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Alma Beaulieu's remains to be exhumed this summer from Fort Resolution residential school graveyard

'Justice Minister (Jay Macdonald) committed to getting Alma home to her sister (Delphine), and the work will begin at the end of the month,' says MLA Richard Edjericon

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Alma Beaulieu was five-years-old when she died while at St. Joseph's Mission residential school at Fort Resolution. Her family -- her now elderly sister -- is fighting red tape as she wants Alma's remains returned to their home in Fort Smith. (Photo courtesy of Richard Edjericon)

POSTED BY: JAMES O'CONNOR JULY 3, 2025

The elderly sister of a young girl who died while at St. Joseph's Mission residential school at Fort Resolution will now be able to honour a promise she made to their mother.

That was to have Alma Beaulieu's remains exhumed, to be re-interred beside her mother's gravesite at Fort Smith.

It took some time — and some **emotional debate** in the NWT Assembly — but Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh MLA Richard Edjericon told CKLB on Thursday that the case no longer falls under the Archeological Sites Act, but the Coroners Act.

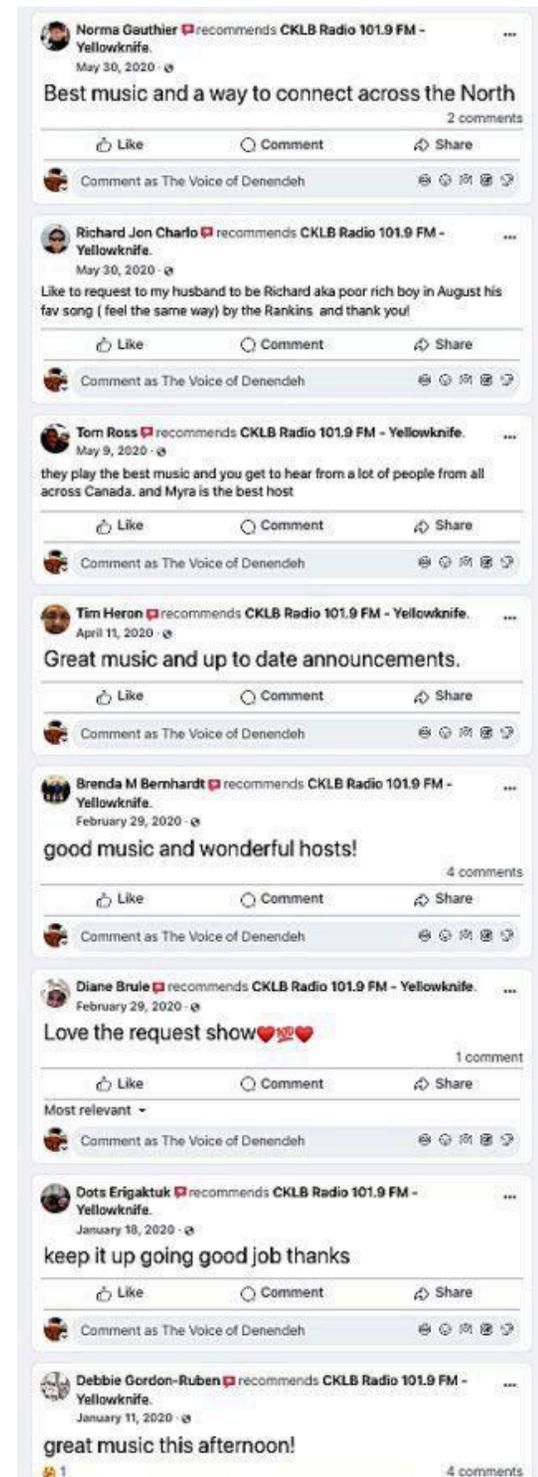
“The Justice Minister (Jay Macdonald) committed to getting Alma home to her sister (Delphine), and the work will begin at the end of the month,” said Edjericon, noting her cause of death is also in doubt.

“It is right and fitting to bring Alma home — and along with all those other kids — they need to be brought home to their families, and the community needs to heal as part of the reconciliation that’s going on today across Canada.

“So, it’s important that we do this work, and I don’t want to see that these kids be deemed as an artifact right now, this minister I brought up already, you know, again, they just got to step up and implement their mandate on the letter and the United Nation declaration by indigenous people.”

An ‘artifact’? Under the current NWT legislation, sites such as Alma’s grave were considered ancestral remains and protected under the Archeological Sites Act, which is in the process of being updated.

That work is being done with Indigenous governments through the Intergovernmental Council, as it’s likely similar situations exist with families across the NWT.





Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh MLA Richard Edjericon stands in the NWT Assembly on February 7th. Dehcho MLA Sheryl Yakeleya is seated at right. (Assembly livestream)

Edjericon said the Coroner's Office will be given the time they need to finish their work and issue the exhumation order which will coincide with Deninu Kųę First Nation (DKFN)'s investigative team arriving on site in Fort Resolution.

The investigative team will carefully investigate Alma's remains to determine her true cause of death.

There are up to 70 other children, who attended the St. Joseph Residential School.

Efforts to investigate the circumstances of their deaths and their repatriation started in 2022 and are similar to efforts across Canada, said Edjericon.



Fort Resolution Residential School in undated image. (Photo: NWT Archives/Ernestine Burke/NCS Collection)

“However, the repatriation efforts in Fort Resolution are the most advanced in the country. (The) work with Alma can set the precedent — not just for bringing the 70 other children home — but work to identify and repatriate children across the country.”

Meanwhile, the investigative team working with DKFN require DNA to match the children at Fort Resolution with their families, should they want them exhumed and returned.

On July 5th, from 9am to 5pm the DNA team will be in the Traders Grill at the Explorer Hotel to continue swabbing – an ongoing process

that saw 40 people participate in Fort Providence.

Steen Hartsen, a DNA scientist from Vancouver, has been helping the DKFN on the residential school project for a number of years, trying help with the identification

“I think it’s fair to say that we’re further along than most nations when it comes to this type of process,” he said. “We’ve been going through this for quite a while, and are at a stage where we can potentially make this identification for Alma.

“It’s important to stress at the end of the day that our goal here is really just to help identify the children and then let the families know, so they can decided what they would like to do.

“Our role here, really is just to support the First Nation in their investigation.

Here is a timeline of the Deninu Kųę First Nation’s investigation:

- In the fall of 2022 the DKFN team began the search for the children that died while in attendance at the St Joseph’s residential school and were never returned home.
- That fall Delphine, an elder, well into her 80s, having heard about the residential school investigations across Canada, called the chief at DKFN to tell him the story of her sister Alma who had been taken to St. Joseph’s residential school and never returned home.
- Her sister Alma had been taken to the St Joseph’s residential school in June 1942 at the age of three and passed away in August 1944 at the age of five years and 9 months.
- No one had informed her family in Fort Smith of her passing.

- Alma's mother heard from the children returning to Fort Smith for the Sept long weekend that she had died. She went into shock and never fully recovered emotionally.
- In 2010 alma's sister Delphine had asked the Roman Catholic Church for a copy of her birth and death records. They sent her Alma's Baptismal record and a "Funerary Record."
- On Alma's death certificate the cause of death is listed as Tuberculosis.
- However, the family were never told that Alma contracted Tuberculosis nor that she had died of it.
- The DKFN investigative team located archival records and hospital records. The school and hospital records do not show any indication that she contracted Tuberculosis at any point in her short life.
- As such, we believe Alma died under suspicious circumstances and that her death required further investigation.
- On the DKFN investigative team are archival researchers, historians, anthropologists, forensic anthropologist, forensic DNA specialists, GPR specialists along with a surveyor.
- While mapping the Fort Resolution Cemetery, they located a rotting cross in the grass in the cemetery with Alma's nameplate,



Alma Beaulieu was five-years-old when she died while at St. Joseph's Mission residential school at Fort Resolution. (Photo courtesy of Richard Edjericon)

along with disintegrated crosses and nameplates of other children.

- The late elder Angus Beaulieu had described an area of the cemetery where the children were buried, an area with numerous white crosses.



St. Joseph's Mission residential school at Fort Resolution. (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation)

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