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[See table of contents](#)

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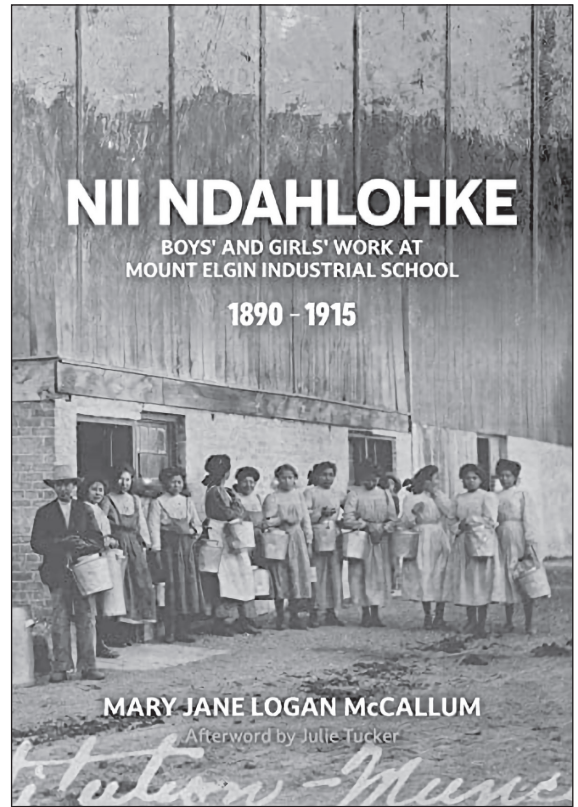
Nii Ndahlohke Boys' and Girls' Work at Mount Elgin Industrial School, 1890-1915

by Mary Jane Logan McCallum

Winnipeg, Manitoba: Friesen Press Editions, 2022. 100 pages. \$17.99 softcover. ISBN 9781039136830 (niindahlohke.ca)

When I first read through *Nii Ndahlohke*, I thought, this is the sort of book we need for every residential school in Canada. Mary Jane McCallum has written a beautiful, accessible, and important book on the history of one of two residential schools in southern Ontario between 1890 and 1915. McCallum is a professor of history at the University of Winnipeg and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous People, History and Archives. Her past research has looked at the history of the Girl Guides in residential schools, Indigenous women and work in Canada, and Indigenous histories of tuberculosis in Manitoba. This project is personal for McCallum, as her grandfather and his siblings attended Mount Elgin Residential School.

The title of the book means “I work hard” in the Lunaape language, and in fact, McCallum includes Lunaape phrases throughout the book to describe the kinds of work that children were doing, as well as a chart with the Lunaape alphabet (53). The Lunaape language is critically endangered, no doubt the result, at least in part, to the loss of language that children and families experienced when children attended Mount Elgin. McCallum was inspired by and worked with the Munsee Delaware Language and History Group on the book. The inclusion of the Lunaape language will



no doubt be of use to those from the community and beyond who wish to learn the language, but also, it is a useful reminder of what was lost when children spent so much time working, and away from their families.

McCallum is a historian of labour, and so focuses on the work that children were forced to do while they lived at the school, purportedly to gain an education. While the “half-day” system was common in residential schools across Canada at the time, McCallum explains that “being forced to work was at the heart of both student suffering and student revolt at Mount Elgin and many other residential schools” (4). McCallum’s argument is that “unpaid work was a central part of day-to-day life for students at Mount Elgin.

Students benefited relatively little from their labour, and in fact, it was unsafe and negatively impacted their health” (4). The book is organized in a way that will make it easy for readers to learn about the history of labour that both boys and girls were engaged in at the school. At the end of each chapter, she includes “four key points,” as well as discussion questions “beyond the book.” She also helpfully includes a glossary with terms that many will find useful. Beautiful art by community members adds to the diverse ways McCallum tells the history of the school and community, but for some, I wish there had been more explanation or details to provide meaning and context for the reader. While I think students from grade 7 through 12 would find the book accessible and useful, as well as college and university students, it will also appeal to any adult interested in learning about the topic of residential schools. It is not written for children, but it is written and organized in a way that makes it accessible to almost everyone, which is no small feat.

McCallum relied upon a variety of sources for this book, including those commonly used by those researching residential schools: a wide array of government and church records, but she also includes numerous striking photographs, and knowledge gleaned through family stories. Her grandfather Arnold Logan, and her great uncle Alonzo Logan both attended the school between roughly 1904 and 1912 (4). McCallum’s family is from the Munsee-Delaware Nation but there are three Delaware communities in Canada, all of whom originated in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but moved north for various reasons: the

Munsee-Delaware Nation, Eelunaapeewi Lahkeewiit (or Delaware Nation at Moraviantown), and the Delaware community at the Six Nations of Grand River. Children from these communities attended Mount Elgin, but also children from various other First Nations in southern Ontario. McCallum argues that the learning about the history of the school and the children’s lives there is important for several reasons, including gaining a better understanding of the lived experience of children in these spaces, but also because, as McCallum points out, “it is important to the ways that the broader history of Indigenous-settler relations unfolded in the communities surrounding Mount Elgin” (5). Many Ontarians are currently engaged in reconciliation work to learn this history, and McCallum’s book will help them in this task. All royalties from book sales go to Indigenous language and history learning programs at Munsee Delaware Nation, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and Oneida of the Thames, including “Save the Barn,” a project to turn a barn from the Mount Elgin residential school into a cultural centre.

Nii Ndahlobke is a fantastic little book that clearly and concisely tells us about the experience of boys and girls at Mount Elgin Industrial School and is a unique and important contribution to the growing field of residential school history. I have no doubt many readers will be struck by the stories and photographs of Indigenous children labouring away in a large industrial institution when they could have been living and learning at home with their families and communities.

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