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Boarding School Seasons

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clashed with school authorities and sometimes were forced to submit to the will of the bureaucracy governing Indian schools. At the same time, Native students and their families resisted and frequently triumphed over that bureaucracy, and they used government boarding schools for their own advantage. Letters reveal the stories of people who have for too long been anonymous and relegated to the periphery of American history but whose lives remain important to their descendants and tribes.

The boarding school experience spanned several generations and affected dozens of tribes in the United States and Canada. That experience, from star quilts to Jim Thorpe, has become part of our common heritage as North American Indians. Though this book is primarily about Ojibwes and other tribes from the Upper Midwest during the years 1900 to 1940 who attended boarding school at Haskell, Flandreau, and Pipestone, some similarity of experience will no doubt be found among tribes from other regions in North America. In 1964 the old boarding school in Lawrence converted to the Haskell Indian Junior College. A cemetery remains on the grounds of what is today Haskell Indian Nations University, a silent testimony to the pan-Indianism of a harsher age. On a hundred tombstones, the names, dates of birth and death, and the tribes of students who did not survive the boarding school experience are engraved. In the Haskell cemetery, thirty-seven tribes are represented.

Native American singer and songwriter Mitch Walking Elk, himself a veteran of the boarding school system, evoked the spirit of Indian resistance to boarding school life in his sweeping pan-Indian anthem that pays tribute to five hundred years of Native American survival in the face of warfare, removals, the abrogation of treaties, cultural genocide, termination, and racism, simply titled, "Indians." Walking Elk, of Cheyenne-Arapaho-Hopi ancestry, attended and was expelled from several Oklahoma Indian boarding schools during his youth. Walking Elk became a runaway at age eleven after he and another student stole two horses and rode for three days before being captured by the police in Cherokee country. Many survivors of the boarding school experience, perhaps even those early Chiricahua pupils at Carlisle, would agree with Walking Elk's interpretation, "They put me in the boarding school and they cut off all my hair, gave me an education, but the Apache's still in there."[16]

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From Reservation to Boarding School

Boarding school education came to the Ojibwe people, the Anishinaabe, during a turbulent period in their history. The General Allotment Act, passed in 1887, and subsequent legislation had worked to erode the traditional, communal method of tribal landholding in favor of individual ownership on reservations. Few reservations escaped allotment. One notable exception was that of the Red Lake band in Minnesota. As historian William Watts Folwell commented about Red Lake in 1930, "It is still Indian country."[1] For tribes across the United States, as well for many Ojibwes, the results of allotment policies and withdrawal of the protective trust relationship were an often devastating loss of country. Ojibwes in the Upper Midwest, whose seasonal economies were already challenged after being removed to new territories or having their reservation holdings reduced, could ill afford the environmental destruction and dispossession that unfolded in northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan after the turn of the century. Land fraud was rampant, and the interests of ecocidal timber companies dominated the political landscape of the woodlands.[2]

By 1920, the once-luxuriant pine trees in the north had been cleared from many reservations. The land base of Ojibwes had declined precipitously, and new Euro-American landowners, beneficiaries of tribal losses, populated the region. Ojibwes were expected to settle down to work as small farmers. This was not a real possibility for many Indians. Lands were so diminished in size that nothing more than a small garden was feasible for most families. Tribes complained that the allotment process itself had been unfair, that high-quality and valuable land had been lost to Indians. Undeniably, remaining reservation lands were frequently far too poor to farm. For example, in Wisconsin during the 1920s, the Lac du Flambeau Reservation was so covered by stumps and brush that the cost per acre of removing the old growth and timber company debris would have exceeded the value of the land. Lac Court Oreilles Ojibwes, who were

also left with meager farming land, and the Lac du Flambeau band mostly relied on the traditional economy, tourist work, or off-reservation jobs for support. Red Cliff residents had such poor agricultural lands that most Ojibwes there were forced to labor off the reservation in the fishing and lumber industries.[3]

The story was similar for many Ojibwes in Minnesota. After the devastation of their vast timber lands and the extensive land fraud perpetrated upon the bands congregated at the White Earth Reservation, most residents depended on wage labor or were forced to abandon the reservation entirely due to lack of opportunity. At Leech Lake, 437 allotments had been abruptly transferred from individual trust "for the benefit of the people" of the state when the Minnesota National Forest was created by an act of Congress in 1908. Twenty years later, without intended irony the park was redesignated the Chippewa National Forest.[4]

The increased poverty and landlessness of many Ojibwes both threatened and confirmed the strength of the traditional economy. The seasonal rounds of hunting, fishing, making maple sugar, harvesting fruits and wild rice, this familiar and revered work, remained central to reservation life and Ojibwe identity in the twentieth century. Nett Lake Ojibwes, who were left with a fair amount of swampland after their allotments had been made, still retained ownership of some of the finest wild rice stands in the Great Lakes. Few Nett Lakers were able to maintain adequate gardens, but traditional subsistence activities, tourism, and off-reservation labor maintained the band. Nett Lake also increased its land base slightly in the postallotment period. The people living on the rocky Superior coast at Grand Portage fared somewhat worse. Their reduced reservation was diminished to the extent that by the 1930s, the several hundred band members there owned little more than three acres per person of the original tract that had been reserved for them by treaty in 1854.[5]

As historian Melissa Meyer has argued, if the "government's programs of assimilation had a chance to succeed anywhere, White Earth should have become an experimental showcase" because of its incredibly rich and diverse environment of fishing lakes, rice stands, forests, and fertile farmlands. Historians have documented the corrupt history of the postallotment era at White Earth, a time when the regional pine cartel, Minnesota politicians, the federal government, local banks, and residents mingled interests to defraud conservative Ojibwes of their land and timber. Unfortunately, the corruption and fraud at White Earth was not exclusive to the reservation or even to Minnesota, but instead became part of a larger pattern of tribal dispossession in the nation.[6]

The effects of this immense exploitation of people, land, and resources reverberated in Ojibwe country for many years. Out-migrations from reservation communities, increased participation in wage labor, and a continued degradation of wild-rice stands and other environments contributed to a deterioration of the seasonal economy. As deforestation progressed in the rustic timber and lake country, tourism contributed to tribal incomes in northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Ojibwes worked at a number of off-reservation odd jobs and many found new sources of income as loggers, millers, and farm workers. Even so, seasonal changes still inspired many Ojibwes to harvest wild rice and blueberries, turn sap into maple syrup, and track deer in fresh snow.

The lives of Ojibwe people in the Upper Midwest were transformed as a result of new land tenure policies and the educational programs designed by the federal government to assure the success of allotment. Ironically, policies and practices of the assimilation years dismantled the economies of self-sufficient people who had for generations successfully educated their children in the cultural knowledge, values, and economic tradition best suited to the integrity of the woodland environment. A new educational agenda from Washington, which mandated forced acculturation away from that source of learning, would create unprecedented sources of stress for Ojibwe families and jar their distinctive cultural foundation.

Throughout most of the boarding school era, Ojibwe families encountered new economic conditions while some migrated to different homes. White Earth, the home of Mississippi, Gull Lake, Pembina, and Otter Tail Pillager bands, never fully realized the plans of Minnesota politicians who hoped to merge all Minnesota Ojibwes, except for those at Red Lake, on a single reservation. Still, migrations to the reservations "peaked in 1891 and again in 1893–1894," causing the population to double "between 1890 and 1920."[7] The reservation was also characterized by ethnic diversity, as Metis families formed a significant community at White Earth. This community, considered among the many people who profited from the exploitation of the reservation, maintained large households with more children than their conservative Ojibwe "cousins."

Conservative families tended to be patrilineal, nuclear, with fewer children, but they identified a greater number of "dependents" in the census of 1910. The census indicated "a rise in the number of extended households" at White Earth after the economic descent precipitated by the land fraud. Widening poverty and landlessness within the community motivated conservatives to incorporate extended family and other tribal members into their households. Reckoning kin in the "Indian way" was often an informal process in a culture that respected cousins as brothers and sisters. The virtues of generosity and flexibility had always served the Ojibwes well.[8]

Poverty, diaspora, and disease were the combined legacies of dispossession at White Earth and other reservations in the United States. In the boarding school era, tuberculosis replaced smallpox as the largest health threat to Indians. It has been estimated that one in every twenty Ojibwes was infected with the deadly disease shortly after the turn of the century. Deaths from pulmonary disease multiplied at White Earth between 1910 and 1920. In 1915, a doctor found 130 cases of it among the 898 Ojibwes he examined on the Bad River Reservation in Wisconsin. Studies conducted during the 1930s still revealed alarmingly high rates of tuberculosis among Indians in Minnesota. The suffering was widespread among Ojibwe communities, as evidenced by the high rates of the disease found at Fond du Lac and Grand Portage. At Nett Lake, an estimated 30 percent of the population was afflicted with tuberculosis.[9] Approximately 15 percent of Minnesota Indians contracted tuberculosis at some point during their lives.

Tuberculosis statistics for Ojibwes were grim, but other communicable diseases also ravaged Ojibwe communities in the early twentieth century, including syphilis, gonorrhea, and trachoma. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, charged with providing medical care for Indians, often placed the blame on American Indians themselves for their poor state of health. The bureau attributed high rates of disease, child mortality, and early death to the ignorance of an "immoral," superstitious people who preferred medicine men to government physicians and rejected vaccinations and the concept of cleanliness. The few poorly paid physicians and other health care personnel who served Indians could little alter the crisis in health care that existed on many Ojibwe reservations.[10] Indian people were continually afflicted by diseases, such as trachoma, that were not problems for the majority population in the United States.[11] Communities were particularly vulnerable to epidemic disease, as evidenced by the high death rates during the influenza pandemic of 1918.[12]

During times of crisis, Ojibwe families had historically relied on the generosity of family members and the community at large. When new patterns of homelessness emerged at White Earth and other reservations after the turn of the century, time-honored methods of caring for the needy and adopting parentless children proved inadequate. Disease disrupted family life and other long-standing Native institutions. The ranks of the poor, sick, widowed, and orphaned grew. All too often, husbands, wives, and even older siblings were left with large families to maintain after the death of a spouse or parent. Overcrowding became a common feature of Ojibwe households, and many remaining allotments, some of them held by minor children or vulnerable to tax forfeiture, were secure only temporarily.

During these trying years for American Indians, some promoters of assimilation still looked to boarding school education as a panacea for many social problems, if they lacked the reformist zeal of the previous generation. The idea was conceived decades before that boarding school education, which removed young children from the tribal environment, would "civilize" and prepare Indians for citizenship while providing them with a practical, vocational education. It was widely assumed that vocational education not only suited the "native mentality" but would also help to solve the nation's so-called "Indian problem" by training the growing number of impoverished and landless Indians for wage labor.[13]

Early in the era of forced assimilation, coercion was often used to gather Indian children to the far-away schools. Rations, annuities, and other goods were withheld from parents and guardians who refused to send children to school after a compulsory attendance law for American Indians was passed by Congress in 1891. Boarding schools in the Midwest were seldom located in areas close to Indian communities, making the transition traumatic for children. Visits from parents were rare events in the lives of boarding school students, especially those from very poor families. Assimilationists argued that the task of "civilizing" Indian children would be easier and lapses into tribal ways less likely if students stayed away from their homes and relatives until their education was complete.

Indian parents across the country responded in strikingly similar ways to the residential school concept. For the most part, they proved to be tenacious. They often refused to surrender their children to government authorities, especially the very young, and resisted boarding school education. Stories have filtered out of the Southwest that describe how rural tribal children had to be virtually kidnapped from their parents in order to be taken to the alien schools. In her autobiography, Helen Sekaquaptewa recalled that Hopi children were taught by their parents to play a game similar to "hide and seek" to avoid the police.[14] The most painful story of resistance to assimilation programs and compulsory school attendance laws involved the Hopis in Arizona, who surrendered a group of men to the military rather than voluntarily relinquish their children. The Hopi men served time in federal prison at Alcatraz.

Ojibwe students were often rounded up by the reservation police before being sent to boarding school. Nina King of Red Lake recalled being removed after police came to her home. Certainly coercion was a popular method used to recruit early boarding school pupils, and in 1907 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp still endorsed the use of force in bringing children to school when families would not cooperate with voluntary measures.[15]

Historian Frederick Hoxie has shown that the enthusiasm of reformers for boarding school education waned considerably after the turn of the century in favor of reservation day schools. Reformers and policy-makers began to doubt that full assimilation for Indians was possible. Boarding schools of this era imparted low expectations, and the goal of Indian education became to provide students with primary skills or channel them into a limited number of vocational trades. As expectations diminished, boarding school attendance remained a common experience for American Indians through the 1930s. More children attended day schools, but unfortunately, the bureaucracy was slow to respond to the new trend of reservation-based education. Euro-American reformers lost their initial enthusiasm for the transforming power of Indian education, and budget cuts undermined plans for vocational training. Non-Indian officials and teachers maintained a consistent level of disdain for tribal institutions and languages until a new wave of reformers led by John Collier infiltrated Indian education. Hoxie has suggested twentieth-century boarding schools became "an empty remnant of the reformers' original design."[16] For most Indian students, government boarding schools provided them with a minimal education and a minimum of care.

Like other tribal people in the United States, Ojibwes were primarily educated in off-reservation schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a still-significant number of children were in residential schools in 1940.[17] A survey conducted at Red Lake in the late 1920s indicated that over 40 percent of the adult residents who had received formal education had been to one of the off-reservation government schools. By 1930, attending Flandreau, Wahpeton, or another school had become an arrangement common for people in the Red Lake community.[18]

Ojibwes and other tribal children continued to attend boarding schools during the Great Depression, even though the popularity of the residential school concept had withered in the eyes of progressive reformers. Many schools were closed when Collier, a passionate critic of the boarding schools, became commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933. A dozen boarding schools had been closed between the years 1928 and 1933, after the concept came under renewed attack by reformers and politicians, but more Indian students were in residential schools than ever before. The school population was higher in 1933 than it had been in the late 1920s.[19]

That American Indians attended government boarding schools in increasing numbers during the 1930s—institutions that were a recurring source of resentment on the reservations—is not necessarily a sign that after several decades Indian people had finally warmed to the idea of residential schools for their children. More likely, it is a sign that boarding schools had become familiar institutions and that, when economic or family problems beset Indian people, boarding schools could be useful to them. When the deprivation of Indian families became acute during the 1930s, the boarding schools filled with children. Depression-era records from Red Lake report a truckload of hungry children arriving from White Earth to be placed in their boarding school because their own families were unable to provide for them.[20]

One historian has estimated that 25 percent of tribal members from the Lake Superior Ojibwe bands worked off the reservation at some form of wage labor at the time of the economic collapse.[21] The general economic depression affected Ojibwe children and adults alike, and Native demand for the schools fueled enrollments during the 1930s. From an Indian perspective, the curtain did not fall on the boarding school era when reformers and policy-makers targeted residential schools for closure because they were obsolete, irrelevant to their plans for Indian reform.

Ojibwe families, known for strong kinship ties, only reluctantly sent their children to distant boarding schools even when persuaded it was for their best interest. Although most parents preferred to have their children remain at home or be educated on the reservation when that was an option, it is also evident that a great many Ojibwe families decided based on sheer hardship to send their children away to boarding school. The presence of so much disease on reservations widowed women and men before their time, and, ironically, many Indians began to use the boarding school as a refuge for their children during a family crisis.[22]

There are many examples in the government archives of letters from families in distress who sought help from boarding school officials. When a Wisconsin Ojibwe father who had been recently widowed wrote to the superintendent of Flandreau in South Dakota, he described an unfortunate but all-too-common situation for American Indians living on early-twentieth-century reservations.

> I have lost my wife and left me with six children. . . . I would like to ask you to send these little folks over to you two or three years so I can get along. It is hard for me [to] stay here alone home because children not used home alone when mother gone. When I am going working out it hard for them . . . and this all I ask you if you have a place for them.[23]

Under these sad circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine why a father would ask to place his six children in a residential school, even though it may have meant a separation of several years.

While facing a similar crisis, another father turned to Flandreau's superintendent for help in February 1924, just a week after the death of his wife.

> I am writing you to see if you can do me a favor by taking my daughter in your school it would be a big favor to me as my wife died Feb. 4th and have no way of taking care of the girl we cant stay at home as it is very lonesome for her. . . . Therefore I am asking you this favor. to turn my daughter over in your care.[24]

Indian women were sometimes faced with the predicament of having to relinquish custody of their children to government boarding schools. Again, the death of a spouse was often the compelling factor. When a woman found it impossible to support a large family after the death of a husband, she could be reassured by the idea that clothing, a regular diet, and a stable place to live would be provided for her children. As one woman confided to her granddaughter at Flandreau, she thought the girl would have "better eats" at school than if she were to live at home.[25]

Writing from a reservation in South Dakota, a Lakota woman described the many hardships she suffered after the death of her husband, who left her as the sole caretaker of seven children. The mother, Mrs. Bad Moccasin, wrote the superintendent of the school at Flandreau, where her son and daughter were students:

> I am always glad to hear from my children saying they are improving in their studies and that they sure are taking interest in it. That's what I want them to do is to take interest in their studies so they can learn and try to make man and woman out of themselves as those children have lost their father when they were little, and I have brought them up the best I can.

Due to her own illness, Mrs. Bad Moccasin was no longer able to earn a living for her large family but hoped her children would be someday able to support themselves as well as their younger siblings. She wanted her children to be educated and learn a trade at school. Indian families viewed government boarding schools as the only alternative for their children, one of the few opportunities for young people from rural areas to be educated and develop skills for future employment.[26]

A six-year-old White Earth Ojibwe boy, Wallace, was first sent away to boarding school when his widowed mother was not able to care for him or his five siblings, aged three to seventeen. At the time Wallace entered Flandreau as a teenager, his application form said he had "no fixed home other than [the] Wahpeton Indian School" in North Dakota. Wallace did not return to White

Earth; instead he lived his entire childhood and adolescence in government boarding schools.[27]

When Wallace turned nineteen, he entered the army and was sent to Fort Snelling in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In a postcard to the Flandreau school from its longtime student, Wallace, a veteran of government institutions cheerily wrote, "I'll be in uniform by the time you receive this card. Ft. Snelling is a nice place. Lots of freedom, good food (best in U.S.) and two cities to visit." In his message, Wallace fondly referred to his alma mater as "My Shangri-la."[28] That boarding schools proved to be a haven for some children, like Wallace, stands as a somber testimony to the poor quality of reservation life for Ojibwe families in the early twentieth century.

There are many signs that the fabric of Ojibwe community life persisted only under great stress during the boarding school era. For generations, Ojibwe families and other tribal people had traditionally made room for parentless children in their households. Orphans were treated with kindness, and little distinction was made between "natural" children and those adopted. Often, adoptees were blood relatives who simply went to live with a grandparent or aunt and uncle after a parent died. But as family life suffered during the early reservation, postallotment, and Great Depression years, traditional methods of absorbing orphaned children into the extended kinship group were not always possible. For a society that regarded caring for relatives as a virtue, with tender devotion to both the young and the elderly, this was a troubling sign.

When Ojibwe families could no longer maintain traditional methods of adopting orphans, more children were sent away from Indian communities to live and be reared in government boarding schools. Reservations like White Earth in northern Minnesota, devastated by allotment and plundering timber companies greedy to gain title to Indian lands, were unable to provide homes for all their deserving children. When a little White Earth boy, Clifford, described by a social worker as a "half starved undernourished child" was sent to the Pipestone boarding school in Minnesota after the death of his father, a note on his application read, "The boy is absolutely homeless with no relatives to care for him."[29]

Orphaned children often applied to government boarding schools as family networks failed. A young Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe boy, Woodrow, went to Flandreau after numerous family members died, leaving him and a sister orphaned. Because his natural mother died when the boy was small, he already resided with foster parents on the reservation. After the death of his foster father, Woodrow explained that his mother "can't afford to pay board tuition or transportation to and from Ashland the nearest school."[30]

Ojibwe family life was complex and blighted with instability on early-twentieth-century reservations. Children, left alone after the death of parents, were frequently shuttled from one home to another on the reservation as those families met with death or hardship, too. When Bernice, a young Ojibwe girl from Reserve, Wisconsin, applied to boarding school at Flandreau, it was because her shattered family could find no alternative.

Bernice's mother had died in 1924 of tuberculosis. Her father had remarried, giving Bernice a stepmother and eventually two younger siblings. When her stepmother died in 1929 of pneumonia, Bernice and two half-brothers went to live with their maternal grandmother, since their father was unemployed. The grandmother had also taken in the children of two of her recently widowed sons. At the time of Bernice's application to Flandreau, her younger brother, Antoine, a second-grader, was found to have an active case of pulmonary tuberculosis. Though Bernice had been a good student at the local school in Hayward, Wisconsin, achieving above average scores in science, history, arithmetic, English, and music, she stopped attending classes during the winter months because she lacked proper cold-weather clothing. By the time she entered Flandreau as a ninth-grader, Bernice reportedly did not "have a place that she [could] actually call her home nor [had] her living conditions been satisfactory." By going to school in South Dakota, Bernice hoped to attend classes regularly and to study home economics.[31]

Mrs. Mary Twobirds, a Bad River Ojibwe woman from the community at Odanah, Wisconsin, sent several of her grandchildren to Flandreau beginning in the 1920s. Described as a "very intelligent old lady" by the local agent on the reservation, Mrs. Twobirds had raised six of her grandchildren after the death of her daughter, the children's mother. She frequently counseled her grandchildren about the importance of an education and reminded them that she would not always be able to provide for them. Mrs. Twobirds explained: "I am the guardian of these poor children since there mother died. I took care of them. I'm there grandmother and I've worked hard to raise these children on my own. Sent them to school here, our school here only goes as far as 8th grade."[32]

A determined woman, Mrs. Twobirds bought a second-hand car to retrieve her grandchildren during the summer vacation. While driving from northern Wisconsin to South Dakota, they even "tipped over once, on a certain curve." Mrs. Twobirds lived twelve miles from the nearest high school in Ashland, Wisconsin, and daily transportation back and forth from school was problematic for the family, particularly during the northern Wisconsin winters. For the Twobirds grandchildren, Flandreau represented an opportunity for them to complete their schooling.[33]

Boarding schools could be a solution to some problems of Ojibwe children from every age. In 1938, two Lac du Flambeau brothers, James and Carl, went away to high school at Flandreau. The boys' mother had died some years before, at which time they went to live with their grandmother, who subsequently passed away. James and Carl were making their home with two sisters, aged thirteen and twenty, when they enrolled at Flandreau. Though the older sister was doing her best to protect and maintain the family and reportedly kept a nice house, she acknowledged that it would be best for the boys to "go on to school."[34]

A surprising number of students, older and orphaned, were not being cared for by adults at all when they enrolled in boarding school. In 1913, Joseph High Elk of Eagle Butte, South Dakota, asked to enter Flandreau after having taken "care of myself since I was old enough to work." Years later, when a teenage Menominee, David, enrolled at Flandreau in 1936, the agent at Keshena, Wisconsin, reported that he was "without parents [and] has no home." The hard-working Menominee boy had been trying to support himself while he attended a local high school. The agent wrote that David had "used practically all of his money paying for board and lodging while attending a nearby high school, and we have decided that he can no longer afford to pay such expenses."[35]

Alphonse Caswell, one of many former Flandreau students from Red Lake, decided to go away to school after his parents died. Alphonse planned to learn a trade and then return home to Red Lake to care for his younger brother and sister, Louis and Priscilla, who resided with relatives. As a young man, Alphonse strongly felt responsible for his younger siblings and assumed the roles of his late parents. By the time of his graduation, Alphonse was described as "an exacting workman, capable of thinking for himself," and with "a pleasing personality."[36] As it turned out, Alphonse's time at Flandreau greatly influenced his later life. After graduation he married a young woman from White Earth, Ethelbert Branchaud, whom he had met while she attended the Pipestone boarding school, just a few miles away from Flandreau. Later, Alphonse's younger sister Priscilla went to Flandreau. Flandreau was undergoing change in the 1930s, developing into a more sympathetic institution, and Alphonse successfully kept his family together with some help from the school. The Caswells remained a close and loving family.

During the 1930s, the poor economy influenced the decisions of even some of the most intact reservation families. Poverty conditions forced many Indians to consider placing their children in government boarding schools. A mother and father from Mahnomen, Minnesota, sent two sons, George and James,

to Flandreau and a daughter, Ruby, to Haskell in 1931. Their eighty-acre farm in rural Mahnomen with its two-room house had proved inadequate for an extended household of thirteen family members. Their children had to walk a long distance to the nearest school. Their mother complained that this was too hard for her young children during the frigid Minnesota winters writing, "They walk to schools its about two miles and some times it to stormy & cold to send them they miss a lot of school."[37]

Though the parents wanted their children to be educated, and the father "works so hard [and] likes to see his children finish school," they clearly had mixed feelings about sending their children to live in a government boarding school. The two boys were together at Flandreau, but Ruby had to be sent to Haskell in Lawrence, Kansas, because there was no room for her at Flandreau, which was closer to Mahnomen. Not long after parting from their children the mother wrote an anguished letter: "I hate to see [Ruby] go to Haskell so far away. she wont be able to come home next summer as the fare will be so high." After receiving her sons' report cards, their mother wrote "I think [George] is home sick that why he cant make up his minds to study he has never been away from home before so sorry I sent him away he was our best farmer and we sure miss his help."[38]

Some Ojibwes tried to make a living on the reservations, whereas others decided to make their way in the cities. In the 1920s, it was not unusual for the growing number of urban Ojibwe parents, especially women, to enroll their children in boarding schools. These women, often single mothers, had left reservations like White Earth, and migrated to urban centers in order to find work to support their families. Once in the city, women generally could find work only at low-paying, menial jobs. In cities like Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago, Indian women usually lacked the family networks of the reservation, which made finding care for their children and supporting a family an increased burden.

When women did not receive support, financial or otherwise, from the father of their children, they had few alternatives other than to send them home to live with relatives or to enroll them at Indian boarding schools. This was the case for one Ojibwe mother living in Saint Paul, Minnesota, who left an abusive husband after he tried to assault their twelve-year-old daughter. In the aftermath of this crisis, the woman asked to send her daughter and another child to Flandreau while she looked for work.[39]

In 1924, a single mother of several children labored in the linen room of the Ryan Hotel in Saint Paul while two of her sons attended school at Flandreau. As she explained,

> I have had the sole support of my three boys for the last six years. . . . I never had no help from their father . . . with the exception of the little he has sent for them this spring. I have had to care and work for them while they were small . . . but I am just like an old mother bear and will fight for my children.

Given her precarious economic situation, this parent felt boarding school was best for her boys and she was "real proud of the good work they have been doing this year."[40]

Boarding school became a solution for many urban Indian women when they were not able to support a family. In 1925, a woman with two daughters, aged fourteen and eleven, living in Milwaukee asked to enroll her children at Flandreau. As she said, "I am living in the city, trying to keep my two little girls and sending them to school, but with what little funds I have I can not do justice to them or myself so I have been thinking of your school."[41]

The following letter, written in 1925 by an Ojibwe woman who had relocated to Minneapolis, illustrates some of the problems Indians encountered as they moved to new, urban areas. The mother, originally from White Earth, felt that the urban environment was a bad influence on her child. As she explained to the administrator at Flandreau:

> I have my boy Herbert . . . from White Earth, with me and I have come to the conclusion that this city life is not conducive to his moral welfare. His grandmother . . . is not able to give him the proper care on account of [forgetfulness] or else I would send him back to the reservation. My sincere wish is that he enter your institution so that he may obtain the proper training to success.[42]

In 1933, an official in the Office of Indian Affairs sent a circular to the Wahpeton, Flandreau, and Pipestone boarding schools advising the superintendents there to enroll only the neediest of children because of soaring enrollments. The commissioner commented that Indians in the Upper Midwest were in very bad circumstances, particularly during the winter months, and pointed to the poor economy as the reason families were asking to send children away to boarding school in unprecedented numbers.[43]

Ojibwe families found some relief from hardship during the Depression through emergency government programs, such as the Works Project Administration (WPA) and the Indian Division of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC-ID). American Indians in the western Great Lakes built roads to secluded areas, worked on housing projects, and watched for forest fires in the wooded

regions of northern states. An anthropologist who worked at White Earth in 1938 pointed out the nearly universal reliance on poverty relief and pension programs in the community.[44] As with other Americans, Ojibwes weathered the worst miseries of the Depression through hard work and active participation in poverty-relief programs. Boarding schools also provided some benefit to families.

A young Saint Croix Ojibwe girl, Ruth, was sent to Flandreau during the Depression because her family had a difficult time making ends meet. Though the father was "known to be a good worker" as a pulpwood cutter and "when that work is not available he works as a laborer on the WPA, earning $40.00 per month," the family of seven still could not "manage on their income." Ruth's father remembered a better time for his people, when the seasonal round had nourished the Ojibwe and made the observation of "how difficult it is for them to adjust to a 'white man's' way of living [and] when they were children an Indian family was never without meat or fruit as is now the case."[45]

When Ruth's father became ill with pneumonia, the family considered sending her to Flandreau, where she could enter the tenth grade. The opportunity appealed to Ruth, who otherwise would have had to attend high school in Webster, Wisconsin, nine miles away from her home in Danbury, and her parents could not afford to pay transportation costs. Ruth said she much preferred Flandreau because "she has a feeling that at Webster 'Indian girls from Danbury' are not accepted graciously."[46]

Although the Depression may explain why enrollments in government boarding schools remained high throughout the 1930s, other issues were also involved. The campaign to have Indian children enter public schools in the United States was slow-moving, and many students who had integrated the system complained of racism. In fact, Indian students often complained that racism was the reason they chose boarding schools over public schools in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The intertribal environment attracted students who otherwise had to deal with discrimination in schools closer to home. Racism toward Indians was a problem not only during the early years of integrated schooling. As late as 1941, an Ojibwe boy, Melvin, from Ponsford, Minnesota, wrote to the Flandreau superintendent, asking to transfer back to boarding school after his experience at Park Rapids High School in northern Minnesota. Melvin wrote:

> I would like to know if I could get in school at the beginning of the second semester, because it is very difficult for me to attend school at *Park Rapids, Minn.* because I am the only Indian boy there and all the kids look down on me, probably you would understand better if I were to tell you all.[47]

For a variety of sound reasons, students like Melvin often chose to attend off-reservation Indian schools. The small towns of northern Wisconsin and Minnesota have an unfortunate history of discrimination against Indians.[48] When students felt unwelcome in nearby public institutions due to racism against Indians, government boarding schools offered a less threatening environment. Rural students had many serious issues to consider when deciding on a school, including their own proximity to public school facilities or the inability of some local schools to offer the upper grades.

Sometimes children were attracted to boarding schools when siblings or cousins were already students. At times boarding school students actively recruited new pupils when they came home for summer vacation. In August 1921, before the start of a new term, a young Lakota boy from Greenwood, South Dakota, wrote to his superintendent wondering if "you want a boy to school that is in third grade and another boy in second grade. If so let me know before Sept . . . both of these boys are 8 . . . years of age."[49]

A few students, such as George White Bull, carefully considered their educational options before deciding on a particular school. In 1913, the young boy from Porcupine, South Dakota, wrote to ask to be enrolled at Flandreau, after attending Ogalalla boarding school for four years but saying he no longer got "much out of it."

> I am going to write to you and asked you how I can come to school and so wish you would give me the proportion to come I play in band for two or three years and I'm just in fifth grade and I am very glad to learned little more if I can I have looked over all the non-reservation schools but I dont think I can go any wheres but to come over to your Flandreau Indian School as I thought this School will give me a little more education so that I can make an honest living when I get out. I know several Indian boys from here that had been there before and as they tell me about how the School is over there and so I thought I will get my learning from you Well Sir I wish you would kindly send me some blanks so that I can fill them up The very first thing I want to do when I get over there is to join the band.[50]

It was very common for siblings, cousins, or friends to attend the same boarding school, which alleviated some of the isolation most students encountered at off-reservation schools. In 1913, Simon Antelope of Greenwood, South Dakota, enrolled his fourteen-year-old son at Flandreau as well as a neighbor's son who "talks English and reads it." Mr. Antelope commented that the boys were "both full Indian but are used to work on farm." In a similar request made in June 1914, a North Dakota father sent the ten-dollar fare for the summer return of

his son Waldo and asked to send another boy back with him in the fall who was "a little younger than him but smart and talk good English."[51]

Some children, especially those with a poor family life, grew tired of their situation on the reservation and asked to be sent away to school. Josephine, a teenager from Wisconsin, was reportedly "anxious to go to school away from the reservation" and felt that the "classical courses offered at the local parochial school" did not "benefit" her, and "wanted to begin high school work with a vocation in mind." Josephine's family was poor and received support from their agency.[52]

The complexity of Native American life and the multitude of problems Indians encountered throughout the boarding school era are all too obvious from the letters received at Flandreau and Haskell. In many cases, it is apparent that boarding schools created problems for Indians, but clearly in other instances the institutions provided a solution, however temporary, to some of their most crucial dilemmas. Americans Indians at times resented boarding schools, and rightly so, but they also found them useful. In times of family crisis or economic hardship, Indians could turn to boarding schools for help. Ojibwes and members of other tribes found a place for these institutions after the era of forced assimilation had passed.

Throughout the boarding school era, Indian parents and students hoped education would provide them with the skills to earn a living in order to cope with reservation conditions. After reservations were reduced in size or allotted, the most frequent result was poverty for Indians. When families could not earn an adequate living on the reservation or in the city, they often enrolled children in boarding schools as a temporary or long-term solution to some of their most pressing problems. Parents expected that in boarding school basic needs would be met in the form of food, clothing, a rudimentary education, and the opportunity to learn a trade. Even modest expectations on the part of parents were sometimes disappointed.

Reservation life proved to be a constant struggle for American Indians in the early twentieth century. Disease and poor health care combined to take the lives of many Indians at a young age. The high death rates reached a crisis point in many Indian communities. Traditional methods of absorbing needy individuals into the larger kinship network were not always possible as early death and increased poverty overwhelmed Ojibwe family life. In many instances Indian parents died young, and children were left without caretakers. Boarding schools often took in needy and orphaned children.

Ojibwe communities were situated in remote regions of the northern states. School facilities, especially high schools that were designed to serve the non-

Indian community, were seldom conveniently located for Ojibwe students. During the notoriously harsh winters in these regions, it was nearly impossible to expect children to attend schools miles from home on a regular basis. Again, Indian students and their families had few alternatives other than education in a residential school.

Ojibwe students sometimes chose education in a government boarding school because of the familiarity and security of an all-Indian environment. Ojibwes from northern Wisconsin and Minnesota often complained of the discrimination they experienced in local white communities. There is little doubt that government boarding schools, although often antagonistic toward tribal cultures in many ways, also provided a friendly environment because of the intertribal composition of the student body.[53] The decision to enter a government boarding school could be made by a reservation official, a struggling parent or guardian, or a personally motivated student. But, once reached, the boarding school path was frequently rocky, and there were few signs of an easy passage for beginners.