University of Wisconsin- Eau Claire

Providing a Home Away from Home:
The Winnebago Indian Boarding School

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CONTENTS:

ILLISTRATIONS:

Figure

ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses how the experiences of students at the Winnebago Indian Boarding School, located in Neillsville, Wisconsin, compared to other Native American children at Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools. Based out of the Ho-Chunk mission founded in Black River Falls, Wisconsin, the boarding school was supported by the Reformed Church of Wisconsin. Benjamin Stucki, the son of Ho-Chunk missionary Jacob Stucki, took on the responsibility of operating the school in 1919. Stucki's dedication and devotion to the Ho-Chunk children marked an important difference in how his boarding school operated compared to other BIA schools with many of the dangerous circumstances that surrounded BIA schools not found at the Winnebago Indian Boarding school. Mr. Ben's lifetime goal became to provide his students with an education and an understanding of the Christian faith.

Introduction to Native American Education:

Life for the Ho-Chunk tribe in the beginning of the twentieth century had few promising prospects for the future. Upon the tribes return from a reservation in Nebraska, the Ho-Chunk could no longer legally claim any land within the state of Wisconsin. Without tribal recognition, the federal government no longer offered aid to the Wisconsin Ho-Chunk. These dire circumstances brought missionaries from the Reformed Church of Wisconsin to the Black River Falls area to establish a mission to bring needed aid to the Ho-Chunk tribe. An important element of their goal became preparing the next generation to succeed in the predominantly white world. Almost as quickly as the preacher established a church, so too did a primary school became available for a small contingent of children in a convert house on the mission grounds. The needs for education at Black River Falls grew at such a rate that it became apparent to mission leaders a separate facility would have to be constructed. The Winnebago Indian Boarding School located outside of Neillsville, Wisconsin and was in operation for over thirty years under a dedicated administration and staff. To better understand the atmosphere at the Winnebago boarding school, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of the evolution of Native American education. The Winnebago Indian boarding school when compared to Institutions run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs shared a number of similarities and differences in their approach to a variety of educational issues, such as; funding, curriculum, religion, health, and discipline. Although BIA schools and the mission boarding school shared similarities; a significant difference in how the Winnebago Boarding School operated was the leadership and dedication of Superintendent Ben Stucki and his devoted staff. His influence defined the experience had by the children who attended the school. Throughout the history of the school, Mr. Ben and his fellow teachers stayed

committed to their mission of bringing education to the Ho-Chunk tribe along with an understanding of Christianity.

It is not unusual that the Winnebago Indian boarding school had its foundation in a church mission, with its Superintendent an ordained minister. Religious organizations provided the first influences of European education to Native American tribes. With a combination of education and Christianization, both priests and pastors melded academic education with their message of religion and piety. The churches handled much of the responsibility for educating Native Americans until the nineteenth century. Beginning in 1819, the federal government began to slowly gain control over Native American education when it created the Civilization Fund, which provided federal subsidies to Christian schools educating Native Americans. The government's hands-off assistance continued until the close of the century. The turmoil inflicted by the Civil War forced many American Indian schools to close down during the 1860s, when they did not receive the necessary funds from the fractured federal government. Once the country rebounded from the effects of the war, the federal government focused on forming a federal system of education for Indian children with the goal of blending young Native Americans into dominant American culture.

A prominent federal policy to effect Native American education in the late nineteenth century was the Dawes Act of 1887. Established to help Native Americans transform into yeoman farmers, the act divided the reservation into individual allotments of land. The ultimate goal of the policy was to press Europeans values of individualism and the importance of private property onto Native Americans who were use to communal living.[1] Henry Dawes lobbied the bill as a system to bring Indians emancipation from the federal government. He considered

[1] John Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 81.

himself a friend of the Indian and believed that farming provided the logical answer to the troubles faced by Native Americans. Lawmakers believed that by pushing Native Americans into agriculture they provided "the only escape open to these people from the dire alternative of impending extirpation."[2] The Act allotted 160 acres to each head of the family, with sons receiving land when they reached a certain age, and 80 acres to a single person.[3] Policy makers initiated the Dawes Act for three specific reasons; to break up tribal life, to enable Indians to receive the benefits of civilization, and to protect their remaining landholdings.[4] Education became a component of the conversion process to force Indians to conform to American mainstream ideology and accept the ideology supported by the Act. Francis Prucha's, *The Great Fathers*, analyzed the legislative history of federal Indian policies through discussing both the reasoning of the lawmakers' actions and the impact the policies had on Indian tribes. Prucha argues, "There was a fundamental agreement that neither homesteads nor legal citizenship would benefit the Indians if they were not properly educated to appreciate the responsibilities as well as the benefits of both." [5] Policy makers believed that Indian boarding schools provided the best option to "help" Native Americans understand their new role in society.

Applying the key concepts of assimilation, Captain Henry Pratt opened the first federal Indian boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The primary goal was to instruct Indian children on how to survive and flourish in white society. He fervently believed that complete immersion in white society would teach the Native Americans how to live Christian, productive

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[2] Francis Prucha, *The Great Father*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1986), 227.

[3] Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education,* 81.

[4] Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education,* 82.

[5] Francis Prucha, *The Great Fathers,* 232.

lives as well as kill the tribal spirit within the child before it had a chance to mature. In 1895, Pratt publicly proclaimed the objective of boarding schools was to, "Kill the Indian, Save the man."[6] Ward Churchill analysis the impact of boarding schools, in his book titled, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, as a genocidal institution. He found that Pratt and his processors reflected the philosophy, "to be discernibly was to be other than human; to be human, one could not be discernibly Indian." [7] To the people responsible for constructing boarding school philosophy, the Native Americans held no place in society and the only way to ensure their survival as people was to stripe away their tribal heritage. Pratt looked to new European immigrants as a model for assimilating Native American tribes.[8] The Captain saw the immigrants successful integration as proof that true assimilation could be achieved. The standard set by the Dawes Act continued to direct Indian policies into the early part of the twentieth century until the publication of a controversial report helped to bring attention to several dangerous conditions found at BIA boarding schools.

Assimilation into white society remained the goal for non-reservation boarding schools until the publication of the Meriam report in 1928. John Collier, the commissioner of Indian affairs under President Franklin Roosevelt, looked at the Meriam report as a sign of failure of the current Indian policy of allotment and assimilation. Collier promoted a piece of legislation known as the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, designed to reverse the perceived negative effects of the Dawes Act.[9] The federal report made it blatantly obvious that Native American children lacked the necessary knowledge to succeed in either the white world or their native

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[6] Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2004), 14.

[7] Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save the Man*, 14.

[8] Richard Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

[9] Francis Prucha, *The Great Father,* 321.

society. The federal government reluctantly conceded that tribal participation ensured greater success of educational programs directed at their youth. Reservation schools became more numerous while boarding schools slowly disappeared and assimilation receded little by little from the forefront of education. Indian parents, encouraged by Collier's recommendations, enrolled their children in the public school systems in unprecedented numbers during the early half of the twentieth century. The movement into the public school system displayed another strategy of Collier's that allowed Indian children to become part of white society without being removed from their own heritage.[10] The Johnson-O'Malley Act, passed in 1934, made available extra funding to states that provided, "the education, medical attention, agricultural assistance, and social welfare including relief of distress, of Indians."[11] Not everyone within Collier's administration agreed with public school enrollment for Indian children. Willard Beatty, the administrator of Indian education under Collier, began to have doubts about the value of any perceived benefits that Native American children received in public rural schools. He believed, "That there is nothing in the administration and curriculum of the average rural school that is better for children than what is offered by a Federal school."[12] The constant change in the Indian policies played a large part in determining what skills Native American children were taught and the opportunities they could expect after graduation. The Winnebago Indian boarding school also dealt with the debate of where the children's best interests were served. The school started as an answer to a need, but Mr. Ben always hoped the future would see the Ho-Chunk families united and prospering, which could only be achieved by providing the youth with an education to overcome poverty and disadvantages that they otherwise had few avenues to escape from.

[10] Francis Prucha, *The Great Father,* 329.

[11] Francis Prucha, *The Great Father*, 319.

[12] Francis Prucha, *The Great Father,* 330.

The Winnebago Boarding School:

The Winnebago Indian tribe once claimed over ten million acres of Wisconsin soil, until the white population continued to grow in the Wisconsin territory and conflicts over the land arose between the two groups. [13] In 1837, under pressure from the government, the Wisconsin Ho-Chunks ceded the remaining land they owned in the state. For the next thirty-four years, the tribe moved across the Midwest as the Federal government settled them further and further west. The tribe's final relocation placed them in Nebraska, however many Ho-Chunks returned to Wisconsin soon after they arrived in the new territory. In 1875, the federal government passed legislation that allowed the members of the Ho-Chunk tribe to legally live in Wisconsin and granted them citizenship.[14] After the tribe received the right to establish a settlement in western Wisconsin, they official changed their name to the Ho-Chunk Nation.

In the late nineteenth century, members of the Reformed Church of Wisconsin felt it their Christian duty to extend a benevolent hand to people that had lost nearly everything. Reverend Jacob Hauser arrived in the Black River Falls area in 1875 and quickly began a mission to spread his religious message to the Ho-Chunk nation. By 1878, the Reverend and his wife opened a small school at the mission with an original enrollment of ten pupils.[15] From this small gathering of Ho-Chunk youth grew a boarding school that would eventually educate over one hundred students in a year. The Winnebago chief, Blackhawk, approached Rev. Hauser and passionately proclaimed, "We love our children. It will make us glad to see them well taught. We are glad

[13] Throughout the rest of the paper, the Winnebago name will only be used in the title of the school, the tribe will be referred to as the Ho-Chunks

[14] Jason Tetzloff, "Diminishing Winnebago estate in Wisconsin: from white contact to removal" (Masters Diss., University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire), 95.

[15] "Winnebago Mission Highlights Pamphlet", Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

you have come."[16] After receiving the blessing from the tribal leader, the school grew each year, which prompted the Reverend to request another minister to assist at the mission. Rev. Hauser asked a young preacher named Jacob Stucki to join him in his holy quest of convincing the tribe to join their settlement, and ultimately convert them to Christianity. The Stucki family did indeed moved to Black River Falls, and with their added assistance the school grew to forty students along with a mission that continuously added new members. With such a growth in size the issue of space presented a problem that needed a quick solution. Rev. Stucki asked his son Benjamin to come back to the mission and take on the responsibility of caring for the Ho-Chunk children.

Figure 1: Reverend Benjamin Stucki in 1946. Produced by Arthur Casselman, *The Winnebago Finds a Friend, (*Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1932), v.

"A True Friend to the Winnebago"—Rev. Benjamin Stucki, Superintendent Winnebago Indian Mission

[16] "Winnebago Mission Highlight Pamphlet," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Growing up in a missionary family devoted to bringing Christianity to the Ho-Chunk tribe, Benjamin Stucki did not hesitant when called back to fulfill a need. Being raised within the tribe Stucki felt he had an intimate knowledge of the people, and a practical and fluent use of their language. He readily expressed his feeling for the tribe with the statement, "I have spent my whole life with them and for them, I have always been their true friend."[17] Stucki's devotion never faltered even with the interruption of WWI that took him far from home. Throughout WWI, Stucki served as an ambulance driver and stretcher bearer were he cared for a seemingly endless amount of wounded soldiers. After the War, Stucki returned to America to attend Medical school at the University of California, though he did not complete his training. Instead he returned back to Black River Falls, with his own family, to assume the duty of being a fulltime missionary and educator.

In 1917, the Woman's Missionary Society of General Synod gifted the mission with a donation to build a boarding school in the nearby small community of Neillsville. Rev. Ben Stucki soon began to oversee the construction of the school and assumed responsibility for its administration. Operational at its new location in 1921, the school provided primary education for the Winnebago tribe until 1957, at that time it became a child care facility supervised by the state of Wisconsin. The school always contained a large population of Ho-Chunk children but did have a small number of children from other Wisconsin tribes including; Oneida, Chippewa, Potawatomie, and mixed.[18] Students traveled from as far away as Nebraska to attend the school which was supported by the subcommittee of the Board of National Missions as a special project

[17] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1932), 89. Interview with Benjamin Stucki

[18] "Report to the Mission board," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3 Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

within the Reformed Church of Wisconsin.[19] Arthur Casselman, a member of the Board of National Missions arrived in 1943 to document experience of the both the children and the administration. Though written with an obvious bias towards his religious affiliation and reflecting a prejudice of the times, Casselman's analysis and observations provide valuable material on the school. Casselman reiterated that for Rev. Benjamin Stucki, the school's mission promised to bring the word of God and education to the impoverished youth of the Ho-Chunks.[20] Congregations of the Reform Church Synod supplied Mr. Ben with financial support in the hopes it would fulfill the poverty stricken needs of the Ho-Chunk youth that attended his boarding school.

[19] "Winnebago Mission Highlight Pamphlet," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

[20] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1932), 151.

Faith in Funding

When looking for funding for his educational endeavor, Mr. Ben did not have the same resources available to him as utilized by BIA schools, which became both a challenge and a blessing. Federal boarding schools depended not upon Christian charity but on the budget of the United States government for the majority of their expenses. Funding for a school correlated with the enrollment numbers of the institution. Historian Brenda Child argues in *Boarding School Seasons*, "additional students meant a much-welcomed budget increase for salaries and schools, since funding was measured on a per capita-basis."[21] Child's analysis focused on how the need for more children often caused over-crowding in many of the boarding institutes, resulting in the spread of illness through the student population. Children's well-being did not receive top priority when looking at the dangers they faced at schools not capable of handling their over-capacity student body. Children's diets especially suffered with a meager average for food allowance in government schools to be 11 cents per student.[22] These left children grossly depraved of needed nutrients and caused many to have malnutrition health concerns. Mr. Ben's reliance on private funding did not ensure that his students never fell ill, but for the children at Winnebago Boarding school overcrowding and inadequate meals rarely presented a problem. With a budget supplied not by federal guidelines, but on people's generous donations, the Winnebago school did not share the experience of other boarding schools.

Mr. Ben worked tirelessly as the Superintendent to ensure his school and students received enough financial support to sustain their needs. For example, he wrote a compelling

[21] Brenda Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families, 1900-1940.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), xiii.

[22] Brenda Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families.* 32.

letter in October 1921, to a variety of congregations lobbying for the numerous items that the children lacked when they arrived at the school. "The work is yours," he passionately argued, "the responsibility for seeing it carried out is yours also. Will you and your friends, for Jesus' sake, not grasp the opportunity, lend us your financial and material aid, and pray God in all earnestness, that He may establish His kingdom even among this people?"[23] Through efforts such as this, Mr. Ben made it clear that the care of the Ho-chunk children fell to all Christian people as a service to God and His message. Whether compelled by a Christian responsibility to help those less fortunate, or as a desire to expose the tribe to God's word, members of the Reform Church from across the nation gave to the school throughout its existence.

Support from outside sources remained critical to the school's operations due to the poverty that many of the tribal members suffered. A majority of the children arrived at school with just the worn and ragged clothes on their back. Free tuition and the promise of basic necessities increased enrollment since many parents lacked the ability to pay for clothing and other educational expenses. Mr. Ben composed a wish list of the standard articles that the children needed in 1921 items included; nightgowns, sweaters, stockings, and flannel bloomers for the girls and numerous pairs of trousers, suspenders, suits, and knickerbockers for the boys. [24] The response was remarkable as donations from church members flooded the school throughout the year. For every article of clothing that the children wore out a replacement could be found. By 1953 the school urged families to contribute funds for clothing, shoes, dental care, and the occasional medical emergency. Unfortunately hard times continued to affect many members of

[23] "Congregation letter, October 1921," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

[24] "List of Articles needed for our Winnebago Indian Mission School," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

the tribe and parents could only afford to give $1,000 dollars in total for their children's education out of the estimated expense of 66,000.[25] Though the Mission school strived to never turn a child away at times the funding and space could not keep in step with the ongoing needs of the Ho-Chunk children. Mr. Ben used his ability to raise funds, with a special skill of soliciting congregations, to ensure that the children who attended his school received all that they needed.

The Staff at the school relied upon the generous monetary donations of dedicated people to maintain the physical needs of the school. A brochure for the school claimed, "Our many fine benevolent institutions have been able, over the years, to build up a loyal constituency, which, through church organizations, Syndical grants, and personal gifts, maintain and develops these works of charity."[26] Written in 1953, the brochure affirms the school's dependency on both the church and its charitable donors. With the Church's considerable donations and the help of private donors, the Winnebago Indian School boasted an impressive building that managed to meet the needs of thousands of Ho-Chunk children throughout the years.

[25] "Financial Report 1953," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

[26] "Winnebago Mission Highlight Pamphlet," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Building a Dream

Figure 2: Winnebago Indian School 1942. Produced by Arthur Casselman, *The Winnebago Finds a Friend,* (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1932), 133.

The Indian School from the old stone steps.

As discussed in the early chapter, steady reliable funding for BIA schools remained a prevalent problem for Superintendents especially felt during the construction and maintenance of their institution. BIA schools and the Winnebago school shared similar features with their campuses consisting of a school, dormitory, industrial building, and often times a farm. The BIA school in Tomah, which also hosted a large population of Ho-Chunk children, housed four dormitories, a hospital, power plant, main building, 340-acre farm, gymnasium, outer-buildings,

and several classrooms.[27] The size of the Tomah Industrial School, and its ability to maintain funding, reflected its significant position in Native American education for Wisconsin tribes which lacked other close location to send tribal children. Unfortunately for many BIA schools the buildings preexisting on school locations or constructed specifically for the students use failed to meet their basic needs. Historian Brenda Child found that in many schools children were kept in unfinished buildings or forced to inhabit unsafe facilities. The issue of overcrowding also affected the safety of children when they were made to share rooms that lacked the proper exits in cases of emergency, most commonly attics.[28] Although the dormitories at the Winnebago Indian School were found on the third floor, the buildings did not contain the same physical threats present at BIA boarding schools.

Surrounded by hills and farm land and nestled against the Black River, the Winnebago Indian boarding school's physical landscaping provided a tranquil setting for its numerous students. Mr. Ben moved the school to the Neillsville location in 1921 when the makeshift school at the mission became overcrowded. Mr. Ben was completely involved in the planning and designing of the building, and actually served as the building contractor because of the cost of hiring a professional.[29] In 1928 another large donation from the Woman's Missionary Society of the former Reformed Church allowed the Stuckis to enlarge the school, making space for many children they had previously turned away.[30] The addition to the main building, the location had several supporting structures which included; three dwellings for staff, barn, and

[27] Mary Burke. *Workhouse of Acculturation: Tomah Indian Industrial School* (Master's thesis: University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 1993), 16.

[28] Brenda Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families.* 29.

[29] "Ben Stucki; A Memorial," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

[30] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago*, 134.

supportive outhouses, which created a nurturing environment that allowed the Ho-Chunk children to learn and grow.

Central and dominating, in both the children's lives and on the property, the main building consisted of three floors divided into sections based on their purposes. The boys occupied the ground floor with a large playroom and lavatory that opened onto the yard. Strategically placed, these rooms provided the matron with the necessary facilities to undertake the daunting task to rid the boys of the grime and dirt from the outdoors before they dispersed it throughout the building.[31] Canned vegetables and fruits, along with the boilers occupied the remaining rooms which were considered part of the "old building." With the new addition the school added rooms for provisions, a bakery, tool room and workshop, along with a massive laundry. At the opposite end of the ground floor, the girl's playroom looked vastly different than the boy's, with toys and activities available to capture little girls' attention.[32] The ground floor reflected the practical need of housing a hundred children with its playrooms and access to the outdoors, the first floor had a more studious atmosphere.

[31] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 136.

[32].Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* , 137.

Figure 3: Children play in classroom at the Winnebago Indian School Neillsville, Wisconsin. Wisconsin Historical Society Image ID# 35258. Reproduced with permission of the Wisconsin Historical Society

Distinctively more academic in nature, the first floor contained the primary and intermediate classrooms in the older portion of the building. Although located in separate rooms, the classes would join each other on many occasions for lessons in writing and grammar.[33] A large room next door to the classrooms contained the dining area and large kitchen, which at meal times could be seen with long tables filled with hungry children at every spot. Administrative offices, a reception hall, and an office work room took up a portion of the new addition in the center of the school. Beyond the offices stood the library, painstakingly assembled by Mr. Ben throughout the years to make valuable sources available for the students. Mr. Ben took special interest with the medical dispensary, with his own extensive medical background, which hosted an array of medicines and medical equipment and even a modern medical hospital washstand. [34] The rest of the floor contained a large schoolroom used for older

[33] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago,* 1 38.

[34] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* , 139.

students, along with study hall and chapel services. The children spent a great deal of time in this portion of the building, but many felt the third floor to be their own special space.

The top floor contained the "homes" of the children for the school year. The boy's dormitories and washrooms again occupied the older portion of the building, with their matron close by to monitor their activity. Another house matron for the children lived between the girls room to be close at hand in case of an emergency during the night. The isolation ward, with two sick wards, a bathroom, a lavatory, a screened porch, and a nurse's room took up the end of the building in effort to control the spread of illness. In front of the isolation ward the rooms for the older girl were located. These were special rooms that only held four to six girls per room, and the young women had the opportunity to decorate their space and add their own personal touches.[35] The last room, large in size, contained a sort of department store for the school. Donations from various congregations included; children's clothes, toys, or even school supplies that filled the room and provided the school children with materials to fit their every need. George Stacy, a former student of the school, recalled that the clothes brought in and distributed from this room were affectionately known as "Stucki Clothes."[36] The presence of the donations reinforced the strong bond that the school shared with Reform church congregations and with religion. Religion became part of everyday life for the students at the boarding school, which Mr. Ben hoped would eventually lead the children to accept Christianity.

[35] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 141.

[36] George Stacy, former student of school, interview with author, tape recording, 29, September 2007.

Religion: Protestant and Perfect

Christianity meant more than an ideology of faith to the educator; it represented a productive work ethic and the key component to American society. Michael Coleman theorized that secular and missionary educators believed democratic values of the nation needed to be attached to a protestant form of Christianity to truly integrate Indian tribes into society.[37] The concept of the division of church and state did not exist in Native American education. David Wallace Adams defined how Christian religions would be used to change Native American children. "Indian children needed to be taught the moral ideals of charity, chastity, monogamy, respect for the Sabbath, temperance, honesty, self-sacrifice, the importance of pure thoughts and speech."[38] Instructors believed that Christianity allowed Native American children to adopt these qualities in place of their Native heritage. Staff members at the Winnebago boarding school also viewed religion as a vital element to the emotional and spiritual health of their students, with the hope to distance them from their "heathen" culture.

In a detailed report sent to the office of Indian Affairs in 1944, the objectives of the Winnebago Mission School defined the role religion played in the students' lives. Mr. Ben explained that, "Children are taught fundamentals of Christian religion so as to have a basis of individual judgment for eventual decision."[39] As with the federal boarding schools, Mr. Ben hoped to prepare his students for mainstream culture by providing them with a base of a belief in

[37] Michael Coleman. *American Indian Children at School, !850-1930,* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), 106.

[38] David Wallace Adams. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School,* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansans, 1995), 27.

[39] "Report to Indian Affairs, 1944," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

the Protestant God. Although the appearance of freedom of choice for the students could be felt through this statement, religious practices and ceremonies occurred daily. Casselman noted that, "At every meal all stand quietly for a prayer in unison, and when the meal is finished all rise and sing a song of thanksgiving." Students also began their school days with a devotion and concluded with vespers lead by the ordained Superintendent.[40] Sunday mornings opened with a chapel service held at the school for all the children. Mr. Ben used the Ho-Chunk language to conduct the ceremony, marking the only time that the children would hear their language from authority figures at the school.[41] In response to the heavy presence that religion had in the school, it seemed unlikely that children felt they had the right to forsake the message told to them again and again.

Though Mr. Ben wanted to promote an open atmosphere so that the children would not feel pressured to conform to Christianity, but the continuous religious ceremonies and activities undoubtedly alienated some students. Reuben Snake, a former student, reflected on his experience with religion at the mission school in his autobiography, *Your humble Serpent: Indian Visionary and Activist*. Snake's frustration and resentment concerning the religious element of his education are conveyed through his passionate words. Snake described the over-all atmosphere of the schools as "puritanical," where children could only have fun in a Christian way. Children used to the freedom of their home life found themselves in a lifestyle far more structured that contained a different set of priorities. Snake recalled the importance of religious rituals throughout his schooling. "We learned all those hymns. We had to memorize all of them

[40] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 163.

[41] George Stacy, former students, interview with author, tape recording, 29, September 2007.

and were coached on how to sing them properly."[42] For the staff of the school, even little issues, such as words to a song, had great importance when it concerned their students unsure faith.

The lasting effect that religious training had on the children did not always meet the expectations of Mr. Ben and his staff. George Stacy observed that, "Some of them once they got through school, they went back to whatever their dad or parents were brought up as. It was recently Peyote religion right around the turn of the century from Nebraska."[43] Stacy's own home environment differed some from many of his fellow students in that he had a strong foundation in Christianity before arriving at the school. George's grandfather, John Stacy and his wife became the first converts at the Winnebago Mission years earlier. As religion slowly spread at the mission, Mr. Ben's conviction to bring religion to the Ho-Chunk children grew stronger. Constantly focused on his students' spirituality, Mr. Ben placed great emphasis on the Christmas season.

[42] Reuben Snake. *Your Humble Serpent: Indian Visionary and Activist* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1996), 49.

[43] George Stacy, interview with author, tape recording,, 29, September 2007.

Celebrating the Season:

A special time for Mr. Ben and his students at the Winnebago Indian Boarding school occurred with the preparation and production of the Christmas season. Mr. Ben looked at the holiday as an opportunity to promote a positive Christian experience for the children and their families. The celebration for the children centered on performing a nativity program, and making simple gifts for their families. Mr. Ben also wanted the school to reflect a traditional Christmas spirit. In a news letter sent to their supportive mission groups, teacher Cilla Kippenhan described the festive scene at the school. "Everywhere and almost all time halls and playrooms from the basement up to the third floor resounded with Christmas carols. What charming memories these Indian children will carry with them all their life of Christmas at the Indian school."[44] Kippenhan taught at the school for the majority of years it was operational and held the positions of both principal and matron. Kippenhan, along with the other staff, supported the festivities at the school by helping with the production of the Christmas pageant that the Children preformed at the end of the season.

The highly impressive Christmas pageant held by Mr. Ben's students earned recognition even within the Neillsville community. A reporter submitted a glowing article to the *Neillsville Press*, after he witnessed the performance.

> "The poise, confidence and enthusiasm displayed by the Indian children delighted the audience. There is no question that these children are endowed with much musical and dramatic talent; they have beautiful voices and their poses and gestures displayed fine emotional natures. It was apparent, of course, that their native talent had received the best training, and this reflects great credit on Superintendent Stucki, and other members of the school faculty." [45]

[44] "Indian Mission News 1944," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

[45] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago,* 134.

The particular pageant described occurred at the Opera house in the town of Neillsville. Because of the events location, the program had a higher attendance of townspeople then what would be considered normal for the program. For many this provided the first opportunity for community members to develop on opinion of the students based on their talent, rather than the brief encounters that occurred with the students trips into town. Mr. Ben received a great deal of the credit for the work of converting "native talent" to an elaborate display of Christian fellowship. For the townspeople the image of the Native American children seemingly embracing the holiday of Christmas symbolized the success of Mr. Ben's mission. But, as discussed in the religion section children often participated in the school's Christian events while maintaining their belief in their family's religion. For the majority of the years the pageant took place in the large classroom on the second floor. Here the audience consisted mainly of staff members and the children's family members from around the area. George Stacey's family had the ability to attend the show because his father owned a reliable car. Not all of the students' families could witness their children's performance because they lacked means of transportation.[46] Although the pageant may have been hard work for students their efforts were rewarded when the staff handed out Christmas presents for everyone.

A significant contribution of Mr. Ben's to the school involved his success at gathering donations for his students. This hard work became most apparent during the process of handing out gifts to the children. Each child would receive one gift from the mercantile styled storeroom found in the school. Throughout the year donations from churches and other community groups poured into the school, Mr. Ben and his staff now had the opportunity to pass out the gifts of charity to the children. With numerous students coming from homes that struggled to survive,

[46] George Stacy, interview with author, tape recording, 29, September 2007.

parent's incomes did not allow for extra expenses such as toys. For these children the presents they received would be the only ones that Christmas. The giving attitude of the school could also be found in the contributions made by the students themselves that wanted to make the holiday happier for people that needed extra care.

A special part of the Christmas celebration involved the children making "White gifts" for other children in need. The production of these presents came from class work or activities. The girls usually contributed to the gift collection, handkerchiefs, towels, and aprons; while the boys contributed dresser scarves, handkerchiefs, and hand-crafted match holders. The younger children made candy boxes in their art classes and then filled them with hand-made candy.[47] All of this work from students that came from impoverished circumstances themselves demonstrates the giving spirit of the children. The gifts came from different vocational classes that the children attended in addition to their academic courses.

[47] "Indian Mission News, 1944," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Curriculum: Writing and Working

Both BIA and mission schools advocated, well into the twentieth century, that education for Native American children served as the most important means of assimilation into white society. The curriculum provided in Indian Schools focused on practicality and necessity and aimed ultimately to have Indian youth embrace mainstream American values. Not until the Meriam report, published in 1928, did criticism arise concerning the fact that only one uniform curriculum existed throughout Bureau of Indian Affair schools and that much of the information stressed white cultural values.[48] Uniformity and the domination of Euro American cultural values played a large role in the difficulty that many students encountered at their institutions. Historian Michael Coleman described in his book, *American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930,* how little policy-makers believed in the scholarly ability of Indian students. The curriculum introduced in 1901 was based in the assumption that Native American children should not have intensive academic studies but instead should be trained in fields of agricultural and other manual work.[49] With the allotment of reservation lands in 1887, came the belief that the future of Native Americans belonged in agriculture or manual labor. The practice of incorporating both tracks of education at schools became known as half-and-half curriculum. The practice of splitting the children's time between academic studies and training in fields for their future jobs could be found at all school to some extent. Vocational classes and instruction represented a major portion of schooling that Indian children received while in school.

[48] Margaret Szasz. *Education and the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1977), 23.

[49] Michael Coleman. *American Indian Children at School,* 46.

The aim of education shifted in 1901to heavily favor vocational training, with the appointment of Estelle Reel as Superintendent of Indian Schools. Reel believed, "Indian children had no need for high academic training they neither understood nor would use."[50] Farming and manual trades that would offer a future occupation for students became the focus. Students needed knowledge of, "crops best suited to the soil, climate, and locality" on their reservation to prepare them to be future farmers, or to be hired on as an agricultural worker, and to return to the land allotted them under the 1887 General Allotment Act. Vocational training for boys also extended to other manual trades. At the Tomah Indian Industrial School, males learned to farm, become blacksmiths, dairymen, and carpenters.[51] Bigger institutions, such as; Phoenix Industrial School, Haskell located in Kansas, and Chilocco founded in Oklahoma, provided the opportunity for students to transfer there to earn a vocational degree in carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring, shoemaking, harness making, printing, and working in a bakery.[52] Instructors believed that training in these fields opened doors for students beyond the reservation, and compensated for their lack of academic knowledge. Consequently, without the necessary academic skills required, such as reading and writing, the Non-Indian workforce failed to offer job opportunities for the majority of graduated students. Young Native American women also engaged in a specific study shaped to help women find jobs in the domestic field.

Native American women received education that, as with the men, prepared them to enter into employment positions or to one day be efficient at managing their own home. For many Indian girls, the jobs that awaited them would be found as domestic workers. Young female

[50] Mary Burke. *Workhouse of Acculturation: Tomah Industrial School,* 23.

[51] Mary Burke. *Workhouse of Acculturation: Tomah Indian Industrial School,* 26.

[52] Richard Trennert, *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988) 2.

students at the Tomah School learned to bake, sew, cook, launder, and master basic domestic practices. At the Phoenix Indian School, young women had the responsibility of completing the daily housekeeping chores. "They made, washed, and ironed their own cloths, cleaned their rooms," Historian Richard Trennert explains, "and prepared and served the food."[53] These activities gave students plenty of practice for their future employment or for running their own homes. Practicality and useful skills motivated the staff at the Winnebago Indian School to invest in a manual training program in addition to their academic studies, with hope that such training would result in gainful employment.

The mission school hosted an active farm that Mr. Ben used to both supplement the school with needed supplies and as a tool to promote agricultural knowledge and skill. In the early 1940's the farm consisted of twelve cows, twenty pigs, and around two hundred chickens.[54] The cows supplied the school with an abundance of butter, milk, and cottage cheese, even with enough surplus milk to be sold for profit. Alongside mastering farming techniques, young men also developed skills in carpentry, care of tools, cement work, barn and silo management, fence construction, simple house-building operations and repair work. Both the farm and the garden relied heavily on students' labor in order to supply the school with necessary products and provided income. Reflecting societal norms, boys training focused on projects and skills needed outside the home, whereas young Indian girls learned the proper techniques used for running a successful household based on the typical duties of housewives. [55]

[53] Richard Trennert. *Phoenix Indian School*. 47

[54] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 144.

[55] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 147.

Domestic Science, taught by the house matrons, centered on how to be the perfect housewife, or how to succeed as a domestic servant. Young ladies spent hours in the sewing and ironing rooms located on the second floor practicing over and over the proper way to wash a shirt, hem pants, or iron at an efficient pace. The matron taught them the practical lessons on how to make their own clothing and other household articles. Part of the girls responsibility became ensuring all the ironing for the school got done. The Bureau of Child Welfare of the State of Wisconsin also became involved in the girls' education with a class focused on infant healthcare. After the female students completed the class they received a state certificate recognizing their achievement.[56] Though given the opportunity to learn skills applicable in the job market, the students failed to receive the same level of academic education that their white peers obtained.

Low expectation and the idea that Native American children would be better served by a manual education rather than the academic education, lead to curriculum that for decades failed to be comparable to white education. Students attending BIA schools would be expected to learn the English language, arithmetic, history, geography, and religion and then to master a trade.[57] The Winnebago Indian School differed from BIA schools by following the Wisconsin State course of study and worked cooperatively with the county school system. Mr. Ben chose to follow state regulations rather than the recommended curriculum set out by the BIA in the hopes of providing a firmer foundation in academic training. Specifically, the children had classes in English, arithmetic, history, and religion, in addition to vocational training. The result of a more demanding academic regiment can be seen in a poem written by a female student at the school in 1944.

[56] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 146.

[57] Michael Coleman. *American Indian Children at School,* 40.

"Sometime, Somewhere:"
You gave on the way a pleasant smile,
And thought no more about it
It cheered a life that had been dark and white,
Which might have been wrecked without it.
And so for that smile and fruitage rare,
You'll reap a crown-sometime, somewhere

You spoke one day a cheering word,
And passed to other duties.
It cheered a hear, new promised stirred,
And painted a life with beauties.
And so for that work of golden cheer,
You'll reap a crown- sometime, somewhere.

You lent a hand to a fallen one,
A life in goodness given.
You saved a soul when help was rare,
And won an honest heart forever.
And so, for that help you proffered there,
Kind friend, you'll reap a joy- sometime, somewhere[58]

The ability of the young girl to construct such a piece, spoke to the understanding she had developed of English. The county superintendent tested the children at the school regarding their academic achievement with standardized tests given at the area public schools.[59] The children at the Winnebago School scored fairly well even though they faced a problem their English speaking counterparts did not have to face: being immersed in a foreign culture.

BIA schools forbade the use of tribal languages early in its existence. Historian Brenda Child looked at the personal accounts of students to understand the impact that the schools had on the perception of their native heritage. "Government schools taught students to be ashamed of their names, their tribal languages, and even family surnames derived from tribal

[58] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago*, 168.

[59] "Mission News Letter 1953," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

languages."[60] The stigma attached to native languages kept children from learning a new language with the assistance of their tribal tongue. Children often "learned" English in a parroting fashion by repeating the sounds produced by their teachers; many students mimicked pronunciation without the knowledge of what the words meant. English became the greatest obstacle that children faced in their academic studies.

Teachers continued to teach only English, and mostly ineffectively, until the Meriam report exposed the schools inability to properly prepare students. Director of Indian Education, Will Carson Ryan, viewed the findings of the report as an opportunity to gain support for bilingual education in boarding schools. Ryan met heavy opposition with his idea for reform. "Those who promoted the mainstream theory for the amalgamation of the Indian into the dominant culture saw no reason to postpone the inevitable by encouraging Native languages."[61] The lack of bilingual books and teachers created a bigger obstacle for Ryan to overcome. Throughout Ryan's administration and into his successor's term the issue of bilingual education remained controversial. A resolution to this issue did not occur until 1965, with the passage of the Bilingual Education Act. BIA schools shifted their position dealing with the enforcement of English, turning to a more compassionate understanding for students that had not been exposed to the language. The Winnebago Indian boarding school did not show this same acceptance as they maintained their policy of English only.

The restriction placed on the use of English at the Winnebago Indian School never weakened during its many years of operation, with the belief that children would learn the language at an accelerated rate if not allowed to speak in their native tongue. Reuben Snake reflected on the emphasis placed on English throughout his stay at the mission school. "We had

[60] Child, Brenda J. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families*, 29.

[61] Margaret Szasz. *Education and the American Indian*, 71.

to speak in English. We couldn't practice any of our cultural activities because they were condemned as pagan, superstitious ritual."[62] Teachers at the school focused primarily on spelling, writing, and pronunciation with children in the beginner classes, and insisted that English be the only language used in any grade. Exposure to English often did not occur for children until enrollment at the school. George Stacy remembered that the majority of his classmates struggled with English, and many did not catch on to lessons very quickly.[63] Teachers used the Bible to communicate their lessons, taking both vocabulary and grammatical structure

Figure 4: Children in the large classroom located on the third floor, also used for chapel services. Produced by Arthur Casselman, *The Winnebago Finds a Friend, (*Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1932), 135.

Upper grades, Indian School.

from the book. The Bible provided a logical choice for instructors to use as a teaching tool because many students had read it first in Ho-Chunk. This provided students with examples of

[62] Reuben Snake, *Your Humble Serpent,* 49.

[63] George Stacy, interview with author, tape recording, 29, September 2007.

writing both in English and Ho-Chunk to utilize for reference points. The four gospels of the New Testament composed the first book translated into their native tongue by John Stacy and Jacob Stucki. Mr. Ben also utilized the Ho-Chunk language during his Sunday morning services. Coleman found that mission schools often broke their strict language policies when, "communicating religious truths"[64] Having to conqueror a significant portion of the English language to earn their diplomas provided to be a hindrance for a majority for students. Children felt frustrated with the demands and restrictions of the boarding schools and many found ways to act out their displeasure, unfortunately the punishment handed down by Mr. Ben or a staff member could be more then what the students bargained for.

[64] Michael Coleman. *American Indian Children at School*, 106.

Discipline: Runaways and Rule-Breakers

The regular occurrence of severe punishments endured by students at BIA schools first became a topic for public discussion with the Meriam report. Discipline in its use and range of severity affected every student at boarding schools. The report made it apparent that a reason for the harsh treatment of students in BIA schools reflected the attitude teachers had toward their jobs and the students. Historian Margaret Szasz stated that, "the highly criticized disciplinary method of the boarding school was directly related to the fact that the Bureau was simply unable to compete with public schools in hiring teachers and staff members."[65] The lack of motivated, dedicated teachers reflected the lack of funding available for Native American educations. Schools filled the staff with whatever person would take the position placing very little importance on the children's well-being. The Winnebago Board School did not reflect this trend with a stable roaster of teachers and staff members that proved to be dedicated to their work and Mr. Ben. Without most years of operation, the Winnebago Boarding school had four teachers, three matrons, a farmer, cook, gardener, and an assistant superintendent.[66] Many of the staff members had once worked at the old mission or had family that did. Steady turnover and poor pay were not the only troubled areas found in the boarding school system

Another problem encountered within the politics of boarding school was discussed by Szasz, who noted that, "teachers and staff members who sympathize with the children were quietly transferred by less sympathetic directors."[67] This ensured that teachers who wanted to

[65] Margaret Szasz. *Education and the American Indian*, 21.

[66] "Report to Mission Board 1953," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

[67] Margaret Szasz. *Education and the American Indian*,21.

have a positive impact where prevented from disrupting the strict system in place. Ultimately the decision on what actions deserved discipline and how severe the punishment came from the director of each institution. The Meriam report tried to restrict the power of this position by forbidding Superintendents from using corporal punishment at the schools. People had begun to realize the damage effect such treatment had on students.

The uses of corporal punishment on children at boarding schools caused traumatic memories for students. Helen Sekaquaptewa's experience with discipline at the Phoenix Industrial School was recorded in the comprehensive historical monograph by Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder titled, *American Indian Education*. Helen recalled, "Corporal punishment was given as a matter of course, whipping with a harness strap was administrated in an up-stair room to the most unruly repeaters [chronic runaways] had their heads shaved and had to wear a dress to school." [68] Improvement in discipline did not occur till after BIA teachers' salaries became competitive with other schools and the Washington offices finally gained control over how discipline was used. The advancement made with the findings of the Meriam report weakened under the 1930 directive made by Commissioner Rhoads. Rhoads believed that restricting severe punishment rendered superintendents useless in some situations. He decided, "That severe punishment would be permitted in 'emergency' situations."[69] Szasz suggested that although the Commissioner had not meant to reinstate dangerous policies, such as flogging, the directive unspecific phrasing left room for disastrous consequence. While the debate in BIA schools over appropriate discipline measures continued for years, the discipline situation at the Winnebago Indian Boarding school remained at the discretion of Mr. Ben and his staff.

[68] John Reyhner and Jeanne Eder. *American Indian Education* , 187.

[69] Margaret Szasz. *Education and the American Indian*, 23.

Mr. Ben's philosophy of discipline reflected both his high expectation of the children, and assumptions made about Native American homes. "Consider the home environment and the lack of moral training these children have had. We can't expect them to become angels over night. Don't worry; they'll change by and by."[70] Mr. Ben gave this advice to staff members when they became discouraged about their progress with the children. As can be seen with the above statement, Mr. Ben was affected by prejudice surrounding Native American students and the up-bringing they received at home. Their family environment, in Mr. Ben's opinion, did not install the proper "moral training" needed for students to become successful adults. Moral training, he believed, should be based in Protestant values and beliefs. With a portion of their students coming from non-Christian households, the focus of discipline reflected a desire to enforce strong Christian morals in each student.

It became the responsibility of teachers and house matrons to enforce the rules established by Mr. Ben. Left to several different interpretations the severity of punishments varied dependent on the enforcer and the action. For Reuben Snake, the teacher's refusal to allow the use of Ho-Chunk language or rituals made the environment of the school, "unpleasant and oppressive." The punishment that Snake and his fellow classmates received when they were caught singing in Ho-Chunk and conducting tribe dances spoke to the seriousness with which the teachers viewed this offense. "The housemother tied me to a stairwell post and beat me with a razor strap."[71] Snake's defiance of the rules against practicing his Indian heritage and his willingness to accept a punishment that was, "standard practice at the school," demonstrates the resilience that children had to maintain their culture. The greatest act of defiance for students was running away from the school back to the life they knew.

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[70] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago,* 155.

[71] Reuben Snake, *Your Humble Serpent,* 50.

When Mr. Ben chose the location for the school, part of the appeal involved the close proximity to the Ho-Chunk mission which had a concentrated population of the Ho-Chunk tribe. For students, the closeness provided an opportunity for escape. Students took advantage of the distance to exercise their dissatisfaction with the school and have their complaints recognized. Both Snake and Stacy recalled or participated in daring escapes. Stacy remembered when he and two other boys took off for home, following the Black River determined to make the 26 mile trek. The boys had made it quite a distance before being spotted by a passing motorcyclist and returned back to school. The boys were punished by being denied supper and free time that day, and for growing boys that seemed the harshest of punishments.[72] Snake recalled that other students caught making their escape received a much harsher punishment. "They'd be hunting them and when they brought them back they used to shave their heads. That was part of the punishment for running away, to be shaved bald-headed."[73] Stacy recollection of types of punishment did not include such severe actions. The difference in experiences the boys had could reflect both the amount of resistance found in the child and their ability to find trouble. With Stacy's family already converted to Christianity and active within the mission, the structure and demands made by the school were more familiar. For numerous students like Snake with a background where he was treated as, "a free spirit on the reservation…then thrust into an environment where everything was controlled," the boarding school became something to rebellion against. [74] With students varying reaction to the rules, Mr. Ben left much of the discretion of punishment to up teachers and house matrons. When the superintendent was not

[72] George Stacy, interview with author, tape recording, 29, September 2007.

[73] Reuben Snake, *Your Humble Serpent,* 50.

[74] Reuben Snake, *Your Humble Serpent,* 51.

busy distributing punishment to the children, he worked tirelessly to ensure that the school stayed as health as possible.

Living Dangerously at Boarding Schools

Contagious diseases and infections plagued Native American boarding schools throughout the country. Students lived in tight quarters that provided a perfect breeding ground for many devastating diseases. Tuberculosis and Trachoma proved to be the greatest dangers at boarding schools. Historian Margaret Szasz discussed the impact that illness had on the children attending boarding schools in her book, *Education and the American Indian.* "Epidemics swept through crowded dormitories and endangered new arrivals. The two illnesses common among Indians at this time-Tuberculosis and trachoma-struck many of the children."[75] Szasz theorized that inadequate diets and over-crowded living conditions prevalent in government boarding schools acted as an incubator for childhood illnesses and caused the rapid spread of these diseases. Scholar Brenda Child looked at the dangerous diseases that plagued the students through the letters of both sick children and their concerned parents. Written from an ethno-history perspective, the book, *Boarding School Seasons,* provided insight into the inner fears of children far from home and weak with illnesses. Child argued, "Disease spread easily in the communal environment of the boarding schools, where students shared not only pencils and books but also soap, towels, washbasins, beds, and even bathwater."[76] Exposure to contagious diseases was a guarantee in such an environment. Children could no more fight off the illnesses assailing their body than the homesickness that assaulted their hearts.

A major hot spot in many schools appeared to have been the bathroom facilities, which enable many different reasons for contamination of the student body. Child found that lack of

[75] Margaret Szasz. *Education and the American Indian,* 20.

[76] Brenda Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families.* 58.

funding in many schools lead to bathrooms being kept in dangerous conditions. Soiled towels, no toilet paper, and toilets that did not work adorned many of the restrooms located in dank, dark basements. The trough style sinks also sported in many of these facilities lead directly to the spread of trachoma, and impetigo as children shared dirty water.[77] Far from a sterile haven, the Winnebago Indian School also dealt with many major medical concerns, though proper hygiene and proper medical care remained a top priority for Mr. Ben.

By the second year of operation at the Neillsville site, Mr. Ben and the staff had an effective medical procedure in place. Early in the academic year a physician from the Department of the Interior's: Indian Field Service arrived at the school to give extensive physicals to every student. The doctor also vaccinated the children and treated skin diseases that students had contracted. In his final report the physician observed, "It is a neat and well conducted little school." In October 1922, the physician found eight cases of trachoma and had to operate on six.[78] Though the school tried to fight against the appearance of trachoma, the commissioner of Indian affairs stated that in 1924, the Winnebago had the highest percentage of trachoma of any tribe in Wisconsin.[79] Federal boarding schools discussed and later implemented a plan to build a separate facility for children suffering from Trachoma with the hope of stopping the rampant disease. Located in Fort Defiance, Arizona, the first boarding school designated for students with trachoma opened in 1927. Segregation of the infected students rarely happened

[77] Brenda Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families.* 38

[78] Jill Sardegna and Dr. T. Otis Paul, *The Encyclopedia of Blindness and Vision Impairment*. (New York: Facts on File, 1991) 224-225. Trachoma is a contagious, bacteria disease and is a leading cause of blindness in the world, especially found in third world countries. The bacteria thrived in overcrowded conditions that lack clean water and poor sewage disposal, sanitation, or proper hygiene practices. In such conditions the disease easily spreads throughout the entire population. Symptoms include pain, oversensitivity to light, and impaired vision. In the beginning of the twentieth century the only treatment was surgery, antibiotics became available in 1937, but not always successful.

[79] "Department of Interior Medical Report," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 5. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

with perfect accuracy and trachoma remained a threat for several decades.[80] In the case of the Winnebago School there was no evidence that students were turned away because of illness. Mr. Ben dealt with the problem by educating people at or involved with the school. In response to the reappearance of diseases after summer vacations the school began a course on hygiene and care. As a reward Mr. Ben purchased motion pictures about hygiene that became a highlight of afternoon entertainment for the children.

Proper hygiene represented only half of the problems faced by young students. Childhood tuberculosis could place a student in isolation for prolonged periods and endanger his or her life. Mr. Ben admitted two students to the tuberculosis sanatorium in the early half of the century from the school. The children remained at the health care facility until they had tested negative numerous times for the infection.

Another illness caused a moment of panic in 1925 when the school cook presented with symptoms resembling diphtheria. Immediately, Mr. Ben wrote the department of Interior's physician, Dr. Culp, and notified the Wisconsin State board of health. Dr. Culp sent strict instruction as to the proper procedure to prevent a devastating epidemic at the school. Culp recommended rigid isolation for the patient and sterilization of everything he or she came into contact with. Next the administration needed to take both nose and throat cultures of every person in the building, a daunting task in itself. Only after a patient started to exhibit signs of the disease could a vaccination of Antititoxin be given, which placed teachers on a constant vigil for symptoms. A total of three negative reports had to be administered before isolation ended.[81]

[80] Brenda Child. *Boarding School Season: American Indian Families.* 59.

[81] "Department of Interior Medical Report," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 5. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin

The strict guidelines presented in the document display the overwhelming task of ensuring the health of the students. Mr. Ben never loosened his standards when it came to the health of his students. He became an advocated for their health care to the government and for this reason children at the school escaped many of the dangers faced by children at other facilities. The missionary also used his healing knowledge at the mission in cases of epidemics or emergency.

Conclusion

The ideology of Indian boarding schools continued to progress throughout the twentieth century. During the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, Native Americans joined together in a Self-Determination movement that affected the BIA system of education. Focused and determined through a rhetoric of self-determination, tribes began to gain a significant amount of control over their children's education. Beginning in 1966, tribes could receive grants from the BIA to establish residential day schools located on their reservation. The practice expanded till, the number of tribally controlled bureau funded schools outnumbered the number of schools still directly operated by the BIA.[82] Children no longer had to be removed from their homes and cultures to receive an education. With tribes gaining more power within the BIA itself, Indian education ideology and curriculum shifted to reflect the needs of Native American youth more appropriately. Parents of Native American students along with active tribal members were involved through parent committees, school boards, and tribal councils. [83] For many tribes education has become focused on ways to fight the staggering unemployment rates on reservations across the country. While children that attended Indian boarding schools may not felt there could be many positive outcomes of having to leave their families, from their experience grew the self-determination movement, and the concept of pan-Indianism.

From the experiences of boarding schools, students left with a knowledge of what it meant to be "Indian." With the self-determination movement, there grew a concept of pan-Indianism, which is defined by Thomas Cowger in his book, *The National Congress of American Indians*, Cowger used the definition created by anthropologist Joan Ablon to explain the new

[82] Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 324.

[83] Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 325.

cohesiveness among tribes. "This new ethnic identity, with elements of pan-Indianism and tribal orientation, might be the result of increased interaction between tribes."[84]This increased interaction occurred for many people at their childhood boarding school. While surviving the experience of an educational institution that did not have the students best interest in mind and often times left them in danger, children learned to cohabitate and even depend on children from other tribes. For some students that attend the BIA boarding schools this may be the only positive aspect they can remember. The children at the Winnebago Boarding School did not have the same level of multi-tribal exposure found at BIA schools, but Mr. Ben did realize the importance that the tribal community played in the education of their youth and hoped to return the control of the education back to the Ho-Chunk parents.

The Winnebago Indian School offered the Ho-Chunk tribe that had lost everything, a place to send their children to learn the necessary skills to live in society. Though created with the best of intentions, Mr. Ben believed that:

> "No matter how high and noble the ideals and efforts of individuals charged with the conduct of such schools, it is impossible to duplicate the atmosphere of normal home life in an institution. The environment in even the best, with its dormitory life and large group activities is always artificial. Not only does the boarding school create an artificial environment for the children, it also produces an unnatural environment for the parents."[85]

Mr. Ben, his family, and his staff dedicated a great deal of their life to the Ho-Chunk children. The tribal responded to their devotion by respecting and honoring them in their tribe. Mr. Ben actually became a member of the tribe in a ceremony conducted in 1942.

[84] Thomas Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 9.

[85] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago* 150.

The name the tribe decided on for the missionary was Najkehunka, which meant "Chief in heart."[86] For his many years of dedication and service, the leaders of the Ho-Chunks recognized the affection and care Mr. Ben had bestowed upon tribe. Students also shared great affection for the Superintendent that both knew their language and loved their heritage. Mr. Ben found his greatest joy in life by, "Supplying the guidance of their tender receptive souls needs to bring them into the Jesus way of life."[87] This passion and love for his students transformed the Winnebago boarding school into a home for the Ho-Chunk children.

[86] Arthur Casselman, *Winning the Winnebago,* 89. A great chief of the Ho-Chunk tribe was called Chief Najkehunka, and was considered to be the tribes "George Washington" because of his many contributions to the tribe. The ceremony consisted of a gathering of tribal members, where the leaders anointed Mr. Ben with his new name and as tribal members filed out they took his hand and called him by his new name.

[87] "Indian Mission Newsletter," Benjamin Stucki Papers, Box 1, Folder 3. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin