.

For more information on language in our databases:

<https://royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/archives/about-us/content-warning>

## Structure of religious orders in Canada

The Catholic Church, also known as the Roman Catholic Church, is the largest Christian church (by membership) and the largest international institution in the world. The head of the Catholic church is the Pope; administratively, the church is divided into dioceses or bishoprics, led by a Bishop, which report up to the Pope. Each diocese oversees parish churches and diocesan priests. In the Catholic Church, a religious order is a community of consecrated life with members that profess solemn vows. They are classed as a type of religious institute, or a society in which members pronounce public vows and lead a life of brothers or sisters in common. Religious orders are led by a Superior General, and do not report to a Bishop. Religious orders often work in partnership with dioceses, and duties between the two structures may be shared, but administratively they are separate organizations, both ultimately reporting to the Pope.

## Types of religious records within different Catholic agencies

Records are created by religious organizations, as well as by churches, parishes, and dioceses. Different records will be kept in different repositories. The records of religious organizations, such as the Oblates, reflect their specific role and mandate in the work they do. Below are listed examples of related records found in other catholic repositories.

## Diocesan archives:

- Sacramental records: there are seven holy sacraments in the catholic church: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, marriage and holy orders. Each of these produce records; the most commonly requested records are baptismal, confirmation, marriage, and burial. (Although not a sacrament, records relating to the holy rite of burial in the catholic church are generally treated in the same way as sacramental records). Sacramental registers are usually managed by diocesan archives, and follow similar access and restriction rules as vital events registrations. The Archdiocese of Vancouver outlines access to sacramental records this way:

*Under British Columbian privacy legislation, information about sacramental records can only be given to the person whose name is on the record, the parent, or legal guardian of a youth under the age of 18, or if written consent for the release of the information has been given.*

- *Sacramental records are only available to the public after these times:*
  - *Baptisms after 100 years*
  - *Confirmations after 100 years*
  - *Marriages after 75 years*
  - *Burials after 20 years*
- Diocesan administration and operational files
- Records of inactive parishes
- Records of catholic service organizations, such as the Catholic Women's League or the Knights of Columbus
- Records of catholic charities, such as Development and Peace (Caritas) or local charities such as Anawim House
- Archbishops', bishops', and priests' papers
- Records of closed catholic schools
- Catholic newspapers, newsletters, and pamphlets
- Etc.

## Parishes and churches:

Individual churches create their own records. Parishes are administrative units that may represent a single church, or multiple churches that share the same priest and office staff. The term "parish" also refers to the congregation, or people that attend a particular church or

church community. Records may be kept with a church or a parish. A diocese is made up of many churches and parishes. Records found in churches or parishes include:

- Active sacramental registers. Schedules for transferring registers to diocesan archives vary from diocese to diocese. Churches and parishes also have the authority to issue sacramental certificates. This is similar to the way that the BC Archives maintains vital events registrations, but the Vital Statistics Agency is responsible for issuing vital events certificates.
- Active administrative records, including financial documents, membership lists and personal information, program records such as religious education (church-led classes) or social activities, etc.
- Newsletters

**Catholic School Boards:** Records of currently operating catholic schools are maintained by the local catholic school board.

**Catholic Children's Aid Society:** The Catholic Children's Aid Society existed from 1905 until 1973. It was a society incorporated under the Protection of Children Act. The records were transferred to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and many of them are now in our custody. Records of adoption are maintained through the Vital Statistics Agency.

**Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre at UBC (IRSHDC):** The IRSHDC contains digital copies of records relating to BC Residential Schools and Indian Hospitals from multiple repositories, as well as primary source records such as survivor testimonies. Available records include:

- Survivor testimonies
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings
- Photographs
- Maps and site plans
- Government documents
- Church documents
- Belongings
- Newspaper articles
- Library resources



**National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR):** The NCTR is the central repository for records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), as well as copies of all records relating to Residential Schools in Canada. They currently hold more than 5 million records in their holdings, the vast majority those created by the TRC during its mandate. The record types in the NCTR holdings are the same as those listed for the IRSHDC.