



**PENELAKUT
TRIBE**

Press Release

The Penelakut Tribe releases interim findings of Kuper Island Indian Industrial School archival research and ground-based investigations

August 4, 2025

The Penelakut Tribe and the Spune'luxutth Sulxwe'en (Elders Committee) will release their research and investigation efforts in finding the missing children and locate marked and unmarked graves of former students who attended Kuper Island Indian Residential School.

The first IRS opened in British Columbia in 1867 in Mission, BC, and the last schools closed in 1975. Kuper Island IRS opened in 1890 and operated on the island of Penelakut until 1974. During that time, approximately 2,000 children attended from more than 90 communities. The actual number of students and communities is still unknown due to restrictions on access to information and archives, as well as poor record-keeping practices by the school and the government.

Kuper Island IRS is known globally. Approximately one-third of the students became deathly ill within the first twenty years of the school being open. Although the school has been extensively researched and is the focus of numerous investigations, the Penelakut Tribe intends to present new findings to the public on Monday.

The findings will be presented after the annual walk for the children, starting at 8:30 am, August 4th at the Chemainus BC Ferries dock.

The Penelakut Tribe will not be taking questions before or during the event from the media. We thank the public and the media in advance for respecting the space survivors and their families' needs on this day.

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PENELAKUT TRIBE

Quick Facts:

- Penelakut Island was called Kuper Island by colonials from 1851 – 2010. The name occurred when the navy surveyed the area and named one of the largest islands after Captain Augustus Leopold Kuper and his frigate, HMS Thetis.
- The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) is a Roman Catholic religious congregation that was founded in 1816 and operated Kuper IRS for approximately 85 years on the island.
- The estimated total number of children who are listed to have attended is 1,892; however, many children attended without official documentation.
- Children came from at least 85 different villages and communities in British Columbia.
- The average age on admission was 9 1/2, with the average length of stay nearly 4 years. “Graduates” of Kuper left with an average grade 3 or 4 education.
- The school was built hastily in 1889, and required extensive repairs by 1905, with major structure failures within the first 15 – 25 years of operation.
- The per diem did not cover the expenses to feed and care for the children; industrial training included sewing, cooking, cleaning, farming, plumbing, carpentry, maintenance, dairy, laundry, etc.
- At least 443 students were recorded as seriously ill while enrolled. National Library of Medicine reports Indigenous populations in Western Canada had mortality rates more than six times the highest rates recorded in Europe.
- More than 121 deaths are referenced on the NCTR memorial site, with 88 deaths confirmed through research between 1890 and 1953. The project is tracking an estimated 140 - 175 deaths because of the experience at Kuper.
- The TRC described Kuper as one of the more isolated and severe institutions in the Canadian Indian Residential School system.