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“I am Still Dakota”: Assimilation, Education, and Survival on the Lake Traverse Reservation

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**“I AM STILL DAKOTA”: ASSIMILATION, EDUCATION, AND SURVIVAL ON
THE LAKE TRAVERSE RESERVATION**

By

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B.S, Black Hills State University, 2021

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History
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In the Graduate School
The University of South Dakota
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The members of the Committee appointed to examine
the Thesis of Katherine Kemp
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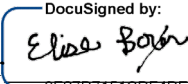
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ABSTRACT

In 1867, the Sisseton Wahpeton signed the Lake Traverse Treaty and settled on the Lake Traverse Reservation in Northeastern South Dakota. As part of the growing westward expansion of settlers, the U.S government confined Indigenous peoples to reservations and tried to destroy their culture. Federal and state governments since then have continued to eliminate, relocate, and assimilate Indigenous people. For Indigenous peoples, the land is life, and assimilation through boarding schools served to sever them from their land and enforce white superiority.

In this thesis, I argue that the Sisseton Wahpeton found ways to engage in cultural resilience utilizing Indigenous paradigms of doublespeak, the rhetoric of refusal, survivance, and healing. Chief Gabriel Renville saved whites in the U.S.-Dakota War and used settler views of him as “friendly” to work for the creation of the Lake Traverse Reservation. Sam Brown served within the settler safety zone as an example in the larger national agenda of what defined a civilized Indian. But this also allowed him to support cultural resilience within the Sisseton School in subtle ways. The children who attended the school carved out paths of cultural resilience and refused to say that all was well in the community. Finally, the boarding school closed in 1919, and the Catholic Tekakwitha Orphanage opened in the 1930s as another method of settler colonial assimilation. Under a color-blind racial ideology, Catholic Oblate priests believed white families must adopt Indigenous children to save them. Yet, Sisseton Wahpeton children who experienced these traumas found ways to heal the soul wound of their trauma with a return to traditional methods of healing.

By the late 20th century, the Sisseton Wahpeton created new pathways for cultural resurgence through self-determination and educational reclamation. Survival schools like Tiospa Zina used grassroots curriculum and Dakota language to renew their Indigenous identity and culture. From one generation to the next, the Sisseton Wahpeton rejected paternalistic narratives of assimilation and survived. Instead, through various Indigenous paradigms of doublespeak, resilience, and healing, they shifted their identities in new ways to keep their culture alive.

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Dr. Elise Boxer

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge and pay my most profound respects to the Oceti Sakowin people whose land I live on. I dedicate this to the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate and to the students who did and did not survive the government boarding schools.

Pilamayaye

Preface

In this thesis, I use the term Indigenous when speaking of American Indian tribes. I believe the term Indian is a derogatory word that erases a culture of over five hundred tribes with Indigenous names and histories. Māori Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, suggests that “In some contexts, such as Australia and North America, the word Indigenous is a way of including the many diverse communities, language groups, and nations, each with their identification within a single grouping.”¹ For generalization, I may use the term Native American or Indigenous interchangeably when describing tribes who live in North America. Furthermore, I use the term, Dakota, when discussing all four of the Eastern Dakota bands. When needed, I specify the tribe, such as the Sisseton (Sisistunwan) or Mdewakanton (Bdwakantunwan). It is important to note that the Sisseton and Wahpeton discussed in this thesis are two different bands that are part of the larger Dakota Oyate. Each band is further divided into separate tribal groups. But in the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War some of the two bands settled on the Lake Traverse Reservation and further intermarried.

Additionally, when describing governments, I use the term American or federal government to make visible Indigenous governance, both pre-and post-IRA. Finally, I approach this work as a white woman with no Indigenous history or connection to the Lake Traverse Reservation. Yet, I am aware of my white privilege, and the history of white women manipulating power structures to the detriment of Indigenous people. I do not presume to tell their history for them. The Sisseton Wahpeton community continues to preserve and tell their stories and histories. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge my thesis is written from a non-Indigenous perspective while centering Indigenous theories, methodologies, and histories.

¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2021), 6.

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Introduction

On 25 February 2022, the Sisseton Agency Headquarters & Wacipi Grounds of the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate at the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation became a registered, national historic site. The space symbolizes one hundred and fifty years of resilience and the continuation of the Sisseton (Sissituwan) and Wahpeton (Wahpetonwan) identity and culture. A wacipi is a site of prayer, but it also brings a community together for feasting, dancing, and celebrating kinship.

Sisseton Wahpeton archivist Tamara St. John stated, “This nomination to the National Register is symbolic of a connection between the Sisseton Wahpeton ancestors of the past that survived much and who said prayers for the generations we are today. They wanted us to know our culture and the beautiful lifeways they loved and lived there at the Sisseton Wahpeton Ceremonial Grounds.”¹ These ancestors experienced a wealth of trauma and navigated expectations that they must assimilate and give up their land. While they incorporated new ways within their Dakota ways and spirituality, they did not necessarily give up their traditions and beliefs. But one hundred and fifty years after removal, trauma, and assimilation have not been easy. Yet the Sisseton Wahpeton continue to assert their presence, not absence, as a people.

Sisseton, South Dakota, is within the boundaries of the Lake Traverse Reservation, the first reservation opened for white settlement in South Dakota. The tribe has a long history battling assimilation by white society, especially in boarding schools. As I began to explore educational assimilation in the Lake Traverse Reservation, I learned that the Tekakwitha

¹ Jeff Mammenga, “Sisseton Agency Headquarters & Wacipi Grounds listed in National Register of Historic Places,” *South Dakota State Government Press Release*, February 25, 2022.

Orphanage which opened in 1938 just outside Sisseton, was selling Dakota children in the 1950s under a claim of benevolent charity to white families.² Further research revealed Tekakwitha was merely a new form of cultural elimination in which settler society utilized educational institutions under false pretenses. My research so far shows that the Sisseton boarding school, Sisseton Indian Industrial that opened in 1873, was the first Native American boarding school in South Dakota, long ignored by boarding school literature about off-reservation federal schools that focuses on the 1890s.³ These two institutions, Sisseton Indian Industrial and Tekakwitha Orphanage, are part of a larger story of white settler society trying to assimilate Indigenous peoples through education. Both institutions were found on the Lake Traverse Reservation and both sought to eliminate Indigenous culture. Tekakwitha Orphanage must be understood as a new form of cultural elimination via adoption by white families.

Subsequently, my thesis fills this void in regional boarding school history by addressing government assimilation in South Dakota via educational institutions. I begin this thesis with the origins of Sisseton Indian Industrial School, the experience of teachers, and school conditions in 1873 based on primary sources. I also document the views of students and staff in the final years of the school between 1900 and 1919 using *Annual Superintendent Reports* and student speeches published in the *Sisseton Weekly Standard*. Finally, I go beyond the school's history and consider larger federal child removal policies and how they may be related to the creation of the Tekakwitha Orphanage in the 1930s.

² Father John Pohlen to Seely Family, April 25, 1952, in BCIM Mission Reports, 1902-1975, Sisseton Reservation, *Tekakwitha and St. Matthew's Missions*, microfilm, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Milwaukee, WI (Hereafter referred to as BCIM Mission Reports).

³ Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *Sisseton Agency*, 1892, 52.

To do this, I create a modern case study of assimilation policies at the Lake Traverse Reservation in the twentieth century. Uncovering the erasure of the Sisseton boarding school history and Native American experiences enriches our understanding of boarding school history in South Dakota and nationally. My research questions consist of the following: how did Sisseton Indian Industrial serve as a tool of the settler state to destroy the identity of Dakota children? How did Dakota students and staff at Sisseton Indian Industrial navigate assimilation policies? Once the boarding school closed, how did the Oblate missionaries at Lake Traverse Reservation continue assimilation policies into the Great Depression? Finally, how did students at the Tekakwitha Orphanage assimilate but simultaneously retain their culture through acts of resilience based on Indigenous ways of knowing?

To solve these questions, I utilize settler colonialism and survivance as theoretical frameworks. I show how government boarding schools tried to take students away from their land and culture through removal and education. I then use Indigenous paradigms to analyze how Sisseton Wahpeton students and the teachers subverted this settler colonial system in ways that refashioned and renewed a continuing culture of survival. Because of their persistence and adaptation in the face of assimilation, newer generations of the Sisseton Wahpeton were able to create tribal led schools with gras-roots curriculum and rebuild the community. Suppose we refashion the story of the Sisseton Wahpeton as one of survival? As a people who look to the coming generations as they continue a long historical pattern of cultural resilience in the face of settler colonialism? In doing so, we create Indigenous futurity, the ability to heal the sound of a coming one story at a time and imagine beyond settler oppression. The first step in such a project is to center the Sisseton Wahpeton voice in ways contests the narratives of successful settler colonial assimilation.

In settler colonialism theory, white settlers look to erase Indigenous people by taking land to create a settler society. In “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” anthropologist Patrick Wolfe stated that, “settler colonialism is a structure, not an event.”⁴ Settler colonialism differs from exploitative colonialism, which is a system that occupies or usurps land, labor, and resources from one group of people for the benefit of another. Settler colonialism is inexorability tied to occupying land and resources permanently, in essence, the invader stays and declares themselves “Natives of the land.” But to continue occupation requires an ongoing structure of the elimination of the “other.” According to Wolfe elimination is “inherently eliminatory but not invariably genocidal.” He refers to this as the “logic of elimination,” which consists of physical violence, religious conversions, blood quantum rules, census rolls, individual land allotments, institutionalization, and Indigenous child removal.⁵ These logics of elimination impose a system of power with one race group at the apex top and those who fall below, but the apex group benefits with access to land and resources.

Critical to understanding settler colonialism is that the system is predicated on the *continuing* removal and exclusion of Indigenous peoples from their land to reaffirm settler ties to the land. It is also important to remember that the settler always feels under constant threat, an anxiety that they themselves will be challenged for their presence and removal. Thus, settlers justify the oppression of Indigenous peoples through stereotypes and narratives of “savage Indian,” or “poverty-stricken Indians.”

⁴ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 387–409.

⁵ Wolfe, *Elimination of the Native*, 387.

These narratives in turn have erased white settler history in that they are settlers, and so we see histories full of “pioneers.” Because settlers claim they are the first on the land, they can go in and claim it with direct challenge using dangerous methods such as child removal.

Ultimately, settler colonialism is about land, ownership of land, and extraction of resources. Land is the goal and Indigenous people stand in the way of this. One way of solving the “Indian problem,” is the removal of Indigenous children to boarding schools to destroy their culture. For Indigenous peoples, the land is life, and assimilation via education in boarding schools served to sever them from their land and enforce white superiority. But how are tribes challenging the structure of settler colonialism in ways that look beyond it to envision an Indigenous futurity?? One way is a structural transformation of Indigenous identity that allows for cultural and educational resurgence over time using survivance.

Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor wrote in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* that survivance is “Native individuals who perform active resistance and rejection of dominance.”⁶ For those in boarding schools such resistance could be subtle or blatant as tribes found ways to reject that they easily assimilated. Furthermore, Vizenor concludes that responsibility to kin is a communal act that supports survivance. Indigenous teachers in boarding school were often related to the students and found ways to support them. Therefore, the very act of survivance is a rejection of settler erase as survivance creates an Indigenous presence, not absence due to assimilation.⁷ Additionally, historian Christopher Pexa further suggests that these survivance are active performances of rejection that are “translating and re-working settler state

⁶ Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 11-17.

⁷ Vizenor, *Survivance*, 19.

mandates into Indigenous understandings of relation."⁸ Dakota teachers and children re-made connections to culture at boarding schools as a means of survival.

Throughout the twentieth century, the historiography of federal government boarding schools moved from focusing on administrative policies and alums interviews, to recently looking at intercultural relationships and how students navigated these institutions for survivance. Canonical works on American Indian boarding schools begin with David Wallace Adams' *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, first published in 1995, which helped define the field.⁹ Adams showed how reformers believed civilizing the Indian through American education was more benevolent than killing them. Government boarding schools enforced English language, individualism, Christian religion, and vocational training. These schools would civilize Indigenous people into valuable members of American society. Once transformed, they would no longer need vast acres of land, and the government could use this surplus land for white settlement and agricultural farming.

Other monographs about boarding schools, such as Ojibway Brenda Child's *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* and Mvskoke K Tsianina Lomawaima in *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*, offered new perspectives by using oral histories and student correspondence to show resilience and resistance against assimilation.¹⁰ Choctaw Devon Mihesuah examined Indigenous experiences from the lens of race

⁸ Christopher Pexa, *Translated Nation: Rewriting the Dakota Oyate* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 148.

⁹ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); For a discussion of national Indian policies of assimilation see Francis Ford Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1976); Francis Ford Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001).

¹⁰ Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); K Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln:

in *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1901*, and addressed how students navigated identity at the Cherokee Female Seminary.¹¹ A more recent work following Child and Lomawaima is Chippewa Denise Lajimodiere. In the 2019 *Stringing Rosaries*, Lajimodiere interviewed multiple alums of boarding schools across the Great Plains. These alums told of their experiences and allowed themselves to heal the soul wound of their traumas from the schools.¹²

Scholars of South Dakota boarding school history include Scott Riney's *Rapid City Indian School, 1898-1933* and Cynthia Landrum's *The Dakota Sioux Experience at Flandreau and Pipestone Indian Schools* also used letters between students and families and government records to examine the role of off-reservation boarding schools in South Dakota. Like Adams, Riney agreed that boarding schools have complex legacies of resistance and accommodation. But Landrum highlights communities at Flandreau and Pipestone as sites of adaptation. She suggested that by the 1970s, Dakota tribes, gaining control of these schools, dismantled settler assimilation through tribal curriculums.¹³

Several historians wrote theocratic boarding school narratives: Claudia Duratschek, in *Crusading Along Sioux Trails: a History of the Catholic Indian Missions of South Dakota*, addressed Catholic boarding schools in South Dakota from 1860 to 1930.¹⁴ Sicangu Virginia

University of Nebraska Press, 1994); See also Sally Hyer, *One House, One Voice, One Heart: Native American Education at the Santa Fe Indian School* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1990).

¹¹ Devon, Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

¹² Denise Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: The History, the Unforgivable, and the Healing of Northern Plains American Indian Boarding School Survivors* (Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2019).

¹³ Cynthia Landrum, *The Dakota Sioux Experience at Flandreau, and Pipestone Indian Schools* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2019); Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School, 1898-1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Claudia Duratschek, *Crusading Along Sioux Trails: A History of the Catholic Indian Missions of South Dakota* (Yankton: Grail Publication, 1947).

Driving Hawk-Sneve in *That They May Have Life: The Episcopal Church in South Dakota, 1859-1976* argued how the syncretism of Episcopal and Lakota religion by missionaries and Lakota families made religious boarding schools more survivable in South Dakota.¹⁵ A more recent work in 2018 by Harvey Markowitz, *Converting the Rosebud: Catholic Missions and the Lakota's 1886-1916*, addressed the role of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM) at the St. Francis Mission. Markowitz argued that the missionaries took part in the breakdown of Lakota families, but Lakota children also adapted elements of Catholicism that reaffirmed their culture.¹⁶ Finally, Fred Kohoutek's 1939 work, "A History of the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation," is the only scholar to address the Sisseton boarding school directly but stopped in 1891 after allotment of the reservation.¹⁷ My work builds on Kohoutek by examining the Sisseton Indian Industrial School in the 20th century. Other case studies of boarding schools in South Dakota include dissertations and masters' theses. These works focused on federal policies, assimilation methods, off-reservation boarding schools, and intercultural relations.¹⁸ But using the lens of settler colonialism, my thesis centers on educational assimilation and survival through the history of an on-reservation boarding school and orphanage.

First, settler society used narratives of the unfit family on Lake Traverse to remove Dakota children as part of an ongoing settler colonial project of land dispossession. Scholars discussing the effect of settler-colonial child removal include Margaret Jacob's *White Mother to*

¹⁵ Virginia Driving-Hawk Sneve, *That They May Have Life: The Episcopal Church in South Dakota, 1859-1976* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977); See also Carole Barrett, "St. Elizabeth's Boarding School for Indian Children, 1886-1967" (PhD diss., Grand Forks: University of North Dakota, 2005).

¹⁶ Harvey Markowitz, *Converting the Rosebud: Catholic Mission and the Lakota's, 1886-1916* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018).

¹⁷ Fred Kohoutek, "A History of the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation," Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1939.

¹⁸ Edward Welch, "A Model of Assimilation: The Pierre Indian School, 1891-1928," Master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 2006; Robert Galler, "Environment, Cultures, and Social Change on the Great Plains: A History of the Crow Creek Tribal School," Ph.D., diss. (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2000).

a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940. Jacobs addressed the role of white women in child removal policies of Indigenous in both the U.S and Australia as a form of land dispossession.¹⁹ As teachers and recruiters, White women undermined Indigenous connections to land as they raised Native American children in boarding schools. Furthermore, these women enforced white family ideals and individualism, not Indigenous ways of knowing.

Additionally, Samantha Williams, in *Assimilation, Resilience, and Survival: A History of the Stewart Indian School, 1890–2020* argued that the government used settler-colonial policies of forced removal and religious conversion, English education, and abuse at the Stewart Indian School. She suggested that these boarding schools are rural borderland spaces that allow students and families to subvert the system.²⁰ Julie Kamoā wrote, “Education for Elimination in Nineteenth Century Hawai’i: Settler Colonialism and the Native Hawaiian Chiefs’ Children’s Boarding School,” and asserted that Congregational missionaries taught Hawaiian children to be ashamed of sex and bodies and, instead, encouraged miscegenation to undermine the Hawaiian monarchy as part of a settler-colonial system of land theft.²¹ For example, in Hawaii settler policies tried to breed out Indigeneity to disconnect them from their cultural identity. Doing this helped white society, who could claim the people were not Indigenous enough to own land.

Scholarship on Native American student writing centers on adaptation, identity, and resistance strategies. Where earlier scholars focused on students’ experiences at boarding

¹⁹ Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

²⁰ Samantha Williams, *Assimilation, Resilience, and Survival: A History of the Stewart Indian School, 1890–2020* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022).

²¹ Julie Kaomea, “Education for Elimination in Nineteenth-Century Hawai’i: Settler Colonialism and the Native Hawaiian Chiefs’ Children’s Boarding School,” *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2014): 123–44.

schools, Clifford Trafzer, in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*, addressed their time after school. Trafzer demonstrated that students used education to “turn the power” and become activists and intellectuals.²² Child and Lomawaima suggested that the oral histories of students proved resistance. However, Sarah Klotz, in *Writing Their Bodies: Rhetorical Relations at the Carlisle Indian School*, and Jacqueline Emery, in *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, hypothesized that Indigenous students writing in boarding school magazines were a form of both resistance and cultural survival.²³

Analysis of student writings in government boarding schools changed the field. Child removal policies are a crucial feature of settler colonialism that looks to disconnect Indigenous peoples from their land. Scholarship concerning child removal at Lake Traverse has primarily focused on the Sisseton orphanage. In her book *Indian Orphanages*, Marilyn Holt examined Native American on-reservation orphanages in New York, Oklahoma, and South Dakota.²⁴ Holt specifically analyzed Lake Traverse and the role of the BCIM as a tool of the settler state by articulating Native American orphanages and adoption policies as another form of assimilation. In *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous in the Postwar World*, Margaret Jacobs further addressed the settler-colonial adoption of Indigenous children to white families as part of a larger project of land dispossession via Indigenous assimilation and child removal policies.

²² Clifford Trafzer et al, *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

²³ Sarah Klotz, *Writing Their Bodies: Restoring Rhetorical Relations at the Carlisle Indian School* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2021); Jacqueline Emery, *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

²⁴ Marilyn Holt, *Indian Orphanages* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

Jacobs examined child removal policies at Lake Traverse Reservation in the 1960s. Specifically, she discussed Sisseton Wahpeton, Cheryl Spider DeCoteau, who testified in Congressional hearings on what would become the Indian Child Welfare Act, or ICWA. DeCoteau testified against state social workers on the reservation who unfairly removed Dakota children from families and communities. My work explores in more detail beyond Holt and Jacobs concerning settler colonial assimilation at the Lake Traverse Reservation as I end with the closure of the Tekakwitha Orphanage in the 1980s and the opening of the Tiospa Zina Tribal School shortly after. Furthermore, I draw upon Klotz and Emery by analyzing Dakota speeches of students. I follow Adams by examining how teachers at the Sisseton boarding instituted assimilationist policies. But unlike Riney and Landrum, I consider the role of the on-reservation Sisseton boarding school and how Dakota navigated their identities.

Primary documents concerning the Sisseton boarding school consist of superintendent reports on the Lake Traverse Reservation between 1874 and 1938 from the *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*. The agents in these reports detail the public events at the school. The *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Sisseton Agency, 1824-1881*, are correspondence between agents and the Commissioner concerning the Sisseton boarding school.

Inspection Reports of the Sisseton Agency, 1873-1899, offers reports on the conditions and staff of the boarding school in its early history. *Annual Reports of the Superintendent, Sisseton Agency, 1910-1938*, gives information from multiple superintendents on the Sisseton boarding school, law, agriculture, poverty, and events on the reservation. Volumes 17, 28, and 34 of the *Statutes of the United States* detail Dakota treaties that document land dispossession, the creation of reservation boundaries, and name, a government-funded boarding school. The writings of Eugene Mossman add a white perspective to the school. Opposite this, the writings of

Sam Brown, in the *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*, supply a Dakota voice for the school administration. The *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, starting in 1892, was a Republican paper published every Friday. Between 1900 and 1919, the *Sisseton Weekly Standard* changed ownership five times. The paper included a weekly article on events at the Sisseton boarding school. One article, “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” in the June 1914, issue includes students' graduation speeches.

An official I contacted at the Oblates of Mary Immaculate archive said documents regarding Tekakwitha Orphanage were being moved to a central archive in Texas and not open to the public. However, they led me to Marquette University's archive, where I found Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM) correspondence. Therefore, other primary documents will include those from the BCIM, such as director's correspondence from Directors Hughes and Tennelly, with Oblate Father Pohlen between 1923 and 1938. The BCIM Sisseton Mission reports from clergy between 1923 and 1948 supply statistical information. The Sisters of the Divine Savior do not give public access to their archives, and I, therefore, rely upon secondary literature regarding them. But I do include an interview with Sister Irene DeMarrias from the 1980s in *The Bishops Bulletin*, a Catholic newspaper. DeMarrias, a Sisseton Wahpeton, worked at Tekakwitha Orphanage as a teacher for forty years and provides Dakota views of resilience at the administrative level. Newspapers such as the *Sisseton Courier* between 1930 and 1949 and the *Sota Iya Ye Yapi Ye* in 2010 further add context to the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate. These newspapers often discussed the poverty in Sisseton, education, and the ongoing court cases for land compensation in Sisseton.

In four chronological chapters, my thesis explores institutions of educational assimilation on the Lake Traverse Reservation from the perspectives of administrative staff, students, and

Catholic missionaries. Chapter one of the thesis sets up the early development of Sisseton Indian Industrial on the Lake Traverse Reservation. I begin with a historical background of how the U.S. government removed the Dakota to Lake Traverse Reservation and include 1867, 1872, and 1891 treaties to document treaty money used to build the school. I reveal that Chief Gabriel Renville advocated for the creation of the Lake Traverse Reservation for his people. I also show how Renville collaborated with Agent Moses Adams in creating the Sisseton Indian Industrial School, and the paternalistic views toward Indigenous peoples at the time. This first chapter primarily explores the school's early history between 1873 and 1880 and the views of the staff.

But I conclude that those like Renville began the path of creating a space of cultural strength and renewal. Chapter two of the thesis covers the school from 1880 to 1891. I use *Agent Reports*, *Inspection Reports*, and Principal Thomas Gordon's writings to discuss the school's curriculum, industry work, and poor health conditions. This section examines how the school implemented national assimilation policies. However, the writings of principal Gordon show the reality of differing agendas at the local level and how the Dakota navigated these policies. Finally, I examine the power dynamics between agents, and the school with the tenure of Principal Sam Brown, a Sisseton Wahpeton tribal member, using his family papers. I analyze how he ran the school and navigated his identity as a mixed-blood Dakota.

Chapter three focuses on the early 1900s to show how the school shifted to vocational classes and day-to-day operations. Chapter three examines Superintendent reports of Sanford Allen and Eugene Mossman alongside national Indian policies and how teachers viewed students as inferior. The graduation speeches of Alcesta Barse, Edward LaBelle, and Frances DeMarrias challenged these stereotypes and showed how these students used education to survive. In the 20th century, Dakota removal and education changed and shifted to adoption. My concluding

chapter examines the history of child removal at the Lake Traverse Reservation with the closing of the boarding school and the arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Sisters of the Divine Savior in 1923. Subtopics include the reports and letters of Catholic priest Father Pohlen in his work to construct the Tekakwitha Orphanage. Using propaganda from the Catholic priests, I show that the orphanage is a continuing legacy of settler colonial assimilation that we cannot ignore. I also analyze the experiences of Dakota students Phil St. John, Howard Wanna, Joannette Star Takara who attended Tekakwitha Orphanage. I examine how their stories add to our understanding of how Dakota children navigated settler colonial systems of assimilation and found ways to heal. I conclude my thesis with a brief discussion of the self-determination era of the 1970s. I show that the long history of resistance and resilience provided Dakota with the tools to mobilize and address community issues of racism in the public schools by creating a tribal run school, Tiopsa Zina, and defining education on their terms.

In this thesis, I argue that the Sisseton Wahpeton found ways to remain Dakota by engaging in Indigenous paradigms of doublespeak, refusal, survivance, and healing. First, Dakotas practiced doublespeak, an Indigenous method of resilience which allows one to appear assimilated, but in reality, they are advocating for Indigenous lifeways. Anthropologist Ho-Chunk Renya Ramirez provides a unique framework for understanding resistance to settler colonialism on Indigenous identity. In the 2018 *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud*, Ramirez believed that the syncretism of Ho-Chunk cultural and modern identities allowed her grandparents, the famous activists Henry and Elizabeth Roe Cloud to survive assimilation. According to Ramirez, “Henry and Elizabeth relied on flexible and fluid notions of gender, identity, culture, community, and belonging that they carried with them as they traveled around Indian Country and within white environments.” Of

course, leaving a reservation did not mean a loss of culture either. Yet, the Clouds walked a careful balance whereby they were viewed as both good and bad Indigenous peoples.²⁵

They worked in boarding schools, on government projects, and functioned as models of assimilation. But Ramirez used their writings to depict subversive doublespeak. Henry was involved with the 1928 Meriam Report and the 1934 Indian New Deal.²⁶ In Henry's speeches, he called for Indigenous resilience using the white man's education. Elizabeth collaborated with women's clubs to advocate for women working for tribal councils. Ramirez reminds us that Indigenous culture and identity survive in the face of assimilation. Rather, Indigenous identity is fluid, and shifts to accommodate a nuanced resilience. Doublespeak differs from the usual English definition of intended deception or confusion. The Dakota view of doublespeak is to appear assimilated and to slowly gain access to white privilege so as to create a space of cultural survival over time. For example, Chief Gabriel Renville saved white settlers in the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War and used settler views of him as "friendly" to advocate for the creation of the Lake Traverse Reservation.

Yet even as he advocated for farming and assimilation, he held to Dakota traditions that angered the government. For instance, Renville kept multiple wives and continued to advocate for sacred traditions. Renville also refused to speak English in his interactions with the government. The power of voice and language are critical to the tribe, this is the belief that what you say has power and carries a history of your people. Other Sisseton Wahpeton also appeared assimilated and worked within the system to support the tribe. Sam Brown is used as an example

²⁵ Renya Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 7-8, 228.

²⁶ Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*. Institute for Government Research (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928).

in the national agenda of what defined a “civilized” Indian. Because of his service in the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War, the government looked on him favorably when he applied for the position as principal. But this also allowed him to support cultural resilience within the Sisseton Indian Industrial school in subtle ways. Third, the children who attended the school wrote speeches of ambivalence in which they engaged in a rhetoric of resistance. Students carved out paths of cultural survivance, refused to say that all was well in the community, and asserted the local realities of assimilation.

Finally, as the boarding school closed in 1919, the Catholic Tekakwitha Orphanage opened in the 1930s afterward as another method of settler colonial assimilation. Catholic Oblate priests at the orphanage under a color-blind racial ideology believed that children's best interests were for white families to adopt them. Color-blind racial ideology is a view that claims to end discrimination by ignoring race. Yet denying the negative racial experiences of the children and adopting them to white families is a form of settler elimination. Settlers deny the history and look to erase it through disconnection from families and living with new white parents.

But the Sisseton Wahpeton children who experienced these traumas found ways to heal the soul wound of their historical grief with a return to traditional methods of healing. By the late 20th century, the Sisseton Wahpeton found new pathways for cultural resurgence through self-determination and educational reclamation. Survival schools like Tiospa Zina used grassroots curriculum and Dakota language to renew their Dakota identity and culture. From one generation to the next, the Sisseton Wahpeton performed active methods of survivance that rejected paternalistic narratives of assimilation. Instead, through various Indigenous paradigms of doublespeak, resilience, and healing, they shifted their identities in new ways that kept their culture alive.

This thesis begins by examining the first government boarding school in South Dakota, adding an essential piece to local Dakota and South Dakota histories. The scope of this thesis ends in the late 1980s with the closure of the Tekakwitha Orphanage. But I also end with a look at the ways in which the Sisseton Wahpeton people shifted toward educational cultural renewal at the start of the twentieth-first century. I hope this work allows historians and tribal communities to understand better boarding school assimilation and methods of Indigenous survival in South Dakota.

Chapter One:

Dakota Painted White: The U.S-Dakota War, Land, and Educational Assimilation

Sisseton Indian Industrial School opened in July 1873 as the first government on-reservation boarding school in South Dakota. The school was located in the small community of Goodwill, South Dakota, within the boundaries of the Lake Traverse Reservation. The *Iapi Oaye*, a Dakota-language Presbyterian newspaper created by missionary Stephen Riggs, published an article describing the opening of the school on a hot summer day.²⁷ That afternoon, Riggs was joined by the reservation agent Moses Adams, Dakota pastors John and Daniel Renville and Robert Hopkins, all of whom worked at the Ascension Day school and Good Will Mission Day School nearby. Riggs used their attendance to prove that the tribal community approved this new boarding school. Even Chief Gabriel Renville had a speech of acceptance and appreciation for the school's creation, but his address was not recorded. The government only wanted symbols of Dakota acceptance for the school, not their opinions.

The educational assimilation which occurs in these government boarding schools, and the Dakota people's resistance or adaptation, is central to my thesis. This first chapter seeks to understand what forms of elimination led up to the creation of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School and how these experiences prepared them to either resist or adapt. Settler society tried to assimilate the Dakota through religion, coercion, and education in Minnesota which led to tensions and the U.S-Dakota War. In the aftermath, many of the tribes scattered or intermingled into other tribes. I argue that Gabriel Renville and his band, were instrumental in creating the

²⁷ "Laying the Cornerstone," *Iapi Oaye*, November 7, 1873.

Lake Traverse Reservation, and critical in starting a foundation of cultural resistance against settler colonialism that generations of Sisseton Wahpeton have followed.

I begin this chapter by discussing several forms of elimination in early periods of Dakota history. I start with tribe as they were in Minnesota, the acculturation and factionalism encouraged by missionaries, the U.S-Dakota war, and their removal from Minnesota. Factionalism and trauma continued to haunt the tribe well into the twentieth century as the Sisseton Wahpeton settled onto the Lake Traverse Reservation. But because the tribe tried to help their white neighbors and mixed blood relatives in the war, missionaries and the government believed assimilation would be easy. Yet the tribe now had experience with acculturation (religious, settler government and more) that prepared them for the boarding schools to come. Discussion of Chief Gabriel Renville is critical because he fought for the creation of the Lake Traverse Reservation, while at the same time appearing assimilated to federal agents. Because of his success, the tribe created a new space from which to heal, and prepare for the ongoing fight for cultural survival. As I discuss in this chapter, settler colonial elimination continued to evolve through educational structures to solve the “Indian problem.”

Christian missionaries created the Good Will Mission Day School at the Lake Traverse Reservation to continue the same assimilation project started at the Lac qui Parle Mission in Minnesota. However, sources show that Dakota girls at the school found ways to subtly resist the teachers. In time, the reservation became a test site for government boarding schools in South Dakota with the opening of Sisseton Indian Industrial School in 1873. Finally, I discuss the difficulties the tribe dealt with at the close of the nineteenth century. The government continued to push the tribe to give up land and encourage them to accept allotments. At the same time, Renville and the community had to deal with agents who tried to ban their culture, language, and

religion. Ultimately, these interactions with settler society, both government and religious, encouraged the tribe to find more subtle ways of cultural survivance in boarding schools.



Figure 1: Graph of the Oceti Sakowin tribes. Courtesy of the Minnesota State Historical Society.

The Sisseton Wahpeton is part of the Dakota in the Oceti Sakowin Oyate. They are the Star People, according to Dakota origin stories. Dakotas traveled along the spirit road Canku Wanagi, which settlers refer to commonly as the Milky Way. The Star People emerged at Bdote Mni Sota, where the Mississippi and Missouri rivers meet. Wakan Tanka used the mud of Maka Ina, mother earth, to shape the first Dakota man and woman. Settlers refer to this location as the confluence of the rivers. The Dakota people view water as sacred because, like the people, it comes from the land. Dakota historian Waziyawin tells of the history where “Dakota people consider Minnesota the site of our creation and we have existed on this particular land base for thousands of years. It is the Dakota homeland, no other population in the world can claim this deep connection to Minnesota.” Waziyatawin's assertion gives context to Dakota's spiritual views of the land.²⁸

Unlike the American views of capitalism, property, and individualism, Indigenous tribes such as the Dakota hold differing views of land and water. The waters of the Bdote Mni Sota in Mni Sota provide a sense of origin for the Sisseton Wahpeton. The water tied together all past,

²⁸ Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2012), 15-22; Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2011), 10; Waziyatawin has gone by Angela Cavender Wilson and then Waziyatawin Angela Wilson. She will therefore be cited based upon her name at the time of the specific book.

present, and future peoples. The Bde Mini Sota provides Dakota's spiritual, physical, and cultural connections. For hundreds of years, the tribe had medicines, plants, food, and water from the area. They had burials along the waterways and held ceremonies at this sacred site. To the Dakota, they did not own the land because it was a relative. Dakota's views and connection to land go beyond the legal right to physical and personal relationships. However, the settler's view of the land is the ideological justification that whites could use the land and rivers better than Dakota. For example, in the 1850s, the Minnesota rivers became critical for trade and transportation via steamboats. Settlers viewed Dakota as an obstacle to white progress and eliminated Dakota claims to land and resources. Any Indigenous presence would vanish due to the inevitable tide of history and become regulated to the past. Settlers considered themselves Indigenous to the land over the generations because they were born here instead of immigrants or migrants.

Thus, the settler distanced themselves from the dispossession their presence created through moves to innocence. Indigenous scholar Aleut Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, in their work “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” expand on the concept of settler innocence. These “moves to innocence are those strategies or positioning that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of responsibility without giving up land, power, or privilege, without having to change much at all.”²⁹ In the case of the Dakota, the American conception of the frontier was that of a colony, and the government was inherently colonial in its subjugation of Indigenous tribes. Settler’s views of manifest destiny on land ownership ignored Indigenous cultural and spiritual perspectives. Manifest destiny is the American belief in imperial expansion for new lands and

²⁹ Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.

resources under what they believed to be the divine right of God. This ideology was critical considering that the Dakota lived on fertile agricultural land in southern Minnesota, northern Iowa, and the eastern Dakotas. The earliest Dakota interactions with whites in Minnesota consisted of French fur traders and Catholic, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian missionaries.³⁰

While religious missionaries tried to teach Dakota about the religion of the white man, fur traders created trade networks with the Dakota. The Dakota embraced fur hunting for survival because fur traders often pressured Dakota with alcohol or gifts to incentivize them to hunt. The overhunting eventually led to the depopulation of beavers.³¹ French traders married Native American women to build trade networks and were part of a broader settler colonial project of assimilating tribes via mixed-blood children. Seeing the fur trade market breakdown, the government agent Lawrence Taliaferro, suggested Dakota surrender their claims to land in Wisconsin in 1837. In return for giving up the land, the Dakota could use the profit to become better farmers. But as Waziyatawin counters, the government typically used threats of removal or refusal to provide annuities to the Dakota to force consent of land.³²

By the mid-nineteenth century, settler society demanded the removal of Indigenous peoples throughout the country. As Great Plains historian Jeffery Ostler notes, “In areas of high demand---northwestern Ohio, southern Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and southern Wisconsin. Native nations faced as much pressure to relocate west of the Mississippi as any of the southern nations.”³³ This was part of President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act, whereby removal

³⁰ Westerman and White, *Mni Sota Makoce*, Chapters 2 and 3; The Dakota consists of four main groups: The Bdwakantunwan (Spirit Lake People), Wahpekute (Shooters among the Leaves), Sissituwan (People of the Fish Villages), Wahpetonwan (People Dwelling among the Leaves).

³¹ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like*, 28.

³² Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like*, 30-32.

³³ Jeffery Ostler, *Surviving Genocide : Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (Yale University Press, 2019), 289.

would “extinguish the Indian title to all lands lying within the states composing our federal union, and remove beyond their limits every Indian who is not willing to submit to their laws.”³⁴ Those who stayed and refused removal would have to give up their culture, renounce their heritage, and submit to state laws and taxation.

This benevolent policy, supposedly, would protect the Indigenous by removing them from the influence of white settlers. At the same time, the newly opened land supplied economic growth through farming for settlers and railroad construction. Some tribes experienced forced or voluntary removal and were removed west of the Mississippi to reservations, away from traditional homelands and on small tracts of land. As a result, tribes became disconnected from their traditional lands, experienced violent traumas, and destabilized culture.³⁵

Continued westward expansion by settlers across the Great Plains led to treaties such as the 1851 Treaty of Traverse des Sioux in exchange for cash annuities, debt payments, and farming provisions.³⁶ But Minnesota historian Mary Wingard suggests that, “annuities created a new sort of dependence--on the good faith and competence of the federal government, both of which frequently proved lacking.”³⁷ Settlers sought to eliminate Indigenous peoples through annuity dependency that confined them to reservations, but this was about gaining more land. As Indigenous peoples became dependent upon annuities, they had to sell their land to pay for borrowed goods. This framework allowed settlers to gain access to Indigenous land through treaties and theft by private citizens.

³⁴ Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*, 288.

³⁵ Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*, chapter 9.

³⁶ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Massacre in Minnesota: The Dakota War of 1862: The Most Violent Ethnic Conflict in American History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 30-33, 65-67; Charles Kappler, *Indian Affairs, Laws, and Treaties* vol 2: 781-85, 588-90.

³⁷ Mary Lethert Wingerd, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 139.

For example, Indigenous peoples have sovereignty because they are pre-constitutional nations with control over their affairs and culture. Indigenous tribes in America once entered into treaties with the American government. A treaty is an agreement made between two sovereign nations. Treaties defined alliances between countries and designated territories and eventually included land cessions and payment. The purpose of these treaties was to end conflicts between settlers and tribes, and gain access to the land to create forts and white settlements. Treaties sometimes promised various things like education, annuities, and tools for farming in return for Indigenous moving to reservations.³⁸ However, these treaties led to an extreme loss of land and resources as settlers pushed for more. By 1858, Dakota lived at the small Sioux reservation on the Minnesota river.

³⁸ See Charles Kappler, "Agreement with the Sisseton and Wahpeton Bands of Sioux Indians, U.S.-Sioux, Sept. 20, 1872," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. II, *Treaties* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 1057-1059

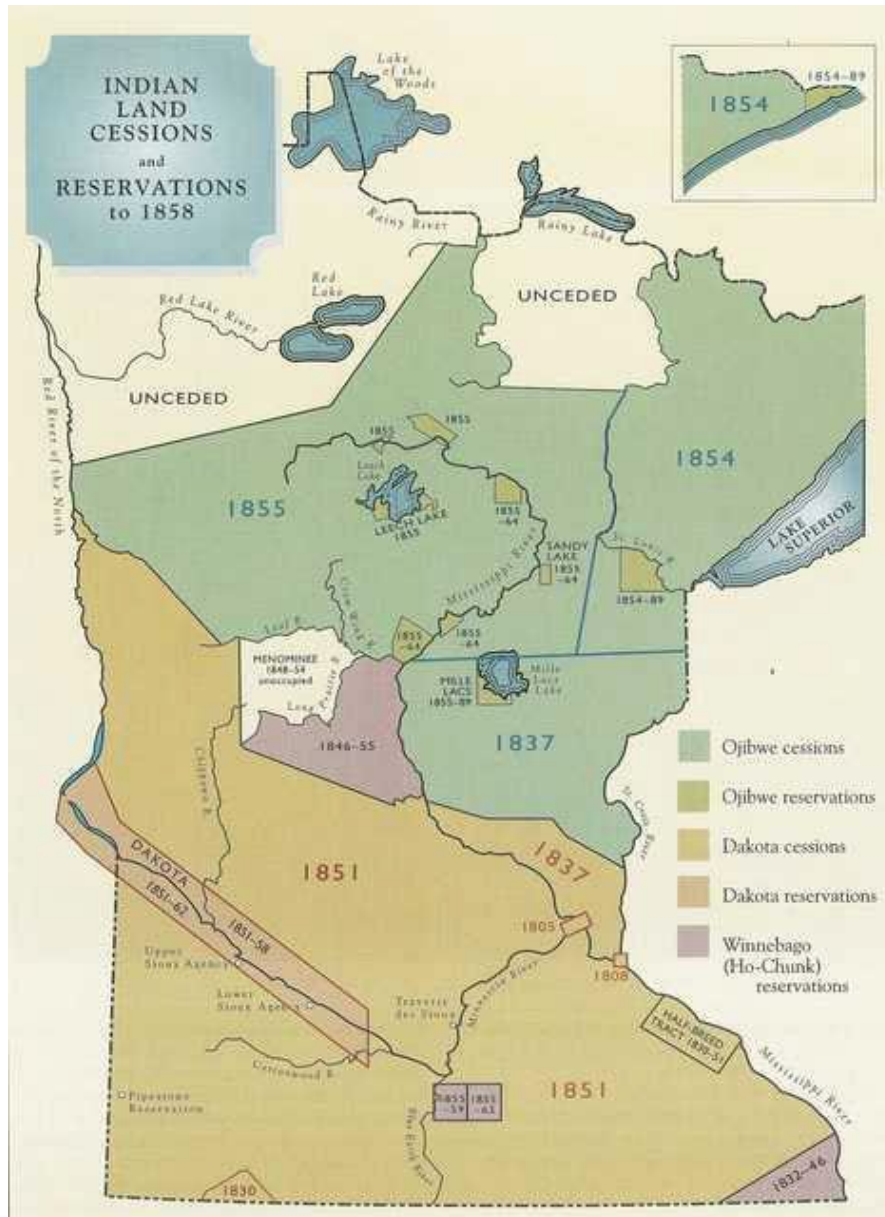


Figure 2: Dakota Land Cessions and Location in Minnesota by 1858. Courtesy of Ann Kaplan, *Making Minnesota Territory, 1849–1858* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1999), 7.

At the Minnesota river were two agencies. The Lower Sioux Agency, to the south, had the Mdewakanton and Wapekute villages led by Taoyateduta, Mankato, Wasuheyadan, Wacouta,

Wabasha, and Hushasha.³⁹ These bands continued to practice traditional culture and refused to assimilate. Up north at the Upper Sioux Agency, in small villages, were the Sisseton and Wahpeton bands of Walking Runner, Red Iron, and Walking Iron. Presbyterian missionaries like Stephen Riggs settled at Upper Sioux Agency and had better luck converting the Sisseton Wahpeton who were more open to learning the white man's religion. Nevertheless, at both agencies, U.S. Indian agents and missionaries pressured Dakota men to become farmers rather than continue their hunting traditions.

For instance, missionaries and agents provided better annuities, food, and gifts to those who converted and gave up Dakota culture. Converted and traditional Dakotas led to factionalism and frustration between the Mdewakanton, Wapekute, Sisseton, and Wahpeton. Because the Sisseton and Wahpeton who selectively assimilated, who wore clothing and lived in houses, were often the ones to receive better annuities and food from the government. The increase of settlers who used up nearby resources only heightened tensions.⁴⁰

Furthermore, a crop failure in 1861, a terrible winter, and the lack of animals to hunt, combined with no annuities, all contributed to the tension. Additionally, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law in 1862.⁴¹ This development led to increasing conflicts with Indigenous tribes throughout North America. The Homestead Act, approved by Congress in 1862, gave male individuals the right to claim lands in the West under federal ownership. Of course, single women could also homestead, and so too could married women

³⁹ Lucius F. Hubbard and Return I. Holcombe, *Minnesota in Three Centuries* (St. Paul: The Publishing Society of Minnesota, 1908), 3:273; Samuel Pond, *The Dakota, or Sioux in Minnesota as They Were in 1834* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1986), 139.

⁴⁰ In the years leading up to the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War, the settler population in Minnesota grew exponentially from 6,000 in 1850 to 150,000 in 1860, when it became a state; see Linda Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile: The Untold Stories of Captives in the Aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019), 20.

⁴¹ *Statutes at Large*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session (1862): 392–1443.

declared heads of household in case of a deceased or missing husband.⁴² After selecting a 160-acre plot and filing a claim, settlers had five years to improve the site by building a home and a farm. After five years, settlers could apply for the title to the land. Hundreds of thousands of Americans utilized the Homestead Act to purchase land. Of course, married women could not submit claims as they were dependents of their husbands. A deluge of settlers poured across the Great Plains in search of land to claim.⁴³

Any discussion of the Sisseton Wahpeton cannot occur without discussing the 1862 Dakota War, the consequences, and turbulent history. The U.S.-Dakota War lasted only six weeks and was the first significant engagement between the U.S. and Oceti Sakowin. There is no final, conclusive statement about the war. Scholars have written about the U.S.-Dakota war for the past seventy years and have different interpretations, including causes. Scholars have focused their analysis on the following issues: who was to blame, the truths surrounding atrocities on both sides, tribal factionalism, and the legality of the trials.⁴⁴ Therefore, this requires an overview of the U.S.-Dakota War and how the Sisseton Wahpeton ended up at the Lake Traverse Reservation in the aftermath. The ways in which the tribes adapted to elimination (religious,

⁴² Francis Ford Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); 660, 683-84.

⁴³ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987), 60; For a discussion of women's roles on homesteads see Barbara Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains: Gender and Settlement on the Homestead Frontier, 1870-1930* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ For general history on the Dakota War see: Gary Clayton Anderson, *Massacre in Minnesota: The Dakota War of 1862: the most violent ethnic conflict in American history* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019); Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1961); William Watts Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, Vol. II (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1924); Alan Woolworth and Gary Anderson, *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative accounts of the Minnesota Indian war of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988); Isaac Heard, *History of the Sioux War and Massacres of 1862 And 1863* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863); For discussion on the trials see Carol Chomsky, "The United States-Dakota War Trials: A Study in Military Injustice" *Stanford Law Review* 43, no.1 (November 1990): 13-98; and John Haymond, *The Infamous Dakota War Trials of 1862: Revenge, Military Law, and the Judgment of History* (Jeffersonville: McFarland & Company, 2016).

settler, government, and more), also show us how they learned to use the system in their own ways for tribal betterment. In the consecutive sections, I discuss the U.S.-Dakota War and how both government, and missionaries contributed to factionalism and pressure that weakened the Dakota. Yet I also believe that men like Gabriel Renville used how white society viewed him, as “friendly” to the advantage of the tribe, in order to create the Lake Traverse Reservation.

One historian defined the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War this way: “Outraged at the U.S. government's betrayals and violations of its treaties, Dakota took up arms and began killing white traders and settlers in southern Minnesota on August 18, 1862.”⁴⁵ Things leading up to the war included: thievery of annuities, attack on Dakota culture, factionalism, starvation, land lost in treaties, and the depletion of buffalo by settler society.⁴⁶ Attack on their ways of life changed the Dakota from hunting and subsistence practices to relying on government annuities.⁴⁷ Another factor was rampant corruption and exploitation among agents and traders in their interactions with the Dakota.⁴⁸ One common tactic was traders extending credit during the winter and then claiming large parts of the summer annuity payments as compensation. Most scholars attribute the late annuity payments as the primary cause due to the Civil War and the appropriation of funds.⁴⁹ A significant factor in the war's lead-up was the attack on Dakota identity by the Presbyterian-Congregational missionaries.

⁴⁵ Karen Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36.

⁴⁶ Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), Chapters 4-7.

⁴⁷ Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile*, 20.

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Massacre in Minnesota*, 31-33.

⁴⁹ Elijah Black Thunder. *Ehanna Woyakapi: History and Culture of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota* (Sisseton: Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 1975), 32-35.

The ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) came out of the Second Great Awakening in America in the 1830s.⁵⁰ The Second Great Awakening reflected people's fears of the growing modernity and industrialism in the cities. ABCFM missionaries consisted of Protestants who believed that individual transformation towards religious salvation would bring the second coming of Christ. Such missionaries also believed that Indigenous people must learn Christian civilization, not "Indian," and could then become a sedentary Christian community. Most religious missionaries traveled out into the plains and began preaching to the tribes to bring salvation to all people. In Minnesota, missionaries Stephen Riggs and Thomas Williamson settled with their families on the Upper Sioux Reservation. These missionaries learned the Dakota language, and Riggs created a Dakota orthography still in use today. Together, the two started the Lac Qui Parle missionary school, which taught reading, math, sewing, Christianity, and writing the Dakota language to a variety of Indigenous.⁵¹ One of the students at the Lac Qui Parle Mission was a young Gabriel Renville, and his Dakota name was Ti'Wakan, or Sacred Lodge.

Little did Riggs and others suspect, but men like Gabriel Renville would become fierce contenders for tribal land and cultural survival. Renville did not stay for long, and he never attended a boarding school in his life. But he saw the usefulness of education and advocated for a boarding school for his people to learn the white man's ways. The ABCFM, however, saw themselves as having only benevolent intentions. According to missionaries, mixed bloods like Renville were spiritually doomed if they did not give up their Dakota culture. Indigenous peoples must be saved from the vices of white men and land loss due to the government. Stephen Riggs

⁵⁰ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 145.

⁵¹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1861, 91; For a history of Lac Qui Parle see Jon Lee Willand, "Lac Qui Parle and the Dakota Mission." Master's thesis., (University of South Dakota, Vermilion, 1964).

argued, “Civilization is the highest achievement of modern evangelism.”⁵² Civilizing the Dakota could only occur through religious conversion to Christianity and rejection of Dakota culture.

Under settler colonialism, missionaries sought to replace the Dakota “worldview with an appreciation for the superiority of economic individualism and private property.”⁵³ To make this more appealing, those who converted to Christianity received more food or annuities from the agents.⁵⁴ For example, the Sisseton Wahpeton received farming tools and food only if they broke from their culture. Ostracization of Dakota who refused to convert, increased tensions among the people. Dakota farmers, who converted, did so in the wake of severe cultural change. The motivations for conversion and a switch to farming are complicated and unique to each Dakota. Yet traditional Dakota resisted assimilation and for the missionaries to leave. They refused to become farmers, convert to Christianity, and often went beyond the borders of the reservation that settler society tried to enforce. Traditional Dakota saw the mixed-blood farmer Dakota as their relatives and yet felt frustration from missionaries converting their families. Like traditional Sisseton Wahpeton, the Dakota farmer selectively acculturated; they had to reimagine Dakota life meaning in new ways. Sometimes this consisted of a syncretism between Christianity and Dakota religion, a method Sisseton Wahpeton continued to use in the boarding schools to come. But adopting a mix between Christianity and Dakota religion helped the children who attended these earlier mission schools.⁵⁵

⁵² Stephen Riggs, *Tah-koo Wah-kan; or, The Gospel among the Dakotas* (Boston: Congregational Publishing Society, 1869), xxxi.

⁵³ Wingerd, *North Country*, 107.

⁵⁴ Angela Wazyatawin Wilson, *In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors: the Dakota Commemorative Marches of the 21st Century* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2006), 45-46.

⁵⁵ Wingerd, *North Country*, 244.

Religious missionaries and the U.S. government contributed to immense factionalism among the Dakota. But settler society did not acknowledge their culpability in factionalism. Competing identities forced onto them, such as being a farmer or resisting assimilation, divided the Dakota Oyate. Wingerd noted, “This intertribal cultural conflict eroded traditional authority structures and community coherence.”⁵⁶ Intertribal factionalism hindered the tribe long into the twentieth century and weakened community resistance to assimilation in boarding schools. The U.S. settler government also tried to weaken tribal communities by dividing the bands with annuities to those who assimilated. A form of systemic settler colonial elimination, these annuities created a dependence on the government. These treaties led to land loss, politics weakening traditional governance, and education attacking kinship. During the 1860s, those like the Sisseton Wahpeton found their entire way changing in new and unknown ways.

The catalyst for the U.S.-Dakota War consisted of multiple things, such as rampant corruption and exploitation among white traders in their interactions with the Dakota. Traders often extended credit during the winter, and then claimed large parts of the summer annuity payments in recompense. Late annuity payments were the biggest issue in the lead up to the U.S.-Dakota War, mostly due in part to the ongoing American Civil War, and treaty annuities being distributed elsewhere. The earlier winter also created immense suffering among the tribe and hundreds starved from late annuities.

Chief Little Crow, a well-known chief to the whites, argued for the release of their government provisions from the storehouses even though the money had not arrived yet. The local Agent Galbraith discussed the issue with white traders; the spokesperson of the traders,

⁵⁶ Wingerd, *North Country*, 272.

Myrick, is quoted to have famously said, “so far as I am concerned, if they are hungry, let them eat grass.”⁵⁷ Accounts on what happened a few days later differ greatly; what we do know is that in August of 1862 four young Mdewakanton men shot and killed five settlers in Acton, Minnesota. The four men returned home to tell the tale and knowing that the whites would collectively blame all Dakota for the actions of a few. The Dakota faced a decision of what to do. The Dakota factions were split, some argued for peace and others argued for war. Most Dakota turned to Chief Little Crow to lead them. However, even though he did argue against using force, there was no calming the outrage of the younger men.

On 18 August 1862, Mdewakanton and Wahpekute attacked the lower agency and spread out from there burning towns and farms, killing men and capturing women and children. Myrick was found with a mouth stuffed full of grass. This was not about random violence, but to regain lost land and address ongoing betrayals of the American government. White settlers reacted to these events with hysteria and created rumors of the warriors committing horrific acts. Stories of violence are a common theme in many scholarly works surrounding the U.S-Dakota War of 1862, and no research has proven Dakota violence true. Some tried to warn their white neighbors, some of whom were their mixed blood families. But settlers wanted their revenge at the audacity of the Dakota resisting land loss, starvation, and attacks on their entire way of life. However, after despotic trials in which scholars continue to debate the legality, on 26 December 1862, in Mankato, Minnesota, thirty-eight Dakota men were hanged simultaneously in the largest hanging in American history ordered by President Abraham Lincoln.⁵⁸ It cannot be emphasized enough how important and cataclysmic the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War was on the Northern Plains.

⁵⁷ Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 5.

⁵⁸ David Martinez, “Remembering the Thirty-Eight: Abraham Lincoln, the Dakota, and the U.S. War on Barbarism,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 5-29.

From this time on, many whites viewed Dakota people as duplicitous, warlike, and untrustworthy and therefore people who needed to be “civilized” by churches and schools.

After the hanging the bodies of the Dakota men were buried in a mass grave and dug up by local physicians that night to be used for medical research.⁵⁹ While scholarship has centered on the hanging of the thirty-eight men, Minnesota and the U.S. government forcibly removed over one thousand seven hundred innocent Dakota women, children, and men to a concentration camp. These souls were not involved in the war, but having surrendered peacefully, did not escape without consequence.

The American government sent these Dakota families to a concentration camp at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, where they experienced horrific violence. A Congressional Act of February 13, 1863, forced those who survived out of Minnesota. Under this act, Congress broke Dakota treaties and forfeited Dakota lands and annuities.⁶⁰ Those who fled into the Dakota Territory were chased down and killed by American soldiers at the Battle of Whitestone Hill in 1863, while others fled to Canada.⁶¹

The following April, soldiers transported the remaining Dakota to Fort McClellan in Davenport, Iowa. Dakota historian Clifford Canku described conditions at Fort McClellan as “overcrowded barracks, built of green wood, offered little protection from the Iowa winter, and the prisoners were not provided adequate food. They were kept shackled for months, and at least 120 people died of smallpox and other ailments.”⁶² But the Dakota in this fort adapted, became

⁵⁹ Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 130.

⁶⁰ Act of February 16, 1863, 12 Stat., 652.

⁶¹ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 44; For a history of the Sisseton Wahpeton who went to Canada, see Dan Beveridge, *The Red Road, and Other Narratives of the Dakota Sioux* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

⁶² Clifford Canku, *The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters: Dakota Kaškapi Okicize Wowapi* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2013), 2; Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look Like*, 56.

baptized, and learned to read and write the white man's language to survive and advocate for release. Importantly, the Dakota passed down this rhetoric of survival to their own children who later attended boarding schools.⁶³

Some of these Dakota released were later sent to the Lake Traverse Reservation to act as tools of religious assimilation as they preached to their fellows.⁶⁴ Dakota like Robert Hopkins and John Renville became teachers at religious day schools. Finally, after four long years, General Ulysses S. Grant released the Dakota men at Davenport in 1866 and sent to them Santee Reservation in Nebraska.⁶⁵ But what about the Sisseton Wahpeton from Minnesota? Those who surrendered to the soldiers, had converted to Christianity, and started farming to survive?⁶⁶ The government needed an intermediary to negotiate with these specific Sisseton Wahpeton, and for this, they recruited a handful of Dakota scouts. Mixed-blood Sisseton Wahpeton Gabriel Renville led the charge of these scouts. In return for protecting white settlers in the war, the Renville scouts would be paid to act as negotiators with various tribes. As scouts they would also be a deterrent against further incidents like what happened in 1862. Many Renville scout camps settled around Fort Wadsworth in the Dakota Territory, just on the border to their original land in Minnesota.

These scout camps became a refuge for displaced Sisseton Wahpeton in the aftermath of the war, and the fort provided food from army supplies. Renville knew that if his scouts did not support the government, they might lose out on a chance at recovering land. Land was critical in establishing culture and a space from which to preserve their identity to combat ongoing settler

⁶³ Wingerd, *North Country*, 325.

⁶⁴ Stephen Riggs, *Mary and I. Forty Years with the Sioux* (Chicago: Holmes, 1880), 204.

⁶⁵ Canku, *The Dakota Prisoner of War Letters*, 1.

⁶⁶ Not all the Sisseton Wahpeton wanted to settle; some refused any peace talks, and some continued hunting what buffalo they could find or followed the Mdewakanton into Canada.

expansion for land. When a Mdewakanton band led by Big Eagle, newly released from Davenport, tried to hunt on the James River, Renville and others were quick to tell the group they must stay west of the James River, away from their territory.⁶⁷ The Sisseton Wahpeton needed a reservation to survive and had to appear friendly to whites and willing to deny their Dakota brothers.

The Creation of the Lake Traverse Reservation

In the fall of 1866, a Sisseton Wahpeton delegation went to Washington, D.C. to discuss signing a treaty. This delegation included Gabriel Renville as Chief and Scarlet Plume as sub-chief of the Sisseton, and Akipa as sub-chief of the Wahpeton. Samuel Brown and Charles Crawford acted as interpreters.⁶⁸ Yet, this delegation did not represent all the Sisseton Wahpeton, as some had gone to Canada or intermarried with other tribes after the war. Those scattered around eastern South Dakota now struggled to secure land to settle. History views men like Gabriel Renville in complicated ways. He worked diligently to create a reservation for his kin to survive. Some might argue that his work as a scout for the American government was a betrayal to other Dakota. Other Dakota men would follow in the steps of those like Renville, caught between the definition of what is considered a good or bad Dakota. Was Renville good because he selectively acculturated himself and his people? Was he bad because he advocated for becoming a farmer and giving up hunting? Settler historian Gary Clayton Anderson provides a perfect summary of the complexity of Renville:

⁶⁷ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Gabriel Renville: From the Dakota War to the Creation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation, 1825-1892* (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2018), 63.

⁶⁸ Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, 69.

Even as he embraced Christianity at one time, he ultimately refused to abandon his Dakota's people's Medicine Society. He held to and reinforced kinship obligations even as he courted capitalism. He won favor among white missionaries and Indian agents for promoting hard work and initiative even as he frustrated them for his love of dancing and feasting. Furthermore, he held many of his people's traditions and lifeways in high regard even as he gave total commitment to the civilization program that the Bureau of Indian affairs hoped to introduce to all Plains Indians.⁶⁹

Gabriel Renville forged a new path for his people to survive with the creation of the Lake Traverse Reservation by courting white settlers. He promoted farming and sent his children to the Carlisle Boarding School. At the same time, he drew irritation from agents because he refused to give up his obligations to his multiple wives and families. He could write in English but refused to speak it. The Indigenous voice has power, and Renville denied that power to settler society. Instead, he used the white man's writing to support tribal sovereignty. On his own terms, Renville and his fellow leaders navigated negotiations with the U.S. government that continued to pressure Dakota to cede more land. Newton Edmunds, Dakota Territorial Governor, suggested solving the "Indian problem" of wandering refugees by confining them onto a reservation rather than acknowledging the government's actions that led to their dispossession in the first place.⁷⁰

Renville and his bands had to face a choice in settling on a reservation again. How much could they give in to assimilation while still keeping their culture? Going back onto a reservation risked dependency on the government and further betrayals. As he looked to the future, Renville negotiated carefully for a new treaty to create a reservation for his people. Dakota men like Renville set a precedent of learning the white man's system so as to subvert it and keep the culture alive.

⁶⁹ Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, ix.

⁷⁰ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1866, 180.

The 1867 Treaty with the Sioux-Sisseton and Wahpeton bands created two reservations: the Devil's Lake Reservation in North Dakota and Lake Traverse Reservation straddling North and South Dakota.

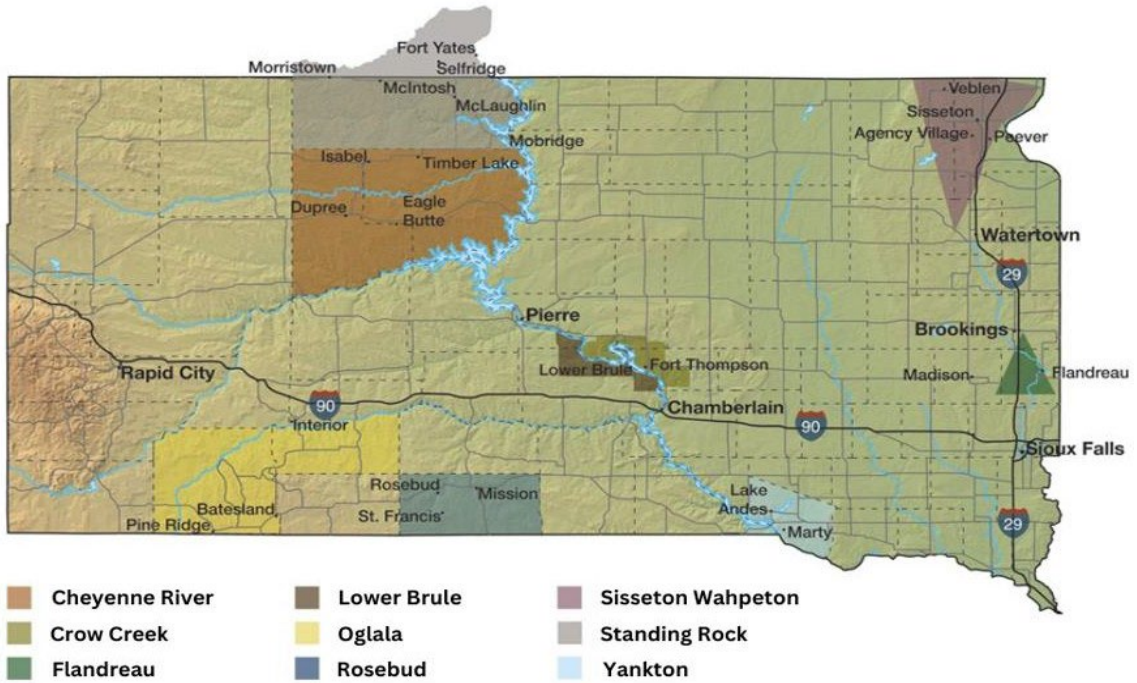


Figure 3: South Dakota Map of the Nine Reservations. Courtesy of South Dakota Department of Tribal Relations.

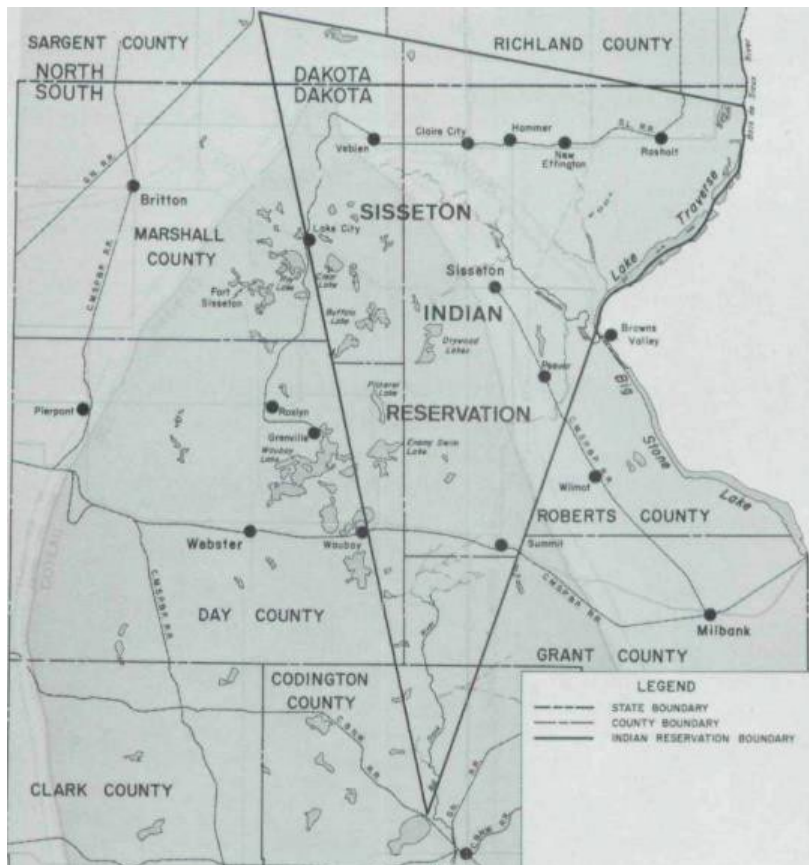


Figure 4: The Lake Traverse Reservation Map. Courtesy of Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Lake Traverse Reservation is where Renville's scouts and Sisseton Wahpeton mixed-bloods settled. According to the 1867 treaty, the Lake Traverse reservation held 918,780 acres, with an estimated one thousand five hundred Sisseton Wahpeton living on the land. Only mixed-blood Sisseton Wahpeton could settle on the land, and under the treaty, each family head or single person would receive one hundred and sixty acres. As part of the Homestead Act, they had to live on the land for five years and cultivate fifty acres before obtaining a patent to the land. The fifty-acre requirement was five times the number of acres white settlers had to plow, ten acres, to meet homestead regulations. If someone did not follow the regulations, the government

could take the land.⁷¹ Federal government policies pressured the Sisseton Wahpeton to assume this risky agriculture and brought in the help of religious groups to continue assimilation.

In 1869, President Ulysses U.S. Grant instituted the Peace Policy. This policy looked to solve the annuity and treaty corruption in the Indian service that led to the U.S.-Dakota War. The government would provide clothing, food, and farming equipment to transition tribes to a civilized life. Under the policy, they assigned reservation agencies to a religious group based on their prior missionary interactions, and assigned the Lake Traverse Reservation to the Presbyterians.⁷² The Presbyterian missionaries believed that the Sisseton Wahpeton had shown the success of Christian assimilation by saving white settlers in the war. What wonders could be achieved with Dakotas if they continued the civilization program in South Dakota? By 1870, Stephen Riggs and Thomas Williamson arrived with their families at the Lake Traverse Reservation to continue educational assimilation and planned to exercise their authority to choose the new agent.

Chief Gabriel Renville at once objected to this and argued that the tribe preferred Agent Daniels. Riggs and the missionaries argued Renville liked Daniels because he was willing to look the other way on polygamy and dancing.⁷³ In 1870, Renville wrote a defiant letter in which he blasted Riggs and Williamson, “We have never known of any good from the teachings of yourself and Mr. Riggs among the people. Whenever you come among us, you always make a great deal of troublesome talk and ill feeling. Beware of false prophets which come to you in

⁷¹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 188; Charles Kappler, “Treaty with the Sioux, U.S.-Sisseton-Wahpeton, 1867” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. II, Treaties (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 956-959; Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi* 70; Fred Kohoutek, “A History of the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation,” Master’s thesis, University of South Dakota, 1939, 11.

⁷² Prucha, *The Great Father*, 152-165.

⁷³ Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, 90.

sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves, ye shall know them by their fruits. We know you only as such.”⁷⁴ Renville’s letter is jarring as he compares the missionaries to the false prophets that they preached him to beware. These men had preached honesty yet continued to attack Dakota culture as uncivilized and encouraged divisions among the people. Riggs himself had encouraged Dakota to sign treaties that in turn lost them their land, and been an interpreter in the 1862 U.S-Dakota War trials that saw their kin hanged.

Renville continued, “For that reason we do not want one of your sect for our Agent for it would be just the same as having you for our Agent and we cannot see anything but fighting among us, which you will be the cause. if we are to have ministers among us, it would be well to have those who would teach us in the ways of truth and honesty, a thing which you cannot do.”⁷⁵ Renville well remembered the actions of the missionaries in Minnesota in sowing factionalism amongst the Dakota. Now they were already creating factionalism with new religious churches and the Good Will Mission Day School.

In the summer of 1870, Riggs and Williamson created the Good Will Mission Day School on the Lake Traverse Reservation, where they taught language and curriculum in Dakota and English.⁷⁶ Teachers at Good Will instructed the children “to forget the things behind them as savages and press forward to the things ahead of them as Christians.”⁷⁷ Dakota students needed to forget their Dakota culture and focus on becoming civilized Christians. Dakota language was

⁷⁴ “Gabriel Renville Letter,” Brown County Historical Society, quoted in Daphne Hamborg, “The Impact of Dakota Missions on the Development of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862,” Master’s thesis., (Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2012), 60.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Hamborg, “The Impact of Dakota Missions on the Development of the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862,” 60.

⁷⁶ Riggs, *Mary and I*, 233; For a discussion of missionary history in Minnesota see Linda Clemmons, *Conflicted Mission: Faith, Disputes, and Deception on the Dakota Frontier* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2014).

⁷⁷ D.E. Evans, *Good Will Mission* (New York: Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church, 1904), 10-11.

acceptable to expedite this process, but only for Christianizing the children, not teaching them their culture. Sisseton Wahpeton children ages three to ten attended classes for nine months of the year, with an average annual attendance of fifty-five children.⁷⁸ Schools like Good Will mission foreshadowed the continuing attack on Dakota culture. Nationally, in the 1870s, the government believed religious day schools like Good Will were the best method to uplift Native Americans.⁷⁹

This policy shift occurred from the belief that the “Indian Wars” were too expensive and that the better solution was to civilize through education. The House Committee on Indian Affairs remarked, “Put into the hands of their children the primer and the hoe...they will grow up into habits of morality and industry.”⁸⁰ To support the goals of mission schools like Goodwill in assimilation, the school eventually became a government contract school. A 50/50 system whereby the government provided yearly funds to maintain the buildings while the Good Will Mission furnished books and clothing. Instead of giving money for the tribe to create their schools, as said in the treaties, the American government utilized religious missionaries, not the tribe, to educate.⁸¹

Like other religious schools, mission schools would replace Dakota education with western education. Dakota children had learned their language from oral histories told by parents and daily use. But in schools like Good Will Mission Day School this was forbidden and seen as

⁷⁸ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1870, 225; 1872, 534; 1882, 40; 1890, 67.

⁷⁹ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 28.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 8.

⁸¹ Contract Schools Ledger, box 1, Record of School Contracts, 1887-1911, Education, BIA, NA-D.C; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 66; Margaret Connell-Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 9-11.

“savage.”⁸² From 5:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., the teachers looked to replace these ways of knowing with English and Christianity. Girls learned to sew and were taught general housework. Teachers taught boys how to use farm tools and enforced that they would become farmers, teachers, good Christians, and nothing else.⁸³ This reshaping of their identity and way of life profoundly affected the experiences of the Sisseton Wahpeton people. The experiences of students at the day school Good Will Mission Day School helped prepare the Dakota community to deal with a boarding school that enforced even more rules and abuses.

But the creation of a boarding school on the Lake Traverse Reservation began through the work of the second government agent, Reverend Moses M. Adams. He had previously worked as a missionary in Minnesota with Riggs and Williamson, and was a familiar face to the Dakota.⁸⁴ Adams and Renville would become fierce political foes during his time at the Lake Traverse Reservation. Gabriel Renville worried about the new restrictions against their culture that Adams might employ. He was right to worry, as Adams held onto compulsory observance of the Sabbath, outlawing dancing, and gambling. Marriages must also be between one man and one woman. Adams swore to withhold food and annuities from any he heard disobeying these rules. Renville often used the white judicial system to his advantage in his complaints that Adams had no authority to enact these rules.

Renville believed Adams did not separate church and state. Church members received the best rations, even those who did not work.⁸⁵ But Adams argued that Renville and his party

⁸² Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 138-140.

⁸³ Evans, *Good Will Mission*, 11-12.

⁸⁴ Everett Sterling, “Moses N. Adams: A Missionary as Indian Agent,” *Minnesota History* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1956): 167-177; Jon Lee Willand, “Lac Qui Parle and the Dakota Mission.” Master’s thesis., (University of South Dakota, Vermilion, 1964), 200-201.

⁸⁵ Complaints of Gabriel Renville, February 12, 1873, *Letters Received*, Fort Sisseton, Records of the United States Continental Commands, 1821-1920, RG 393, NA.

continued to feast, have multiple wives, gamble, and hold to traditional beliefs.⁸⁶ Ultimately, the government viewed Renville more favorably over Adams because he appeared open to assimilation and sent his kids to the Carlisle Indian School.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, a boarding school closer to home on the reservation must have seemed preferable to sending the children far away. Keeping children close to home was the opposite of growing national policies to send children to schools far away from their communities to sever their connection to culture. We do not know what conversation, if any, occurred between the Adams and Renville about education. But, in 1872 the first mention of an on-reservation boarding school at the Lake Traverse Reservation appeared in government letters.

Agent Adams wrote in an 1872 letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Walker that constructing a boarding school would cost \$8,000. He believed such a school would create a new generation of Indigenous teachers. Children would learn the importance of white morals and abandon their tribal cultures. Then, they would return to their communities to spread the wisdom of renouncing tribal culture for that of the settler. In his argument, Adams directly cited Article Six of the 1867 Lake Traverse Treaty and claimed that the government was not upholding its end in creating a boarding school.⁸⁸

Because the Sisseton Wahpeton people had attended Presbyterian mission schools in Minnesota and now started western farming habits in the Dakota Territory, settlers viewed Dakota as friendly and easy to assimilate. However, disregarding their seizure of Dakota land in

⁸⁶ Adams to Commissioner Francis Walker January 24, 1873, *Letters Received*, Sisseton Agency, 1872-1873, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm 1475.

⁸⁷ Anderson, *Gabriel Renville*, 91; Sterling, "Moses N. Adams," 170.

⁸⁸ Moses Adams to Commissioner Francis Walker, February 26, 1872, *Letters Received*, Sisseton Agency, 1872-1873, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm 1475; Moses Adams to Commissioner Edward Smith, February 26, 1873, *Letters Received*, Sisseton Agency, 1872-1873, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm 1475; Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 206.

Minnesota, settlers and railroad companies continued to push for more land.⁸⁹ The 1872 Lake Traverse Agreement said that in return for giving up ground on the north end of the reservation to white settlement, the government promised annual payments of \$80,000. Adams pushed for the addition of Article Six whereby, “Sections sixteen and thirty-six shall be set apart for educational purposes, and all children of a suitable age shall be compelled to attend school at the discretion of the agents.”⁹⁰ He was quick to pounce on the opportunity, writing to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Walker, “I have to renew my recommendation for a boarding school for the more thorough education of pupils, that they may be gathered from their homes of ignorance, vice, and degradation.”⁹¹ Adams dismissed any thoughts that the Dakota had their ways of education passed down through oral histories to children at home. Instead, he believed he was saving them from their homes, but such projects always require money, a difficult problem in 1873.

The spring of 1873 was particularly bad for Dakota peoples living in Dakota Territory. Aside from ongoing wars against settler expansion in the West, a depression increased the need to extract economic resources. The national financial crisis of 1873 occurred for a variety of reasons and affected everyone. Most significant among them was an over-expansion of railroads, which tied their wealth to bank companies. When the largest of these banks, the Jay Cooke & Co firm, closed its doors after a failed attempt to build the Northern Pacific Railroad across the Dakota territory, bonds defaulted. The bank closure caused multiple businesses to fail, railroads

⁸⁹ Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi*, 69-70.

⁹⁰ Charles Kappler, “Agreement with the Sisseton and Wahpeton Bands of Sioux Indians, U.S.-Sioux, Sept. 20, 1872,” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. II, Treaties (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 1057-1059.

⁹¹ Moses Adams to Commissioner Francis Walker, September 13, 1873, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1872, 256.

went bankrupt, and affected the money used for boarding schools.⁹² Even though it was not much, the government did not stop in the fervent mission of assimilation when money arrived to fund the goals of agent Adams.



Figure 5: Sisseton Indian Industrial School in 1891, Courtesy of *Sisseton Agency Training School Collection*, 1899-1900, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.

In April 1873, Commissioner Edward Smith supplied \$6,000 for school construction from the general Sisseton Wahpeton appropriation fund.⁹³ The Sisseton Indian Industrial School began that July as a small two-story brick house with an attached farm; the kitchen, dining, and laundry were in the basement. Three rooms on the first floor, two bedrooms on the second floor,

⁹² For a history of the Panic of 1873 see Jon Lubetkin, *Jay Cooke's Gamble: the Northern Pacific Railroad, the Sioux, and the Panic of 1873* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

⁹³ Commissioner Edward Smith to Moses Adams, April 10, 1873, *Letters Sent by the Office of Indian Affairs*, NA Series M21, Roll 112.

and an attic.⁹⁴ Space was forever cramped, and not until 1884 did the school expand with five more rooms, steam heating, bathrooms, and a well to supply water to the school.⁹⁵ Classes included half-and-half days led by Presbyterian teachers. Children learned basic arithmetic, English, history, and bible study. Girls learned to cook and sew, while boys learned woodcutting, farming, and livestock.⁹⁶ Their academic education followed the model of boarding schools to civilize Indigenous children and thus break them from tribal communities. The productive use of children in agriculture and education supported national land ownership trends and disconnected them from traditional values. The Sisseton Indian Industrial School predominantly took in Sisseton Wahpeton children from the community. Over the decades, the school also took in Ihanktonwan, Ojibway, Mdewakanton, Ponca, and Sicangu children. The Board of Indian Commissioners said Indigenous adults were a lost cause. Instead, education was critical in elevating Indigenous children into moral citizens.⁹⁷

Understanding government boarding schools requires some background information on settler views of “Indian” education. The central directive for the American government's view of Indigenous tribes was civilization. Anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, in 1877, put forth a racialized hierarchy that classified Indigenous peoples as “savage” because they did not follow what whites perceived as civilized life.⁹⁸ Such beliefs rationalized extreme racial ideologies of white superiority. If Indigenous peoples were uncivilized, western settler expansion took

⁹⁴ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1873, 226. The average child attending the school varied from five to nineteen years of age. Therefore, it is essential to note that the older children would have seen firsthand the U.S.-Dakota War and held a wariness of these teachers and systems.

⁹⁵ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1884, 50.

⁹⁶ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1875, 252.

⁹⁷ *Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 1882, 7-10; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 689.

⁹⁸ Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001), 17-21.

primacy over Indigenous claims to land. But the most objectionable points against Indigenous peoples were beliefs of nuclear families and private property. Some tribes, like the Dakota, held onto polygamy or were matriarchal societies, and thus did not follow settler ideas around monogamous, patriarchal families.

Furthermore, white views of the family established the principle of property owned by the individual white farmer. But, of course, this ignored tribes that had no concept of private property; how could you own your relative the earth? Settler society believed that to be civilized was to follow the white values of private property: individual ownership. It was no longer popular to kill the Indians and it was costly to starve; now, they must be saved. Philanthropic organizations such as the Indians Rights Association gathered yearly with other reformers at the Lake Mohawk Conference in New York. Calling themselves the Friends of the Indians, they held to a paternalistic view that Indigenous ways must give way to white ways. The key to this would be education in boarding schools that claimed to raise Indigenous peoples from savagery.

In government boarding schools, Indigenous children would learn to become self-sufficient, civilized, and no longer dependent on the government. These views also dovetailed with the government's desire for more land. Reformers developed a defense of boarding schools using an ideology that would bring a positive good. The educational indoctrination of children would teach them that their only hope would be to assimilate. Education would quickly civilize the tribes, and the government believed this could occur in only a few years. The reality, however, was far different, as boarding schools continued for decades. Children, not the Indigenous parents, were the wave of the future.

Boarding school education, not tribal education, was important. Reformers argued that education would prepare Indigenous children for the white man's world. Boys would learn to till

the soil and give up their hunting. Girls would live a life of poised Victorian motherhood. Civilized knowledge from American textbooks, not Indigenous oral histories and experiences, would be enforced instead.⁹⁹ Reformers relied upon racialization that preserved the notions of manifest destiny and dismissed their actions against Indigenous peoples.

According to Francis Ford Prucha, the assimilation of Indigenous peoples would occur in three phases: First, confinement onto small reservations; second, breaking up tribal land into small allotments and becoming self-sufficient farmers; and finally, the termination of the reservation.¹⁰⁰ The first model for this was on-reservation boarding schools, often located near the agency on the reservations. In such schools, students learned the white man's way of writing and writing. Teachers told children that their cultural ways were savage and to be ashamed of their families. Students would become civilized by cutting their hair, learning to wear white settler clothing, sleeping in gender-segregated dormitories, and eating in a dining hall. Students would live at these schools for eight to ten months of the year and be encouraged not to go home in the summer by participating in the Outing System.¹⁰¹

The problem of on-reservation schools like Sisseton Indian Industrial School was twofold. One, students who returned home for summer vacation frequently returned, as critics said, to “the blanket,” or revert to Indigenous culture, undoing all the civilized work of the school according to reformers. Two, on-reservation schools were still too close to Indigenous communities. Because the schools were close to an agency, children could see their parents on ration days when they came to collect food from the agent. Some agents debated the value of building walls around the schools to create a complete disconnect between families and

⁹⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 159.

¹⁰¹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 31.

students.¹⁰² Other reformers believed schools must be built far away from families for complete assimilation into white society.¹⁰³ The off-reservation boarding school, often located hundreds of miles away from Indigenous homes served as a second model. Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania opened in 1879 as the first off-reservation government boarding school. Indigenous children would attend these schools year-round and be kept far away from the influences of their community.¹⁰⁴

Richard Henry Pratt, the superintendent at Carlisle from 1879 to 1903, believed in a complete disconnect from tribal life. The only way to save Indigenous children was to integrate them into white society. His views aligned that of the government to destroy Indigenous culture of the students through Christianity.¹⁰⁵ Pratt asserted, “I believe in immersing Indians in our civilization and when we get them under, holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked.” Pratt espoused that one must drown the child in the salvation of western Christianity.¹⁰⁶ As a result, Carlisle Industrial school opened in 1879, an off-reservation boarding school that took in hundreds of children. Under the mantra of “kill the Indian to save the man,” the attack on tribal culture occurred through the English language, abuse, labor, and oppression.¹⁰⁷

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ezra Hayt promoted boarding school education as the quickest solution to civilizing Indigenous people. He further suggested that students could be

¹⁰² *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1887, 219; 1879, 111.

¹⁰³ Ann Stewart, “Work in the Carlisle Indian School,” *The Elementary School Teacher* 5, no. 9 (1905): 571-73.

¹⁰⁴ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 3, 31.

¹⁰⁵ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 276; Francis Ford Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 274-281.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom; Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 282.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 56-58; Richard Henry Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the National Education Association*, 1895 (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1895), 761-762.

used as “hostages for the good behavior of parents.”¹⁰⁸ By 1902, there were twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools throughout the nation.¹⁰⁹ In South Dakota, the U.S. built boarding schools in Pierre (1891), Flandreau (1893), and Rapid City (1898). Today, thousands of Native American children continue to suffer the mental and physical trauma of boarding schools. Children as young as five were taken away from their families by white missionaries or government employees. They faced humiliating abuse, assault, and destruction of their identity. Reformers believed that Indigenous people could grow and learn intellectually, but only through isolated disconnection and indoctrination in western work ethics.¹¹⁰ These assimilation policies occurred in schools all over Great Plains in the nineteenth century as tribes engaged in conflicts with the government.

Sisseton Indian Industrial School, though an on-reservation boarding school, followed policies of assimilation that sought to destroy Dakota culture and replace it with that of the white man’s ways. Even though Gabriel Renville lived to see agent Adams removed, the boarding school by then performed as a well-oiled machine of assimilation. But their long history of adapting to assimilation back in Minnesota, now prepared the tribe for the next generation.

By 1875, J. H. Hamilton replaced agent Adams; Hamilton strictly believed that only through education in boarding schools could Dakota children become civilized. “The education of the Dakotas means the civilization of the Dakotas. Essential to this is the abandonment of tribal relations and dealing with them as persons, not tribes or bands, or in other words,

¹⁰⁸ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1878, xv.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 56-57.

¹¹⁰ Clifford Trafzer et al, *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 14.

individuating them.”¹¹¹ Teaching to think of the self, not the whole community, shaped Dakota's identity right from the start at the Sisseton Indian Industrial School.

In 1873, the U.S. government hired the first principal and matron of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School, Samuel Armor and his wife, Alice Taylor. Originally from New York, the couple had met and married while attending Oberlin College in Ohio.¹¹² After graduation, they immediately joined the Indian Service and worked as principal and matron for two years on the White Earth Ojibway Reservation in Minnesota. Afterwards, they moved out to Dakota territory and helped start Sisseton Indian Industrial School. They only stayed for a year due to Samuel's failing health before moving on to California. While no writings yet found discuss Samuel's work at the school, the *Iapi Oaye* did publish an article by Alice about her work.

In the article, “Our Girls,” Taylor describes all the good labor she has done to improve the girls into true womanhood.¹¹³ The goal was to enforce Victorian motherhood upon young girls. To promote an ideal that they would support their husbands as farmers and nurture settler society notions of “civilized” life, not Dakota life, in their children. “May God make of them true women and missionaries to their people,”¹¹⁴ Taylor wrote. Mvskoke K Tsianina Lomawaima in *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*, argued that the government focused specifically on Indigenous women as a critical site of assimilation. “Women's capacity to bear this burden was taken for granted by the Victorian vision of woman as mother,

¹¹¹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1875, 252.

¹¹² Samuel Armor, *History of Orange County, California: With Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County Who Have Been Identified With Its Earliest Growth And Development From the Early Days to the Present* (Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1921), 231-233.

¹¹³ “Our Girls,” *Iapi Oaye*, September 1, 1874.

¹¹⁴ “Our Girls,” *Iapi Oaye*, September 1, 1874.

influencing society and shaping the future through her nurture of her children.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, Taylor noted the respectful obedience of the girls to her orders. The girls seemed eager to sweep, clean dishes, make beds, play music, and learn to sew. But these norms established strict labor roles that espoused the nuclear family and motherhood.

When a child spoke English, she recalled, “I feel as rich as if someone had given me a five-dollar bill.”¹¹⁶ Taylor was delighted at her success in civilizing the young girls whenever she heard English, not Dakota. But for every step forward, the students seemed to regress. Dakota girls found ways to resist assimilation in subtly. Taylor often bemoaned the laziness of the girls, “Because they can dress themselves somewhat suitably, read and spell a little and cook a meal passably, they consider their education completed, and are headstrong and unwilling to be taught.”¹¹⁷ Dakota girls subtly challenged the domestic settler agenda. Taylor recounted an incident where four girls attended one music lesson and then refused to the next day. In a tone of frustration, Agent Hamilton wrote the ABCFM asking for more women missionaries willing to teach at the government boarding school, “the men of this tribe have made far greater progress and have yielded more readily to civilizing forces than the women have.”¹¹⁸ Dakota woman subtly resisted the assimilation practices of the government, and perhaps the men, like Renville, adapted some aspects but not all. Refashioning themselves in new ways that kept Dakota ways of being alive certainly prepared the Dakota to resist ongoing educational assimilation. But nationally, the coincidence of gold discovered in the Black Hills and continued settler expansion, tremendously increased pressure on Sisseton Wahpeton to assimilate faster.

¹¹⁵ K Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 86.

¹¹⁶ “Our Girls,” *Iapi Oaye*, September 1, 1874.

¹¹⁷ “Our Girls,” *Iapi Oaye*, September 1, 1874.

¹¹⁸ Agent John Hamilton to Mrs. E. W. Blatchford, July 7, 1875, *ABC*, 183.3.7, v. 5, 170.

By 1876 unemployment in America had risen to 49%, and Principal Mortimer Smith wrote in outrage that the staff Sisseton Indian Industrial School had been let go for the year because the government could not pay them.¹¹⁹ In the fall of 1876, the Sisseton Indian Industrial closed due to a lack of funding from the government. Now more than ever, settlers wanted land to find gold and solve the national crisis, no matter how it might hurt the Indigenous peoples. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Custers government sponsored exploration a few years earlier in 1874 had found gold in the Black Hills, six hundred miles west of the Lake Traverse Reservation. A flock of miners and settlers poured into the Black Hills, violating both Fort Laramie treaties of 1851 and 1868. In response, fighting for a return of land, the combined might of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, defeated Lieutenant Colonel Custer and his 7th Cavalry in 1876 at the Battle of Little Big Horn or what Lakotas called the Battle of Greasy Grass.¹²⁰

After the Battle of Little Big Horn and a country facing economic depression, the American government stole the Black Hills. To do this, the Manypenny Commission traveled across the Great Sioux Reservation and met with Lakota, Yanktonis, and Santees to secure signatures to cede the land.¹²¹ According to historian Jeffery Ostler, the Manypenny Commission, acting on behalf of the government, gained these signatures through threats of ending annuities or even moving all the tribes forcefully out of the Dakota Territory.¹²² Such a

¹¹⁹ Mortimer Smith to Agent John Hamilton, April 15, 1876, *Letters Received*, Sisseton Agency, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm 1476.

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the Lakota in the Black Hills see Jeffery Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: the Struggle for Sacred Ground* (New York: Penguin Group, 2010); Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills/White Justice: The Sioux Nation versus the United States: 1775 to the present* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Charles Kappler, "Treaty with the Sioux, Brule, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonai, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, and Santee and Arapaho, April 29, 1868" *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. II, Treaties (Washington: Government Printing office, 1904), 998-1007; Kappler, "Treaty of Fort of Laramie with the Sioux, 1851, September 17th", 594-96.

¹²¹ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 632-634.

¹²² Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills*, 99.

threat must have been frightening not only to those in the West, but also their relatives the Sisseton Wahpeton.

But, some Lakota, now reliant upon annuities, did sign. However, the two hundred and thirty signatures did not meet the required three-quarters of male tribal members in article twelve of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. But settler society, desperate for land and access to Lakota resources, passed the Black Hills Act in 1877. With gold to fill the national coffers, local projects like boarding schools could continue in assimilation, and the Sisseton Indian Industrial School reopened in 1877 under a new staff.¹²³

All seemed well in 1878, with a new agent, E.H.C Hooper, Principal R.A. Tuckey and matron Araline Grant to lead Sisseton Indian Industrial School. Hooper boasted that the fall harvest on the school farm topped all others with 395 bushels of wheat and ninety-five bushels of oats.¹²⁴ The program of civilization seemed right on track, and Hooper planned to lead the tribe to become civilized farmers in the national republic. However, like many agents at this time, Hooper was corrupt and often stole from agency stock for his mercantile business. Chief Gabriel Renville allegedly told the inspector on the case, “I want this man sent away,” and so he was.¹²⁵ But efficiently removing an agent, much less a school principal, would be far harder for the tribe in the coming years.

As the Sisseton Wahpeton entered the nineteenth century's final years, they had successfully settled onto their reservation, created schools, and taken farming allotments. After

¹²³ The Black Hills Act bypassed the three-fourths treaty requirement and reduced the territory of the Oceti Sakowin, illegally stealing the Black Hills. It is a point of contention today whereby the government admits this wrong. But has tried to pay off the tribes for damages with millions of dollars, but the all the tribes refuse the money and want the land returned to them.

¹²⁴ *Annual Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1878, 40-43.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Anderson, *Gabriel Reveille*, 116-117.

experiencing removal from Minnesota, they struggled to redefine their sense of self and place in the Dakota Territory. Men like Chief Gabriel Renville navigated politics to help his people be independent but still held to traditional ways and sovereignty. But the logic of elimination continued: corrupt agents outlawed Indigenous culture or extracted resources from the tribe. Missionaries opened Good Will Mission Day School, preached Christianity, and condemned Dakota spirituality. The government opened a boarding school, outlawed language, and enforced Victorian gender roles and individualism. Simultaneously, continued settler expansion into the Great Plains created enormous difficulties as settlers enviously eyed the large arable reservation. As a result, the Sisseton Wahpeton faced some of their most significant challenges as they became the first reservation in the Dakota Territory opened to white settlement.

I have full confidence in my very ability to redeem the school from the poor state into which it falls, to make it prosper and a means of life to help my people.

Samuel Jerome Brown,

February 7, 1889.¹²⁶

Chapter Two: Americans Do Not Like When the Dakota Fight Back: A Tale of Sam Brown

On 27 July 1886, principal Thomas Gordon asked Dakota student Gabriel Robertson if he had made his bed that morning. When Gabriel answered that he had, Gordon said he must remake the bed. Gabriel replied he had already made the bed and tried to walk away.¹²⁷ Grace Buffalo and Norman Robertson testified to the tribal council that Gordon became annoyed and threw rocks at Gabriel.¹²⁸ Gabriel started running away when he saw Gordon draw a revolver. The school's matron, Kate Gordon, told her husband, "Don't shoot him, Thomas!"¹²⁹ The incident with Gabriel was Gordon's first instance of misconduct at the school reported by Inspector Hansen. Gordon remained principal for another two years before Agent Israel Greene transferred him. We do not know what became of Gabriel Robertson. Like many Indigenous people his age, the federal government tried to keep him in a boarding school until he aged out. These violent occurrences perpetrated by staff were not unique, isolated events, and happened in

¹²⁶ Sam Brown to Charles Painter, February 7, 1889, in Correspondence and Other Papers, undated and 1826, 1847-1927, 1948-1956, *Joseph R. and Samuel J Brown and Family Papers*. Reels 12-14, Microfilm edition. Minnesota Historical Society (Hereafter referred to as Samuel J Brown Family Papers).

¹²⁷ Gabriel Robertson to Chief Justice Thomas Robertson, January 24th, 1887, Interview, *Sisseton Agency*, Inspection Reports 1883-1899, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

¹²⁸ Grace Buffalo to Chief Justice Thomas Robertson, January 24th, 1887, Interview, *Sisseton Agency*, Inspection Reports 1883-1899, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50; Norman Robertson to Chief Justice Thomas Robertson, January 24th, 1887, Interview, *Sisseton Agency*, Inspection Reports 1883-1899, RG64,NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

¹²⁹ Grace Buffalo Interview, *Sisseton Agency*, 1887; Norman Robertson Interview, *Sisseton Agency*, 1887.

many Native boarding schools. The story of Gordon and Gabriel is another example that the threat of elimination in boarding schools was not so distinct, and federal policies of benevolence were not always successful at the local level.

In reality, the illusion of benevolence was deceiving. Settler colonialism masked and rationalized the physical abuse of children in boarding schools under an ideology of paternalistic benevolence. On-reservation boarding schools reflected the balance of power between Natives and non-Natives at the state level, one unequal to the tribes. In the 1890s, the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota was the first one opened for white settlement by the government under the U.S. 1887 Dawes Severalty or Allotment Act.¹³⁰ The act was another form of settler colonial elimination as tribal men became heads of heteropatriarchal households and farmed alongside wives who submitted to them.

Meanwhile, all extra land would fall into white hands and quicken the process of assimilation by taking land. White society held a belief of themselves as “Natives” who had conquered the wilderness by taking it from the “sub-human” peoples. One aspect of this conquering was removing the children of such people to boarding schools. Yet if stories of abuse by teachers became known and a school closed, tribes could claim the treaties were not honored and resist continued settler expansion. Treaties between tribal nations and the federal government had promised many things. One stipulation of treaties was that in return for Indigenous land, the government would build schools for the tribes and provide a white man’s

¹³⁰ Under the Dawes Act tribes were expected to farm 160 acres of reservation land. After a period of twenty-five years the government gave individuals a deed to the land and citizenship, if judged competent. Any surplus land was sold by the federal government to white farmers. Originally, the Dawes Act began with benevolent intentions when reformers feared American greed threatened reservation land. However, the Dawes Act contributed to immense fractionalization by increasing the number of heirs and continued land loss as white settlers bought up sold land. See Prucha, *The Great Father*, Chapter 26.

education. Most teachers in these boarding schools did not care for the children. The ultimate goal was to teach Indigenous children to become civilized farmers who gave up all tribal culture and land.

But some Indigenous people worked in the boarding schools their children attended as an “Indian” assistant, laundress, disciplinarian, or cook. In these positions Indigenous people carved out spaces of strength in which they might comfort or support children. I argue that Sisseton Wahpeton Sam Brown entered such spaces and advocated for cultural strength. Sam Brown had to walk a tight rope in response to the intense and conflicting pressures of settler colonialism. The federal government viewed him as a mixed-blood who gave up his culture and agreed to indoctrinate the children of his people in boarding schools. Yet applying the Indigenous methodologies allows us to reinterpret the story of Sam Brown as a Dakota man working within the system to advocate for safety of the children, and ultimately, cultural survival. I believe the letters of Dakota mixed-blood Sam Brown, who became principal of the school in 1890, after Gordon stepped down, reflect a brief but essential example of how the Dakota continued to subvert assimilation. The Dakota tribe looked to education to challenge the settler colonial government that continued to take their land.

This chapter examines conflicts at the local level between principals, staff, and Lake Traverse Reservation agents at the Sisseton Indian Industrial school between 1880 to 1890. I begin by examining other principals, like B.S. Haskell, and then I discuss principal Thomas Gordon's tenure in the 1880s and why Dakota parents did not trust the school. Finally, the federal government installed principal Sam Brown, and I show how Dakota, like him, worked to make the school good for the time.

Sam Brown applied for the position of principal in 1889, hoping to save the school from being closed and make it “a school for our people.”¹³¹ He was so successful that attendance at the school reached an all-time high. Despite this time, his efforts to eliminate corporal punishment and abusive white teachers led to complaints from white staff. Eventually, the government fired Sam Brown because his disabilities from being in a wheelchair impacted his work. The push by the Sisseton Wahpeton for control of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School did not occur in a vacuum. In this period, the tribe experienced an intense period of assimilation via land loss and in the on-reservation boarding school. In the end, education became a critical site of power to help resist land loss by learning the tools of the white man who deeply wished the cultivatable land.

By 1880, settlers moving west into the Dakota Territory wanted the one million acres held by the Sisseton Wahpeton tribe. Settlers of the Roberts, Grant, and Marshall counties appealed to their congressional representatives to change the treaties and open surplus land for settlement.¹³² One man commented, “why allow one million acres of fertile lands in the midst of civilization to be possessed by a few greasy savages?”¹³³ Negotiations occurred between county representatives and the Dakota Chief Gabriel Renville very clearly articulated the stipulations. First, 1862 annuities must be returned. Second, land taken from the Dakota under so-called survey errors must also be returned. Third, Dakota scouts who served under General Sibley would receive' veteran's compensation.¹³⁴ Renville demanded that all money be in cash, “not in

¹³¹ Sam Brown to Commissioner Morgan, February 10, 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹³² Fred Kohoutek, “A History of the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation,” Master’s thesis., University of South Dakota, Vermilion, 1939, 39.

¹³³ *Yankton Daily Press and Dakotian*, May 28, 1884, quoted in Kohoutek, *A History of the Lake Traverse Reservation*, 37.

¹³⁴ Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi* 69-70; Kohoutek, *A History of The Lake Traverse Reservation*, 39.

shoe pegs and overalls.”¹³⁵ Because of the constant crop failures, drought, and grasshopper plagues, more farming tools would be useless. The Dakota had resorted to cutting down their few trees, selling the wood for food, and either selling or eating their livestock.

Most of these requests the government agreed to, and then the government further pushed for the opening of the reservation. One scholar tabulated that, “309,914 acres were allotted to individual tribal members, and the remaining 608,866 acres were declared surplus and sold to white settlers for \$2.50 per acre.”¹³⁶ The influx of settlers and crop failures affected survival on the reservation. But it is important to note going forward that land loss and education are both a part of assimilation. Indigenous parents put their children in on-reservation schools to keep them fed and gain a white man's education to empower the community against assimilation. Today, we know that boarding schools were closed because of bad food, disease, rampant abuse, and forced acculturation to separate children from families. There were also problems with the high staff turnover and abuse of children. Out of the clamor of reformers calling for a change in Indian policy came Helen Hunt Jackson's 1881 *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes*.¹³⁷ Jackson's work highlighted the long history of bloody conflicts and a corrupt Indian Affairs department. Like other on-reservation boarding schools of the time, Sisseton Indian Industrial School did not differ significantly in neglect of the children or corrupt administration.

In the following, I analyze the failures of various teachers at the school which almost led to the closure of the school right when the reservation opened for settlement. I argue that within

¹³⁵ George Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, vol 1 (Chicago: SJ Clarks Publishing, 1915), 833-34.

¹³⁶ Michael Lawson, “Indian Heirship Lands: The Lake Traverse Experience” *South Dakota History* 12, no. 4 (1983): 213-231.

¹³⁷ Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1881).

this crisis, Dakota teachers entered into these spaces and appeared to be willing models of assimilation. In reality, they subverted assimilation and supported tribal strength and protection of the children.

As early as 1883, agent Charles Crissey praised principal B.S. Haskell for the students' excellence and the parents' eagerness to crowd their children into the school by any means.¹³⁸ He does not mention why the parents might be desirous of placing their children in the school. Agent Benjamin Thompson, who replaced Crissey, quickly scolded principal Haskell for not caring for the children because he was more focused on breeding cattle for money. Soon, Haskell was fired for leaving the school for days, neglecting the children, and illegally herding cattle that destroyed the school's crops.¹³⁹ This is an example of how the school failed the students: principals did not invest in the education of Native children. Principals neglecting their duties allowed staff free reign to commit fraud or worse.

For example, Haskell's successor Amasa Crossfield, reported Howard Thompson, a teacher, for assault. Thompson was accused of attacking sixteen-year-old Dakota students Annie Cloutier and Kitty Lacroix. However, Agent Benjamin Thompson, the father of Howard, responded to the accusation against his son by accusing principal Crossfield of not controlling students speaking the Dakota language and of being after his job by making up lies about his family. Soon after these accusations flew back and forth, agent Thompson quietly transferred his son to another reservation. Neither Annie Cloutier nor Kitty Lacroix received justice for the assault committed against them. Federal employees on reservations caught committing crimes

¹³⁸ *Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, Sisseton Agency, 1883, 45.

¹³⁹ Inspector M.R Barse to B.S Haskell, Sisseton Indian Industrial School Inspector, November 30, 1883, *Sisseton Agency*, Inspection Reports 1873-1881, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

were simply transferred to another reservation. But the tribe grew warier now of the principals and teachers running the school.

Colonel Thomas Cage Gordon was the most infamous of the staff at the Sisseton Indian Industrial School in the late nineteenth century. He was viewed unfavorably, clear by many inspection reports at the time. Gordon was born in 1856 in Jackson, Louisiana, to a family line with settler roots in the South.¹⁴⁰ He came to the Lake Traverse Reservation in 1886 with his wife, Katherine Latta. She became the matron, he, the principal. But Gordon's work at the school became so bad that the tribal council charged him as a troublemaker. The Sisseton Wahpeton tribe tried to remove Gordon from his appointment in a petition to the agent. But Inspector Tinker claimed the tribe was upset because Gordon had made political promises and did not hold up his end. This exchange also shows us how the tribe tried to use settler jurisdiction to achieve their goals of tribal sovereignty. Although their attempt to remove Gordon was unsuccessful, over time, Gordon's lack of care led to the end of his time at the school.

In his first year as principal, Gordon wrote to Agent Israel Greene to ask for money to hire an assistant industrial teacher because the industrial teacher was too tired to teach. The average duties of industrial teachers included “hauling water, sawing wood, teaching classes, the building, and maintenance of fires, looking after the cellars, and supervision of the boy's dress.”¹⁴¹ Gordon believed the work assigned by Agent Greene was too much and resulted in a constant turnover. Historian David Adams found that teachers and administrators at boarding schools often left their jobs because of the low pay, hard work, and terrible living conditions.

¹⁴⁰ Octavia Zollicoffer Bond, *The Family Chronicle and Kinship Book of Maclin, Clack, Cocke, Carter, Taylor, Cross, Gordon, and Other Related American Lineages* (Nashville: McDaniel Printing Company, 1928), 360-362.

¹⁴¹ F.C Gordon to Agent Israel Greene, February 2, 1888, H75-133, folder 1, *Sisseton Agency*, Military Records, South Dakota State Archives, Pierre, SD.

Teachers taught classes, chaperoned students during chores, conducted evening supervision of the children, and completed daily chores. Reservation schools were significantly affected by the shortage of staff since the low number forced some to take on the duties of two people. Lack of adequate staffing and increased responsibilities led to staff turnover because teachers simply wanted to teach.¹⁴²

The Indian Office warned its employees that “long hours of service are required, and that every employee must be willing to work night or day if special emergencies arise that the duties of an employee do not end at a given hour, but may be continued indefinitely.”¹⁴³ Principal Gordon said that caring for one hundred heads of livestock, cultivating the school farm, and supervising the school was too much for one person.¹⁴⁴ He believed that he could create a great school with more money and always envisioned big projects. Unfortunately, these so-called big projects never went anywhere and became a nuisance to the community. Inspector Tinker wrote that principal Gordon could not obtain money to improve the school because no one trusted him with the school finances. Eventually, principal Gordon took a pay cut and hired his nephew George McClelland as the assistant industrial teacher. While he might have solved one problem, the issue of student health became an enormous failure.

In 1887, the agency physician reported principal Gordon to Agent Jenkins about the sickening conditions of food storage in the school basement. According to Inspector Bannister, the roof had collapsed, vegetables rotted due to feces from animals who lived in the basement,

¹⁴² David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 39.

¹⁴³ US Office of Indian Affairs, *Rules for the Indian Service*, 1898, 18.

¹⁴⁴ F.C Gordon to Agent Israel Greene, February 2, 1888, H75-133, folder 1, *Sisseton Agency*, Military Records, South Dakota State Archives, Pierre, SD.

and beef was chopped and cooked on putrid blocks.¹⁴⁵ These conditions increased disease outbreaks and the death of hundreds of Indigenous children both on Lake Traverse and across the nation. Ojibway Brenda Child in her study of government boarding schools said, “the anxiety the Indian parents felt regarding the health of their children in boarding school was exacerbated by the pervasiveness of serious diseases.”¹⁴⁶ Tribal communities often distrusted the boarding schools due to failure to protect the children from serious diseases. However, Principal Gordon blamed any disease outbreak on teachers neglecting their chores, but the Dakota community was tired of excuses. In December 1887, the tribal council wrote to Inspector Bannister, asking him to remove principal Gordon. They charged him for not being a good man, and although the Inspector's report does not say it outright, we can infer that the tribe called him a “bad man.”

According to the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty with the Lakota, the “bad man” clause meant that if a white person injured the person or property of the tribe, the United States, once given proof, would arrest the offender.¹⁴⁷ Of course, the American government rarely enforced the “bad man” clause. Clearly or essentially, however, the tribe argued that principal Gordon was a bad man. He was meddlesome, a liar, always armed, not supervising the children, only in it for the money, and ruining the school's reputation.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, they specifically called attention to the incident with Gabriel Robertson in 1886.

¹⁴⁵ Sisseton Agency Physician to Agent Israel Greene, December 29, 1886, *Sisseton Agency*, Inspection Reports, 1873-1881, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

¹⁴⁶ Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 55-68.

¹⁴⁷ As a reminder the Lakota are part of the larger Oceti Sakowin nation. I suggest that under tribal beliefs in which all relatives are related in the spirit of kinship and responsibility, the Dakota could also use the bad man clause; Charles Kappler, “Treaty with the Sioux, Brule, Oglala, Miniconjou, Yanktonai, Hunkpapa, Blackfeet, Cuthead, Two Kettle, Sans Arcs, and Santee and Arapaho, April 29, 1868,” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. II, Treaties (Washington: Government Printing office, 1904), 998-1007.

¹⁴⁸ Inspector Bannister, “Charges Against T.C Gordon,” December 13, 1887, *Sisseton Agency*, Inspector Reports, 1883-1899, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

In his work on American jurisdictional interactions with Oceti Sakowin tribes, Hunkpapa Lakota Vine Deloria Jr stated, “If an incident aroused the fighting spirit on either side, then some form of compensation or retribution would have to be made public to pacify the injured parties.”¹⁴⁹ The Sisseton Wahpeton expected the BIA to get rid of Gordon as they were the injured party. However, agent Jenkins did not remove Principal Gordon, and things worsened. The corn meal for the children, often stored at the mill, was left forgotten and spoiled. Principal Gordon gave more excuses. Later, the bakery and laundry burned down due to a fire from drought, the girl's outhouse was falling apart, and so was the water mill to pump water. The wooden school buildings were a potential firetrap, and a lack of space had children sleeping in the attic exposed to the weather. A lack of updates to the kitchen meant that only three stoves could hold two pans of bread each and over a hundred and forty students to feed three times a day. Inspector Thomas had a list of suggestions on how to use the funding to update the school. However, he worried Principal Gordon would overzealously spend the money on wasteful projects. For example, Gordon often began construction on a project, only to repeatedly change his mind on a location halfway through and waste the materials. Waste was always a particular issue when it came to the Gordon era.

By 1889, disease outbreaks from conditions at the school led to parents refusing to send their children anymore.¹⁵⁰ Rumors spread through the neighboring towns of the failing school. The police caught three runaway students hiding in a haystack thirty miles from the school.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Vine Deloria Jr, “The United States Has No Jurisdiction in Sioux Territory,” quoted in Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, *The Great Sioux Nation: Sitting in Judgment on America* (New York: American Indian Treaty Council, 1977), 141-46.

¹⁵⁰ Inspector William Junker, Sisseton Indian Industrial School Inspector, *Sisseton Agency*, June 24, 1889, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

¹⁵¹ Inspector William Junker, Sisseton Indian Industrial School Inspector, *Sisseton Agency*, June 24, 1889, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

Eventually, the scandal was too much, and Agent Greene had principal Gordon transferred to the Yakama Reservation in Washington. However, while he was sure to comment on the unfortunate aggressive policies of Gordon, he also lamented the inherent ungratefulness of Indians. Instead, the agent painted the Sisseton Wahpeton as ungrateful when they objected to principals being violent or lazy; as one Dakota elder countered, “The white people are just as bad, even worse. You never hear about the things that happened to our people, because it was never written in the history books. They say it is always the Indians who were at fault.”¹⁵²

Subverting the settler colonial narrative of assimilation requires reading previously neglected Dakota sources on the Sisseton Indian Industrial School from frontiersman Samuel Jerome Brown. Highlighting the experiences of Sam Brown as principal of the school follows the Indigenous paradigms of Seminole scholar Susan Miller. She advocates that Indigenous perspectives must be “at the center of historical narratives.” Thus, the Dakota view, not the white, is privileged.¹⁵³ Let us now consider the Dakota view of mixed-blood Sisseton Wahpeton Sam Brown who became a principal at Sisseton Indian Industrial School.

Sam Brown is well known today in the Great Plains for his work as a frontiersman, historian, and Indigenous advocate for education and civil rights. He was born in 1845 to Joseph R. Brown, a frontiersman and Indian agent for the Dakota, and his mother, Susan Freniere Brown, a mixed-blood descendant of Dakota chief Tatanka Mani. Joseph was one-eighth Dakota and a citizen of the Sisseton tribe. Sam Brown was a scout in the Minnesota militia and captured during the 1862 Dakota War. Settlers often repeated the story of his midnight ride through a

¹⁵² Angela Cavender Wilson, “Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota Family” in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, edited by Devon Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 133.

¹⁵³ Susan Miller, “Native America Writes Back,” in *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History*, edited by Susan Miller and James Riding In (Texas: Tech University Press, 2011), 18.

blizzard in 1866. He rode over one hundred miles to warn of an attack and—when the threat proved false—back through a terrible blizzard to stop his request for reinforcements from the U.S. Army. The incident, at age twenty-one, left him in a wheelchair for life.¹⁵⁴

The story of Sam Brown is complex. He navigated a crisis between defining himself as Dakota and his actions as an assimilated Indian. In my analysis, I rely on the methodology of Ho-chunk Renya Ramirez, who suggests that Indigenous people, like her grandparents Henry Roe Cloud and Elizabeth Bender Roe Cloud, could both subvert and uphold the settler system through doublespeak. Doublespeak is where Indigenous “speech generates two meanings: one appears dispassionate and agreeable; the other could express subversive material or ideas.”¹⁵⁵ Sam Brown also shared some similarities with another well-known Dakota, the physician Charles Eastman.

Both were Dakota authors, activists, and historians. Both attended white missionary schools at a young age and saw the value in learning the white man's ways. They relied on “flexible and fluid notions of gender, identity, culture, community, and belonging that they carried with them as they traveled around Indian Country and within white environments.”¹⁵⁶ Of course, leaving a reservation did not mean a loss of culture either. Dakota people like Brown and Eastman, walked a careful balance between Dakota and the white world whereby they were viewed as both good and bad. Both worked in boarding schools and government projects as models of assimilation. Yet Eastman became a co-founder of the Society of American Indians

¹⁵⁴ Grant Anderson, “The Prairie Paul Revere,” *South Dakota History* 8, no. 1 (1977): 24-33; Samuel Brown, *In Captivity: The Experience, Privations, and Dangers of Samuel J Brown and others, While Prisoners of the Hostile Sioux: During the Massacre and War of 1862* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1996); Alan Woolworth and Gary Anderson, *Through Dakota Eyes*, Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁵ Renya Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 6.

¹⁵⁶ Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 233.

and supported white education for Indigenous children. He believed there was still much to be learned from Indigenous ways of knowing. Like Sam Brown and Charles Eastman, Dakota had to carefully mediate between two worlds while keeping Native knowledge alive. Sam Brown became known for his work for Dakota scout annuities and later as a teacher on the Crow Creek Reservation. Both men were products of assimilation and became individual success stories to white settler society.

However, modern Dakota, such as historian Waziyatawin, contested that Sam Brown represents an indoctrinated Dakota whose actions as a scout betray his people.¹⁵⁷ But this misses the historical context of assimilation and its impact on the Brown family. I argue that the Brown family subverted allyship with the white man to reinvigorate a new form of Dakota survivance. Other scholars, such as Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, concluded that elite mixed bloods like the Brown family were accepted by white society because they denied their roots.¹⁵⁸ While true, this obscures the complex reality faced by mixed-blood Dakota caught between two worlds, and limits our understanding. Instead, I offer a different story of Sam Brown by looking at his actions as principal of a government boarding school as an example of doublespeak. Sam Brown served within the settler safety zone as an example in the larger national agenda of what defined a civilized Dakota.

In their concept of the safety zone, anthropologist Teresa McCarty and historian Mvskoke K Tsianina Lomawaima argue settler society contains Indigenous peoples in these safe spaces perpetuated as “anti-modern, poverty-stricken and serve as a constant reminder and

¹⁵⁷ Angela Wilson Waziyatawin, “Decolonizing the 1862 Death Marches,” in *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History*, edited by Susan Miller and James Riding In (Texas: Tech University Press, 2011), 138.

¹⁵⁸ Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, *The War in Words: Reading the Dakota Conflict Through Captivity Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

justification for U.S. land claims.”¹⁵⁹ In this definition, settler society believes the Lake Traverse Reservation is anti-modern and its poverty serves as justification for oppression. But they further suggested that Indigenous people working in government schools, worked within a “tug-of-war between tribal and federal interests.”¹⁶⁰ Therefore, I apply this concept to that of Sam Brown, where his role allowed him to support Dakota resilience within boarding schools in subtle ways.

Sam Brown became the principal of the Sisseton Industrial School because the American government did not view him as a threat. Lomawaima and McCarty conclude that “the safety zone can contain within it Native American movement, negotiation, and creativity: expression of what Native people assert as their Indigenous identities, cultures, and sovereignty.”¹⁶¹ The presence of friendly Indian Sam Brown as principal of a boarding school suggests a triumphant narrative of educational assimilation. But his writings and frustration with the federal government are evidence of Indigenous negotiation. Sam Brown reinforced his identity and roots as a Dakota man as he worked within the safety zone to create a third space of Indigenous survivance.¹⁶²

Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as Indigenous individuals who perform active resistance and rejection of dominance.¹⁶³ For Dakota, such as Sam Brown and Charles Eastman, survivance is tied into ways of being. Anthropologist Dorthoy Lee in her study

¹⁵⁹ K Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L McCarty, *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2006), 47; K Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty, “Introduction to the Special Issue Examining and Applying Safety Zone Theory: Current Policies, Practices, and Experiences,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 53, no. 3 (2014): 1–10.

¹⁶⁰ K Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L McCarty, “When Tribal Sovereignty Challenges Democracy: American Indian Education and the Democratic Ideal,” *American Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 2 (2002): 279-305.

¹⁶¹ Lomawaima and McCarty, “Examining and Applying Safety Zone Theory,” 6.

¹⁶² According to Kevin Bruyneel, the third space of sovereignty, “resides neither simply inside nor outside the American political system, but rather exists on these very boundaries, exposing both the practices and contingencies of American colonial rule; Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xvii.

¹⁶³ Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 11-17.

of survivance wrote, “Dakota was responsible for all things because they were at one with all things...to be related meant to be responsible. Everyone was responsible for all members of the band, and eventually for all peoples, all things.”¹⁶⁴ As Vizenor concludes, responsibility is a communal act that supports survivance. Therefore, the very act of survivance creates a Native presence, not an absence due to assimilation.¹⁶⁵ Suppose we refashion the story of Sam Brown not as an indoctrinated Dakota but as a Dakota who re-creates his cultural identity. In that case, we can continue to critically reframe our understanding of Dakota survivance, which rejects narratives of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.¹⁶⁶

A New Hope? Dakota Principal Sam Brown

Sam Brown's career represents contradictions. As much as he might have critiqued the system, we cannot dismiss his complex role in the history of the Dakota. For example, he served as a militia scout in Minnesota under General Sibley in the aftermath of the Dakota War and took part in transporting his kin as prisoners. Later, he served as principal of the Crow Creek Day School in 1879 for one year. In the aftermath of the 1862 Dakota War and the wrongful hanging of thirty-eight Dakota men, the American government sent the surviving men to Camp McClellan in Iowa. But the women and children were forcibly put on steamboats and sent to Fort Randall at the Crow Creek Reservation. They suffered starvation, disease, and inhumane treatment at Crow Creek, and hundreds died. While the internment officially ended in 1866, this does not mean that things improved. On the contrary, its rural location meant that Crow Creek Reservation often suffered drought, unpredictable weather and was inhospitable.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Dorothy Lee, *Freedom and Culture* (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1987), 60-65.

¹⁶⁵ Vizenor, *Survivance*, 19.

¹⁶⁶ Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁶⁷ Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of

Sam Brown's choice to work at the Crow Creek Reservation in the aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War creates questions. Did he seek to continue the forced assimilation of his people? Did he feel guilty about his role in the prisoner transports? Or did he take advantage of being viewed as a friendly Dakota to gain steady work for himself and his family? His letters provide some information on life at Crow Creek Reservation. The day school was under contract as a Protestant Episcopal school and predominantly served Yankton (Ihankowan) students, and the average attendance was thirty to fifty students from the reservation.¹⁶⁸ The monthly school reports show Sam Brown used the Riggs Dakota grammar books, and his wife Phoebe taught sewing to the girls. The girls made clothes for themselves and their fellow students. These cotton clothes were supposed to protect them in the frigid South Dakota winters. Unfortunately, conditions at the school were terrible, and a lack of space and protection from the elements created an inhospitable learning environment.¹⁶⁹ But, by 1879, with the opening of the Hope Boarding School in nearby Springfield, South Dakota, the day school closed, and Sam Brown was without a job.¹⁷⁰

Sam Brown returned to Brown's Valley in Minnesota.¹⁷¹ However, in June 1889, he applied for the agent position at the Devil's Lake Reservation and as a clerk at the Lake Traverse Reservation. Sam Brown is almost desperate to get work on either Dakota reservation. Was it to be closer to kin and community? Or to make sure his children shared in the culture of his mother? Maybe he wanted to participate in the land promised to the Sisseton Wahpeton in treaties. He wrote, "I ask for this position because of my soldier record, and because I am a

Nebraska Press, 1993), 146-151.

¹⁶⁸ Monthly Reports of the Indian Schools, Crow Creek Agency, January 31, 1879, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁶⁹ Monthly Reports of the Indian Schools, Crow Creek Agency, February 28, 1879, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁷⁰ Emlen Miller to Sam Brown, November 10, 1879, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁷¹ Browns Valley is named after Sam Browns father Joseph Brown.

democrat, in full sympathy with the present administration.” He reminds them of his time as a Minnesota militia scout and his position as an assimilated Indian.¹⁷² To the Lake Traverse Agent, he particularly emphasized, “I am connected by blood as the principal chief is my uncle, and feel that I am peculiarly fitted for the place.”¹⁷³ The rejection for both positions did not stop him, and with Gordon's transfer, he applied again, this time as principal of the boarding school.

Sam Brown reminded the agent at the Lake Traverse Reservation of “my acquaintance with the Indians there, and with their land, and the treaty under which they live, and being familiar with the allotment lands and the duties.”¹⁷⁴ He noted his relatives who lived on the reservation, his familiarity with the treaty, and the history of the tribe prepared him for the work. Installing Sam Brown as principal of the boarding school must have seemed like an easy solution to ease resentment. As a Dakota, he could quiet community tensions and be considered civilized; he could serve as a perfect model for Dakota children.

At this time, the Sisseton Indian Industrial School had a terrible reputation. The Indian Rights Association, an assimilationist Indian civil rights group, quickly called on Sam Brown, “Can you not give a statement of Gordon's course while he was at the Sisseton Agency? What was the testimony against him? If you do so, we shall be very much obliged.”¹⁷⁵ The national Indian Rights Association often investigated the contradiction between national assimilation policies and the realities of cruelties inflicted on students in boarding schools. The American government could ill-afford stories that assimilation was a failure. Stories of corruption and failure in the schools could threaten American desire to civilize the tribes. So, to keep the

¹⁷² Sam Brown to Charles Painter, February 7, 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁷³ Sam Brown to President Grover Cleveland, February 10, 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁷⁴ Sam Brown to Charles Painter, February 7, 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁷⁵ Harrison to Sam Brown, May 9, 1888, *Samuel J Brown Papers*.

assimilation goals steady, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) had to bargain with the Dakota community to keep sending children to school. Because what if the community talked and stories of Gordon spread further? Critics in the Great Plains often argued that East Coast reformers could never understand the realities of the plains, as if to defend their constant push for Dakota land. But a way to settle all tensions seemed clear, why not install a Dakota figurehead with no real power as principal?

Commissioner Thomas Morgan wrote of the “earnest support of the Indian Office” in his letter assigning Sam Brown the position of principal at the Sisseton Indian Industrial School. Commissioner Morgan served as the Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1889 to 1893. He was critical in creating a national school system for Indigenous children that started with day schools, reservation boarding schools, and outwards to off-reservation schools like Carlisle or Hampton. Modeled after the white man's public school system, Morgan believed his approach instilled values of good morals, work ethic, and provided Indigenous the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. But this was based on the white man's belief in liberty, which meant individually owning and farming land.

Commissioner Morgan wrote, “The Indians must conform to the white man's ways, peaceably if they will, forcibly if they must. They must adjust themselves to their environment and conform their mode of living substantially to our civilization. They cannot escape it and must either conform to it or be crushed by it.” Therefore, Indigenous peoples must accept the education and individuality being thrust upon them, or else. “Dishonesty, injustice, favoritism, and incompetency have no place here anymore than elsewhere in the American government.” Morgan concluded in his speech to begin reforming the Indian Affairs and crack down on corrupt staff like Thomas Gordon. But the American government could use the term

“incompetency” to its advantage when hiring boarding school staff. Sam Brown later found whispers of his incompetency used against him when he challenged the system.¹⁷⁶

In their first correspondence, Sam Brown reminded Commissioner Morgan that he was disabled, but “I have full confidence in my very ability to redeem the school from the poor state into which it falls. To make it prosper and a means of life and help to the people—the accomplishment of which I desire to bend all my energies.”¹⁷⁷ The appointment of Sam Brown was supposed to be an experiment to quiet lingering resentment over Gordon’s service. But Brown was never quiet, and his first act in October 1889 was to abolish the use of whipping as a punishment at the school. By December, teachers complained about the unfairness of Sam Brown, focusing so heavily on the school's management and controlling their schedules. Brown wrote detailed notes on his curriculum plans, teacher schedules, and chores for the week. Here, an Indigenous man told white men and women what they could or could not do.¹⁷⁸

The day for children began and ended with the white man's prayer every day. Classes included exercise, geography, American history, singing, writing, and arithmetic. Children attended classes and chores from six am until ten pm. Various teachers were to ring the main bell a total of twenty-six times throughout the day. On Sunday mornings, all the children attended the Episcopalian church service and the Presbyterian service shortly after.

Textbooks used in the Sam Brown era included: James Monteith's *Physical and Political Geography*, John Stoddard's *Complete Arithmetic*, Horatio Robinson's *Progressive Arithmetic*, Worthington Hookers *The Child's Book of Nature*, William McGuffey’s *Readers* series, and

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Morgan Speech, quoted in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, October 1, 1889.

¹⁷⁷ Sam Brown to Commissioner Morgan, February 10, 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁷⁸ “Order of Work,” “Distribution of School Duties,” *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

Edward Eggleston's *Histories*.¹⁷⁹ Many such textbooks peddled narratives of empty lands, settler superiority, and the extinction myths of Indigenous people.¹⁸⁰ These narratives served settler goals in teaching Dakota people to become white and civilized, that their culture must give way to the white man's ways.¹⁸¹ At the same time, parents hoped curriculum and language could help the children combat the white man at his own game. In his position, Sam Brown was caught between advocating to improve the school for his people and following these broader assimilation policies. He had to choose what was necessary for students to learn and how much room he had to shape the rules.

In 1887, former Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Atkins had ruled that teachers should punish children for speaking the Indian language, and only English being taught and spoken. "If the Indian is ever to become a useful citizen he must know the language of the Constitution, the laws, and the people."¹⁸² These rules enhanced the power of settler society over Indigenous children and made it hard to navigate the system. Reports from Agent Jenkins prove that the community frequently circumvented assimilation policies and the Dakota language used in the school. For example, while making clear about not committing the vices of smoking or gambling, nowhere in his notes did Sam Brown ever state that speaking the Dakota language was forbidden.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ "Books Used in the Sisseton School Room," *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁸⁰ Dolores Calderon, "Uncovering Settler Colonial Grammars in Curriculum," *Journal of the American Educational Studies Association* 50, no. 4 (July 2014): 313-338.

¹⁸¹ Wolfe, Patrick, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 387-409.

¹⁸² *Sioux Falls Daily Argus Leader*, September 23, 1887, quoted in Kohoutek, *The Lake Traverse Indian Reservation*, 28.

¹⁸³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, Sisseton Agency, 1890, 67; 1891, 419.

The experiences of Sam Brown at the Sisseton Indian Industrial School show us that Indigenous boarding schools created new avenues for positions of power. Sam Brown's Dakota identity did not stop parents from protecting their children and refusing to send them to school. For example, in 1889, the interpreter, Henry Campbell, refused to send his son to the school until the industrial teacher George Jenkins was removed for violent punishments.¹⁸⁴ In another incident, Dakota student Robb Eagle and his brother asked for leave to go home and help their blind father haul hay. Of the two incidents, allowing Eagle to go home was easier. Overseeing a staff that never listened to him about the use of violence was a far harder challenge. Some teachers, such as Matron Mary Thompson, objected to oversight by an Indian. She argued to Inspector Tinker that principal Sam Brown had taken away her authority over the children. Thompson dismissed the rights and power of the Dakota people in providing lessons and protection over the children.

Inspector Tinker disapproved of arguments among staff at the school. But he blamed the problem on principal Sam Brown's disabilities, disregarding the employee's refusal to work with a Dakota man and assist him.¹⁸⁵ A Dakota man as a principal was important to the community. However, Sam Brown countered that attendance at the school was the highest it had ever been.¹⁸⁶ The school could safely accommodate one hundred students. But average attendance had dropped to seventy in the era of principal Gordon. The opening of the reservation to white settlement and annual annuity payments coincides with children leaving school. However, it is essential to note that attendance picked back up to ninety-five students under principal Sam

¹⁸⁴ For clarification, George Jenkins was not related to Agent Jenkins.

¹⁸⁵ Inspector A.M Tinker, Sisseton Indian Industrial School Inspector, *Sisseton Agency*, December 20, 1889, RG64 NA-MD, Microfilm 1070, Reel 50.

¹⁸⁶ Sam Brown to Commissioner Morgan, April 29, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

Brown in 1890 and fell back into the seventies after he left in 1891, as displayed in the chart below.

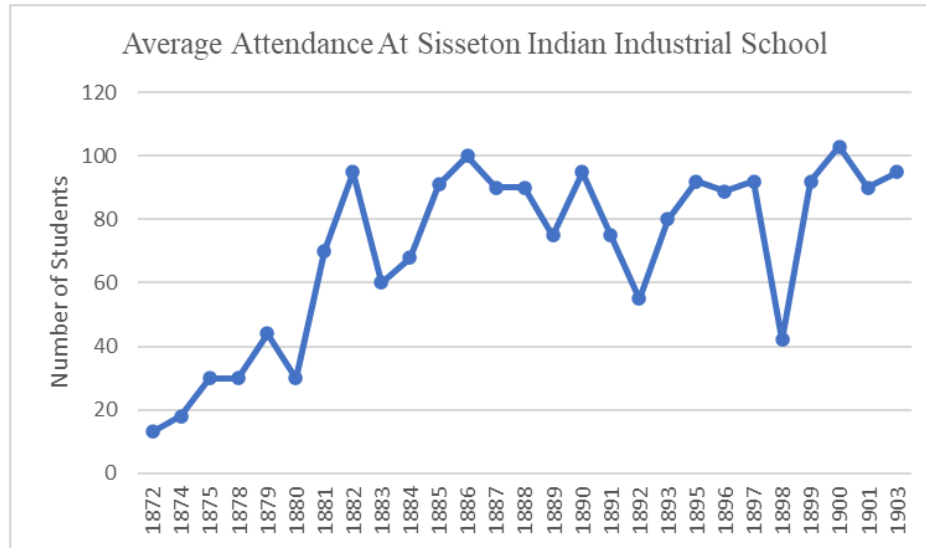


Table 4: Average Attendance at Sisseton Industrial School, 1873-1903. Created by author.

Agent McKusick wrote of his frustrations that parents and the Dakota community went to Sam Brown with their daily concerns. He wrote to Brown advising, “In the future, when Indians come to you, send them to my office. I can always attend to them myself, better than through a third party.”¹⁸⁷ In McKusick’s views, Sam Brown, as a Dakota, was only there to ease the growth of assimilation as a figurehead with no power. Instead, he became a Dakota authority that parents could go to with their concerns. Yet Brown was trapped between a careful balance of a figurehead for assimilation and the safety of individual students who still resisted the schools. For example, runaways were common, even during the tenure of principal Sam Brown. Ojibway and historian Brenda Child found that chaperoned girls at the Flandreau Boarding School were often apprehended not far from government schools after becoming tired and hungry.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Agent McKusick to Sam Brown, September 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁸⁸ Child, *Boarding School Season*, 92.

In a similar case, at the Sisseton Indian Industrial School, on January 8, 1890, Agent McKusick reported to principal Brown: “Sir, Miss Barse and Miss Hopkins called on me this morning and stated that they had left school without permission. They say that they were very anxious and feared that they were to be sent away from school and wished to see me.”¹⁸⁹

Running away was the most extreme form of resistance, and children who deserted did so for various reasons: homesickness, poor boarding school diet, isolation, and abuse.¹⁹⁰ Sometimes the children were caught and sent back to school. Other times they died due to frostbite or starvation. Lucky children successfully returned home after running away. Unlucky children had parents who sent them back to school. Some children escaped to cities or farms where they could hide or disappear. Another common problem in schools was the communication between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school staff.¹⁹¹

Principal Sam Brown wrote to Agent McKusick that the school’s baker, Calista Clark, refused to both cook and take care of students. For example, Clark had to escort the young boys to and from dinner and bed.¹⁹² The students had complained to Dakota teacher, Clara Mason, that when she did the job, Clark often brought them to dinner late and excused them early before they had a chance to finish eating.¹⁹³ Students' daily lives in boarding schools were highly regulated, using bell chimes during sleeping, eating, chores, and classwork, all of which were overseen, “under the eye of a school employee.”¹⁹⁴ However, the reality was that teachers like Clark

¹⁸⁹ Agent McKusick to Sam Brown, January 8, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁹⁰ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 252-25; K Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 94-99; Child, *Boarding Schools Seasons*, 87-95; Brenda Child, “Runaway Boys, Resistant Girls: Rebellion at Flandreau and Haskell, 1900-1940,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 35 (Spring 1996): 49-58.

¹⁹¹ Adams *Education for Extinction*, 97-102.

¹⁹² Sam Brown to Agent McKusick, December 21, 1889, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁹³ Clara Mason to Sam Brown, March 1, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

¹⁹⁴ “Rules for Indian Schools, with Course of Study, List of Textbooks, and Civil Service Rules,” Office of Indian Affairs, 1892, NARA-DC, box 1.

objected to the same rigid, inhumane routines. Principal Sam Brown asked that the agent remove Clark but never received a reply. He wrote again and reminded the agent that Commissioner Morgan had promised the office's full support, that he had held up his end, and now Morgan must do as promised.¹⁹⁵ A Sisseton Wahpeton in power was the one to set the school straight and improve enrollment and the duties of the staff, not the American government.

Furthermore, Sam Brown had not forgotten the incident with Campbell's child and asked for the removal of George Jenkins for his inexperience, virulent temper, lack of honor, and abuse of students. He also requested the removal of Jenkins's wife, Arrie Grant, as a teacher, and their friend, the shoemaker J. M. Phillippi.¹⁹⁶ Of these two, principal Sam Brown said they were troublemakers who made fun of his disabilities and intentionally ignored his position as principal. Many white teachers and workers in boarding schools criticized working alongside Indigenous teachers, much less a Dakota principal in a higher position than them. The BIA transferred George Jenkins, and he left the Indian Service to work as district representative of Roberts County in the South Dakota House of Representatives.¹⁹⁷ In representing Roberts County, men like George Jenkins found their revenge by pushing for the opening of the Lake Traverse Reservation for white settlement. Everything came to a head in 1890, when the American government tired of Sam Brown kicking the hornets' nest and demanding better change in the school.

In early January 1890, Agent McKusick wrote that Sam Brown must resign as principal of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School due to bodily infirmities and physical disability.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Sam Brown to Commissioner Morgan, January 2, 1890, *Samuel J Brown FamilyPapers*.

¹⁹⁶ Sam Brown to Commissioner Morgan, January 2, 1890, *Samuel J Brown FamilyPapers*.

¹⁹⁷ John Hipple, *South Dakota Legislative Manual* (Pierre: South Dakota State Archives, 1903), 246.

¹⁹⁸ Agent Mckusick to Sam Brown, January 9, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

Outraged, Sam Brown wrote to his colleague Charles Painter of the Indian Rights Association, to intervene to stop the dismissal. But Painter did not help, writing back, “I doubt not that the unwillingness of white men to have the patronage of the Indian service to pass into the hands of Indians will lead them to throw obstacles in the way of any such experiment as was made in your case.”¹⁹⁹ The case is that Sam Brown did too well in his work, improving the school and building an educational space of Indigenous strength.

Sam Brown continued to resist what he saw as blatant discrimination to silence him. Finally, turning to Commissioner Morgan for answers, Sam Brown wrote a long, six-page letter about his time as principal at the boarding school. “I was struck dumb with amazement. I felt that the implied censure was untimely, uncalled-for, and most cruel.” He had clarified upon hiring that, yes, he was disabled, so why now was he suddenly being fired for it? Brown wrote, “After I had succeeded in regaining for the school the confidence of the Indians, in the face of my many difficulties and obstacles, and without that earnest support of the Indian Office, which I had confidently looked for, but never got.” Attendance at the school was the highest it had ever been under his tenure. Commissioner Morgan had promised his full support, and yet when the chips were down and Sam Brown tried to openly challenge the system, no support came. “One of those three employees was finally removed, not, however, until after my head had fallen into the basket. I was removed—And as if to add to my humiliation, my successor's salary was raised!”²⁰⁰ A Dakota man succeeded in firing white teachers for abuse, but Sam Brown knew the government had its revenge by firing him in turn. While a stirring letter of defense it did not

¹⁹⁹ Charles Painter to Sam Brown, January 21, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

²⁰⁰ Sam Brown to Commissioner Morgan, April 29, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*; Samuel Brown’s annual salary was \$1,000 a year. His successor, John Shelland, had a salary of \$1,200 a year, Quarterly Reports of the Indian Schools, *Sisseton Agency*, September 30, 1889; *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1892, 69.

move Commissioner Morgan, who wrote back, “after much reluctance, your dismissal was recommended by the Agent, two Special officers of the Interior Department, and a gentleman connected with Indian matters.”²⁰¹ Again, while Morgan claimed much reluctance in Sam Brown's firing from the school, he relieves all responsibility for himself. If the Dakota failed at his work, why, it was only a sign of the weakness of his race after all, not the failure of the Bureau to hold up their end.

Sam Brown's former coworker, Clara Mason, continued to write to him about the daily happenings of the school, “I do not know what this school will do without you. Almost all the large girls want to go home. Eight have gone and five of the largest boys have gone. They all tell me because Mr. Brown is gone, and the employees do not like them.” Clara appeals to him that the students have begun running away since his departure and the students feel unwelcome. Perhaps whipping has been resumed as a punishment without Sam Brown putting a stop to it? Clara pleaded to him, “Do please try to come back and let us have a good school. Mrs. Vanderheyden says, because Mr. Brown was good, he was sent away.” Agnes Vanderheyden was a Sisseton Wahpeton woman who had worked at the school as a laundress since 1883. She saw firsthand the changes in the school that each successive principal brought and the impact of Sam Brown.²⁰² In the end, the Brown era came to a swift end, and he retired to Browns Valley in Minnesota. Nevertheless, Sam Brown continued to correspond in letters with historians about the 1862 Dakota War, his friendship with Chief Gabriel Renville, and his memories of the frontier. He died on 29 August 1945, aged eighty.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Commissioner Morgan to Sam Brown, May 31, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

²⁰² Clara Mason to Sam Brown, March 1, 1890, *Samuel J Brown Family Papers*.

²⁰³ Elijah Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi: History and Culture of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota* (Sisseton: Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 1975), 48.

Fraught and havoc describe the early years of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School. Men like B.S Haskell and Thomas Gordon cared little for the students or community at the Lake Traverse Reservation. Because of neglect, disease, corruption, and assault occurred at the school and threatened its closure. But the story of Sam Brown adds a deeper understanding of how the Sisseton Wahpeton worked to address a system that tried to eliminate their culture. Dakota men like Sam Brown carved out new paths for Indigenous reclaiming of education. Working within the settler system, Brown used his reputation and past experiences in white society to his advantage as he worked to create tribal strength within the Sisseton Indian Industrial School. The interactions that he and others experienced at the boarding school deeply changed their identity and culture as they created ways to subtly resist. Ultimately, the government removed Sam Brown because he was a threat to the goals of settler colonial elimination.

As the nineteenth century ended, the Sisseton Indian Industrial School followed national policies and shifted to emphasize vocational labor work. At the same time, the American government heavily pushed for the opening of the Lake Traverse Reservation for white settlements. As a result, a new generation of Dakota students faced a difficult road ahead. For example, in March 1891, Congress authorized the taking of Indigenous children to schools via force. Agents could now withhold rations, clothing, annuities, and even guardianship of parents who resisted.²⁰⁴ Teachers who came after Sam Brown strictly enforced gender-segregated classes and religious devotion.²⁰⁵ Nationally, Frederick Jackson Turner wrote *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* in 1893 and argued that white individuals had conquered the wild

²⁰⁴ *Statutes at Large of The United States of America*, vol. 26, 1014 and vol 27, 635.

²⁰⁵ Principal Shelland and Johnson both worked at the school in the late 1890s; Father John Shelland, "Curriculum," *Bulkey-Shelley Family Papers*, 1893, Sophia Smith Collection, SSC-MS-00264, Smith College Special Collections; Philena Johnson, "Education of Indian Girls," in *Report of the Indian School Superintendent to the Secretary of the Interior*, Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1896.

free land of the frontier. He also cast Indigenous peoples as faceless savages erased by white expansion.²⁰⁶

However, the frontier was not a land of hope and growth but a place of conquest and oppression of Indigenous peoples. A critical dynamic of settler colonial oppression that continues even today is the dispossession of Indigenous people from their land, and educational assimilation was the perfect tool. Sam Brown was principal of the boarding school for one year, but I argue the groundwork for continued Indigenous resilience only needs a day to build a space that challenges settler society. Because of Sam Brown, a new generation of Dakota students found opportunities for cultural resistance to talking back against their assimilation.

²⁰⁶ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1894), 16.

All the land in this country upon which the whites have built their wealth belonged originally to the red men. The prosperity of this community depends on the exploitation, honest though it may be, of the Indians. All the money which they receive eventually finds its way into the hands of the white people.

Frances DeMarrias, "Our White Neighbor,"

Sisseton Weekly Standard, 1914.²⁰⁷

Chapter Three:

The White Men Had No Honest Intentions: Dakota Students Talk Back

In the fall of 1919, the Sisseton Indian Industrial School on the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota closed its doors. The closure was not unusual; at the start of the twentieth century, many government boarding schools closed under pressure from lack of funding, disease, and a push towards public schools. However, while historians have tried to make sense of Indigenous boarding school history in South Dakota, the absence of the Lake Traverse Reservation boarding school in the literature is stark.²⁰⁸

The consequences of intergenerational trauma from boarding schools cannot be understood today unless we know where these schools began and their cultures. The Sisseton Indian Industrial School was the first on-reservation government boarding school in South Dakota which opened in 1873, after the forced removal of the tribe from Minnesota.²⁰⁹ The school functioned as a tool of the American government to erase Indigenous identity, using

²⁰⁷ "Graduating Exercises at the Indian School," *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

²⁰⁸ Elijah Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi: History and Culture of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota* (Sisseton: Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 1975), 59; In this work I speak of the Sisseton Wahpeton, but more generally refer to them as Dakota; Oceti Šakówiŋ Oyate [oh-CHEH-tee shaw-KOH-we] (People of the Seven Council Fires) which also includes the Lakota and Nakota who together make up the seven tribes: Bdwakantunwan, Wahpekute, Sissituwan, Wahpetonwan, Ihanktown, Ihanktowana and Tetonwan.

²⁰⁹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, Sisseton Agency, 1892, 52.

regimentation and vocational work to instill white values. These white values included individual land use and rejection of tribal culture, language, and religion.

Frances DeMarrias's 1914 speech criticized the ongoing dispossession of Dakota lands on the Lake Traverse Reservation. DeMarrias specifically calls attention to the so-called benevolent intentions of settlers who removed her people. She is in direct dialogue with the local, regional, and national conversations about assimilation policies. About three thousand and sixty-four children passed through the Sisseton Indian Industrial School doors. Of the six students to graduate from the school, Frances DeMarrias was one of them.

The 1900s was an era that historian Frederick Hoxie refers to as the second phase in the American government's assimilation plan. Where Indigenous would join settler society, not as equals but as subordinates to the whims of the white man.²¹⁰ As the first government boarding school in South Dakota, Sisseton Indian Industrial School followed these assimilation policies. Understanding how students at the school navigated their identities in response to these policies requires first deconstructing the superintendents' views at the school. Debates about the effectiveness of on-reservation boarding schools also played a part in the final years of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School.²¹¹ I argue that analyzing student and superintendent reports reveals contestation over identity and subtle resistance as seen in the act of writing. Dakota students represented an ongoing pattern of Indigenous survivance and resilience as they became growing intellectuals using education to turn the tide against settler colonial elimination.

²¹⁰ Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: Bison Books, 2001), 33.

²¹¹ Thomas Morgan, "What is an Indian?," *Sixty-Fifth Annual Report of the Commissioner for Indian Affairs* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892), 31–37.

I believe that growing as advocates and critics, students Alcesta Barse, Edward LaBelle, and Frances DeMarrias addressed the same ongoing problems of settler colonialism we see today: gender affirmation, voting rights, discrimination, and exploitation. Dakota children at Sisseton Indian Industrial School adapted their identities to fit within what their audience wanted to see. Alcesta appeared to support the role of Dakota women, as submissive, that white society desired. But she relied upon notions of a Dakota mother's traditional strength that supported rather than demeaned her position. Edward LaBelle told his audience they could not complain of a lack of rights if they did not use the white man's tools for community growth. Frances DeMarrias directly addressed the long history of biased exploitation done to her people by whites who continued to take land.

This chapter begins by looking at Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) school superintendents Sanford Allen and Eugene Mossman. Both served as tools of the settler state that began shifting from academic curriculum to vocational curriculum in government boarding schools. Their reports also tell us how they tried to enforce elimination of Dakota culture. The second half of the chapter discusses how Dakota students used graduation speeches to address the day's political issues. Students created literary tools of revitalization grounded in traditional values. Their speeches show us how students pushed back against stereotypes and addressed the assimilationist rhetoric of the superintendents.

Instead, as historian Clifford Trafzer argued, Indigenous students in boarding schools “turned the power” to make education useful to keep the culture and survive in the white man's world.²¹² These moments also serve as cultural weapons of what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald

²¹² Clifford Trafzer et al, *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 237.

Vizenor refers to as survivance. Indigenous rhetoric is built using traditional culture in which the writings “are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry,” and thus, available for use to reconsider the narrative of students as passive.²¹³ Student speeches highlight the nuance of the on-reservation assimilation policy failures and ultimately, rejection of wholesale assimilation. On-reservation boarding schools were sites where children struggled with internal definitions of tribal identity vs. people on the outside telling them what identity means. Frances DeMarrias's speech shows us that students' writings are essential for understanding boarding school residents' views in this period and for how the Sisseton Wahpeton continued to adapt to assimilation.

At the start of the twentieth century, national policy for Indian education encouraged educating the children but not integrating them into white society. Administrators and anthropologists debated if Indigenous people could learn not to rely on the American government. But they did not acknowledge their part in the atrocities that forced this reliance. Instead, they devised a solution to create a working-class curriculum to solve “the Indian problem.” Estelle Reel, the Superintendent of Indian schools, created a course of study on “low expectations and practical lessons.”²¹⁴ These curriculums included baking, farming, and blacksmithing, which did not improve the students but transform them into a workforce. The more western belief was that the children could become sophisticated workers who settled on allotted lands, and gave up culture, if only shown the way.²¹⁵

Activists such as Ho-Chunk Henry Roe Cloud, a Society of American Indians founder, critiqued this kind of vocational training. Roe Cloud had worked as a superintendent at Haskell

²¹³ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on PostIndian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 1.

²¹⁴ Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, 196.

²¹⁵ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 336-344.

Industrial School. He compared vocational work to an eighth-grade education that served no purpose but to create a workforce for a white society. Roe Cloud advocated discontinuing vocational schools and reforming Indigenous education.²¹⁶ When questioned about the shift toward industry work and not an academic curriculum, Superintendent Allen at the Sisseton Indian Industrial School said, “This is an agricultural country and special stress is given to the farming and agricultural purists.”²¹⁷ National assimilation policies played out at Sisseton Indian Industrial School which began emphasizing vocational curriculum, not an academic or cultural one.

The Rise of Vocational Assimilation, 1914-1919

From 1910 to 1914, the superintendent who oversaw the Sisseton Indian Industrial was Major Sanford Erastus Allen. Born in 1838, he arrived in Sisseton in 1910 from New York with his wife and son. Like many settlers traveling westward, Superintendent Allen and his wife Libby each homesteaded a claim of one hundred and sixty acres in Becker Township, just outside the reservation. Supt. Allen spent his tenure emphasizing the importance of farming and sustaining the school. However, he quickly became frustrated over attendance, writing, “the Indian children could attend day schools if they would do so, but their attendance in many cases is very irregular.”²¹⁸ Resistance to attendance was sometimes a form of protesting white settlement, treaty violations, and protecting the culture.²¹⁹ Agents often threatened parents by withholding rations and sending police to take the children. Ten children at Pickerel Lake whose

²¹⁶ Quoted in Steven Crum, “Henry Roe Cloud, a Winnebago Reformer: His Quest for American Indian Higher Education,” *Kansas History* 11 (1988): 171-184

²¹⁷ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1910, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²¹⁸ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1911, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²¹⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 239-241.

families refused to enroll them in day schools were enrolled at Sisseton Indian Industrial School by the following year, “making fine progress.”²²⁰ His boasting claimed that assimilation was successful but ignored the realities of such dangerous work. In one case, thirteen-year-old Louis Ortley lost three fingers to a buzz saw doing carpentry.²²¹

Supt. Allen critiqued the need for reforms or encouraging children to go on to higher level education. He reported on the splendid work of the school in training the children in vocational work. Supt. Allen viewed the issue as one of race, the children came to the school mentally inferior and uncivilized, but the school must uplift them. Allen wrote, “the large farm with its livestock and crops are handled as these boys should learn to handle their own. Any girl leaving this school at eighteen years is properly prepared to care for a home of her own.”²²² The Dakota boys learned from males in an apprentice system to farm, raise livestock, and work to sustain the school. White women instructed Dakota girls in Victorian gender ideals of housekeeping, laundry, and cooking.²²³ These teachers disregard cultural norms in which Dakota women gathered food and the men hunted.²²⁴ Such policies aim to destroy the coming-of-age cultural ceremonies for Native children by teaching them to feel shame for their culture.²²⁵ The concept of internalized colonialism in schools meant that children distanced themselves from what they were taught was wrong. Kenyan scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o refers to internalized colonialism as a cultural bomb that seeks to destroy a people's sense of their culture to annihilate

²²⁰ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1911, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²²¹ “Local Happenings of the Week,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, March 4, 1910.

²²² *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1910, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²²³ Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 87-147.

²²⁴ Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi*, 100-104.

²²⁵ Cutcha Rising Baldy, *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 100-123.

“their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.”²²⁶

Indigenous people within the settler system begin to buy into these stereotypical beliefs of Indigenous people as sub-human. One example of this is restrictions on Indigenous languages in boarding schools. Settlers taught Indigenous children that their culture and ways of knowing were wrong and to become civilized laborers only by owning individual private land. For that reason, it is important to discuss the white teachers working at Sisseton Indian Industrial School and understand the mindset.

Eugene Mossman was the most notable of the staff in the last years of Sisseton Indian Industrial. Mossman was the school's principal when six students finally graduated. They even included his photo in the *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, describing his winning personality and high moral standards in instructing the students. Born in 1872 in Iowa, Mossman started his career in the Indian Service as superintendent on the Cheyenne River Reservation from 1903 to 1905. He became the principal from 1910 to 1914 and superintendent from 1915 to 1918.²²⁷ He served his final years as superintendent at the Standing Rock Reservation from 1921 to 1933.²²⁸ Supt. Mossman believed in the national concepts about the importance of assimilation. In addition, he held to the views of the time that traditional dances were a dangerous threat to students who went home for the summer.²²⁹ These stereotypes are vital because they play into themes of race in child removal. By describing families as a threat or lacking intelligence, settlers claimed there was something inherently wrong with Natives. Thus, reformers must look at the child's best

²²⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986), 3.

²²⁷ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1914-1918, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²²⁸ Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country After World War I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 75-90.

²²⁹ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1915, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

interests and say they do not need tribal culture to survive. White society exploited the labor of Dakota children, even as they claimed this work ethic benefited them.

For example, the school enforced a belief that only through landownership and an excellent work ethic could Native children contribute to society. At Sisseton Indian Industrial School, Supt. Mossman wrote that the boy's construction of chairs and tables saved on costs for the school. The girls made clothes for the younger children. The staff put these chairs and fancywork made by the girls on display at the end of the year. Supt. Mossman commented that the exhibits at the end of the school year "to be one of the most important meetings of the year."²³⁰ In the 1916 commencement exhibit, the staff sent baby clothes and a cradle made by students to the Department of Indian Affairs in Washington.²³¹

These European examples of male masculinity and domestic motherhood also drew monetary support for the school's mission. However, behind the scenes, students resisted these portrayals of peaceful assimilation. Historian David Wallace Adams in his research on boarding school students demonstrated that students engaged in passive and active resistance, often through giving nicknames to teachers or going on hunger strikes. In contrast, active resistance consisted of running away or acts of arson.²³² At Sisseton Indian Industrial School, no supervision occurred during playground activities. One can surmise that the children used these spaces to practice language and culture.²³³ Students ran away from school as an act of defiance. In 1917, thirteen students tried to run away from the school, but the police caught them and returned them to the school. Another three children deserted the following year.²³⁴ A national

²³⁰ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1916, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²³¹ "Graduating Exercises at the Indian School," *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 23, 1916.

²³² Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 224; Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light*, 94-99.

²³³ Mossman, Eugene, "Sisseton's Playgrounds for Its Students," *The Native American* 13, no. 24 (June 1912), 351.

²³⁴ Monthly Reports of the Indian Schools, *Sisseton Agency*, 1910-1919, NA RG75 Box 161.

rise in deserters led Indian Affairs Commissioner Leupp to view off-reservation boarding schools with doubt.²³⁵ Instead, he argued paternalistic themes on the importance of children being close to their families at on-reservation schools.

Of course, this meant Native Americans would be safely contained on a reservation, out of sight and mind from white settlers. One might think this meant more funding for schools like Sisseton Indian Industrial to support such views. But Supt. Mossman continued to ask for money to repair the school and never received it. This is perhaps because Indian Affairs Commissioner Cato Sells ran the BIA in the Mossman era and called day schools “the final solution” for “the elimination of the Indian as a distinct problem for the federal or state governments.”²³⁶ Despite these setbacks, Supt. Mossman disagreed with sending children to off-reservation schools. He argued that the federal government should fund the school for another twenty years, or the tribe would fall into anarchy.

Further, his belief in his more civilized identity than the Dakota influenced his choices. He commented that parents “knew nothing of the economy” and the newly arrived children were “dirty and lousy.”²³⁷ His comments are an example of settler-colonial identity tied to white privilege. Waziyatawin concluded, “Colonizing society uses approaches that blame the youth, parents, communities or Indigenous nations rather than identifying these issues as a direct consequence of the colonization of our people.”²³⁸ By describing them as ignorant, Supt. Mossman erased the experiences that the Dakota faced from forced removal.

²³⁵ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 226.

²³⁶ Francis Ford Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 823.

²³⁷ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1917, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²³⁸ Michael Yellowbird and Waziyatawin, *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2005), 126.

In 1916 Supt. Mossman started *The Sisseton Indian Farmer*, a yearly newsletter that promoted all the good the school was doing with assimilation. In explaining his goals, Mossman stated, “We desire also to use the paper to forward our efforts toward securing more diversified farming among the Sisseton people. We hope also to use the paper to interest our white neighbors in what we are trying to do.”²³⁹ News of Mossman's work reached as far as Arizona. *The Native American*, a weekly newsletter at the Phoenix Indian School, commented on the *Sisseton Indian Farmer*, saying it was “a crucial factor in advancing the interests of the Indians.”²⁴⁰ Never mind that such interests consisted of assimilation and destruction of Dakota culture. The *Sisseton Indian Farmer* supplied detailed daily class schedules and curriculum. The newspaper also described the successful work of Dakota alums as farmers and homemakers.

However, in describing those who attended classes, the articles refer to the students with demeaning military language, such as Company B or Section II—analyzing Supt. Mossman's comments reveal the intentional erasure of traditional Dakota culture. He said, “The first-grade pupils made Columbus booklets in the shape of a shield depicting the story of Columbus as a memory gem to fix the date 1492 in their minds.”²⁴¹ The children created paper calendars with pictures of Jesus, made Halloween decorations, and learned about the pilgrims of Thanksgiving.

Thus, Superintendent Mossman tried to prove his competence in changing the identity of Dakotas by showing that an American work ethic could be instilled. However, these young children living in these white systems affected their tribal identity. Caught in this third space, never entirely white, although trained too, but not privy to their Indigenous culture because they did not grow up at home. How did children in these schools keep their identity or culture in

²³⁹ “New Indian Publication Launched,” *The Tomahawk*, December 28, 1916.

²⁴⁰ “As We See Others,” *The Native American* 18, no. 4 (Phoenix: Phoenix Indian School, 1917), 60.

²⁴¹ “Sisseton Indian Farmer,” *The Sisseton Weekly Standard*, December 26, 1916.

subtle ways? How did they talk back against the assimilation they saw every day? Settler's propaganda supported the notion that the educational model at Sisseton Indian Industrial was working. However, these articles give us access to texts that capture how Dakota students resisted assimilation in the Mossman era.

The Wakanyeja Awaken: Frances DeMarrias, Alcesta Barse, & Edward

LaBelle



Figure 6: Graduating Students in 1914. "Graduating Exercises at the Indian School," *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

In 1914, the *Sisseton Weekly Standard* published a two-page spread celebrating the graduation ceremonies of the Sisseton Indian Industrial.²⁴² The school proudly boasted that for the first time in the thirty-nine years of the school's history, three Dakota students had graduated from the school and could now attend any high school in South Dakota. *The Standard* took a group photo of Dakota students Alcesta Barse, Frances DeMarrias, and Edward LaBelle pictured

²⁴² "Graduating Exercises at the Indian School," *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

alongside their speeches (Fig. 6). The picture imitated those of schools like Carlisle Indian School, which took photos of students before and after arrival to show the success of assimilation. The students' faces appear blank under the control of the teachers, who prove their ability to keep discipline. Photos of students showed the progress of the education system in the settler state. These photos held enough visible "Nativeness" without having to talk about it, it is in essence a performative indigeneity. Settler society could consume the culture through "performances," and believe assimilation was voluntary, but at the same time deny their role in the assimilation. Each student wrote a speech to perform in front of an audience that *The Standard* published: "The Indian Home," "The Indian Voter," and "Our White Neighbor." The newspaper extolled student success in becoming civilized because they showed "a mental development beyond that of the average eighth-grade student."²⁴³ They appeared assimilated, but their race constrained them to the status of the other. However, these student speeches offer alternative readings that allow for seeing Native American survivance. With this in mind, an analysis of these students and their writing, starting with Alcesta Barse, reveals themes of resistance and resilience.

Alcesta Barse was born in 1898 on the Lake Traverse Reservation. She graduated in June 1914 and attended Haskell Institute from 1914 to 1917. At Haskell, she performed in piano, choir, theater, and women's societies. Alcesta appears as the typical story of Native American assimilation. However, in her graduation speech at Sisseton Indian Industrial, Alcesta first eased the audience with comments about the vanishing Indian: "The old Indian home was of extreme simplicity; there was none of the modern luxury, convenience, and comfort. Little attention was

²⁴³ "Graduating Exercises at the Indian School," *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

given to cleanliness or healthfulness; the home was simply a poor sort of shelter.”²⁴⁴ She described the shamefulness of where she came from and the moral white virtues education had given her. However, Mohawk Audra Simpson suggests an alternative analysis of Indigenous writings. Perhaps Alcesta merely tells the audience what they want to hear? That the deficit Native American cannot rise without white people's help. But Alcesta takes part in ethnographic refusal to tell the audience about her culture, ways of doing, and connection to the land. She may be using knowledge of the matrilineal roles of Dakota women as caretakers. Remarking that “with the changed conditions of today, the Indian girl ought to learn how to care for the home and its premises. She ought to take pride in keeping the house clean, orderly, and all its surroundings in neatness and order.”²⁴⁵ Again, these comments follow national beliefs about domestic motherhood with white women as stay-at-home parents. Furthermore, domestic erasure also happens with narratives of Indigenous women through representations that dehumanized them. Such narratives are part of the settler logic of elimination where you must dehumanize them to push them from land to replace them. Adding in a gendered aspect, settler men see themselves as apex, and white women fall into place with Native American women at the bottom.

However, Native American women held sacred power in their ability to give life to the next generation that settler society dismissed. Dakota Wahpeton scholar and physician, Charles Eastman, wrote that Dakota women held all rights to the property and raising of the children.²⁴⁶ We can also use the methodology of Mohawk Audra Simpson for another analysis of Alcesta. “It

²⁴⁴ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

²⁴⁵ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

²⁴⁶ Charles Eastman, *Soul of the Indian* (USA: Fenwyn Press Books, 1970), 41; Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi*, 100.

is about historical formation. And by refusing to agree to these terms,” by refusing to be erased and discussing critical modern issues, they “are asserting actual histories and thus legislating interpretive possibilities in contestation.”²⁴⁷

The concept of Indigenous refusal is also expanded on by Dakota English scholar, Christopher Pexa. In his study of Dakota resistance to assimilation in the twentieth century, Pexa argues that Dakotas' lived experiences, like Alcesta, are a site of performative ambivalence as cultural brokers. “They created a façade of an assimilated person but navigated the colonial system within the rhetoric of refusal.”²⁴⁸ Alcesta continued her speech by addressing the importance of children and the home, “The moral and ethical conditions of the home are of the greatest importance. Children should be properly restrained and be taught the importance of self-control in a sunny atmosphere to be obtained in the home.”²⁴⁹ Here Alcesta ties her identity to that the home and community, a place central to Dakota womanhood in supplying protection and lessons.

Additionally, I do not dismiss the intergenerational trauma of boarding schools that continues today in Native American families. However, her use of “self-control” suggests lessons of motherhood. Dakota woman provided balance and are the center of the Tiospaye. Dakota women held the traditions of the people and the lessons that prepared the next generation to succeed. Dakota people speak of their children as Wakan, meaning sacred, because they are the future. Indigenous mothers use oral history as lessons of wisdom for their children. Alcesta wanted to bring a sunny atmosphere to the home, was she trying to recreate a space of safety and security at home that she herself experienced? Alcesta continued “Let the home be made a place

²⁴⁷ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 22.

²⁴⁸ Christopher Pexa, *Translated Nation: Rewriting the Dakota Oyate* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 10.

²⁴⁹ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

where the loved ones are secure from all bad influences, where cleanliness in person and in surroundings, where thrift, industry, and mutual respect and love abound.”²⁵⁰ One may assume Alcesta references her teachers who tell her that her traditions at home are a bad influence. But she does not clarify what or whom these “bad” influences are. Suppose she wishes to secure the home from outside influences of settler society? In the final part of this section, Alcesta comments on cleanliness.

Settler society, disregarding the circumstances that led to it in the first place, viewed the homes of Indigenous people as unsanitary. By focusing on cleanliness, Alcesta appears assimilated by stressing what her teachers have told her. Yet I draw attention to the closing of her speech where she ends on mutual respect. But respect for whom? Family? Her teachers? Her tribal community? I suggest that she speaks of responsibility and communal reciprocity.

In their sacred roles as women, those like Alcesta taught the next generations their responsibilities as Dakota people; how to be a good relative both to the land and to four and two-legged nations.²⁵¹ Alcesta adapted tribal epistemologies and the importance of respect to fit within the context of a settler-colonial system that reveals cultural continuance.

In 1915, Alcesta became a member of the Society of American Indians.²⁵² By 1923 she lived in Hot Springs, South Dakota, under the married name of Alcesta Murphy. She reappeared in 1949 in Rapid City, South Dakota, as a Dakota elder and a member of the Public Committee for the National Congress of American Indians²⁵³ (NCAI). Native Americans in the mid-20th

²⁵⁰ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

²⁵¹ Angela Cavender Wilson, “Grandmother to Granddaughter: Generations of Oral History in a Dakota Family” *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 20, no.1, (1996); 7-13.

²⁵² *The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*, vol. 3, no. 4 (October-December 1915), 314.

²⁵³ “Rapid City, SD: General Material, 1949,” *National Congress of American Indians Records*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

century, like Alcesta, shifted to using their education as a cultural strength for civil rights organizations. Groups like the NCAI fought for treaty recognition and against tribal termination in the 1960s.

The second student to graduate in 1914, Edward LaBelle, was born in 1894 on the Lake Traverse Reservation. Unlike the two girls, Edward did not attend another school. Instead, he later married and worked as a carpenter by trade, moving from reservation to reservation. In his graduation speech, Edward knew the importance of his generation to argue for their rights and tried to convey this stating, “The Indians are important in the legislation in this part of the state today. They desire a further removal of the federal restrictions by which they consider their rights are hampered.” Edward argued for an end to restrictions against tribal sovereign rights such as criminal jurisdiction, traditional ceremonies, dances, and religion.

Like Alcesta, Edwards writing does appear assimilated as he wonders “how can they expect that [rights] when they fail to appreciate and live up to the privileges they already have?”²⁵⁴ At first glance, Edward says the tribe should not expect a return of rights, they should instead be happy with their little farms and becoming part of a wider nation. Read another way, he also says one must appreciate education as a useful tool to fight against federal restrictions. Edward continued, “An ignorant voter is a detriment to the state and is the prey of the vote seeker because of his disregard for matters of importance. The Indian voter should have the same ideals and the same live interest as the white.” Edward speaks about the important issue of being able to vote in South Dakota. Nationally, the Snyder Act in 1924, also known as the Indian Citizenship Act, granted citizenship to all Native Americans in the U.S., but voting rights were

²⁵⁸ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

still controlled by states.²⁵⁵ In South Dakota, prior to the Snyder Act, tribes had a limited right to vote. But only if the individual rejected all culture and kinship ties to their tribe. Further, such cases were considered on a case-by-case basis in which the individual proved their intelligence.²⁵⁶

Citizenship and tribes were a critical debate of the early 1920s. Yet in this period just after WWI, Indigenous people were seen by the government as untapped resource of voters for the national election of 1916.²⁵⁷ But some tribes, like the Iroquois Confederacy rejected citizenship and argued it was merely another form of settler colonialism. If “given” citizenship, a patent to their land and ability to vote, the government viewed them as self-sufficient. What constitutes “self-sufficient” is a slippery slope in which governments may no longer honor treaties or provide economic support by arguing a tribe is self-sufficient.

At the same time, citizenship opened up access to federal voting and the ability for tribes to have their voices heard. Edward’s speech shows us that as early as 1914 Dakota people were discussing the critical issue of voting. He ended his speech with an intriguing statement, “A citizen is honest, industrious, loyal to his country, and intelligent.”²⁵⁸ Citizenship meant rejecting one’s culture, living as a white man, intelligently speaking English, and taking up farming. Edward negotiated his identity in connection with the sensitivities of his audience. He conceded to his audience that Native American voters are indolent and must be loyal to the country. On the contrary, Edward does not clarify whose country. Edward's people see themselves as a sovereign nation that signed treaties as a nation-to-nation. His choice of words here is refusal. Instead,

²⁵⁵ Act of June 2, 1924, Ch. 233, 43 Stat. 253.

²⁵⁶ Jeanette Wolfley, “Jim Crow, Indian Style: The Disenfranchisement of Native Americans,” *American Indian Law Review* 16, no. 1 (1991): 167-202.

²⁵⁷ Wolfley, “Jim Crow, Indian Style,” 178-179.

²⁵⁸ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

Edward articulates that Native Americans must use their education for their goals. He envisions using education as a form of political strength to overturn federal restrictions, return the land, and stand equal to the white man at their own game.

The final student to graduate in 1914, Frances DeMarrias, was born on the Lake Traverse Reservation in 1898. She also later attended Haskell Institute from 1914 to 1917 in the business department, where she learned secretarial skills. After graduating from Haskell, she married and returned to the Lake Traverse Reservation. In Frances' graduation speech at Sisseton Indian Industrial School, she said, "There is a vast difference between reputation and character. Reputation is what we seem to be, character is what we are." Frances's mention of character vs. reputation parallels culture vs. identity. Settler society painted her people with a reputation as degenerate, lazy, and a culture disappearing into the past. But she asks her audience to consider the character of her people for who they are, not what settlers stereotype them as.

Additionally, she challenges these settler stereotypes that label her people with a reputation as criminals and only useful as labor. "The Indians of this locality are the victims of a bad reputation of a few, and it is a condition that is manifestly very unjust. The citizens of the white community are not judged by the standards of their worst citizens?"²⁵⁹ Human beings are complicated, and not everyone should be judged by the actions of a few. Here we see the memory of the 1862 U.S. Dakota War in her words that still haunts the tribe. This band of the Sisseton Wahpeton did not take part, and yet settler society judged the refusal or difficulty of some to assimilate as a precursor to trouble.

²⁵⁸ "Graduating Exercises at the Indian School," *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

Like Alcesta and Edward, Frances also seems to disparage her community, “why should the Indians be considered worthless because a few are?” Frances negotiates the complex rhetoric of reproducing the stereotype of the lazy Native American but she turns the conversation around by focusing on criminal bias against her people. “In criminal cases and the numerous convictions, the Indian who has money can't be so easily convicted.” White people with money are more often able to pay bail money and Frances critiques the settler society for its bias of so quickly convicting her people who do not have white privilege. Interestingly, she then swings the conversation to land rights saying, “All Indian lands ought to be taxed, and because they are not, is no excuse for the injustices heaped upon the Indians.²⁶⁰ Reservation land is held in trust by the American government in accordance with treaties and is, therefore, not taxable by the state. Often, this created resentment and racist actions by white society. In 1916, Supt. Mossman reported he instituted a boycott against the barbers of Brown Valley for their refusal to service Native Americans.²⁶¹

Frances ended her speech with a strong conclusion that blatantly critiqued her audience. “All the land in this country upon which the whites have built their wealth belonged originally to the red men. The prosperity of this community depends on the exploitation, honest though it may be, of the Indians. All the money which they receive eventually finds its way into the hands of the white people.”²⁶² This part of her writing is striking in that Frances refuses the narrative that peaceful assimilation is occurring in the community. Instead, she reminds the audience that the American government displaced her people and continue to exploit them. Then, of course, Frances throws in the added comment about the honest intentions of settlers in their exploitation.

²⁶⁰ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

²⁶¹ *Annual Narrative Report*, Sisseton Indian School, 1916, South Dakota State Archives, microfilm #4463.

²⁵⁸ “Graduating Exercises at the Indian School,” *Sisseton Weekly Standard*, June 26, 1914.

As historian Jaqueline Emery remarks in her study of boarding school newspapers, “boarding school students had to develop even trickier and subtler strategies in their writings to express their critical perspectives and connection to Native community.”²⁶³ Frances participated in strategies that critiqued settlers who only wanted the land for its resources and at the same time judged the people who objected as criminals.

As growing advocates and critics, Alcesta Barse, Edward LaBelle, and Frances DeMarrias addressed the same ongoing problems of settler colonialism: Native American land theft, gender affirmation, voting rights, and citizenship. Using these speeches, Indigenous people can conceive alternative strategies for Native American cultural revitalization. Their stories re-center Dakota students into the narrative of early South Dakota that the settler-colonial society erased. The writings of students at Sisseton Indian Industrial show how they navigated settler experiences that looked to define their identities. Uncovering the student debates from government boarding schools allows for cultural survivance and what historian Sarah Klotz calls “carving out a path for emergent intertribal revitalization and self-determination in the twentieth century and beyond.”²⁶⁴ According to Klotz, students in boarding schools created unique paths of resistance to challenge assimilation, and we can see these patterns in the writings from their boarding school years.

Students in boarding schools had complex reactions. Some looked back on it with success, and some saw it as abuse. But others used education as a cultural strength. Alcesta navigated the experience and joined important Native American rights organizations such as the

²⁶³ Jacqueline Emery, *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 13.

²⁶⁴ Sarah Klotz, *Writing Their Bodies: Restoring Rhetorical Relations at the Carlisle Indian School* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2021), 14.

Society of American Indians and the NCAI. Edward argued against a state that still denied and manipulated the voting rights of his people in a country that had already given tribes citizenship. While Frances stayed on the Lake Traverse Reservation, of the three, she was the most outspoken of the settler system. This new generation of Dakota students used their education and shaped their identities in new ways that kept the culture alive. Their voices complicate the narrative of successful settler colonial assimilation in boarding schools. However, wider events affected the education institutions that Dakota children could use to challenge settler society. By 1919 it was no longer financially popular to fund on-reservation boarding schools. The idea of Richard Henry Pratt on complete disconnection of children through off-reservation schools became a cornerstone of settler colonial assimilation. The government wanted Indigenous children to start attending white public schools or transfer to off-reservation schools far away from family. Either solution solved the “Indian problem,” and saved the government money. The Sisseton Wahpeton tribe argued to keep Sisseton Indian Industrial going, perhaps to keep the children close to home.

For example, Victor Renville, chief of the Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal Committee, wrote to the Committee of Indian Affairs, asking for \$50,000 to keep the boarding school. But unfortunately, the American government ignored its role in the growing conditions of poverty and debt among the tribe. Congressman Henry Ashurst, a senator from Arizona and chairperson of the committee, asked if the tribal fund “would in the ensuing year, be exhausted to materially reduce the support of the school.” When the committee told him no, he concluded, “that settles that for the present.”²⁶⁵ But the tribe had hoped to make the school their own, improve the

²⁶⁵ United States Congress, *Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, H.R. 18452 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917), 511-514.

sanitary conditions, and keep the children close to home.²⁶⁶ Instead, the federal government concluded that the school, last updated in the 1880s, was unsanitary and cost far too much to repair.²⁶⁷

Sisseton Indian Industrial School closed its doors in 1919. Agents then pushed families to send their children to attend the off-reservation schools of Wahpeton and Flandreau, where assimilation would be easier if far from home.²⁶⁸ The boarding school fell into disrepair, and the town of Sisseton tore it down a few years later.²⁶⁹ The Great Depression began in 1929, and the memory of the boarding school became overshadowed by the more significant issues of poverty on the reservation. Historian Scott Riney succinctly described the Native American boarding school as “a place that was both good and bad, or neither, and in the end, simply gone, living only in the memories of students.”²⁷⁰ But uncovering the erasure of Sisseton Indian Industrial and its students now broadens our understanding of boarding school history in South Dakota. However, what comes next to replace the old industrial school only underscores the persistence of settler colonial assimilation as a way to eliminate through education.

The Great Depression created immense poverty on the Lake Traverse Reservation and religious missionaries soon arrived seeking to uplift the tribe through Catholicism and charity. Settler colonial elimination took on new forms of assimilation with benevolent charity and adoption. The new goal was to remove the children entirely from their families and adopt them

²⁶⁶ “Improvements to unacceptable sanitary and heating conditions at the boarding school on Sisseton Reservation, North and South Dakota, 1915,” *Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Central Classified Files, 1907-1939*.

²⁶⁷ “Discussions concerning closure of the dilapidated boarding school on Sisseton Reservation, North and South Dakota,” *Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Central Classified Files, 1907-1939*.

²⁶⁸ Wahpeton Indian School was thirty miles north of the Lake Traverse Reservation just over the border in North Dakota. Flandreau Boarding School was 137 miles south of the Lake Traverse Reservation.

²⁶⁹ Oliver Swenumson, *Across the Years: History of Sisseton, South Dakota* (Watertown: Interstate Publishing, 1992), 484.

²⁷⁰ Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School: 1898-1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 225.

out to white families to raise them and teach them to be civilized. A quasi-school, the “Tekakwitha Orphanage,” opened in 1938 on the Lake Traverse Reservation. Once again, the white people were coming for the Native American children.

We have come to a Hilterized country. The white man has taken from the Indians all means of self-support. They are just doomed to utter extinction and annihilation if nothing is done for them.

Oblate Father John Pohlen, December 1936. ²⁷¹

There can be no doubt that we will not have harmony and peace among our Indian people, regardless of what the government's program is, unless Father Pohlen can be removed from the reservation.

Sisseton Wahpeton Tribe, September 25, 1937. ²⁷²

Chapter Four:

I Am Still Dakota: The Tekakwitha Orphanage and Dakota Adoption.

By the late 1950s, 40% of all adopted children in South Dakota were Indigenous. South Dakota adoption of Indigenous children was twenty times higher than the national average at the time.²⁷³ What had gone wrong to lead to these statistics? The roots of these numbers lie in the long history of educational assimilation where settler colonialism shifted to using new, but similar tools of elimination: adoption. Therefore, we must set the stage for events occurring in the aftermath of the boarding school closure. In the 1920s, settler ideologies held that tribes were primitive, pacified, and disappearing into history. The second belief was that Indigenous children, not the family, must be saved and made equal so as to participate in modernity. Shortly after the closure of Sisseton Indian Industrial School, two religious organizations worked on the Lake Traverse Reservation between 1920 to 1980 to replace the federal government in the

²⁷¹ Father John Pohlen to Bishop Bernard Mahoney, December 1936, in BCIM Mission Reports, 1902-1975, *Sisseton Reservation, Tekakwitha and St. Matthew's Missions*, microfilm, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Milwaukee, WI (Hereafter referred to as BCIM Mission Reports).

²⁷² Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal Council to Commissioner John Collier, September 25, 1937, *BCIM Mission Reports*.

²⁷³ Indian Family Defense, *Association on American Indian Affairs* (New York: Clear Water Publishing Co, 1974).

mission of educational assimilation. These were the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and The Sisters of the Divine Savior, and each believed in religious and educational charity to the poor. But in the aftermath of the economic boom in Post-World War II life, settler society bemoaned those Indigenous reservations who had not recovered from the Great Depression. Ignoring the long history of assimilation that had led to the situation in the first place, a series of national strategies began to solve the “Indian problem,” through adoption. These strategies perfectly aligned with both the Oblates and The Sisters whose new argument was for putting Indigenous children with white families to save them. Never mind that this would erase identity and culture.

The Tekakwitha Orphanage opened in 1938 on the Lake Traverse Reservation as both a boarding school and orphanage. The goal of the institution was to aid in economic recovery from the depression, and later through the post-war period, with a mission of educating and raising “unwanted” Dakota children. I suggest that the orphanage reveals a new, but similar institution that followed the national off-reservation government boarding schools of the mid-twentieth century. The difference being that the Tekakwitha Orphanage sold its students to white families as part of the national Indian Adoption Project of the 1940s. But I argue that interviews of student alumni and teachers who experienced Tekakwitha Orphanage reveal continued themes of cultural resilience, survivance, kinship, a reconnection to identity, and use of doublespeak. I believe that centering these stories are critical to proving the tribe continued to circumvent settler colonial assimilation. Long established patterns of resilience against assimilation allowed the Sisseton Wahpeton people to build a foundation for cultural renewal, survival, and educational revitalization by healing the soul wound.

In this chapter, my questions include the following: once Sisseton Indian Industrial School closed, how did the Catholic missionaries at the Lake Traverse Reservation continue

assimilation policies? How was the Tekakwitha Orphanage a new, but similar institution of educational assimilation? How did students at the Tekakwitha Orphanage assimilate and simultaneously keep their culture through resilience based on Indigenous ways of knowing? How did Dakota teachers at the orphanage work within the settler system to subtly help the children, and through them, the community? How did white narratives of color-blind ideology of the Sisseton Wahpeton serve the settler state?

I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the arrival of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions at the Lake Traverse Reservation in the 1920s. I examine the arrival of Oblate Father Pohlen to the Reservation in 1923 and the initial goals of the organization in assimilation. I then discuss the Great Depression in the 1930s and conflicts between Father Pohlen and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIA opened day schools on the reservation that supported some forms of Indigenous culture.

Equally, the government shifted from boarding school education and towards private projects like orphanages to provide education and welfare. The Oblates and Sisters sought to completely disconnect Dakota from their cultures by adopting out “unfit” Dakota children to white families. Part of this belief was that the shift from Indigenous as “primitive” to “equal” could occur only through adoption to white families. But critical to becoming religious moral citizens, the central principle of this thinking held that children must renounce their tribe and look to the future, an equal but separate future with white families. By renouncing their tribal citizenship, such a child gave up any connections to tribal land, suggesting the signal core of settler colonialism. Furthermore, each child adopted and taken from the reservation took with them their place as members of the tribe. Within these religious organizations, white women carried a vision of settler motherhood that they enforced their views upon Indigenous families. In

dehumanizing Indigenous mothers, white women elevated themselves as a higher authority, more capable of raising Indigenous children better.²⁷⁴

White matrons like The Sisters of the Divine Savior focused on the deficiencies of Native American mothers, the savagery of Native American men, and the perceived lack of nuclear family. Consequently, they disrupted these bonds of family with a loyalty to the United States by undermining the home and removing the children, which is another crucial aspect of settler colonial elimination. Margaret Jacobs refers to this concept as the Great White Mother. As “great white mothers,” white women involved themselves in the politics of the Indian problem by specifically targeting Native American mothers and their children. White women tied themselves to their Victorian motherhood and sense inherent belief of white privilege in thinking they could do better in raising the children. Religion, or the ideals of civilization, also led some women to see themselves as “saving” Native American children. These women and religious sisterhoods served the larger goals of settler colonialism in disconnecting children from the land. However, Dakota women like Irene DeMarrias also joined The Sisters of the Divine Savior and fought for the students by working at Tekakwitha Orphanage. I expand on this theory further where I believe DeMarrias relied upon the Indigenous paradigm of doublespeak to enact cultural resilience and survivance.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze Tekakwitha Orphanage alumni memoirs of Phil St. John, Joannette Star Takahara, Howard Wanna, and Irene DeMarrias. I compare their experiences and what they might tell us about cultural survivance and resilience. Seminole historian Susan Miller advocates that when writing narratives about Indigenous peoples it is

²⁷⁴ Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 93, 303.

critical to place them at the center in ways that then challenge the settler colonial structure. Therefore, I use the method with Tekakwitha alumni memoirs that will reflect their “behavior and motives in terms of their realities rather than the non-Indigenous realities.”²⁷⁵ I further propose that the methods of healing suggested by Chippewa educator Denise Lajimodiere exist within Indigenous paradigms of survivance. Like Miller, Lajimodiere believes in placing Indigenous voices at the center, thus challenging the settler stigma of victimry. While Lajimodiere does not address maternalism in the same manner as Jacobs, her methods can serve as tools to heal boarding school survivors.

In the mid-twentieth century, critical to the success of this reform were racial ideologies of the forgotten child.²⁷⁶ The so-called “forgotten Native child” served a continuing desire of the settler state to disconnect Native Americans from their land, people, and identity. Under this new propaganda, “administrators envisioned the individual Indian child as the rights-bearing subject, not the Indian family or tribal community.”²⁷⁷ Conquering forces had “supposedly” pacified Indigenous peoples, while new government reforms guided benevolent obligations to save Indigenous peoples. Although the reforms evolved throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, each were influenced by “a peculiar sense of mission, the white man’s burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savages.”²⁷⁸ The educational mission continued even if boarding schools closed down, and the Tekakwitha Orphanage continued the mission to assimilate the Dakota people by using new strategies: adoption.

²⁷⁵ Susan Miller, “Native American Writes Back,” in *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History*, Susan Miller and James Riding In (Texas: Tech University Press, 2011), 18.

²⁷⁶ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 131, 433; Margaret Jacobs, “Remembering the Forgotten Child: The American Indian Child Welfare Crisis of the 1960s and 1970,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 136-159.

²⁷⁷ Jacobs, *Remembering the Forgotten Child*, 143.

²⁷⁸ Renato Rosaldo, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 107–122.

The Lake Traverse Reservation: Land and the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions

In 1923, Director William Hughes of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission (BCIM), appealed to Bishop Mahoney of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. He warned that Dakota souls at the Lake Traverse Reservation were in danger of damnation because they still practiced traditional culture. While not as predominant as in the past, wacipis (powwows) still occurred secretly, and divorce and adultery still occurred. Put another way, Dakota people continued to persist culturally on their terms: in marriage, dances, and religion. The BCIM, which began in 1873 to promote Native American interests, said they were saving Native American souls, but in truth was another form of settler assimilation. To do this they had previously opened Catholic boarding schools in South Dakota: Immaculate Conception at Crow Creek Reservation (1886), St. Francis Mission at Rosebud Reservation (1886), and Holy Rosary Mission at Pine Ridge Reservation (1888). White settlers considered all of these reservations as extremely poor locations in need of charity, salvation, and perhaps, as such, more open to cultural assimilation. By elevating the tribes into becoming farming Catholic citizens, the Catholic church also elevated itself in the eyes of the nation as superior in educating Indigenous peoples.

But the United States was a predominantly Protestant country in the late nineteenth century and the development of Catholic immigrants and schools threatened American identity. Growing anti-Catholicism sentiment nationwide came from the visibility of Catholic mission schools like those in South Dakota. Political infighting between the BCIM and the BIA over

control of “Indian” education, led the government to end all support for religious contract schools, but not the government schools.²⁷⁹

Without such contractual support, organizations like the BCIM had to seek outside help and private funding to continue supporting their educational projects. It is important to note that settler colonialism is a transnational concept and countries are always trading ideas of assimilation back and forth. I believe that inspired by the work of their friends across the border, South Dakota reached out to Catholic organizations in Canada for help in solving the “Indian problem.”

In response to Dakotas’ persistence, Bishop Mahoney invited the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Lake Traverse Reservation in South Dakota.²⁸⁰ The Oblates, formed in 1816 by French priest Eugène de Mazenod, came to Canada as religious missionaries in 1841.²⁸¹ By the first half of the twentieth century, they ran another seventy Catholic boarding schools throughout Canada.

Scholars have examined the Oblates’ role in assimilating First Nation children in Canadian residential schools. One Oblate school, the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada, gained infamy in 2021 when anthropologists (using ground-penetrating radar) discovered hundreds of unmarked graves of First Nations children.²⁸² The addition of Oblate

²⁷⁹ Francis Ford Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 26-38.

²⁸⁰ Oliver Swenumson, *Across the Years: History of Sisseton, South Dakota* (Watertown, S.D.: Interstate Publishing, 1992), 672-673, Claudia Duratschek, *Builders of God's Kingdom: The History of the Catholic Church in South Dakota* (Yankton: Benedictine Convent of the Sacred Heart Convent, 1985), 352.

²⁸¹ Raymond Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Metis* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 9; Donat Levasseur, *A History of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate: Towards a Synthesis, 1815-1898* (Rome: General House, 1985), 131.

²⁸² Jana G. Pruden, 2021, “Anthropologist Explains How She Concluded 200 Children Were Buried at the Kamloops Residential School” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), July 15, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-kamloops-residential-school-unmarked-graves-discovery-update/> (accessed December 202); Frédéric Laugrand and Jarich Oosten, *Inuit, Oblate Missionaries, and Grey Nuns in the Keewatin, 1865-1965* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's

religious boarding schools in America helps to better understand the boarding school experience and enriches the literature as it adds greater depth to the pervasiveness of settler colonial assimilation. Oblates believed in evangelizing the poor and spreading their spiritual message to save Indigenous souls. In her research on the Oblates in Canada, historian Jacqueline Gresko wrote that priests were “directed to establish a school in each mission in which the young would be instructed in Christianity and receive a practical education to prepare them to live in a sedentary civilized society.”²⁸³ A civilized society, of course, was one in which the Dakota renounced traditional and religious beliefs.

When Father John Pohlen arrived at the Lake Traverse Reservation in 1923, he wanted to bring salvation to Dakota children through assimilation. But the goal was never to assimilate Dakota children entirely but to destroy their culture, language, and identity through religious conversion and education. Born in Stolberg, Germany in 1885, Father Pohlen arrived at Lake Traverse Reservation in 1923 as pastor of St. Peter’s Parish in Sisseton.²⁸⁴ He had previously worked at Catholic missions in Indigenous communities in Mexico, Texas, in Minnesota. A general history written by the Sisseton Wahpeton tribe includes a summary of Father Pohlen as “a well-known figure among the Sisseton people” who built the Tekakwitha Orphanage.²⁸⁵

Before he began the construction of the orphanage Father Pohlen traveled between the Catholic churches of St. Mathew’s and St. Benedict’s, not far from Sisseton, South Dakota. He

University Press, 2019); James Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

²⁸³ Jacqueline Gresko, “Gender and Mission: The Founding Generations of the Sisters of Saint Ann and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in British Columbia, 1858 – 1914” University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1999, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 68.

²⁸⁴ “Pioneer and Builder Dies,” *Central Province Newsletter*, March 1969.

²⁸⁵ Elijah Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi: History and Culture of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota* (Sisseton: Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 1975), 28-29.

often preached to a small congregation of white and Dakota Catholics. The Lake Traverse Reservation population at this time included two thousand two hundred Indigenous peoples, seven hundred of whom were considered Catholic for attending church. The rural nature of the reservation made reaching these congregations difficult for priests and doctors. The reservation had no field nurses nor a hospital in Sisseton until the late 1930s, and diseases like trachoma and tuberculosis ran rampant. Oblates frequently complained of the long distances between churches, sometimes a distance of three hundred miles and made it, an impossible task in blizzards.²⁸⁶

Missionaries received a small stipend from the BCIM as long as they gave a monthly report on successful baptisms, confessions, and marriages among the Dakota. Anything else, such as clothes, food, and supplies for their congregation, had to be donated by others. Father Pohlen fundraised by appealing to dioceses throughout the country in begging letters in which he repeatedly asked for money. Sisseton Wahpeton Phil St. John, an alum of the Tekakwitha Orphanage recalled, “I’m sure my picture appeared in many of the mailings. We sold ourselves and did not even know.”²⁸⁷ In such photos, the Oblates dressed the children in rags, sat them in the dirt, and took photos to add alongside funding letters. Of course, the money would go to support the Oblates, not for the tribal community who faced their own difficulties.

In the 1920s, tribes like the Sisseton-Wahpeton did not farm. Instead, they leased or sold their land. Leasing was preferable to the risk of droughts and bad crops.²⁸⁸ But leasing was a

²⁸⁶ Father Joseph Schuster to Reverend William Hughes, March 7, 1926, *Correspondence and Board Minutes/Charters: Sisseton Agency, Lake Traverse Reservation*, microfilm, Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Milwaukee, WI (Hereafter referred to as Hughes Letters).

²⁸⁷ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Denise Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: The History, the Unforgivable, and the Healing of Northern Plains American Indian Boarding School Survivors* (Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2019), 220.

²⁸⁸ Roy Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 326-328; Black Thunder, *Ehanna Woyakapi*, 73.

continued consequence of the Dawes Act. Originally, designed to encourage farming and individualism while destroying communal tribal land, the Dawes Act contributed to immense fractionalization by increasing the number of heirs.²⁸⁹ Furthermore, white settlers ignored the damage that boarding schools, loss of culture, and economic invasion of the American government wrought to their Dakota neighbors. Instead, settlers controlled the historical narrative in ways that celebrated settler colonialism and erased the trauma. Settler histories instituted what Ojibway scholar Jean O'Brien refers to as firsting and lasting. Narratives in *Roberts County History* asserted white settler modernity of pioneers on the Lake Traverse Reservation; However, while settlers memorialized Dakota people who attended the Catholic missions, they also erased their histories of removal and traumas inflicted on the Dakota children.²⁹⁰ Instead the narratives are one of benevolent charity lifting the tribe out of their poverty and bringing them welfare assistance.

Theology scholar Claudia Duratschek wrote that Father Pohlen worked to address the poverty and disease on the Lake Traverse Reservation by creating hospitals.²⁹¹ The narrative of the white savior erases the history of how poverty and illness became a problem in the first place. The allotment act had failed, and too much land had fallen into settler hands. The remaining tribal lands had terrible soil and truly little interest in farming. Rural locations like the Lake Traverse Reservation meant employment was almost nonexistent and lack of funding contributed to turnovers by field doctors who never stayed long.

²⁸⁹ Michael Lawson, "The Fractionated Estate: The Problem of America Indian Heirship," *South Dakota History* 21, no. 1 (1991): 1-42; *Superintendents' Annual Narrative and Statistical Reports, 1910 – 1935*, Sisseton Agency, NARA-D.C, M1011, Roll 140.

²⁹⁰ Roberts Centennial Committee, *Roberts County History* (Sisseton: History Subcommittee, 1961); Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²⁹¹ Duratschek, *Builders of God's Kingdom*, 353.

Pohlen's work is largely not known beyond the reservation. Historian Oliver Swenumson, a local Sisseton resident, agreed with Duratschek and believed Pohlen's work in building schools and hospitals on the reservation should be more recognized.²⁹² Instead of focusing on the negative impact of continuing child removal policies, Father Pohlen is discussed in local histories on the city of Sisseton for his work in welfare improvement. Yet not as much is debated about his building of the Tekakwitha Orphanage or the role he might have played in educational assimilation of the Dakota. But I believe that analyzing the mission reports that Father Pohlen submitted to his superiors provides clues to interactions with the Dakota. Upon arrival, the first thing he wanted to do on Lake Traverse Reservation was not welfare, but to rebuild the old government boarding school.

For example, Father Pohlen wrote, "the only way to reach the Catholic Indians is through a school, as they live scattered over two counties."²⁹³ Rather than address the issues of poverty on the reservation and the history, Oblate missionaries' immediate goal was to continue the educational assimilation system. What is interesting is the response by Reverend Hughes who stated, "It has been determined that the title to the property is vested not in the government, but in the Indians."²⁹⁴ He answered that that the title to the school land belongs to the tribe and that they are not Catholic enough to accept a religious boarding school.

In a second letter three years later, Reverend Hughes is far more secretive. He wrote that the BCIM must write a letter to Indian Affairs Commissioner Charles Burke of the BIA about their intentions to bid for the school land. He makes no mention of the land belonging to the tribe. Yet he ends the letter saying, "Keep this all confidential, or you are lost. Trust no man to

²⁹² Swenumson, *Across the Years*, 672-673.

²⁹³ Father John Pohlen to Reverend William Hughes, March 7, 1923, *Hughes Letters*.

²⁹⁴ Reverend William Hughes to Father John Pohlen, April 20, 1923, *Hughes Letters*.

keep the secret if you cannot keep it yourself.”²⁹⁵ But because the Oblates did not have enough money at the time, their only recourse was to quietly begin fundraising outside the state. With no solution for decent education, many Dakota parents sent children to off-reservation boarding schools to resist integration into racist white public schools.

According to research done by Great Plains historian Herbert Hoover, enrollment of students from Lake Traverse Reservation in the late 1920s included the following statistics: “262 went to public school, thirty-three attended the Government Day School near Old Agency. The remainder of 520 students went to segregated boarding facilities off the reservation: ninety-four to Pipestone, sixty-one at Flandreau, forty-seven at Wahpeton, five at Haskell, and two to Toledo Sanatorium.”²⁹⁶ These statistics show that since the closure of Sisseton Indian Industrial School, families on the reservation sent their children to segregate off-reservation boarding schools.

However, historian Roy Meyer dismissed the shift toward segregated schools as a means of cultural preservation. He concluded that there was no sense of Dakota culture because of the long history of assimilation, that the tribe became a loose affiliation comprised of community districts due to government policies.²⁹⁷ However, I argue that being united only by kinship does not equate to cultural absence but persistence. Relatives share a responsibility to children because everyone is related. They had no notion of concepts like nuclear families until boarding schools enforced this notion. Additionally, the continued land loss affected tribal connection to the land. Hoover said by 1923, with the closing of the Old Agency in Sisseton, “More than four-fifth of the reservation acreage had slipped out of Indian control. Many lived in poverty, and

²⁹⁵ Father John Schuster to Reverend William Hughes, January 21, 1926, *Hughes Letters*; Reverend William Hughes to Father John Schuster, March 7, 1926, *Hughes Letters*.

²⁹⁶ Herbert Hoover, “Indian White Relations in Sisseton Reservation History: Community Development and Education.” Essay in *Buckanaga v. Sisseton Independent School District*, No. 54-5, 804 F.2d 469 (8th Cir. 1986), 9.

²⁹⁷ Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux*, 322.

attached themselves to old communities in the quest for security.”²⁹⁸ In the following section, I explore how the Dakota at the Lake Traverse Reservation, reeling from land loss due to the Dawes Act, and the closure of the boarding school earlier in 1919, now had to navigate the politics of the Indian New Deal, specifically, the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA). Specifically, the Sisseton Wahpeton used the creation of the day schools for cultural reinvigoration as an alternative to the Tekakwitha Orphanage.

The IRA looked to preserve Indigenous culture, land, and education.²⁹⁹ For example, the 1928 government report *The Problem of Indian Administration*, had detailed the government's failure to assimilate Indigenous peoples. It critiqued the housing, health, administration, and education of Indigenous tribes. The report further condemned the child labor of students, abuse, rampant disease, and starvation of the students. Yet, the report did not suggest an end to the boarding school system but instead proposed adding Native American cultural and history classes. The IRA was one response to the report and ended the allotment system, and tried to address unemployment and cultural loss.³⁰⁰

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) offered one solution. The CCC and other programs, like the Works Progress Administration (WPA), gave critical support to the Lake Traverse Reservation. The CCC programs employed and trained individuals in practical skills. Dakota men-built houses and roads and learned to be more efficient in forestation conservation and range development. Yet these programs were short-lived and did little to address the long-

²⁹⁸ Hoover, *Indian White Relations*, 5-7.

²⁹⁹ Francis Ford Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 917-1012.

³⁰⁰ Lewis Meriam, *The Problem of Indian Administration*. Institute for Government Research (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), vii, 3-5, 8.

term difficulties with reservations. Instead, the government focused primarily on encouraging tribes like the Dakota to accept an IRA government based on the US constitution.

But the Sisseton Wahpeton refused the IRA; instead, they reinforced their tribal sovereignty and resisted assimilation. They argued that they could run their affairs pursuant to their treaties, not an American view of what was considered a tribal government.³⁰¹ Because the tribe refused the IRA they did not get as much monetary support during the Great Depression. However, they accepted the building of segregated day schools with the aim of limiting the assimilation then occurring in public schools. These schools could provide food and support for Indigenous children during the depression. Some of these schools taught culture, art, and vocation training, and abandoned old structures of boarding school life that banned ceremonies. In the 1930s, day schools opened nationwide on reservations and at the Lake Traverse Reservation with four day-schools: Old Agency, Long Hollow, Enemy Swim, and Big Coulee. The more secure Indigenous families sent their children to these new Indigenous-only day schools. However, some families, whether by bad luck or extenuating circumstances, struggled in poverty to be judged under a label of “unfit.” Dakota families like the Isaac’s, Renville’s, and the Fish family, discussed later in the chapter, became caught up in the web of black-market adoption by the Tekakwitha Orphanage.

Father Pohlen critiqued the failures of “unfit” Dakota families who doomed their children; he appealed to his white readers to fund an orphanage, not the day schools, pleading for “these poor Indians, especially the babies, whom I am giving the chance to get started in life.”³⁰²

³⁰¹ The Dakota did later adopt some parts of an IRA constitution and became constitutionally established in 1946 by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; Sherry Johnson, *Tribal and Education History of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation* (Sisseton: SWO Tribal Education Office, 2016), 6.

³⁰² Father John Pohlen to Bishop Bernard Mahoney, December 1936, *BCIM Mission Reports*.

Only through his orphanage could the Dakota children have a “civilized” chance at life. In response to Father Pohlen, Indian Affairs Commissioner John Collier answered that the condition of poverty at the Lake Traverse Reservation was regrettable, but countered that Father Pohlen mislead in his accusations of unfit families.³⁰³ He commented that the CCC employed Dakota families to help build roads to access the reservation, and new day schools emphasized tribal culture.

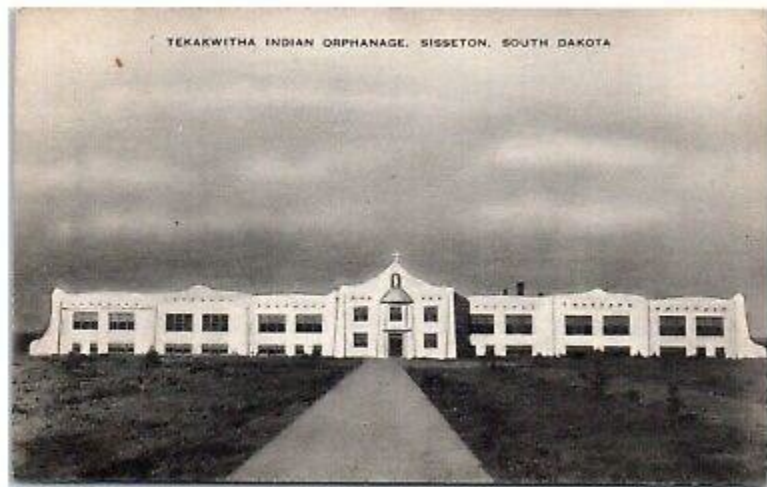


Figure 7: The Tekakwitha Orphanage Photo. Courtesy of Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate.

Meanwhile, after years of fundraising from private white donors across the country, Father Pohlen opened the Tekakwitha Indian Orphanage on 4 August 1938.³⁰⁴ Painted in white brick, two stories high, and styled similarly to the old Santa Fe Indian Missions of Mexico, the Tekakwitha Orphanage took in children from the Lake Traverse Reservation. The Oblates named it after Mohawk Saint Kateri Tekakwitha.³⁰⁵ Since the late nineteenth century, the Catholic

³⁰³ Commissioner John Collier to Reverend John Tennelly, July 12, 1935, *Tennelly Letters*.

³⁰⁴ Swenumson, *Across the Years*, 672-673; “New Orphanage Dedication Sunday,” *The Sisseton Courier*, August 4, 1938.

³⁰⁵ Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint : Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57.

Church has actively promoted the figure of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha as the Catholic face of North American indigeneity.

As the first Indigenous Saint of the Catholic Church, Kateri Tekakwitha carries a complicated legacy with two main views. One view is that it is colonial appropriation and colonials' mythologizing Indigenous women's bodies. Another view is that Kateri Tekakwitha a syncretism between Mohawk spirituality and Catholicism. In using Kateri, the children might find a familiar person looking back; she, too, is dark-haired and shares their complexion. One scholar wrote that "Kateri Tekakwitha's entire life was produced within the context of and as a result of the social devastation of imperialism and colonization."³⁰⁶ In the case of the Tekakwitha Orphanage, the Catholic Oblates promoted this narrative of Saint Kateri saving the Native American children from their pagan cultures. Her depiction as a kind, saintly Indigenous woman stands in for that of Mother Mary. Thus, the Oblates believed the Catholic image of Kateri Tekakwitha sufficiently signified the orphanage would "save" the Dakota Children and send them to new families. As I will show below, the Oblates began working bringing in outside assistance to begin their assimilationist work. However, I show that Sisseton Wahpeton like Irene DeMarrias found ways to work circumvent the system to support cultural survival.

Oh, Won't You Help My Little Indians? Father Pohlen & Native Adoption

When Father Pohlen began the Tekakwitha Orphanage, it served as both a day school and an orphanage. Some children came to class during the day and left in the evening, but some children "supposedly" had nowhere to go and became wards of the priests. Therefore, Father

³⁰⁶ Saint Kateri Tekakwitha was a Mohawk woman from the seventeenth century canonized by the church in 2012; Samuel Rose, "Contradictions of Indigeneity in the Symbol and Culture of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha" *Dialectical Anthropology* 45, no. 2 (2020): 135–150.

Pohlen required a more extensive staff to raise and instruct the children. Dakota who volunteered included local Sisseton Wahpeton women like Lydia Renville, Mildred (Renville) Rodeen, and Irene DeMarrias.³⁰⁷ Director Hughes, in particular, congratulated Father Pohlen on gaining the support of Lydia and Mildred Renville. Lydia was the granddaughter of Chief Gabriel Renville and Mildred his great-granddaughter. Chief Gabriel Renville had saved white people in the U.S.-Dakota War, advocated for farming and education and helped create the Lake Traverse reservation. The BCIM leadership believed that if they could get the help of the Renville family when Gabriel Renville once supported the old government school, the community may view Tekakwitha favorably. But these young ladies did not stay long; DeMarrias soon left for college at Mount Marty in Yankton and converted to Catholicism, but she returned as a nun to work at Tekakwitha Orphanage. Father Pohlen soon appealed for outside help from The Sisters of the Divine Savior in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The Sisters of the Divine Savior consisted of German immigrant women who came to America in 1895. They believed in youth education, caring for the sick, and spreading the Catholic gospel.³⁰⁸ In the 1930s, at the Lake Traverse Reservation, Sisters Maria ‘Hiltrudis’ Regele, Anna ‘Floriberta’ Rossner, and Magdalena Franke began work as nurses for the hospital. At the Tekakwitha Orphanage, Sisters Elizabeth ‘Blanche’ Kinzer, Lucretia Anton, Joannette Beck, and Irene ‘Katherine’ DeMarrias worked as caretakers, cooks, teachers, and disciplinarians.³⁰⁹ The Sisters of the Divine Savior believed that religious conversion to

³⁰⁷ I believe Irene Demarrias is related to France DeMarrias but I am not sure the exact connection.

³⁰⁸ Joseph, Husslein, *These Fifty Years: The Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior, 1888-1938* (Milwaukee: St. Mary’s Convent, 1938), vii.

³⁰⁹ Margaret Shekleton, *Bending in Season: History of the North American Province of the Sisters of the Divine Savior, 1895 to 1985* (Milwaukee: Sisters of the Divine Savior, 1985) 233-34; The 1940 and 1950 U.S. Federal Census lists the following also working at Tekakwitha: Sister Mary David, Sister Genrose Kochne, Sister Henrica Bramel, Sister

Catholicism brought salvation from Dakota culture. Giving up their culture and making peace with God would save Dakota's children's souls. "Many a stray sheep has found its way back to the fold...have made their peace with god and returned to the path of righteousness."³¹⁰ Within this belief of righteousness, white women invaded the intimate spaces of Indigenous families: home.

In *White Woman to a Dark Race*, historian Margaret Jacobs cites anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler to explain how the Great White Mother colonized intimate spaces.³¹¹ Jacobs has shown that, "It was not only in the halls of governance or on the fields of battle, but also in the most intimate spaces of home, schools, and missions where colonialism's power and hierarchies were constituted and reproduced."³¹² The maternalism of the great white mother aided in the national policies of assimilation. It is reasonable to suggest that white Sisters working at Tekakwitha orphanage saw themselves as led by God in this duty to promote the civilization of the Dakota people. White women saw Dakota women as less than civilized because they misunderstood traditional Indigenous childrearing practices. I concur with Jacob's analysis of white missionaries who justified the importance of racial uplift by removing children away from their families.

Jacobs' believed white women saw Indigenous children in need of nurturing, discipline, and work ethic.³¹³ She cites Alice Fletcher and Estelle Reel as examples of white women participating in the assimilation and land dispossession of Indigenous people. Fletcher, an

Burkharda Rappelt, Sister Alacoque Stoppeworth, Sister Georgiana Ginter, Sister Anne Richey, and Sister Mary Buchwalder.

³¹⁰ Husslein, *These Fifty Years*, 51-53.

³¹¹ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 284.

³¹² Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 10.

³¹³ Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 132.

anthropologist, advanced her career in reforming Indigenous people to civilize them. She assisted in removal of children from the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Sisseton agencies. Furthermore, Fletcher was especially important for her work in passing the Dawes Act of 1887, which enforced individual allotments for tribes and broke up their land. Additionally, Estelle Reel served as Superintendent of Indian education for twelve years. Reel was critical in pushing education in boarding schools away from academia and toward vocational education that placed Indigenous children in a low-paid jobs. She often preached equality and referred to herself as the big white squaw who could easily convince Indigenous mothers to surrender their children to boarding schools.³¹⁴ Yet, the curriculum created by Reel for education was not of equality, but in training for menial labor. In what follows, I apply the methodology of Jacobs in analyzing the actions of The Sisters of the Divine Savior, to better understand their actions toward Dakota children, and the negative impacts.

The American government sent white women to reservations in a variety of roles. White women served as teachers, matrons, and housekeepers to control the Indigenous communities, and, through them, the children. These roles improved the status of white women in society, to the detriment of Indigenous societies they claimed to be helping. In their role as “mother,” the Sisters of the Divine Savior undermined and undervalued Indigenous women and motherhood who they believed were failing the children. For example, Sister Mary David also taught violence to children who had never known such a thing. “I had to spank one of the girls one day. I hated to do it, but that was what she needed. Then we sat down together and I tried to explain

³¹⁴ Margaret Jacobs, “The Great White Mother: Maternalism and American Indian Child Removal in the American West, 1880-1940,” in *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests*, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 198-199.

that this is what a mother must do.”³¹⁵ Sister Mary David showed female students that the role of a Dakota mother was to instill violence against her children. Oblate Robert Mertens remarked, “you could swat in any direction and hit someone who had it coming. Funny, the more we spanked, the more they liked us.”³¹⁶ Children at Tekakwitha tried to act according to the Oblates’ expectations, obedient, quiet, and accepting of their situation. Howard Wanna said, “Tekakwitha was a very quiet place.” He attended at age five with several of his siblings and experienced horrific abuses, and explained that as he got older, he tried to run away.

“Simple punishments” for running away included repeating Bible verses, making boys wear a dress during class, and being tied to a tree outside. Harsher penalties included physical abuse from sticks, hoses, belts, and solitary confinement. Some parents in the community resisted and fought back against the assimilation and abuse their children experienced. “My mother got wind of what was going on and came, and ranted and raged,” Wanna recalled. Perhaps noticing the huge personality shift in her son, Wanna’s mother pulled him from the school.³¹⁷

The Sisters of the Divine Savior considered conditions at Tekakwitha Orphanage primitive; they were overworked and received little compensation. Father Pohlen ran a strict budget, enough to keep Tekakwitha going in the 1930s but extraordinarily little else beyond. When he offered control of the hospital to the Sisters of the Divine Savior for \$1, on the condition they care for retired Oblates, the Sisters scorned the offer. Purifying the souls of Dakota children, not older men, was far more enticing. Many Sisters began to travel elsewhere

³¹⁵ Sister Peter Damian, “Tekakwitha Orphanage,” *Worldwide* vol 2, no 4 (Summer 1964), 6.

³¹⁶ Damian, “Tekakwitha Orphanage,” 7.

³¹⁷ Stephanie Woodard, “South Dakota Boarding School Survivors Detail Sexual Abuse,” *Indian Country Today*, July 28, 2011, <https://ictnews.org/archive/south-dakota-boarding-school-survivors-detail-sexual-abuse>, accessed December 20, 2022.

by the late 1950s in search of more appealing service. However, the one lone Sister who continued to stay on at the Tekakwitha Orphanage until her death was Irene ‘Katherine’ DeMarrias.³¹⁸ I suggest that similar to Dakota who came before her, Irene worked within the settler system to her advantage to support the children in subtle ways. In the below section, I discuss the life of Irene and her time at the Tekakwitha Orphanage.

In her role as a teacher at the orphanage, Irene DeMarrias navigated the structure of assimilation in which she did what she could for Dakota children. Irene was born in 1914 on the Lake Traverse Reservation to parents John DeMarrias and Ella Wanna. She was the fourth living child out of ten from the marriage. Records about Irene consist of an interview with the family in 1935 as part of the South Dakota Emergency Relief Administration (SDERA) and church interviews from when she retired in 1988. White social workers who may have had preconceived biases of extended Dakota families conducted these interviews. Similar to the *Problem of Indian Administration* report a few years earlier, the SDERA called attention to the urgent need for improved education, health, and social work on reservations, due to the depression.³¹⁹

For the DeMarrias family, life was difficult, her father worked under the CCC in road work, but the family still spent summers in a tent for her father’s work. Her earliest memories as a girl included her father quietly teaching her illegal Dakota songs. The family was Catholic but still found ways to participate in what was viewed as non-threatening dances during weddings and holidays.³²⁰ While the DeMarrias family found ways to subvert assimilation and appear

³¹⁸ “Sister Irene DeMarrias,” *Bishop's Bulletin*, August 19, 1976.

³¹⁹ Holt, *Indian Orphanages*, 10; William Byler, “The Destruction of Indian Families,” in *The Destruction of American Indian Families*, Ed by Steven Unger (New York: Association on American Indian Affairs, 1977), 3-5; “DeMarrias, John,” by Evangeline Swensson, Sisseton Agency, Case Histories, Roberts County, SDERA Survey, Reel 1, *Survey of Reservations*, 1935, National Archives, Washington, D.C., (Pierre: South Dakota State Archives).

³²⁰ Renya Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power: The Lives of Henry Roe and Elizabeth Bender Cloud* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 233-235.

assimilated, the federal government continued to find faults with them. A social worker who met with the family during the Great Depression believed that Irene was ashamed of her family for living in a tent. Rather than hearing Irene's words, the social worker recalled a phone call with Father Fenton at Stephan Mission School. Fenton claimed that Irene often begged to stay at school over the summer instead of going home.³²¹ Social workers blamed parents for the situation rather than admit a long history of dispossession and assimilation that had led to these events. Furthermore, social workers argued the failings of the Indigenous race were the issue; those who lived in poverty and brought children into that life had mental problems due to their race. The blame was never on the shoulders of the federal government that had instituted policies of elimination in the first place. Irene DeMarrias became part of the broader system of educational assimilation, later graduated from Alverno College in Milwaukee, joined the Sisters of the Divine Savior, and returned to teach at the Tekakwitha Orphanage for fourteen years.

In her role as a mother to Dakota children, Irene walked a careful balance between being a "good" or "bad" Dakota. As a bad Dakota, she worked in an orphanage that destroyed culture and took part in adoption.³²² However, as a good Dakota, she was there to teach the children how to remain Dakota and thus subverted the settler structure. Yet, she must have known that appearing assertive or questioning punishments at the Tekakwitha Orphanage was risky. Instead, she must appear humble, submissive, pious, and innocent. Ho-Chunk theorist Renya Ramirez has studied similar situations in her study of her grandparents Henry and Elizabeth Roe Cloud, who also worked in boarding schools. The Clouds worked within the settler system, thereby

³²¹ "DeMarrias, John," by Evangeline Swensson, Sisseton Agency, Case Histories, Roberts County, *SDERA Survey*, Reel 1.

³²² Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 7-8; Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2013), Introduction.

appearing bad, but they were also good and tried to advocate for cultural persistence. I use the methodology which Ramirez refers to as doublespeak, “On the surface, the colonizer would not notice anything subversive. Underneath the surface, however, the oppressed could communicate a critique of the colonizer. Doubleness speech generates two meanings: one appears dispassionate and agreeable; the other could express subversive material or ideas.”³²³ Irene could be both a good and bad Dakota, a shape-shifting identity that is fluid and subversive. To the Oblates, Irene stood for an assimilated religious ideal for other female students.

However, Irene realized that converting to Catholicism allowed her to advocate not just for Dakota children but for all Indigenous peoples. “I deeply live and love the culture of my people, and I try to instill this into the minds and hearts of my students. I thank God that I can be among my people.”³²⁴ Irene tells her audience she loves God but reminds them she will instill Dakota culture in the children.

The story of Irene DeMarrias reflects a Dakota history of educational strength, not dissolution. Irene’s interviews appeared in the *Bishop’s Bulletin*; a Catholic magazine distributed monthly by the Sioux Falls Diocese. Like the students and Dakota who came before her, Irene’s words appear non-threatening to a white audience. She may not have felt safe to be honest about the things she saw or had to do at the Tekakwitha Orphanage. However, her desire to share Dakota culture reflects what Ramirez refers to as encouraging the next seven generations to value Indigenous knowledge.³²⁵ Irene worked to teach her students the Dakota language, songs, and traditional dances. Asked for her thoughts on all she had done, Irene answered, “I always

³²³ Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 5.

³²⁴ “Dakota is Important to Missionary of Sisterhood,” *Bishop’s Bulletin*, September 1988.

³²⁵ Ramirez, *Standing Up to Colonial Power*, 31-35.

thought of the children.”³²⁶ But while Irene worked carefully inside the system to support Indigenous cultural survival, there was one obstacle she could not overcome: the adoption system. An explanation for which requires a jump back to the 1940s at the Tekakwitha Orphanage when Father Pohlen sold Indigenous children to white families and called it adoption.

In 1948, Father Pohlen sold Dakota infant Daniel Fish to a white family in Watertown, South Dakota, for \$10, the equivalent of which today is \$112.

My grandparents had my father in August 1948, and it was a really hot summer that summer. They were in the middle of building a house, and they did not want to have an infant literally going from house to house while their house is being built. So, they put him in the orphanage, thinking they would pick him up in three or four months. And when they went back to pick him up, he was gone.³²⁷

Dakota families trusted that they could place their children in the orphanage for a short time and come back to pick them up. Fish never had a chance to reconnect with his family before passing away. His son William claims that Daniel experienced no abuse, only an immense sense of cultural disconnection and loss. But the Fish child is the exception, not the rule. Indigenous children adopted by white families had a wide range of experiences: dislocation, abuse, molestation, depression, and a loss of identity.³²⁸

A few years after, in 1953, six-year-old Dakota Cyril Dennis Isaac was also sold for \$10 to a white couple in Illinois.³²⁹ In a letter sent to Cyril’s new parents, Father Pohlen eagerly offered a selection of choices, “We have a few little boys and girls who have no one at all interested whether they live or die or come or go. I would send you a little boy of six years or

³²⁶ “Dakota is Important to Missionary of Sisterhood,” *Bishop's Bulletin*, September 1988.

³²⁷ Lauren Soulek, 2021, “History, stories from the Tekakwitha Boarding School and Orphanage” *Keloland* (Sioux Falls), July 29, 2021, <https://www.keloland.com/news/eye-on-keloland/history-stories-from-the-tekakwitha->, accessed December 2021.

³²⁸ Susan Devan Harness, *Mixing Cultural Identities Through Transracial Adoption: Outcomes of the Indian Adoption Project (1958-1967)* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 98-104.

³²⁹ Soulek, “History, stories from the Tekakwitha Boarding School and Orphanage.”

older or a little girl, whatever you prefer.”³³⁰ Father Pohlen wrote in the letter that no one cared for the children at his orphanage and they can have a pick of whichever Indigenous child they wish.

In claiming that no one cares if the children live or die, the orphanage placed unspoken blame on the Indigenous mother and, by extension, the family and community. Father Pohlen also wrote that he saved abandoned Dakota children from their families, writing, “I picked them from the gullies and the ravines where they would grow up like wild rabbits and the girls as shy as ring-necked pheasants.”³³¹ Father Pohlen implicated a Dakota family who had failed to assimilate, and only through his work were the children saved. Religious missions exploited the system of Indigenous adoption. Jacobs wrote that the Navajo Reservation was particularly susceptible to Mormons because of the limited educational opportunities on the reservation. Having no day schools at the time, the Navajo sent their children to Mormon homes. But these homes, like Tekakwitha, rested on an individualist notion “of rescuing and redeeming the Indian child from what its founders believed was a backward and even wicked life.”³³² Social workers often cited housing, poverty, and overcrowding as proof of this backward life to take the children and send them to white families.³³³

Sophia Isaac tried to get her children from Tekakwitha Orphanage, but the state judged her unfit and terminated her parental rights. While the state judged Sophia unfit, Father Pohlen never judged white couples seeking a child, writing to one couple, “I am not making any

³³⁰ Angela Kennecke, 2018, “South Dakota’s Secret Past” *Keloland* (Sioux Falls), April 5, 2018, <https://www.keloland.com/news/south-dakotas-secret-past/> (accessed December 2021).

³³¹ “A Wheelbarrow Full of Merry Christmas,” December 1939, *Tennelly Letters*.

³³² Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 87-89.

³³³ William Byler, “The Destruction of American Indian Families,” in *The Destruction of American Indian Families*, Ed by Steven Unger (New York: Association on American Indian Affairs, 1977), 3.

inquiries about you, because it takes a good person to make an offer as you did.”³³⁴ Father Pohlen reassured the couple he does not doubt their good intentions and will not question why they want a Dakota child. But Cyril counters that he was kidnapped and sold as cheap Indian labor for white people. Like many Indigenous children, Cyril stood between two worlds but still fiercely contends, “I am still a Dakota Sioux Indian.” Cyril found his way back to Sisseton later in life and reconnected with family; the land called him home.³³⁵

The Tekakwitha Orphanage served as a minor piece in a larger system that adopted out Dakota children like Cyril under vague excuses. While called an orphanage, many children at Tekakwitha were not truly orphans nor abused by families. Phil St. John recalls being able to leave the school:

I went home when the school year ended in May. A lot of the kids at the orphanage stayed there because they did not have a home that I had. Everybody would go home and then we had come back. I had a friend of mine that stayed there all year, he had no home, and he had no parents. His name was Gregory. But he was not there when we got there. Every year we had come back, he was there. “Where is he?” I asked Sister Cabrini, “Where’s Greg at?” She replied, “Oh, some people went and got him; they took him home.” That story has stuck in my head now for fifty years. “What the hell happened to Gregory?”³³⁶

Gregory was most likely adopted, either legally or through a modest cash donation to Father Pohlen.

Father Pohlen’s actions in the 1940s suggest that the system of black-market Indigenous adoption was well under way. Nationally, the Indian Adoption Project in this period began fostering and adopting Indigenous children into white middle-class families to solve the Indian problem.³³⁷ Reformers were horrified that in the aftermath of WWII, while the rest of the county

³³⁴ Kennecke, “South Dakota’s Secret Past.”

³³⁵ “Ripped from His Mother's Arms and Taken to Orphanage,” *Sota Iya Ye Yapi*, March 10, 2010.

³³⁶ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 190.

³³⁷ Margaret Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the*

experienced an economic boom, most Indigenous reservations still struggled with poverty and disease.³³⁸ Propaganda of the forgotten Indigenous child in this period served a continuing desire of the settler state to disconnect Indigenous nations from their land. Margaret Jacobs in her work refers to this tactic as racial equality built within settler colonial child removal. The government claimed non-recognition of race in their paternalism of taking Indigenous children from their families. The children, not the community, needed saving. But to settler society, saving could only occur by destroying Indigeneity via white nuclear families, not the Indigenous communities.³³⁹

It is reasonable to conclude that the Tekakwitha Orphanage in adopting out Dakota children to white families followed federal policies and created a negative impact on the children. But alumni like Phil St. John, Howard Wanna, and Joannette Star Takara did interviews later in life in which they reflected on their time at the Tekakwitha Orphanage. Each of them discussed the ways they resisted the staff and the ways in which they found their way back to their culture. The stories show continued themes of resilience, renewal, shifting identity, and survival. Ultimately, Dakota people adapted their experiences in ways that allowed them to heal the soul wound and begin a structure of education renewal on their terms.

I Survived Because I am Dakota, Tekakwitha Students Write Back

Dakota historian Waziaytwawin once said that the antidote to historical oppression is wide-scale truth-telling. “As Dakota people, we must take up the task of telling the truths of the

Postwar World (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), xxvii.

³³⁸ Jacobs, *Remembering the Forgotten Child*, 137.

³³⁹ Jacobs, *Remembering the Forgotten Child*, 143; Jacobs, *A Generation Removed*, 19, 60, 269.

oppression in our historical and contemporary experiences.”³⁴⁰ Students of Tekakwitha are taking up this task by telling stories of their time at Tekakwitha. Phil St. John was born in a small house by a gulch in the Heipa district of Sisseton, South Dakota. In the 1940s, children had to be at least five years old to attend Tekakwitha. “They made up a birth certificate for me. I think they moved my birth certificate to 1942, so that made me five years old.”³⁴¹ But, of course, this also opened the door to agency corruption if the government can alter a birthdate to meet settler desires for Indigenous children.

As a small child, Phil. St. John worked with his father and grandfathers collecting corn stalks for threshing on leased farms. Among these men, St. John learned the Dakota language, “My dad always taught me I was going to get smart and become a good Catholic. I was able to stay Indian, but I was not a good Catholic. Talk about being traumatized by what happened.” St. John emphasized that his Indigenous culture survived the boarding school. At Tekakwitha, he struggled under the Sisters, who punished him for speaking Dakota. “We’d have to change or watch ourselves, what we would say... You’d get a slap on the head while you’re standing in line.” St. John acted assimilated to the priests by not speaking his language, but at home, things were different. Culture survived. “I believe in the Indian ways. I believe in our culture. We burnt sweet grass all the time in our house. We do it a lot for our healthy ways.”³⁴²

Later in life, he was proud to say understood Dakota and spoke Dakota semi-fluently. These examples stand as Indigenous cultural presence, not absence, of students who survived boarding schools and the orphanage at the Lake Traverse Reservation. Tekakwitha served as a

³⁴⁰ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2008), 91.

³⁴¹ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 187.

³⁴² Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 186-188.

mid-twentieth-century tool to terminate reservations through assimilation and, in doing so, destroy Indigenous cultures. Tekakwitha used the narrative of the destitute reservation and unfit Indigenous family to sever kinship. Once Dakota children converted to Catholicism and accepted their new white family, settler society hoped the children would never return to the reservation. Never mind that some white families did send the children back to the reservation, like Mary Catherine Renville, where they no longer fit in.

Sisseton Wahpeton Mary Catherine Renville reflected on a foster family that assaulted her and then sent her back Tekakwitha. “They took away our sense of belonging to anyone, our opportunities to develop relationships. They kept us off-balance by sending us here and there without warning. But they could never take away the truth: what they were doing was wrong.” Speaking later in life, Mary argues the orphanage tried to destroy her identity and sense of self.³⁴³

Like Renville, Phil St. John recounted that The Sisters at the orphanage, “used to cut our hair, shave our heads. Said we had bugs, that we were dirty because we came from the reservation.” Like many shared experiences across all boarding schools, St. John recalls the use of DDT powder on his fellow students. “They would dump powder all over us. I can’t remember how long we stayed there, but the purpose of that was to kill every damn bug you had in you. If you had any Indian in you, that was supposed to come out.” The SDS at the Tekakwitha Orphanage used chemicals to burn away Indigenous culture and purify the students’ bodies.³⁴⁴

Tekakwitha also followed similar modern mission schools with enforced church attendance, Bible study, farming, shop work, sewing, and labor to support the school. Phil St.

³⁴³ Soulek, “History, Stories from the Tekakwitha Boarding School.”

³⁴⁴ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 189.

John remembered “We had church in the morning. Church and school. We definitely had chores. We cleaned something that’s already been cleaned.”³⁴⁵ The Oblates used the labor of the students to keep the school functioning. St. John recalled a summer in which he and his sister Yvonne stayed at Tekakwitha, and the staff put them to work. He recalled, “We worked with the cows, corn, trash, cleaning buildings and paint. We did all that stuff to learn how to work. The worst thing I ever went through in my life. I didn’t know what pay was, because we never got paid.”³⁴⁶ Their unspoken payment, for which they were expected to be grateful, was unhealthy commodity foods, a place to sleep, and the destruction of their culture.³⁴⁷ But like Howard Wanna, Phil St. John actively resisted assimilation.

One day, St. John and three other boys ran away and escaped across the fields, dashing home. “You’ve got to remember Tekakwitha is only about two miles from Sisseton, so we ran across the field and went home.”³⁴⁸ His parents, who had themselves attended Tekakwitha, and seemingly became caught in a cycle of abuse, punished St. John, and sent him back. “I never ran away again,” he related.³⁴⁹ St. John graduated from Tekakwitha and later attended the Flandreau Boarding School. But he struggled with persistent white racism in Sisseton. In his interview with scholar Denise Lajimodiere, he described the pain of recovering from both physical and spiritual wounds. “Did Tekakwitha put us in those situations that we didn’t get the proper care, the help that we needed? I think so. I think they could have changed things.”³⁵⁰ As adults, those like St. John struggled to speak of their traumas and process the historical grief. The trauma experienced

³⁴⁵ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 189.

³⁴⁶ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 193.

³⁴⁷ Margaret Connell-Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 37-105.

³⁴⁸ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 194.

³⁴⁹ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 195.

³⁵⁰ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 200.

by students led to a breakdown of kinship and an increase in intergenerational abuse³⁵¹ St. John recalled that at Tekakwitha, “They used to have a coatroom. When we got punished, we’d have to all stand against a wall and grab those hangers and hold them up and stand there while they whipped us. We couldn’t cry, and if we cried, we’d get hit again, so we didn’t cry.”³⁵² St. John connected his later problems with alcoholism to his abusive traumas experienced at Tekakwitha.

Another student, Sisseton Wahpeton, Joannette Starr Takahara, also experienced trauma during her time at the Tekakwitha Orphanage. Takahara had lived with her grandmother until the age of six. The extended family system of the tribe meant that grandmothers could easily step and help raise the children. Takahara said, “I sort of blame it on my mother. She should have taken care of us, right?” Life was hard, but Takahara and her cousins hauled wood, collected rainwater in a barrel, and helped with a small garden.³⁵³

Takahara shared a special bond with her grandmother who taught her Dakota oral histories, language, and cultural ideas of womanhood. “She’d tell us stories about a long time ago and I remember a lot of those stories. With all those old stories, she used to tell us, don’t ever forget what I told you, because there will never be anyone else to tell you and there won’t be another language like this.”³⁵⁴ In this example, Takahara’s grandmother keeps Dakota culture and language alive by passing it down through stories to the next generation. Keeping the stories allowed Dakota children like Takahara to reimagine a future beyond the orphanage. But settler society misunderstood her life with her grandmother and saw it as placing a burden on an old

³⁵¹ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 201; Denise Lajimodiere and Donald Warne, “American Indian Health Disparities: Psychosocial Influences,” *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 9, no. 10 (2015): 567-579.

³⁵² Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 188.

³⁵³ Takahara Interview, “Native Voices in the City,” 58.

³⁵⁴ Takahara Interview, “Native Voices in the City,” 255.

woman, so Takahara was removed from her family. “I was sent to Tekakwitha. They called it an orphanage; I don’t know why.”³⁵⁵ Takahara attended for six years before graduating to another school. Takahara found ways to move beyond her experiences, but she had no fond memories of the staff, “It was run by a priest named Father John Pohlen, he was German, and strict.”³⁵⁶ Lillian Owen who attended Tekakwitha from fifth to the eighth grade at the same time, had a different view of Father Pohlen, “People think, you know, he’s mean to kids. He’s not. He’s not at all, I could say that thousands of times and he’s not that.”³⁵⁷ The accounts of both Takahara and Owens show us that children at Tekakwitha Orphanage had complicated positive and negative reactions. While neither Takahara nor Owen were one of the many Dakota children adopted into a white family, Takahara did spend time at the Papoose House, where the children disappeared.³⁵⁸

In the late 1940s, Father Pohlen added an addition to Tekakwitha called the Papoose House. Children in the Papoose ranged from babies to children aged eight before they were moved to the main part of the orphanage. Yet the word choice of Papoose is another example of settler cultural appropriation. Papoose is a Narragansett word for baby. Many of the over five hundred recognized tribes today have specific words for the stages of life and unique meanings behind them tied to culture. Father Pohlen's actions, therefore, is another example of settler cultural appropriation for it homogenized all the Indigenous people's cultural views of children under one definition. The Papoose House served as a site of pain for many of the young children within it. St. John remembers his own time at the Papoose House with sadness, “I remember a

³⁵⁵ Joannette Star Takahara Interview, 1982, edited transcript by Herbert Hoover and David R Miller, “Native Voices in the City,” *Edward E. Ayer Digital Collection* (Chicago: Newberry Library), 58, accessed December 2022.

³⁵⁶ Takahara Interview, “Native Voices in the City,” 58.

³⁵⁷ Soulek, “History, Stories from the Tekakwitha Boarding School.”

³⁵⁸ Takahara Interview, “Native Voices in the City,” 255.

boy crying at night. Someone tried to make him stop crying, and he wouldn't, so they whipped him. Mean-ass nuns, they were mean. As I got older, I think back on those days, and I realize that boy is crying for his mom.”³⁵⁹ Children living in the “Papoose,” feeling homesick and depressed, were punished by the SDS for crying. Sisseton Wahpeton, Mary Katherine Renville, also stayed at the Papoose House, “All I remember of my earliest years at Tekakwitha was being hungry and a punishment that consisted of being placed in a dark crawl space.”³⁶⁰ Yet Joannette Takahara remembers being able to comfort her younger siblings, “They’d have the older kids watch over them. About five older ones, stay with the little ones, you know, so they wouldn’t get scared at night.”³⁶¹ Students at Tekakwitha found ways to navigate the system and comfort the younger children overwhelmed and shaken by their experience.

Takahara graduated and, like St. John, attended Flandreau Boarding School in the late 1950s. She moved to Chicago on the relocation program for a time, married, had two kids, and worked as a nurse. But the death of multiple family members in the seventies shook Takahara. She chose to get a master’s degree and began work as an alcohol rehabilitation counselor. After a visit with a traditional healer at Sisseton, she returned to her Dakota traditional roots and had a vision to heal her community.

In an interview with the Chicago Indian Oral History Project, Takahara recalled, “The things I’ve learned since I became involved in the Indian traditions, I always want to pass on, because it’s given so much to me. I feel like I should share it.”³⁶² Her vision convinced Takahara

³⁵⁹ Phil St. John Interview, edited transcript, quoted in Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries*, 192.

³⁶⁰ Stephanie Woodard, “I Want Everyone to Know What Happened to Us: South Dakota Church-Abuse Survivor Speaks Out,” *Huffington Post*, April 27, 2011. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/south-dakota-sex-abuse-pl_b_851837 (accessed December 20, 2022).

³⁶¹ Takahara Interview, “Native Voices in the City,” 58.

³⁶² Takahara Interview, “Native Voices in the City,” 269.

that she must share the wisdom and lessons she's learned to help prepare the next generation. Like his classmates, Howard Wanna also used education to survive his experiences, "I fought through my failures and obstacles, went to college, and owned a restaurant and a construction company."³⁶³ Wanna used his education help build stability and strength for his community. But the trauma and horrors experienced at Tekakwitha lingered as a soul wound for the students and community. Yet, Takahara found her healing through ceremony, and Wanna found it through his community. Phil St. John worked in counseling in Minneapolis and knew the kin who came in the door seeking help. But through their interviews, Phil St. John, Joannette Star Takahara, and Howard Wanna re-asserted their experiences into the story of the Tekakwitha Orphanage, and challenged the narrative they assimilated easily. The Sisseton Wahpeton relied upon long established methods of cultural fluidity in the face of assimilation and came out stronger.

Yet land is also central to Indigenous resilience, and the tribe began to establish a stronger identity when the Tekakwitha Orphanage closed its doors in May 1986. It reopened a few times later as a tribal addiction center, human resources office, and community center, but no longer did children walk the halls. In 2010, the tribe received an Environmental Protection Agency grant to tear down the building.³⁶⁴ Howard Wanna attended the demolition and recalled, "Suddenly, during the demolition, we saw three eagles circling overhead, rising, and flying down low repeatedly for about forty-five minutes. They had come to take home the spirits of the children."³⁶⁵ Waziyatawin argues that demolishing such sites removes imperialist structures on Dakota land, which "returns to its original pristine condition, and a land under Dakota care that

³⁶³ Woodard, "South Dakota Boarding School Survivors Detail Sexual Abuse."

³⁶⁴ "SWO Tribe Recognizes Federal and State Officials, Contractors for Tekakwitha Demolition, and Clean-Up," *Sota Iya Ye Yapi*, September 27, 2010.

³⁶⁵ Woodard, "South Dakota Boarding School Survivors Detail Sexual Abuse."

we could use for Dakota purposes.”³⁶⁶ The Sisseton Wahpeton healed the violence of the land and drew out the poison in their soul wound. Over the site of the old orphanage, they built Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Memorial Park. At the center is a statue of those eagles still flying with only two words inscribed on the stone: Mi'ksuya (Remember Me) Wicaunkiksuyapi (We Remember Them).

The Tekakwitha Orphanage was a similar but new institution of settler colonial education and followed the same policies of government boarding schools. The teachers and religious staff in the Orphanage tried to destroy Dakota culture, language, and identity under an ideology of Catholic charity. The Oblates and The Sisters work of charity for Dakota families on welfare aligned with national goals to solve the “Indian” problem through the growing Indian Adoption Project. The Tekakwitha orphanage began under a color-blind ideology in the 1930s to save Dakota children from poverty, but in reality, contributed to the broader system of adoption. Under this ideology, Indigenous and white would be equal and partake in equal salvation. Adoption and fostering could thus solve “the Indian problem,” but the philosophy also erased the racial history of violence and inequalities perpetuated against tribes in boarding schools and in general. Religious staff at Tekakwitha took advantage of the tribe with false promises of protection. Parents never thought the priests would sell their children, but they did. Yet the stories of children and communities who experienced Tekakwitha Orphanage add to the colonial legacy of boarding schools.

A study of Tekakwitha Orphanage reveals students like Phil St. John, Howard Wanna, and Joannette Star Takahara used kinship, ceremonies, and reconnection to Indigenous identity to

³⁶⁶ Waziyatawin, *What Does Justice Look like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2008), 105, 112-114.

fight back. Sisseton Wahpeton students through the generations survived new settler institutions like Tekakwitha Orphanage, if not quite the same as they would have been had they been raised in traditional societies. Like Ina Maka, mother earth, Dakota people are fluid and change to survive. Like the students who came before them in schools like Sisseton Indian Industrial School or Good Will Mission, this new generation carved out paths of survivance. Dakota women like Irene DeMarrias used doublespeak where she said one thing but subtly meant another. Irene DeMarrias worked within the settler system and did what she could to help the children. By speaking out these Dakota spoke back against narratives of victimry. Their stories empower and challenge the settler historiography narrative of erasure and successful assimilation in educational institutions.

In speaking to their trauma, the Indigenous people who lived and worked at Tekakwitha Orphanage dismantled the structure of settler colonialism, both mentally and physically. They also healed the soul wound. Yet settler colonialism did not end with the end of the boarding school system and physical destruction of the orphanage but it continues through racism, poverty, disease, alcoholism, and welfare. But the Sisseton Wahpeton at Tekakwitha Orphanage continued a pattern of subtle resistance, survivance, and cultural renewal, in which they asserted presence, not victimry. Voices have power, and what the Dakota put out into the world, written, and spoken, can transform the wider community towards a new mindset of regrowth.

Conclusion

I have argued throughout this work that the Sisseton Wahpeton people have challenged and survived settler colonialism. In particular, I demonstrated that by using Indigenous paradigms of doublespeak, resistance, and traditional healing methods, Indigenous people's identity and culture continue. Although not quite the same as it once was, Indigenous identity is fluid and ever-changing as tribes selectively acculturate. I do not dismiss that thousands of children and their families experienced the attack on their ways of life in government boarding schools and orphanages.

In this thesis, I explored how the Sisseton Wahpeton engaged in cultural resilience from one generation to the next. They survived the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War and its aftermath as they reclaimed Indigenous land despite stereotypes of assimilation. Chief Gabriel Renville was instrumental to cultural survival as he navigated economic challenges and advocated for acculturation on Indigenous terms that kept traditions alive. He was a crucial player in Indigenous education that saw the creation of the government boarding school at Sisseton. Others like Sam Brown accessed settler positions of power as a principal to advocate for his people and education for all Indigenous people. Ultimately, the federal government removed Sam Brown from his position because they viewed him as a threat to settler power.

Sam Brown and Gabriel Renville are often seen as “bad Indians” because they encouraged assimilation. However, they simultaneously tried to assert or reaffirm a Dakota identity, and this complicates our assumptions that they were puppets of the US government. Gabriel Renville saved white people in the Dakota War and acted as a militia scout against his kin. But he asserted his people's sovereignty and cultural survival by helping to establish the Lake Traverse Reservation. At the same time, he helped establish a boarding school where

Dakota children could attend and learn the white man's ways to survive. For this, he was made chief for life and continued to fight for his people's independence on their terms. Renville envisioned a boarding school for his people from which to rebuild. A space of tribal survival for the coming generations not so easily divided by the false promises of the government as they were in the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War.

Similarly, Sam Brown served as a militia scout and even participated in transporting his kin to prison camps in the aftermath of the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War. But he later took advantage of an opening to become principal of Sisseton Indian Industrial. He asserted his place as a member of the Sisseton Wahpeton tribe, who rebuilt the school as a place of tribal sovereignty for his people as a principal. Sam Brown ended physical punishments at the Sisseton Indian Industrial. He allowed the use of Dakota language in the school, and his letters show he challenged a system that tried to remove him for doing good. In truth, the Sisseton Wahpeton people persisted, despite efforts to eliminate them. For example, I showed how the children who attended the school wrote speeches and engaged in blatant refusal to assimilate. Students like Alcesta Barse, Edward LaBelle, and Frances DeMarrias carved out paths of resistance, refused to say that all was well in the community, and asserted continued assimilation of Dakota rights were still happening.

In the 20th century, in the wake of the Great Depression settler society shifted to a new elimination tactic through color-blind ideology that deliberately ignored race. For example, treating Dakota children equal to the white man allowed settlers to erase the history of violence committed against the tribes in the first place. Settler programs like the Indian Adoption Project encouraged such policies whereby religious organizations now oversaw the “Indian problem.”

The Tekakwitha Orphanage classifying Dakota children as orphans was a logical extension of settler colonial educational as staff taught Dakota children shame for their heritage.

Nationally, such policies followed the federal government dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their land by adopting Indigenous children out to white families. To prove this, I have shown how the Tekakwitha Orphanage was a tool for national Indigenous adoption by using plight narratives that blamed parents, not the colonial system. The Oblates and The Sisters of Divine Savior dehumanized Dakota families at the same time they claimed to be helping them. Additionally, these religious organizations abused, and tried to eliminate Dakota culture. But I have shown how children who experienced these traumas found ways to heal historical grief through a return to traditions and reincorporated themselves into their communities. Students like Phil St. John, Howard Wanna, and Joannette Star Takahara became Dakota leaders that strengthened their communities and supported Indigenous sovereignty.

But Indigenous resistance and survivance also occurred at the administrative level through teachers like Sister Irene DeMarrias. She represents an ongoing pattern of doublespeak in the Sisseton Wahpeton people who appear assimilated but are working within the system for cultural resilience. DeMarrias converted to Catholicism and worked at the school to protect and help the children. Through such examples as Irene and the many who came before her, I argue that generations of Sisseton Wahpeton learned the settler system and used doublespeak to forge their own paths in a ridged system.

Without many Indigenous peoples hanging on to their cultures through resistance, language, writing, surviving, and making tough choices, it would have been harder for those after to create real change. It is because of those who were able to come out on the other side that newer Dakota found ways to reforge education on their terms in the era of self-determination. In

what follows I look to the future and the ways in which the Sisseton Wahpeton engaged a continuance of cultures against colonial policies aimed at the annihilation of Indigenous presence and why this is important.

Nationally, during the era of self-determination in the late 1960s, Indigenous communities in cities like Minneapolis, Chicago, and New York organized under pan-Indian movements such as the American Indian Movement. Indigenous people participated in the 1969 Alcatraz occupation and the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties. They advocated for cultural education resurgence, treaty rights, religious freedom, Indian centers, and community. They exchanged culture and language in new ways and relied on their Indigenous experiences to keep their identity alive as Indigenous. Indigenous peoples created Indian centers, missions, and schools, which asserted their sovereignty in new ways. These centers provided jobs, housing, culture, and community. As a result, these urban areas reflected Indigenous spaces of liberation with diverse peoples and nations. Within these spaces arose a vast array of Indigenous activism in response to continued settler colonialism.

One of the avenues through which settler society attacked urban Indigenous peoples was through their children. Public schools did not teach Indigenous culture, and children experienced racism. When parents refused to send their kids to these schools, the government threatened them with the removal of the children. Activists like Ojibway's Clyde Bellecourt and Eddie Benton-Banai saw a need to address the issue. Survival schools in Minneapolis carved out spaces of educational reclamation using community pan-Indianism and a grass-grown effort. In her work *Survival Schools: The American Indian Movement and Community Education in the Twin Cities*,

Julie Davis analyzed the histories of schools in Minneapolis, such as Heart of the School and the Red School House.³⁶⁷

These schools created a space “in which young Indian people could feel safe in the process of exploring who they were and begin to feel good about themselves, without prejudice or hostility and without feeling the pressure to change themselves to conform to dominant social norms.”³⁶⁸ In these schools, the children would remain Indigenous, free from the hostilities and racism of public schools. They learned Indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of knowing. The teachers created a safe space of self-support for children and, through them, Indigenous communities.³⁶⁹ The 1972 Indian Education Act provided funds to urban survival schools for a cultural-based curriculum and community support for parents.³⁷⁰ Believing that postsecondary education could strengthen community reservations, tribes began community colleges.

The first tribal college was the Navajo Community College in 1969 on the Navajo Reservation. With the passage of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978, another nineteen tribal colleges opened on or near reservations. In South Dakota, Sinte Gleska College opened in 1971 as the first tribal college in South Dakota located in the Rosebud Reservation. These schools were a shift away from assimilation and towards Indigenous educational resurgence and cultural renewal. The Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate opened the Sisseton Wahpeton Community College in 1979 and found new ways to challenge settler-colonial educational assimilation through law and tribal schools. According to Sherry Johnson, a

³⁶⁷ Julie Davis, *Survival Schools: The American Indian Movement and Community Education in the Twin Cities* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

³⁶⁸ Davis, *Survival Schools*, 198.

³⁶⁹ Davis, *Survival Schools*, 108.

³⁷⁰ Margaret Connell-Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 197–200; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 1141.

historian of education on Lake Traverse, “In 1981, a group of concerned parents presented statements of problems to the Sisseton Public School Board. The consensus was that the treatment of Indian students was a long-standing issue but was beginning to be intolerable.”³⁷¹ Like in Minneapolis, ongoing racism and ignorance of Dakota culture occurred at the Sisseton Public School and created dropouts by such children.

Parents became fed up with concerns of racism and neglect of their children not being addressed and led them to find a solution through tribal-led schools. Johnson explained, “This same group of parents met with the school board on February 3, 1981, and announced to the board that they were withdrawing their children from the Sisseton Public School and would be starting their own school. On March 16, 1981, a small group of parents and students began holding classes in the north room of the tribal gym.”³⁷² Tiospa Zina Tribal School opened in 1981 as a survival school. The school’s name exemplifies the Indigenous values for cultural survival and protection of the children. The tiospa, or rather, the tiospaye extended family, would teach the children their history. Children once called the Sisseton Indian Industrial school, Tipizi, meaning yellow dwelling for the yellow roof. But now, Dakota people would reclaim the Zi origin meaning “Yellow is the color of the east. It is the direction from which the sun rises and the new day begins. It is to this direction that one prays.”³⁷³ Like Heart of the Earth in Minneapolis, these schools focused on grassroots cultural-based curriculums. But settler society was less than pleased and dismissed any concept of racism in their schools.

³⁷¹ Sherry Johnson, *Tribal and Education History of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation* (Sisseton: SWO Tribal Education Office, 2016), 27.

³⁷² Johnson, *Tribal and Education History of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate*, 27.

³⁷³ Tiospa Zina Tribal School Pamphlet (Sisseton: South Dakota, 2018), 5.

Instead, the Sisseton Public School district charged parents with truancy if their children attended Tiospa Zina. Furthermore, the government threatened parents with the termination of parental rights or incarceration if they did not obey. But Tiospa Zina continued, and under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 signed a contract with the Bureau of Indian Education in 1987. The government would fund tribal use to conduct their affairs and reject previous paternalistic policies. Where boarding schools once tried to eliminate Indigenous culture and identity, tribal schools now took control of educating their children. Everyday practices through teaching and mentorship with culturally relevant materials are a resurgence of community survivance.³⁷⁴

Schools like Tiospa Zina and the Sisseton Wahpeton College are spaces of a resurgence where a reclaiming of identity, culture, and Indigenous education occurs. But tribal-led education is only one solution to combat assimilation. Reservations like Lake Traverse continue to create solutions to their socioeconomic problems. In 1988 the tribe began a holistic workforce development program and now employs two manufacturing companies, three casinos, and a tribal-led newspaper. The Sisseton Wahpeton are not weak or trapped in poverty but strong, resilient, and fighting for the respect of their sovereignty and land rights.

However, I am not naive that these are complex problems with deep historical implications and considerations. Settler colonial assimilation persists, and the long-term effects on communities are immense. Yet tribes continue to fight to protect their children via legal jurisdictions against the federal government.³⁷⁵ Today I believe the boarding school and

³⁷⁴ Prucha, *The Great Father*, 1144-1148.

³⁷⁵ The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) passed in 1978 and gave legal protection and adoption preference for tribal families. The law looked to prevent the adoption of Indigenous children to settler families through welfare support and employment help. But in 2022 the Supreme Court Case *Brackeen v. Haaland* is a direct challenge to ICWA. In this case, which will be decided in summer of 2023, a white couple claims their rights to adopt an Indian child were

orphanage at the Lake Traverse Reservation failed in their assimilationist goals. The people survived; they did not disappear into settler society. Their voices must be heard. The federal government refuses to acknowledge its role in the horrors inflicted on children in these boarding schools.

Instead, when Sisseton Indian Industrial closed in 1919, numerous records were destroyed because the government did not care. Cody White, an archivist from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) confirmed, “Honestly, looking at what is left from Sisseton - it's pretty sad. There were these 5-138 forms, pupils at boarding school, the agencies would generate around the turn of the century that also don't appear to have been saved.”³⁷⁶ Almost nothing was saved except government reports, newspapers, teacher files, and student speeches. This is not usual. In many such agencies, no records were kept. This is one reason piecing together a history of the Sisseton Indian Industrial School was so difficult in this thesis. On the other hand, the letters of Sam Brown, the speeches of students like Frances DeMarrias, and the interview of Phil St. John all made a stronger thesis centering Indigenous voice. Furthermore, I was able to follow a pattern of Indigenous cultural resistance through time at both the administrative and student levels.

The Indigenous voice is critical to any tribal history because it decolonizes the settler colonial narrative of assimilation. A serious oral history project is needed to hear the experiences of Indigenous people who attended Sisseton Indian Industrial School and the Tekakwitha Orphanage. Each year, another elder passes away and takes with them significant history. These

violated by the Indian preference written in ICWA. Tribes have pre-constitutional sovereignty based on the nation-to-nation treaties with the federal government. If the case is overturned on the basis of racial classification and not political, this threatens every aspect of tribal sovereignty.

³⁷⁶ Email with the Author, May 5, 2022.

stories would be useful for dismantling settler colonial patriarchies that persist in narratives of benevolent charity, and we create liberation of the Indigenous voice and history. At the end of this thesis, I am left with even more questions.

Nevertheless, I believe a broader base of Indigenous experiences at either the industrial school or the orphanage would generate new research. Did mixed-blood students have different experiences at these schools? What criteria made a student chosen for adoption? How did parents and community engage with either Sisseton Indian Industrial or the Tekakwitha Orphanage? Did other Dakota working at either the school or orphanage leave behind memoirs? How involved was Tekakwitha Orphanage with the Indian Adoption Project of the 1960s? What might also be learned from a deeper study of the early years of Tiospa Zina as a survival school? Did it have a positive impact on the community? What were the different experiences of Dakota children who attended either Tiospa Zina or the public school? I hope that other scholars can build from the work that I have begun and uncover these questions. Furthermore, as this work is written from a white perspective, I hope that the Sisseton Wahpeton leads the path forward in writing a modern tribal history. I do note that Indigenous people at the national level are trying to make sense of this complicated history.

Nationally, Indigenous peoples are tackling the legacy of assimilation and survival. Laguna Pueblo Deb Haaland became the first female Indigenous Secretary of the Interior in March 2021. One of her first acts in June of that year was to launch the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.³⁷⁷ Today, she continues to visit reservations and hear first-hand accounts from survivors. This project could also address the intergenerational trauma and land dispossession by

³⁷⁷ Federal Boarding School Initiative, June 22, 2021, <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/secint-memo-esb46-01914-federal-indian-boarding-school-truth-initiative-2021-06-22-final508-1.pdf>.

the federal government that occurred in these schools. Furthermore, the initiative created the first-ever database of federally operated boarding schools. Within this database, the Sisseton Indian Industrial is mentioned by the government for the first time in over a hundred years since the closure in 1919.

Listed under the name Sisseton Agency Boarding School, the section is very bare of facts that dismisses the significance of the school. Instead, the report gives the start and end dates, and confirms that it was a reservation government school with housing. But there is so much more to Sisseton Indian Industrial School, it was the first government Indigenous boarding school in South Dakota. The families and students who lived through these schools cannot be dismissed, and my thesis draws attention to an uncomfortable time in history that settler society likes to forget.

But Sisseton Wahpeton do not forget. They continue to persist in truth-telling that will challenge ongoing and past wrongs. Gabrielle Tateyuskanskan, of the Sisseton Wahpeton once said, “It was just understood that when you became an adult, those were the shoes you were going to have to step into to keep the resistance alive. It was going to outlive you, but you had to do your part to protect it.”³⁷⁸ Gabriel Renville, Sam Brown, Frances DeMarrias, Phil St. John, each of them stepped into these shoes and carved out paths of cultural survival that made it possible reshape education and identity. Indigenous truth-telling will be done by the coming generations who heal the soul wounds with restorative justice that reclaims land and education. The struggle against settler assimilation and desire for Indigenous land resources persists. Settler society tries every day to find new ways to eliminate the Sisseton Wahpeton people, but at the

³⁷⁸ Craig Howe et al, *He Sapa Woihanble: Black Hills Dream* (St. Paul: Living Justice Press, 2011), 12.

same time, needs the plight narrative to justify oppression. Yet, despite ongoing settler colonialism, the Sisseton Wahpeton are strong and resilient. Indigenous people are creating Indigenous spaces to address Indigenous trauma and reclaim education.

The Dakota persist. The Dakota survive. The Dakota people are still here.

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