

Native American Mission Schools

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Historical Paper

Paper Length: 2240

A mission school or missionary school was a religious school originally developed and run by Christian missionaries. The first people to start mission schools started to establish in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They compromised and made laws to fix and to prevent children being hurt. They usually took children away from their parents and families for around 4 years. There were many problems with Native Americans attending Mission Schools. It started a conflict between the government and the parents of the children who were sent. They had to stop doing all their native traditions and cut their hair. At the schools they were forced to learn Christianity, and were beaten if they disobeyed or refused to do as told. When they came to these schools they were forced to learn English and English ways.

Once they arrived at their mission schools, the government's goal was to make the Indians "civilized" or give up their own way and adapt to white culture. Christian missionaries were often eager to have Indians adopt white culture because they believed that this was necessary for becoming Christian. The federal government worked with Protestant missions to further the goal of breaking down Indian cultures. The federal government took its first steps to support Indian education by providing funds to religious missions so they could set up schools. The Congress took a more definite step in 1819 when it appropriated \$10,000 for the "Civilization Fund," which was used to provide funds for Indian mission schools. President Ulysses S. Grant took this policy further in 1869 when he initiated his famous Peace Policy. Under this policy, the federal government entrusted the education and "civilization" of entire tribes to various religious denominations.

In the 1870s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and white reformers came up with the idea of creating boarding schools for Indian youth. These schools were funded and operated by the federal government and stressed agricultural and mechanical education for boys and household skills for girls. Many of the reformers believed that these schools could succeed only if Indian children lived at the schools year round. They felt that Indian children could more effectively be "civilized," or brainwashed by removing them from the influences of their families and tribes. The children were often purposely sent to schools hundreds of miles away from their homes in order to make it difficult for them to escape and return home on foot.

The Peace Policy ended in failure in 1882 as Protestant denominations failed to make significant headway in "civilizing" the Indians or solving what Whites saw as America's "Indian Problem." While many Indian people saw the benefit of aspects of white education, they resisted giving up their own languages and cultures and replacing them with English and white ways of life. Even before the program ended, the federal government began to explore new ways to achieve its goals. United States, federal government worked with Protestant missions to further the goal of breaking down Indian cultures. The first and most important of these boarding schools was the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Richard Henry Pratt, a former army officer, established the Carlisle School and brought many children from western tribes there as students. Pratt believed that Indian children had to be immersed in white culture, forced to speak English, made to wear American clothing, and isolated from tribal or familial influences. Pratt wanted to see his system used as a foundation for establishing other

boarding schools, but the federal government was reluctant to spend more money on these expensive institutions. Many of the Indian students who graduated from Carlisle returned to their tribes and took back their tribal languages, practiced tribal cultures, and lived as members of their own tribal communities. Other white reformers believed that day schools on the reservations were more effective and less expensive, since Indian children only attended school during the day and went home to their parents at night. Pratt fought passionately against this idea because he believed that for Indian education to be successful, children had to be removed from their families and tribes.

In the 1880s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs decided to focus more of its efforts on reservation day-schools. However, the boarding school method did not die out. Instead, it was integrated into the Indian education system established by the federal government which included reservation day-schools, schools run by religious missions (often funded by the federal government), boarding schools on Indian reservations, and off-reservation boarding schools such as Carlisle. While these schools functioned differently, they all had the same goal: to strip Indian children of their languages, cultures, and tribal identities. Boarding schools both on and off reservations were most aggressive in this regard since they took Indian children away from their families and tribes and immersed them in white culture.

In many cases, children as young as six years old were taken from their parents and did not see them again until they were teenagers. Parents could visit their children, but boarding schools were often far from reservation homes, and many parents could only make the trip once or twice a year. Many Wisconsin Indian children attended

off-reservation boarding schools such as the Carlisle School and the Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, while others went to religious boarding schools such as the Morris Indian School in Morris, Minnesota, which was run by Roman Catholic nuns.

Reservation boarding schools were also established in Wisconsin, the most important of which was the Tomah Indian Industrial School in Tomah. The federal government began building the school in 1891 on a two-hundred acre tract. The school opened in 1893 with a total of six students, all of them Ho-chunk. Other Wisconsin tribes had students enrolled there as well, but the Ho-chunk always provided the most students because of the school's proximity to their settlements. Like most boarding schools, stressed industrial training for boys and household skills for girls. Later the Tomah Indian Industrial School initiated an experimental farming operation to teach agricultural skills as well. The school also taught reading, mathematics, music, athletics, and military training. Religious training in Christianity was also required. The government also established a reservation boarding school on the Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe Reservation and on the Oneida Reservation. Roman Catholic boarding schools on the Menominee Reservation at Keshena and the Bad River Ojibwe Reservation at Odanah were funded in part by the federal government.

While the federal government operated or funded five boarding schools in Wisconsin, it operated twelve day schools. In part, this was due to cost: boarding schools cost four to five times more to run than day schools. Cost-conscious officials in Washington D.C. hoped that less expensive day-schools would accomplish the same goals as boarding schools in educating and understanding Indian children.

Administrators who ran the schools did everything in their power to deny Indian children access to their cultures.

One Ojibwe man who attended the government boarding school on the Lac du Flambeau Reservation noted many years later that he was taken away from his family at age six without his parents consent. Once he and other Indian children arrived at the school, white administrators "cut our long hair short, made us all wear little black uniforms, speak a completely different language, and sleep with other kids on high bunk beds." After several years at the boarding school, many children returned to relatives they barely knew. Often, they could no longer speak their tribal languages and had forgotten many tribal customs. The Ojibwe man at the Lac du Flambeau school noted that he never spoke the Ojibwe language very much after that since most of it was taken away in that so called government school.

In the end, government-run or government-funded boarding schools and day schools failed to destroy Indian culture, but the federal government and the schools did succeed in undercutting the cultural foundations of several generations of Indian people. Government-run boarding schools and day schools are now a thing of the past and, in the last thirty years, Wisconsin Indian tribes have done much to undo the damage done to their cultures by this type of schooling. Tribes have been able to do this in large part because the passage of the 1972 Indian Education Act acknowledged tribes control over their educational systems within the guidelines set by the federal government for all schools in the United States.

Tribes gained control over their schools as well as a degree of control over federal funds for education. This change has brought about the creation of Indian schools run by the tribes. Indian schools now teach Indian children about their languages and cultures, which is a dramatic change from earlier government policies. In 1976, the Menominee used these new powers and funds to create their own school district. By 1993, the Menominee had also established the Menominee Indian Tribal College on their reservation. Other tribes in Wisconsin have also taken control of their own school systems.

According to Edwin Tabor, teacher at Day School in Upper Lake, California, a daily schedule was:

Opening Exercises
Subject for May-Politeness
Quotations
A roll call from memory
Songs
Pentecostal Hymns, selected by pupils
Reading by teacher from Bible or other selection by pupils
Lords Prayer
Flag Salute
Physical Culture
Gymnastics
General Calisthenics
Games
Ball, Races, Party Games etc.
Breathing Exercises-(In open air)
Reading
Woosters Chart lesson
The Rose Primer
New Educational Reader No.1
Language

Use new words in language work
Talks and sentences about words in lesson
Sentence building & conversation
Elementary English Text
Spelling
Drawing
Oral and local Geography
Hygiene

According to a National Public Radio article, “The government still operates a handful of off-reservation boarding schools, but funding is in decline. Now, many American Indians are fighting to keep the schools open. According to Sherman Alexie author of the book, *The Absolutely True-Diary of Part-Time Indian*, 5 years ago the graduation rates were very low for American Indian students, but they were trending upward. Starting around 2008, we started to see the rates go the other direction while every other major group was kicking upward, but I still think the picture of the overall achievement would have not been dramatically different which is a great thing I believe. American Indians were usually very poor.

The Indian Helper, published this letter on March 9, 1888 where Luther Kuhns sent a letter home from his mission school he attended. In this letter he told his mother, that he thought they were going to tear down in the spring to rebuild the building. He explained that the old dining room was too narrow, also it was only one story high. The tables stood close together, the boys headquarters was two stories high with big doors with big hinges. There was 16-18 boys per room. Usually they were very noisy which

made it hard to study. When Luther returned in 1886 he saw a great big dining room which had been built in 6 months. He also returned to a great big building extending toward the west to east and three stories high. At that point they were building the Little Boys' Quarters and a new gymnasium last Nov. 1887.

Richard Henry Pratt is famous for his philosophy: "Kill the Indian, and Save the Man." according to *History Matters*. Disease was one reason why many Indian Boarding School is closed. Carlisle shut down, at least 168 children who attended Carlisle from tuberculosis, pneumonia and the flu from the school. 500 students were sent home when they got sick or too weak to study. A cemetery was built on the school grounds and remains today as a place to honor and reflect on the students who died.

A mission school or missionary school was a religious school originally developed and run by Christian missionaries. The first people to start mission schools started to establish in the United States during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They compromised and made laws to fix and to prevent children being hurt. I believe there could have been better ways to solve the problems there were having, also I think that it wasn't such a good idea to create a cemetery at the school.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

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Strobel, Tomas, and June Strobel. "Mission Schools Native Americans." 28 Jan. 2018. I gathered many things about being taken away and I got to speak to a local in town whose kids were taken away to go to a mission school in Lac Du Flambeau.

"Weekly outline/lesson plan for Upper Lake Day School, California," Digital Public Library of America, <http://dp.la/item/c5a55aa59e4ea37cec2c490e0a57fb95>.

This was kinda helpful, it helped me understand there daily life and what they learned/did weekly. I would recommend this site if you are ever doing a project on native american mission schools

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Secondary Sources

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"1819-2013: A History of American Indian Education." Education Week, 21 Sept. 2016, www.edweek.org/ew/projects/2013/native-american-education/history-of-american-indian-education.html.

This website helped me get most my information for Native American Mission Schools. It provided a timeline which was helpful for my topic.

Bear, Charla. "American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many." NPR, NPR, 12 May 2008, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16516865.

This was helpful because it explain many things including the disciplines and punishments they get. I would recommend this site to anyone doing a project on this topic

"Boarding Schools." *Boarding Schools - Indian Country Wisconsin*, www.mpm.edu/content/wirp/ICW-41.html.

I got a huge portion of my information from here.