

# The Brown Quarterly

Quarterly Newsletter for Classroom Teachers

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## The Challenges and Limitations of Assimilation Indian Boarding Schools

The legacy of non-reservation Native American boarding schools can be traced to the ideas and efforts of one man, Captain Richard Henry Pratt. A cavalry officer who had commanded African American troops against American Indians in the west, Pratt developed his notion of “assimilation through total immersion” while in charge of incarcerated Indians at Ft. Marion Florida. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Pratt did not believe there were innate genetic differences in American Indians. For him, environment explained all of human nature.

Using the specious analogy that slavery had assimilated African Americans, Pratt contended that non-reservation boarding schools could accomplish the same result for native peoples. In 1879, Pratt got his chance to test his experiment when an old army barracks in Pennsylvania was transformed into the Carlisle Indian School (a National Historic Landmark).

With Pratt as both founder and superintendent, Carlisle became the model for federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding schools across the Midwest and Southwest during the late 19th century. By 1902, there existed 25 federally supported, non-reservation boarding schools for American Indians across 15 states and territories with a total enrollment of 6,000 students. In Alaska, two boarding schools at Sitka and Wrangell were also created with

the express purpose of providing manual and domestic training for a select group of Alaska Native children, those considered “the brightest boys and girls.”



*Lilly Quoetone Nahwooksy and Cynthia Mithlo, Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, Indian Boarding School, Circa late 1800's*

Replicated at other sites, the Carlisle curriculum emphasized vocational training for boys and domestic science for girls. In addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, Carlisle students learned how to make harnesses, shoe horses, sew clothes, do laundry, and craft furniture and wagons. Given the fact that the federal government funded the boarders' education at \$167 per student per year, it is no surprise then that American Indian children, some as young as six years of age, put in long hours providing items for school use and for the market.

Carlisle in 1881 “reported producing 8,929 tin products, including cups, coffee boilers, pans, pots, and funnels, 183 double harness sets, 161 bridles, 10 halters, 9 spring wagons, and 2 carriages ... a total value of \$6,333.46.” Pratt at one point commented that the

Carlisle girls could launder and iron “about 2,500 items each week in a very credible manner.”

Carlisle also pioneered the system of “outing,” the summer placement of young people in the homes of neighboring farmers or townspeople so that in

# A Personal Perspective

In writing this column, I am compelled to write of our Native American spirituality and faith, which I hold strong to as I reflect on recent events involving our country. I awoke this morning to pray and burn cedar in our home. I was comforted by this tradition, but my heart is heavy as I, like millions of Americans, contemplate how anyone could willingly and intentionally kill what our Creator has so beautifully constructed — human life. I am grieving for people I do not even know.

My Grandmother used to say that white men did not teach the Indian about God; we knew of our creator thousands of years before. The Kiowa call him *Dah-kee*. As I grew up in my Grandparent's household, I would often hear my Grandfather, a Cherokee Methodist minister, and my Grandmother, a Kiowa woman leader among her own people, as they would pray. I would often awaken in the stillness of the morning hearing them singing hymns and praying for their family, and the families of others, including our government and tribal leaders.

I was always told these prayers were powerful, and that we will be prayed for hundreds of years after. It is our responsibility, our legacy, to continue these prayers.

I pray for the Mohawk Indian Ironworkers, who were working 50 floors up in Lower Manhattan. They were less than 10 blocks away from the World Trade Center when one of the deadly airplanes came within 50 feet of their construction crane. I believe they were surrounded by the prayers and tribal songs prayed for them by their ancestors years before.

I pray for the Prairie Band Potawatomi in Kansas and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians in California, and other tribal leaders who took the lead in offering financial assistance and support to the many families and their needs in another part of the country from their own. Their generosity will be returned in blessings back to their people.

I pray for more than 300 tribal leaders who were in our nation's capital at the time. I am thankful they are safe, and I am thankful they were there, because I am confident that not one of them left the city without praying in their tribal tongue or holding a prayer ceremony for those affected by this tragedy.

I pray for the Mothers, Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, Aunts, Uncles and Grandparents who are missing and their families. We, as Native people from many tribes, have a common belief that our extended families are our immediate families. This kinship belief is evident in our nation, as we meet in our work places, meeting halls and places of worship to join each other in prayer.

Native American tribes across the country are reacting with powerful prayers and ceremonies in honor of all victims of this tragedy. Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, a university for Native American students, lit a fire circle on campus for prayer and reflection.

I pray for our tribal elders who teach us forgiveness and true altruism even in the light of darkness and despair.

*Aho Daw-kee*

## A Spiritual Journey



by  
Dorothy D. Stites  
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The Brown Foundation is pleased to publish this newsletter for classroom teachers through which we will share resources available from national parks and museums. Established to maintain the legacy of the *Brown* decision, our organization plays an exciting role as a park partner. In 1990 we were instrumental in developing *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site in Topeka, Kansas. We hope you enjoy the *Brown Quarterly* and we eagerly anticipate your comments.

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*Our thoughts are with those who have suffered losses in the terrorist attack against our country. We hope the content of present, past and future issues of the Brown Quarterly will help us better understand and respect all ethnic groups that comprise our diverse population — The Brown Foundation.*

# *The Challenges & Limitations of Assimilation* **Indian Boarding Schools**

*continued from page 1*

exchange for their labor, the children would continue to receive lessons on living in white society in addition to earning a small wage. Outing usually represented a form of cheap labor for nearby residents.

“The hiring of Indian youth is not looked upon by the people of this valley from a philanthropic standpoint. It is simply a matter of business,” commented superintendent of the Phoenix Indian School, Harwood Hall.

Experiences with outing ran the spectrum of satisfying employment to simple drudgery. Despite complaints, most students’ letters indicated satisfaction with outing, but the following two accounts by Carlisle youth demonstrate the diversity of experiences.

*I am up in my cozy room. I love this place, they are so kind. I have a good kind father and mother. . . here.*

*She always calls us Duncce, careless, lazy, ugly, crooked, and have no senses. I have never heard anybody call me that before.*

How were children recruited or lured into boarding school life? Capt. Pratt and Sarah Mathers, a Mt. Holyoke-educated teacher, gathered children among the

Sioux and Apache. Major Haworth, in charge of the Chilocco Indian Industrial School in Oklahoma, traveled far and wide in search of pupils among the Cheyenne, Comanche, Arapaho, Kiowa and Pawnee. The Major had to persuade parents to give up their children to the care of the federal government and place them on a wagon train in the dead of winter. Later, a few select Chilocco students, in the company of teachers, would themselves venture to distant reservations to expound upon the benefits of their school.

**F**or some students, temptation came not in flowery testimony, but in the form of good, old fashioned candy. As Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota and one of Carlisle’s first students, recalled:

*When they saw us peeping in at the window, they motioned for us to come inside. But we hesitated. Then they took out some sticks of candy ... and that was a big temptation. We came inside very slowly, one step at a time, all the time wondering what it meant.*

*continued on page 4*



*Fort Sill Oklahoma Indian Boarding school students and teachers in front of the girls' dormitory in 1918.*

# Indian Schools

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Although federal legislation mandated compulsory schooling for American Indians, children could not be taken off reservations without “the full consent” of their parents. How consent was obtained at times amounted to pure coercion, even violence. At some reservations, quotas were set in terms of numbers of children to be enrolled in boarding schools, with Indian policemen given the detail of deciding which children would be sent from which family. These law enforcement officials might put the agonizing question to a mother “which child to give up, which to hold back?” Thomas Premo, a western Shoshone, recalled, “... As they were being hauled away on a buggy their mothers ran behind them, crying ...” Meanwhile, for orphans, there existed few alternatives other than boarding schools.

Some parents resisted sending their children by



***Photo above: At the Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, Indian Boarding School, the older boys worked on the farm, at the sawmill and in the carpenter and blacksmith shops where they were trained in carpentry, painting and harness making. Circa late 1800s***

running away from the reservation or hiding their sons and daughters. Given the higher mortality rates in boarding schools, they feared for their children’s health and certainly they realized that if their children traveled to a distant state, years would pass before they would be reunited. If the school was in close proximity, this decision could be less wrenching.

Other parents coped with separation by believing that they were giving their daughters or sons an opportunity to succeed in the white world. Perhaps they believed that the education they would receive at Carlisle, Haskell (a National Historic Landmark in Lawrence, Kansas) or Phoenix was infinitely superior to the one at home; and

that the overall quality of life would be better than the daily suffering that stalked reservations.

New boarding school students found themselves adapting to changes at every turn. Like contemporary boot camp, young people were initiated into military discipline. Cropped hair and school uniforms became the first order of business with daily drill practice and scheduled routines. In the early years, children received English names based either on loose translations of their traditional names or on U.S. or British historical figures or even from a list randomly written on a blackboard. Life was regimented from sun up to after sundown with strict discipline and swift punishment. As a typical example, Anna Moore, a student at the Phoenix Indian School, recalled scrubbing the dining room floors.

*If we were not finished when the 8 a.m. whistle sounded, the dining room matron would go around strapping us while we were still on our hands and knees.*

The emphasis on vocational education remained a constant in the boarding schools along with the afternoon chore of producing items for school use and for sale. In 1924, the

young women at the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma produced more than 7,500 linen and clothing items.

Certainly loneliness and homesickness were not the only illness stalking boarding school students. Tuberculosis, trachoma, measles, small pox, whooping cough, influenza, and pneumonia roamed the halls of poorly funded schools, where diseased and healthy children intermingled.

Harshly critical of school conditions, the 1928 Meriam Report noted that meager food budgets (11 cents per child per day), overcrowded facilities, inadequate health care, and overwork of children contributed to the spread of diseases. Indeed, American Indians had a higher death rate, six and one half times that of other racial/ethnic groups. Between 1885 and 1913, over 100 children were buried at Haskell Institute in Kansas, representing only a fraction of the deaths that occurred there as the bodies of youngsters were often shipped home.

Behind the statistics, of course, lay the families touched by tragedy. In 1906, the Superintendent of the Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota sent the following letter:

*Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, Indian Boarding School photos are from an exhibit book from Museum of the Great Plains, Lawton, Ok.*

*It is with a feeling of sorrow that I write you telling of the death of your daughter Lizzie. She was not sick but a short time and we did not think her so near her end ... Had we known that she was not going to live but so short a time, we would have made a great effort to have gotten you here before she died.*

The Meriam Report sparked the beginning of reform. Curricular innovations included the creation of bilingual teaching materials, the preservation of native cultures (including religion), and the end of military trappings. Vocational education, however, was seriously outdated. By the 1930s training students to be blacksmiths and harness makers seemed oddly antiquated, if not downright irresponsible.

Enrollment in these institutions dropped due to the entry of native students into the public school system, but access to public schools had its difficulties. In 1921, California law was amended to include the stipulation that American Indian children could only attend local schools if an Indian facility could not be found within a 3-mile distance from their homes. California native Alice Piper challenged this proviso, and in *Piper v. Big Pine* (1924), the California Supreme Court ruled in Piper's favor, allowing her entry to the local public school. However, the court did not disavow the concept of "separate but equal," and it was not until 1935 that the legislature deleted this discriminatory stipulation. Before the Great Depression, approximately 8,000 students remained in federal non-reservation boarding schools compared to over 34,000 American Indian pupils educated at their local public schools.

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**"The question may very properly be raised whether much of the work of Indian children in boarding schools would not be prohibited in many states by child labor laws."**

**— The Meriam Report of 1928**

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Memories of boarding school life vary from an individual's experience as a star athlete to a desperate runaway. Alumni frequently recall with merriment social events, teachers, close friends as well as the times they got away with some mischief. Young people often met their future spouses on campus. According to historian Steve Crum, the Stewart Indian School in Nevada fostered intermarriage between Shoshone and Paiute students.

Circumscribed in their daily routines, students looked forward to amusements outside the school. Going into town to shop or to the movies was a special treat although in Phoenix, American Indian students had to sit in the segregated areas reserved for people of color. Sports teams promoted school pride and Haskell Institute produced the legendary athlete Jim Thorpe.

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**Memories of boarding school life vary from an individual's experience as a star athlete to a desperate runaway.**

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Beloved educators, such as Ellen Deloria (Lakota) and Ruth Bronson (Cherokee), made life more bearable. "Ruth and Ellen listened to us. They were interested in what we thought ... They taught us that we could accomplish anything we set our minds to ..." recalled Esther Horne.

Fostering a sense of connection and building alliances across tribal affiliations, the boarding school environment, if unintentionally, cultivated a Pan-Indian unity and underscored the need for different peoples to work together in the future. Though laden with contradictions, with hardships and hopes, boarding schools created community. A graduate of Haskell Institute and an educator for more than 30 years in Indian schools, Esther Horne articulated how Haskell shaped her life:

*Most of us who are alumni of Indian boarding schools feel a great pride and sense of belonging to a unique and special group of people ... who have become part of our extended families. Even though boarding schools took children away from their homes ... we created our own community at the school. We were proud of our accomplishments and proud that we had retained so much of our Indianness ... the students and teachers at Haskell will forever be an integral part of who I am as an American Indian.*

**Information for this article was provided by the National Parks Service, Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States, Theme Study, August 2000.**

## Is the Internet available at your school or public library?

### Additional References:

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Adult, Atlas of the North American Indian, Carl Waldman and Molly Braun-Waldman.

Statistics, Statistical Record of Native North Americans, edited by Marlita A. Reddy.

Literature, Smoke Rising: The Native North American Literary Companion.

Law, U.S.; American Indian Law Deskbook, ed Nicholas J. Spaeth.

[http://indy4.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/books/all\\_idx.html#biography](http://indy4.fdl.cc.mn.us/~isk/books/all_idx.html#biography)

### Check out these sites:

**Native American Calendar** - A calendar for Native American events around the country.  
<http://www.nativeweb.org/community/events/>

**Citizens Band of Potawatomi**  
<http://www.potawatomi.org/>

**Chickasaw Nation**  
<http://www.chickasaw.net/>

**Seminole Nation of Oklahoma**  
<http://www.cowboy.net/native/seminole/index.html>

**Native American Report** - subscription newsletter  
<http://www.bpinews.com/hr/issues/nan.htm>

**Ableza**, A Native American Arts and Film Institute  
1279 Mildred Avenue, San Jose, CA,  
<http://www.ableza.org/>

Or use a multi-search engine (try *dogpile.com*).  
If you find a useful site, be sure to add it to your *Favorites*, so you can return to it easily.

## BOOK NOOK

### High Elks Treasure

By Virginia Driving Hawk Sheve

Illustrated by Orne Lyons

In the autumn of the year 1876, a band of Brule' Sioux gave up their freedom and permanently settled in the Dakota reservation. Among this pitiful little band was a youth called High Elk.

He took care of his ailing mothers and raised horses on his share of the land. Many years later, High Elk's great grandson Joe, shared his love for horses.

One day Joe and his sister, Marie, left school after learning a storm was on the way. They did not make it home, but they made it to grandpa High Elk's cave. Joe's horse, Star, was afraid and ventured off into the creek and was swept down stream.

While in the cave, the children discovered a bundle wrapped in hides. Upon arriving home, they shared their find with the family. Mr. Iron Cloud, a historian from the University, was brought in to open the bundle.

As the story unfolds, Joe has many surprises at one time. He finds his horse, Star. He meets his cousin, Howard. The family mare "Sungwiye" has a brand new colt. But above all, Joe learns that he has found a very valuable historical record which was recorded by his great grandfather, hundreds of years ago.

It is just the beginning of many adventures for Joe and his family, the High Elks, and his family, and what a fitting name for the new colt "Otokahe" which means "beginning" in the Lakota language.

# Teacher Talk

## Appropriate Methods For Teaching About Native American Peoples:

- Understand the term “Native American” includes all peoples indigenous to the Western Hemisphere.
- Present Native American people as appropriate role models to children.
- Native American students should not be singled out and asked to describe their families’ traditions or their culture.
- Avoid the assumption there are no Native American students in your class.
- Use books and materials which are written and illustrated by Native American people: speeches, songs, poems, and writings, which show the linguistic skill of a people who have come from an oral tradition.
- When teaching ABC’s, avoid “I is for Indian” and “E is for Eskimo.”
- Avoid rhymes or songs that use Native Americans as counting devices, i.e. “One little, two little, three ...”
- Research the traditions and histories, oral and written, of Native Americans before attempting to teach these.
- Avoid referring to or using materials which depict Native Americans as savages, primitives, “The Noble Savage,” “Red Man,” “simple,” or “extinct.”
- Present Native American Peoples as having unique, separate, and distinct cultures, languages, beliefs, traditions, and customs.
- Avoid materials that use non-Native Americans or other characters dressed as “Indians.”
- Avoid craft activities that trivialize Native American dress, dance, and beliefs, i.e. toilet-paper roll kachinas, paper bag and construction paper costumes and head-dresses. Research authentic methods and have the proper materials.
- Realize that many songs, dances, legends, and ceremonies of Native American Peoples are considered sacred and should not be portrayed as an activity.
- If your educational institution employs images or references to Native American peoples as mascots, i.e. Redskins. Urge your administration to abandon these offensive names.
- Correct and guide children when they “war whoop” or employ any other stereotypical mannerisms.
- Depict Native American peoples, past and present, as heroes who are defending their people, rights, and lands.
- Avoid phrases and wording such as massacre, victory, and conquest which distort facts and history.
- Teach Native American history as a regular part of American History. Avoid materials which illustrate Native American heroes as only those who helped Euro-Americans, i.e. Thanksgiving.
- Use materials and texts which outline the continuity of Native American societies from past to present.
- Use materials that show respect and understanding of the sophistication and complexities of Native American societies. Understand and impart that the spiritual beliefs of Native American peoples are not “superstitions” or “heathen.”
- Invite a Native American guest speaker/presenter to your class or for a school assembly. Contact a local Native American organization or your library for a list of these resources. Offer an honorarium or gift to those who visit your school.
- Avoid the assumption that a Native American person knows everything about all Native Americans.
- Use materials that show the value Native American Peoples place on our elders, children, and women. Avoid offensive terms such as papoose and squaw. Use respectful language.
- Understand that not all Native American Peoples have “Indian” surnames, but familiar European and Hispanic names as well.
- Help children understand Native American Peoples have a wide variety of physical features, attributes and value as do people of *all* cultures and races.
- Most of all, teach children about Native Americans in a manner that you would like used to depict *your* culture and racial/ethnic origin.

From the Ableza Institute, <http://www.ableza.org/>



# Cherokee Female Seminary 1851

## *Native American Boarding School First*

One of the first boarding schools for Native Americans was not created by the federal government, but was founded in 1851 by the Cherokee National Council of Oklahoma. Students at the Cherokee Female Seminary took courses in Latin, French, trigonometry, political economy, and literary criticism, a curriculum that precluded any discussion of Cherokee culture or language. Pupils staged dramatic productions, held music recitals and published their own newsletter. But their graduation rate proved almost non-existent, and color and class hierarchies existed with lighter-peers referring to themselves as “progressive” Cherokees.

Still this institution helped shape an acculturated Cherokee identity in which young graduates “became educators, businesswomen, physicians, stock raisers, and prominent social workers. An 1888 graduate Rachel Caroline Eaten pursued a baccalaureate and then went on for a Ph.D. in History at the University of Chicago. The author of four books on Oklahoma, two on the Cherokees, Eaten taught at several colleges including Trinity University in San Antonio where she also chaired the history department.

Responding to tribal criticisms that the seminary students were ill prepared to take their places as farmers’ wives, the curriculum shifted by 1905 to include classes in “domestic science” with cooking and cleaning predominately featured. For fifty years, more than 3,000 young women had attended the Cherokee Female Seminary, and their lives there “helped to strengthen their identities as Cherokees although there were differences in opinion as to what a Cherokee really was,” according to historian Devon Mihesuah. The old female seminary building still stands on the campus of Northeastern State University in Oklahoma.

### **Other sources about Indian Boarding Schools from the National Parks *Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States, Theme Study, August 2000:***

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Trennert, Robert A., Jr. *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. 1988.



**For information on African, Hispanic, Asian, Native American history, see past issues of the Brown Quarterly on our website at:**

**[brownvboard.org](http://brownvboard.org)**

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