

# Research Colloquium North American History

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Text based Discussion led by Anne van der Pas (FU):  
“Not a Shred of Evidence”: Settler Colonial Networks of  
Concealment and the Birtle Indian Residential School  
by Tyla Betke

Monday, January 13th, 6pm-8pm, Room 201

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Anne van der Pas is a doctoral student at the Graduate School of North American Studies, and a member of the History department of the John F. Kennedy Institute. Her doctoral dissertation research focuses on Indigenous enfranchisement under the Indian Act as a paradoxical term, used to indicate both a federally imposed process of forced assimilation, as well as a release from state oppression.

**Abstract:** Tyla Betke’s article examines how the network of settler colonial systems in Canada worked to ensure the widespread and intentional cover-up that allowed one man to remain in the Indian Residential School (IRS) system for over two decades (from 1910 to 1932) despite overwhelming evidence of his abuse. Using genocide scholar Andrew Woolford’s metaphor of settler colonial mesh as a framework, the article details the 1930 case against Birtle Indian Residential School Principal Henry B. Currie to understand the multiple strategies of concealment used to protect him. A multitude of actors and institutions were involved in the coverup: the Indian agent and the Department of Indian Affairs, the Presbyterian Church, the court systems, and the public press. Strategies of concealment included blatant bribery, transferring accused principals to other schools, document falsification, forced marriages, and misreporting runaways, along with the IRS system itself, which kept children from their families and support systems. The article concludes with a discussion of settler claims of ignorance and the role archives play in revealing the truth about abusers within the IRS system.

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