

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

**FOUNDATION OF THE LAC COURTE OREILLES BAND OF LAKE
SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA:**

**A HISTORY OF EDUCATION ON THE LAC COURTE OREILLES
RESERVATION IN THE POST BOARDING SCHOOL ERA**

**THESIS SUBMITTED TO DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY FOR CANDIDACY FOR THE
BACHELORS DEGREE**

BY

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For Pete's Sake

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Abstract

This project looks at the changes in education during the post boarding school era on the Lac Courte Oreilles (LCO) Reservation in Northern Wisconsin. The project focuses on four schools: St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission School, Kinnamon School, Hunter (New Post) School, and the Whitefish School. The project examines the schools' origins, the reactions to the schools by the tribe and neighboring community, the schools' successes and failures, and how the progression of the schools fit in with the national education plans of the public schools and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Eight students of the schools studied in the project have been interviewed on reflection of their experiences in the schools. The project highlights the value of education by the Lac Courte Oreilles peoples was a predominant factor in the tribe's successes of the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties, into today. As part of the research for this project, St. Francis and Kinnamon school records were attained, general correspondences to the State Superintendent of Wisconsin Schools were reviewed, and from the Bureau of Indian Affairs archives in Chicago several correspondences pertaining to education on the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation were studied. The project includes an area map.

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Preface

I first got interested in the history of education on the LCO Reservation when I heard about the passing of Saxon St. Germaine. I had never met her, but when I heard of her amazing life in the eulogy given on WOJB the day after her passing, I was inspired. Her life seemed to be devoted to education. I began to look around at LCO and think about education, there was a Headstart, an elementary school, a middle school, a high school, and a community college, all run by the tribe. Clearly there is a value on education at LCO, and I began to wonder about the origins of that value. I consulted Dr. Rick St. Germaine about my interest and he recommended that I focus on the nineteen-forties and the nineteen-fifties at LCO. The Hayward boarding school closed in 1938, and many changes to the education of LCO children followed the closing.

Many of the challenges I faced in writing this paper stemmed from availability of resources. Everything I studied either came to me from Madison, Chicago (via Dr. James Oberly), or through sheer luck as the auto-biography of Sister Sirella La Rush from Dr. Larry Martin. Some sources still remain buried. I either did not know where to find them, or was unable to determine if they exist, however further research may elicit more sources on the subject. Much of the information I gathered was from interviews, and these proved to be precious sources indeed. I got to know some people, and discovered how much a person can actually remember about their childhood, no matter how long ago it was.

In the future I plan to dig deeper and go further into the past of LCO's educational history. I also plan on studying more into the recent past as well to more comprehensively study the history of education at LCO, and I consider this paper just the tip of the iceberg.

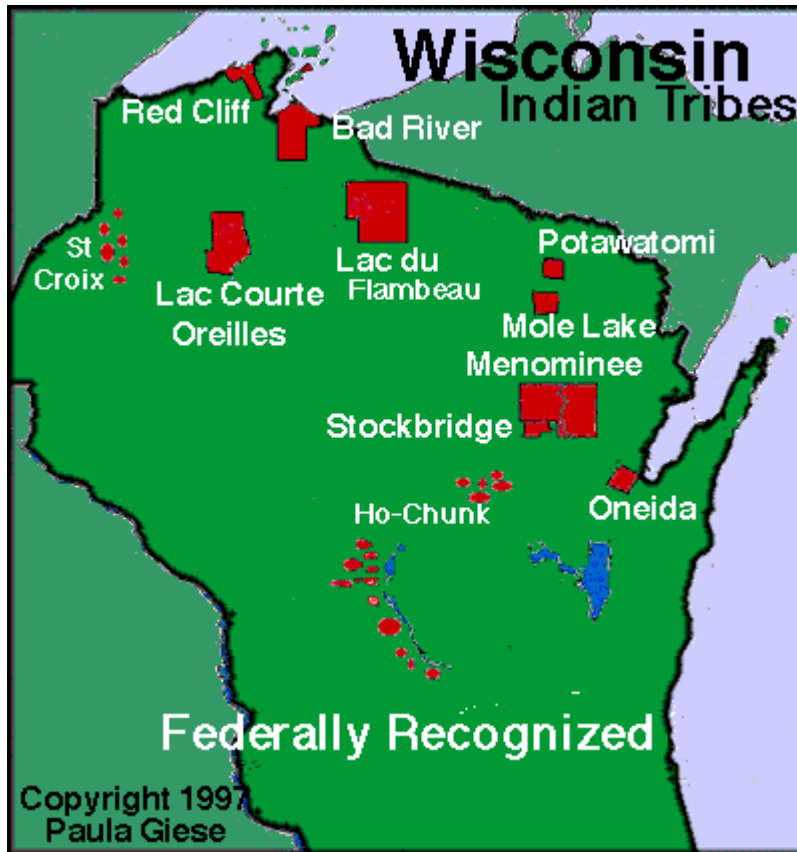


Figure 1. Map of Wisconsin's Indian Reservations. The areas shaded in red show the reservation's area. Map copied from Paula Giese.

Introduction

The policy of education of Native Americans in this country continues to be a sore subject. In both its past and its present Native American education has been mired in disrespect, assimilation, misunderstanding, and apathy. Many generations of Native Americans were trampled under the feet of the boarding schools, and many others since have been marginalized by the curriculum in public schools. At LCO Reservation in the 1940s and the 1950s something

different happened in education, LCO children got to be themselves. The United States focus of education went from eradication of Native American culture to tolerance of Native American culture in a post boarding school era. On the LCO reservation this meant education went from a process of a loss of culture to a growth of culture. When the boarding school in Hayward closed new opportunities for growth arose on the reservation: Four new day schools and a mission school provided a better alternative.

In the early twentieth century traveling around the LCO Reservation was a time consuming task. No paved roads existed on the reservation and in many places streams would overtake the trails for a good part of the year.¹ For many, travel was still done by horse and wagon; there were few automobiles on the reservation. For twenty years students went to school in one of the county day schools until the boarding school was built in Hayward (1902). All of the old county school houses on the reservation closed. Starting in 1925 parents that did not want to send their children to either the boarding school or the mission school once again had another option, Kinnamon. Kinnamon was followed by three other schools in the years that followed. Catholic families sporadically could use the St. Francis Mission School as an alternative, but for families that were not Catholic in faith this was not an option.

For less fortunate LCO children that did not have an alternative, the boarding school became their home. This could happen for a bevy of reasons, sometimes parents could not afford to feed their children and the boarding school represented three meals a day. For some parents that felt that there was little hope of survival by adhering to the traditional ways of life saw the boarding schools as a way for their children to have a better chance in life by joining the

¹ Dr. Richard St. Germaine, interview by author, Eau Claire Wisconsin, November 3,2009.

dominant culture. Frighteningly another way that Native American children ended up at boarding schools was through Indian agents kidnapping children to be in the boarding schools, though I found no evidence of this at LCO, it is widely documented to have happened at other reservations and could have happened at LCO.

In Sawyer County a red truck was used to pick up children on the LCO reservation to take them off to the boarding school in Hayward.²The boarding school in Hayward was based on agricultural education, which meant that the school was a farm that used children as the labor. The farming aspect of the school in Hayward was unsuccessful due to the fact that the school originally educated children in first through sixth grade, later in 1928 it changed to second through eighth grade. Children of that age group are hardly suited to provide the labor necessary for farming. The children lived in a massive dormitory; it housed 160 children all in bunk beds. There was running water and plumbing in the building, and this was something LCO children did not have at home, however the toilets were always backing up and created quite a stench.³This of course created a poor living condition for children, they were constantly being exposed to unsanitary conditions and living in such close proximity to each other allowed illnesses to spread quickly.

During the school day there was a little time spent on reading and math, mostly the female students time was spent learning how to sew and to iron. The male students spent most of their time working on the farm. A lot of time was spent maintaining the school and helping with

² Sr. Sirella La Rush, auto-biography, p.10.

³ U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Annual Reports from the Indian Agency in Wisconsin to the Office of Indian Affairs 1910-1939, Narrative Reports: Hayward School Record Group 75, Microfiche 108, Reel 1: P68-2062, Annual Report 1920, p. 18.

the massive amounts of laundry, or helping with preparing the next meal. This labor was considered part of the curriculum.⁴

The mission of boarding schools was to assimilate Native American children into the dominant white American culture. However for the LCO children, and Native American children in boarding schools everywhere, were not a part of the white culture, and were being removed from their own culture, so Native American children that endured the boarding school experience found it was hard to identify with any culture.

After finishing at the boarding school some LCO children continued their education at the Hayward High School, and others just decided to go home and try to find work. For both groups there was no work on the reservation and no one in Hayward would hire Native Americans.⁵ In the boarding school students were not allowed to speak their Native language, practice traditional songs and dances, or spend time with their mothers and fathers on a regular basis.⁶ Students that endured the boarding schools received little reward; they were alienated from their LCO families, rejected by white society and unable to support themselves financially. The situation must have seemed hopeless.

The closing of the Hayward Boarding school in 1934 marked the end of an era of decline in Ojibwe culture. No longer would education be a tool of killing Ojibwe culture. It can be argued that assimilation through education continues through curriculum for Native Americans; however the focus of schools shifted from farm and vocational labor in the boarding school era

⁴ Margret Connell Szasz, "Indian Reform in a Decade of Prosperity", *The Magazine of Western History*, Vol.20, p. 18-19.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs. Annual Reports, p.2.

⁶ Child, Brenda, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families 1900-1940*, University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2000) p. 3.

to classroom instruction in a post boarding school era. In addition to the change in teaching, Ojibwe culture was allowed to remain with the children, students were not punished for speaking Ojibwe, and they got to return home every night to be with their families.⁷ The importance of the day school experience was twofold; the quality of education wasn't the only difference, it was also about familial bonds.

The many reforms that took place in the 1930s and 1940s in response to the Meriam report focused on curriculum and quality of teaching, but also strongly urged the closing of boarding schools so that children could be at home with their parents. Progressives in the 1930s used the Meriam Report to reform boarding schools because of the horrific conditions in which the students had to endure, and the recognition of the need for parent's nurturing. In the boarding schools the budgets were never adequate to service the amount of children in attendance, and there was always a question regarding how much education was actually transpiring. Children were chained to their beds as punishment, they were forced to walk through the snow without shoes, they were whipped with ropes and water hoses, and sometimes worse.⁸

The boarding school era came about in a time when the focus from the Department of the Interior, or in its earliest days the War department, was focused on wiping out Native Americans. When using the cavalry to exterminate them was no longer acceptable the idea came from Richard Lee Pratt to remove the Native culture from the Native American, make them just Americans, or as Pratt put it, "Kill the Indian and save the man". With the end of the boarding schools as assimilation factories the focus became acculturation. This was still not perfect, but a giant improvement upon the boarding school policy. The change in philosophy happened at a

⁷ Carley, Dick. 2009. Interview by author. Hayward, Wisconsin.

⁸Szasz, Decade of Prosperity, p.18.

critical time when Native American culture was on the brink of extinction. With the return of the day schools and the mission school to LCO more children got to learn the language, they got to experience wild rice cultivation, and sugarbush (harvesting of maple sap for refinement into maple syrup). In other words many core aspects of Ojibwe culture were saved by the day schools and the mission school. The culture went from a state of loss to a state of growth.

LCO children learned that a little thing like self respect, gained from having their culture valued instead of removed, could turn the fate of the Ojibwe Nation around. It was the children of this post boarding school generation that went to college in greater numbers than ever before, and came back to the reservation to lead as council members, business people, activists and teachers. It was this post boarding school generation that fought the United States Federal Government to retain sovereignty and won, and it was this post boarding school generation that established casinos that have made tribes in Wisconsin largely self sufficient. It was the atmosphere of cultural respect in the schools on the reservation that fostered a value of education in the 1940s and the 1950s that made all of that change possible. The schools of the LCO Reservation are the foundation of the tribe.

The Mission School

For LCO the first positive and important interaction with Catholics was with the Frenchman John Corbine in 1790. Corbine married an Ojibwe woman, and his pious example led many Ojibwe to be baptized and become Catholics. His name is revered on the reservation today, and his descendants are many. Corbine lived to be 99 years old and is buried in the middle of the St. Francis Solanus Mission Church graveyard.⁹



Figure 2. John Corbine's headstone, courtesy of St. Francis Solanus Church.

The next Catholic of importance to the LCO was Father Baraga. Baraga was born in Austria in 1835 and chose to come to the Great Lakes region in America under the auspices of the Leopoldine Society.¹⁰ Baraga learned the Ojibwe language and translated parts of the bible into Ojibwe around 1860. He traveled all over the Great Lakes region and baptized many Ojibwe

⁹ Sr. Sirella La Rush, auto-biography, p.18.

¹⁰ Leopoldine Society was a Catholic organization responsible for aiding Catholic Missions in North America.

people into the Catholic faith. Baraga's translated bible is still used by many for scholarly research.¹¹ Father Baraga's example was a demonstration of acceptance and respect for Ojibwe culture that made a real and measurable difference in Ojibwe history. To this day the nun educators at St. Francis Mission School learn Ojibwe and teach it to the children.¹²

In 1885 the first St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission church and a two-room schoolhouse were completed after four years of construction in the village of Reserve on the LCO reservation. Dominic Durcharme was the first teacher in the school and he was soon joined by nuns provided by the School Sisters of St. Francis from Milwaukee.¹³ The sisters worked for free and stayed until 1908, when they returned to Milwaukee. Not coincidentally this was about the time that the lumber industry was drying up in Hayward, and six years after the Hayward boarding school opened. With many families moving away, following the timber to the West, and many of the Native American students being rounded up to attend the boarding school in Hayward, the mission school's enrollment dwindled.

The mission school played an important role as an alternative to the boarding school. Unfortunately the mission school's years of operation were sporadic due to lack of funding and natural disaster. However when the mission school was open it was the only alternative to the boarding school for the reservation until Kinnamon was built. Many children were spared the cruelty and abuse of the boarding school because of St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission School.

Though no one may have recognized her potential at the time, a little girl was educated there in the years before the sisters returned to Milwaukee, Sirella La Rush. She would come to

¹¹ Dr. Lawrence Martin, interview by author October 28, 2009.

¹² Sr. Fellisa Zander, interview by author February 7, 2010.

¹³ Zander interview.

make more of a difference in education and the future of LCO than anybody else before or since. Sirella was Ojibwe, grew up in Reserve, knew how to speak Ojibwe, and first attended school at St. Francis. In her early formative years she was greatly impressed by the sisters at the school, especially Sister Fabiola, and a visiting nun, Sister Augustine.

In 1903 the mission school closed and Sirella had to attend the Indian Boarding School in Hayward. Sirella was ten and hated the boarding school immensely. After one year her father came for a visit to the boarding school, she snuck out of the school and stowed away under the contents in the back of his wagon to ride back home. In town she was soon discovered when her father threw a heavy sack onto the pile and she let out a yelp. Old Charlie LaRush did what any father would do after watching his daughter break down in tears over her treatment in the boarding school, he took her home.

Sirella's family soon made arrangements for her live in Couderay and to go to the public school there, on the other side of the reservation. She had been attending the public school in Couderay for a year when the mission school at St. Francis Solanus reopened. She was 12 in 1905 when Sr. Augsutine asked her if she wanted to be a nun, it is unknown what Sirella saw as her other options at the time, but it is clear that she did not give any of those other options any more thought, the rest of her life was devoted to being a sister.¹⁴

The St. Francis Solanus Mission School again closed in 1908 for one year due to lack of funding for the Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee to continue educating there. The school remained closed until the Sisters of St. Joseph from Superior took over for the next nine years.

¹⁴ La Rush, auto-biography, p. 19.

Between 1908 and 1909 children were once again shipped off to the boarding school in Hayward.

In 1918 Father Philip Gordon, a Diocesan Priest, became pastor of St. Francis Solanus, and though he did not have much to do with the school this was significant because Father Gordon was one of the first Native American Catholic Priests, and an Ojibwe from Red Cliff.¹⁵

His presence at the church must have been an empowering event for people at LCO, and he was a respected man. In fact during the years leading up to the building of the Winter Dam, Father Gordon was chosen President of the Council and Chairman of the Business Committee to act as spokesman for the tribe in the matters of the dam and other ventures that were a threat to the reservation.¹⁶



Figure 3. Father Gordon, courtesy of St. Francis Solanus Church.

In 1921 tragedy occurred, lightning struck the church and the resulting fire destroyed the building. It was Father Gordon that tirelessly worked to raise funds and support to rebuild the church. The structure of the current church was erected in 1923 by pipestone collected at a quarry about twenty miles from the church, with labor donated by the residents of the reservation. But the project was left incomplete, and Father Gordon was sent away to another community before he could see the church completed.

¹⁵ U.S. Works Progress Administration. Chippewa Indian Historical Project, Records, 1936-1940, 1942, Microfiche 532 Reel 1.

¹⁶ Sawyer County Record & Hayward Republican, "Reserve Indians Hold a Council", March 28, 1918.

During this time Sirella was doing well in convent school with the Sisters of St. Francis in Milwaukee. She was the only Native American in the school where most of the girls were German. She was an exemplarily student and in addition to learning Latin she learned to speak German fluently. Once when she was having trouble adapting to being away from home she went to see Father Michaels, the convent chaplain, he told her something that helped her and stuck with her the rest of her life:

Do you know what La Rush means? It means rock in French. You have that name for a purpose. Almighty God gave you that name so that you would be as firm as a rock here in this convent. He doesn't want you to go home for every little thing that happens. He has made you to be here. Be as hard as a rock and stay where you belong. Be a rock all the rest of your life.¹⁷

Sirella graduated from the convent and began her studies at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. When she graduated from Creighton she was sent by the Sisters of St. Francis to a school in Pierce, Nebraska where she taught until she was moved to nearby Osmond. While in Osmond she was in a car accident that claimed the life of another nun and left Sirella with a lifelong injury. In all she spent 14 years in Nebraska.

1925 Sirella received word that her father back in Reserve had become very sick, so she asked the Sisters of St. Francis if she could return home and visit him. They consented and allowed Sirella to take a leave of absence. When Sirella returned to the reservation she found the church unfinished and abandoned. She soon discovered that catechism classes were being conducted in the shell of the church by the local priest, but little more was possible in the church's state of disrepair. The sight of the church, where Sirella had first attended school and fell in love with her faith, was too much for her to take. Sirella began to make plans to finish the

¹⁷ La Rush, auto-biography, p..22.

church and start the school again; the Sisters of St. Francis agreed that reopening the church and the school would be good for everyone so they allowed her to stay.¹⁸



Figure 4. Sr. Sirella La Rush, courtesy of St. Francis Solanus Church.

In 1927 the St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission School was reopened with Sr. Sirella La Rush as principal, a position she held until the 1960's when Sr. Fellisa Zander took over and continued the tradition of excellent leadership up to this day.¹⁹ The value for LCO children to have an LCO educator in front of the class teaching cannot be understated. La Rush was one of their own, she often had family members in her classes, and to a child having this kind of role model is priceless. She often spoke in Ojibwe and allowed the students also to speak in Ojibwe. Parts of mass were said in Ojibwe and hymns were sung in Ojibwe. This experience must have been tremendous for LCO Catholics at a time when everywhere else their language and their

¹⁸ La Rush, auto-biography, p.24.

¹⁹ Zander interview.

culture were under attack. In this school LCO children were no longer being marginalized by a dominant society, they were respected and valued.



Figure 5. St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission Church today. Photo taken by author

This mission church and school were unique, because there was a Native American Nun in charge of a Catholic School. Also the Catholic Church was built and stewarded by a Native American Priest. This was all happening before the day schools began to spread their influence. If the culture of change on the LCO reservation started with the shift of education in a post boarding school era, then that change was first at St. Francis Solanus Indian Mission School.

Many generations experienced La Rush's firm guidance of the mission school, and her name is legendary on the LCO reservation. La Rush was a pioneer, it would not be until the 1970's that LCO children would have another LCO teacher in a non-parochial school. Much like the difference made by the shift from boarding school to day school, having an LCO woman teaching LCO children was an equally powerful occasion.



Figure 6. The entrance to the mission school today. Photo taken by author.

Brief History of Public Education for Native Americans

As early as 1720 future Americans were trying to determine the best ways of educating Native Americans to a European perspective. From Benjamin Franklin's writings and, colleges like Dartmouth in 1769, and William and Mary in 1720 welcomed Native American students, it is clear that an opinion of the potential of educating Native Americans had already been well established before the American Revolution. Franklin noted the reluctance of Natives to learn the ways of art and science as taught by the Europeans. It was of Franklin's opinion that everything the Natives wanted was so easily provided to them through the ease of their agriculture and the abundance of game that there was no work ethic among the Natives. In other words it would be impossible to bring the Natives to a European way of thinking as long as the Native way of life was so prosperous. In fact Franklin titled his letter "The Futility of Educating Indians".²⁰ This letter is a prime example of the attitude towards Native Americans by colonists in New England.

Europeans paid little respect to the wisdom and understanding of the Native peoples they encountered in the Americas. Franklin was quick to note the Native Americans' fascination with European arts and sciences, and was puzzled by the lack of initiative on the Native Americans part to learn the European ways, but he never considered that there already were highly developed Native American arts and sciences that he was ignoring. Franklin, in all of his brilliance, overlooked the reason for the ease of agriculture and hunting of game; Native Americans had mastered their relationship with the plants that would grow in the area and there was a respect and understanding of the wild game that did not exist on the same level with the

²⁰ Ben Franklin, *The Essential Documents of American History*, compiled by Norman Desmarais and James McGovern, (Providence College, 2009) p.1-4.

Europeans. Native hunters had been living on the wild game provided in North America for almost 50,000 years without depleting the resources.²¹

After the introduction of European hunters, countless numbers of species became extinct due to overhunting. The idea of hunting for sport is not part of the Native American culture. For Native Americans it was strictly hunting for survival. Benjamin Franklin's letter is important because it demonstrates how from even before the beginning of American and Native American interactions there was a complete disconnection from the reality of Native American culture and the European perception of Native American culture.

Vine Deloria Jr. further illustrates the point of euro-centrism toward the Native American arts and sciences in his essays on Native American Metaphysics. Metaphysics is a field of philosophy that is concerned with explaining the fundamental nature of being and the world. The realm of Native American Metaphysics pre-contact existed with a respect for the world around it and the Native peoples saw themselves as part of that world in unison with other living, non-human, beings. The focus of Native American Metaphysics was to understand through observation how other living beings in the same realm managed to survive, and exist in balance with each other. Native American cultures existed and exist in wide varieties, and yet in almost all of them a relationship of respect with animals and the environment is almost universal as evidenced in hunting rituals and creation stories. Based on observational study many Native peoples understood the connection between all living beings. They may not have known that it is the carbon base in everything that connects us, yet they still understood there was a connection,

²¹ Arrell Morgan Gibson, *The American Indian: Prehistory to Present*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) p.3.

thousands of years before scientists in the Western European scientific model would make the same conclusions.

The differences between Native American thought and European thought could not have been more different. It is from that initial point that Native American education experienced its first struggles. All of the millennia of Native American knowledge were simply disregarded as savage and uncivilized. In all of the efforts made by missionaries, teachers, and departments over the last four hundred years, it is at the very basis of education's inability to grasp the viability of and respect for Native American arts and sciences that contribute to the failure Native American educational policies.²²

The earliest efforts of education were done by missionaries with the hopes of gaining salvation for "heathen" souls. This education from the missionaries usually was limited to teaching Native Americans to read the bible, and eventually led to the opening of mission schools. Mission schools provided most of the education of Native American students until the boarding schools began to open.

In 1720 William and Mary's became the first college to admit Native Americans. The next college began when Reverend Eleazar Wheelock began an Indian School in Lebanon, Connecticut in the early 1760's, which he later moved to Hanover, New Hampshire where the school later became Dartmouth College. Wheelock wanted to help civilize the Native Americans and teach them the ways of Christianity and European lifestyle. Like most early Native American educators Wheelock began with good intentions, but in the end his use of child labor

²² Deloria Jr., Vine and Daniel Wildcat. *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, Fulcrum Books (Golden Colorado, 2001) p.49, 57.

to pay for the cost of education became the priority, and education was often never delivered.²³

This model of child labor to pay for tuition was repeated in boarding schools. Early missionaries and the Rev. Wheelock all ignored the value of the Native American knowledge set, disregarding it as savage. These early educators were blinded by a need to teach their religion at all costs, and in Wheelock's case he became blinded by his own grandeur and status.

The education of Native Americans became a U.S. federal policy following the recommendations of Richard Henry Pratt when in 1879 he opened the Carlisle Indian School. Captain Pratt claimed to have solved the "Indian Problem" by forcing assimilation. Industrial schooling is an education that is focused on teaching a trade or a skill, in boarding schools this often meant menial labor jobs that were often outdated and physically demanding. Pratt's example of industrial schooling led to a massive expansion of government run Indian Boarding schools; Chemawa (1880), Albuquerque (1884), Chilocco (1884), Santa Fe (1890), Haskell (1884), Carson (1890), Phoenix (1890), Pierre (1891), Flandreau (1893), Hayward (1902). In total there were twenty five off reservation Indian Boarding Schools open by 1920. Pratt's model was based upon the idea that it was the Native American culture passed down from the parents that was preventing Native American children from becoming assimilated. So Pratt's model for boarding schools was to remove the child from the culture they were born in and condition them into the ways of the European American.²⁴ The Boarding School Era marked a dark period for Native Americans, and a separation from Native American culture that even today is struggling to return. The Boarding School Era was about the eradication of Native American arts and sciences, and the essence of the culture of the Native American.

²³ Calloway, Colin G., *The World Turned Upside Down: Indian Voices from Early America*, Bedford/St. Martin's Press (Bedford, Massachusetts, 1994) p.54, 67.

²⁴ Margret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self Determination*, (University of New Mexico Press, 1977) p.9-10.

In 1891 in an effort to strengthen the education of Native Americans, Congress passed an act that required every healthy, school-aged child that was a member of a tribe to attend school. This act reinforced the boarding schools and gave Indian police the jurisdiction to track down Native American children who were not in school (A more subtle effect of this act was that it was another tether on Native American families that might have left the reservation for a myriad of reasons, to have to stay on the reservation in order to keep their children enrolled in school).²⁵ It was hard for parents at LCO to visit their children at the school due to the difficulty of traveling to Hayward, among a host of other personal possibilities. Visitation in the Hayward Boarding School was allowed, and did occur, but not sufficiently enough for most children.

By 1900 Lac Courte Oreilles was considered a “very civilized” reservation, with 1,150 tribal residents many dressed in non-native style of clothing, more than half belonged to a church, 400 could read, and 500 could speak English conversationally.²⁶ These were measures of civilization according to the Indian agents and the Department of the Interior; however it would not spare the Lac Courte Oreilles the horrors of further government interference into their ability to remain Ojibwe.

²⁵ Danziger, Edmund Jefferson, *The Chippewas of Lake Superior*, University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, Oklahoma, 1979) p, 105-107.

²⁶Danzinger, *The Chippewa of Lake Superior*, p.108

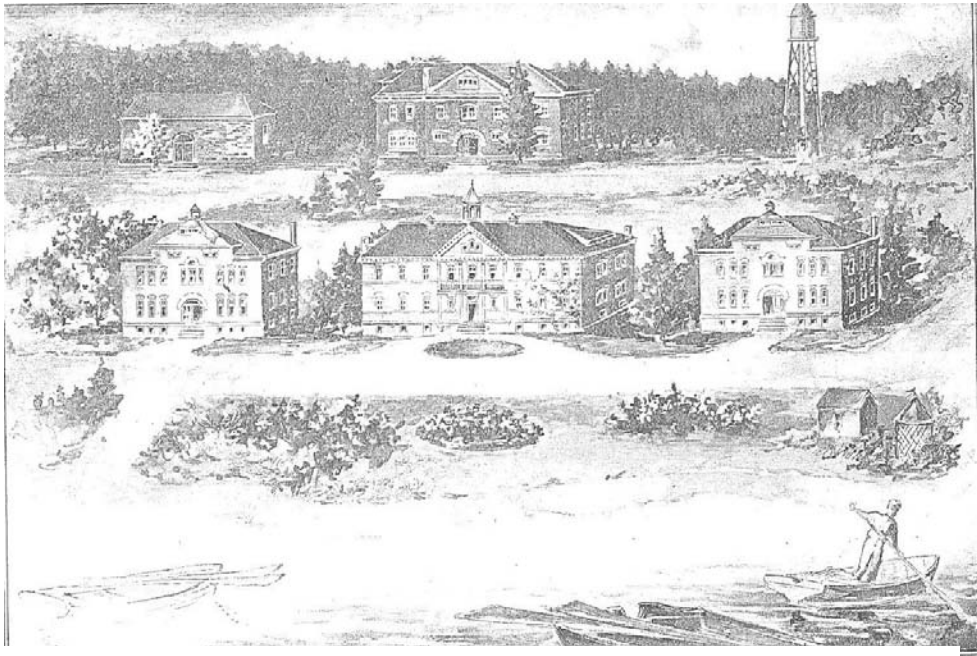


Figure 7. Original design of Hayward Boarding Indian Boarding School, Picture from R.L. McCormick's book, 1901.

Many “country” or day schools existed at the time of the Boarding School Era, though they were usually in disrepair and not in operation for lengthy periods of time. Most day schools consisted of one classroom where children of all age groups would be taught together. At the time that the Hayward U.S. Non-Reservation Indian Boarding School was erected, there were three public schools and four mission schools on the neighboring Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation. The day schools were experiencing difficulties keeping Native American children in school during times of the year like maple sugar harvesting in March and wild rice cultivation in August and September²⁷.

Many children from the LCO reservation had been shipped away to boarding schools in other parts of the country.²⁸ This was not enough for the likes of Sawyer County Schools Superintendent Robert McCormick and Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Jones in 1902,

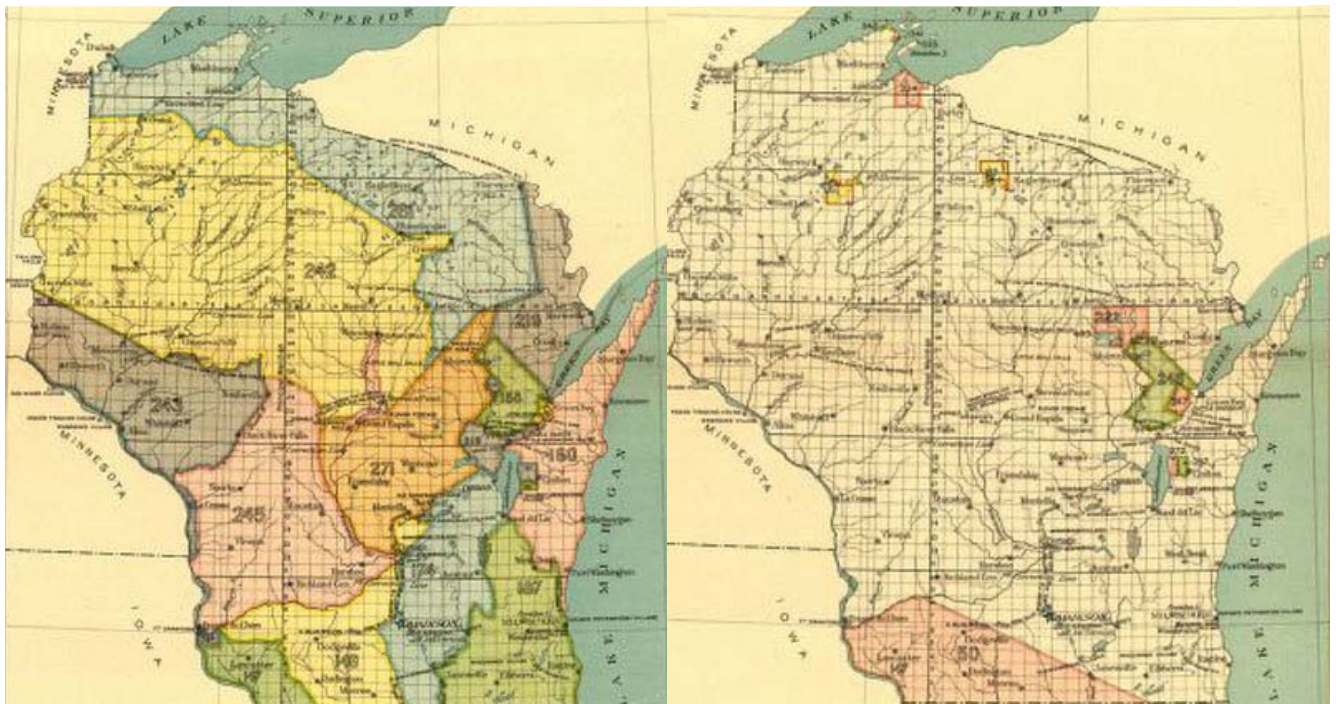
²⁷ Child, Brenda, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families 1900-1940*, University of Nebraska Press (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2000) p. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

therefore the boarding school in Hayward was opened to house and educate Ojibwe children from the neighboring reservation. Both were firm believers in the assimilation of Native Americans, and both had serious doubts about the day schools' abilities to fully assimilate Native American children.²⁹

The morality of the Native American parents was under attack by assimilationists in the early 20th century as one of the ways to promote boarding schools. Poor sanitary conditions and insufficient living situations were condemned by people like McCormick, without any kind of consideration to the causes of the dire situations existing on reservations all across the country.

Figure 8. Map on the left represents the different sections ceded by tribes in the state of Wisconsin. The map on the right represents some of the reservations as they were in 1894. LCO is the yellow square on the left side of the state. Royce maps provided by the Thorpe Project at Oklahoma University, Norman Oklahoma.



²⁹ McCormick, Robert L., *Evolution of Indian Education: Mission-Public School-U.S. Auspices in Sawyer County, Wisconsin*, Hayward Press (Hayward, Wisconsin, 1901) p. 13-14,19,23,25.

Alcohol wreaked havoc on the members of Lac Courte Oreilles; despite laws against selling alcohol, “rum shops” lined the borders of the reservation. Daily their tribal sovereignty was being stripped away in the form of hunting and fishing rights, and there was little that bands like the Lac Courte Oreilles could do about it. The Lac Courte Oreilles were forced to live in new ways that they did not understand, or in many cases want, and they were forced to do so overnight.³⁰

None of these facts were ever taken into consideration by men like McCormick and Pratt that were trying to “save” Native Americans from themselves. There was no reflection to the fact that Native Peoples had thrived without Euro-American culture for thousands of years without extinguishing from low moral standards and alleged poor hygiene. Yet in Northern Wisconsin over a period of 70 years of interference from the American federal government, and incoming settlers, the Lac Courte Oreilles were apparently in a state of despair.

The boarding school was the final solution to educating Native American children for assimilationists. It would handle the truancy issue and at the same time effectively assimilate Native American children into the dominant culture of the Euro-American. However the boarding school experiment was an abject failure, and is thought of as one of the most tragic periods in Native American and American history.

Boarding schools had few saving graces beyond three meals a day. One grace was how the boarding schools offered an opportunity for Native Americans to shine athletically and provided a road to professional sports for stars like Charles Bender and Jim Thorpe.³¹ Many

³⁰Danzinger, *The Chippewa of Lake Superior*, p.126.

³¹ Tom Swift, *Chief Bender's Burden: The Silent Struggle of a Baseball Star*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2008) p.15-20.

Native American children were growing up in extreme poverty, and in these situations parents could hardly provide enough food to raise a healthy child. The boarding schools offered at least three meals a day. These meals were usually inadequate themselves, but it was still something. In fact one of the major complaints of the Meriam report was the underfunding for school meals. Per capita boarding schools were feeding children three times a day with eleven cents, while the average white student in public school per capita ate one meal on thirty-three cents a day.³²

The Meriam report came out in 1928 as a result of a committee investigation of United States Indian Policy. Headed by Dr. Lewis Meriam the lengthy report was a condemnation of the Dawes Allotment Act and the Federal Boarding School Program. The report was used by many progressives to fuel the fight for reform in federal relations with tribes all across the country. When John Collier became the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1933 he used the Meriam report to begin his efforts to help establish sovereign tribal governments with the Indian New Deal and reform of Indian Education.³³

The boarding school experiment had failed miserably and the Meriam Report was the F on the report card. When John Collier took over as Commissioner of Indian Affairs he was part of a progressive movement that was determined to improve life for all Native Americans. Part of the focus was on education, and here Collier collaborated with Carson Ryan, Willard Beatty, and Hildegard Thompson. These reformers worked hard and had great ideas, but were always shackled by an unsympathetic Congress and a lack of funding. Carson Ryan was on the commission that wrote the Merriam Report and he was also part of Collier's Indian New Deal.

³² The Institute for Government Research. *The Problem of Indian Administration: The Merriam Report* (John Hopkins Press, 1928) p.11.

³³ Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 2004) p. 215-218,231-234.

Willard Beatty served as Director of Bureau of Indian Affairs Education from 1936 to 1952, the longest anyone has ever served in that position. Hildegard Thompson succeeded Beatty as Director of BIA education and held the position until 1965, completing over thirty years of a reform approach to the BIA's education department.³⁴

In the years from 1930 to 1965 improvement in education for Native American children was vast but slow moving. Collier's mission to improve the lives of Native Americans was not an easy one; America was heavily invested in the policy of eradication and assimilation of the Native American. If Collier had closed all of the boarding schools his first day on the job 80% of all Native American children would have been without schools.

The transition from boarding school to day school was going to take some time, teachers had to be re-trained and new teachers had to be hired, and school houses had to be built. The teachers in the BIA day schools were comprised largely from teachers that had been a part of the boarding schools. Teachers in the public schools were not used to having to teach classrooms of diverse backgrounds. The system was not perfect, but it was still light years beyond the experiences of the boarding schools. Part of the reform under Beatty was to re-train and train teachers to be more sensitive of Native American culture, not to teach the culture, but to not interfere with the culture. The transition was an enormous feat. In fact the process of closing the boarding schools took about twenty years. When Collier left the BIA in 1945 only six boarding schools were still open. The ones that remained no longer resembled the model of Carlisle that R.H. Pratt had designed in 1879.³⁵

³⁴Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, p. 17, 39-42, 124.

³⁵ Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*,, p.60, 87.

Many children had to go to public schools in places where BIA schools weren't being built. These children had been shipped off far away to boarding schools, and now they were coming home. In many rural communities there weren't enough children to justify building a school, so these children went to neighboring public schools. This raised objections in the non-native towns bordering reservations like Couderay; many in Wisconsin did not want their property taxes to be raised for educating Native American children. Much of the debate, in Couderay, surrounded the costs of feeding the children and transporting them back and forth to the school. In the end bus routes were created, and children were fed off school grounds in a local woman's kitchen.³⁶

Most of the reactions were a misunderstanding of the 1928 Johnson-O'Malley act. This act designated federal funds to compensate public schools that had Native American children in attendance at the school and instituted health care policies. J-O'M is still in effect today and works the same way the free and reduced lunch program does. Millions of Native American children have been educated in public schools thanks to the J-O'M.³⁷

In Wisconsin there was a lot of confusion surrounding the allocation of J-O'M money. Even people that absolutely should have understood the act like Wisconsin 10th District Congressman Alvin E. O'Korski had little understanding of how the act worked. He believed money was being misdirected from a BIA school in his district, not realizing that J-O'M was not for BIA schools. Some thought that any child of Native American descent made their school

³⁶. Bureau of Indian Affairs Archives. Great Lakes Consolidated Undescribed Records Box 146, Letter to J.C. Cavill Superintendent of Great Lakes Indian Agency, 1940.

³⁷ Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, p.93.

eligible for J-O'M money.³⁸ Many children were mistreated as a result of the confusion, and to make matters worse some of the J-O'M funding was embezzled by administrators and bus drivers. Like most new reforms J-O'M in the early days was in need of control and awareness.³⁹

During the last half of Thompson's tenure as director she saw the pendulum of reform swing from acculturation back to assimilation, as it was prior to Collier's reforms. Thompson fought a post WWII economy, Congress wanted to cut budgets, which left little room for teacher training, and implementation of new policies. Teachers did not desire lower paid positions in BIA schools and would leave the first chance something else came up, administrators acted likewise. The turnover in the BIA was amazing and another source of instability and inconsistency to an already beleaguered bureau. Though she never gave up, Thompson was fighting a losing battle.⁴⁰

LCO was not immune to these changes following WWII, however through the efforts of teachers, parents, and the state of Wisconsin, day schools on the LCO reservation became something different. Teachers did come and go, and truancy was always an issue in September and March, but assimilation was not a policy at any of the day schools.

Kinnamon School first began in 1925 as a one room public school on the LCO Reservation on land that was not held in trust. The school was named for a local doctor that administered check ups to the LCO children before the health clinic was built. Almost all of the children in attendance at Kinnamon were LCO, but a few non-native children from the

³⁸ Bureau of Indian Affairs Archives. Great Lakes Consolidated Undescribed Records Box 146, Letter from J.C. Cavill Superintendent of Great Lakes Indian Agency, 1941.

³⁹ Ibid, Letter about Smith girls, and letter from Principal Freel Owl to Superintendent of Great Lakes Indian Agency.

⁴⁰ Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, p. 135-138.

Northwoods beach area attended because it was a lot closer to their homes, and the Hayward public school did not send the school buses past the reservation boundaries.⁴¹



Figure 9. The original Kinnamon School in 1928, courtesy of LCO Living Memories team.

Kinnamon was unique, it was a public school that had a student body that was about 90 percent Native American. It was opened nine years before the boarding school in Hayward closed, it was centrally located and had first rate teachers.⁴² The school housed anywhere from 15-30 children in the one room school house. Children had to use the outhouse, because there was no plumbing or electricity on most of the reservation until the late 1950's. Lunch was cooked and served by Madge Smith or Genieve Isham in later years, from a kitchen in the basement with the help of some of the children.⁴³

⁴¹ Harry Moeller and Ray Moeller, Hayward, Wisconsin interview by author, on November 17, 2009.

⁴² Dick Carley, Hayward, Wisconsin, interview by author, on November 20, 2009.

⁴³ Dr. Richard St. Germaine, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, interview by author, on November 30, 2009.

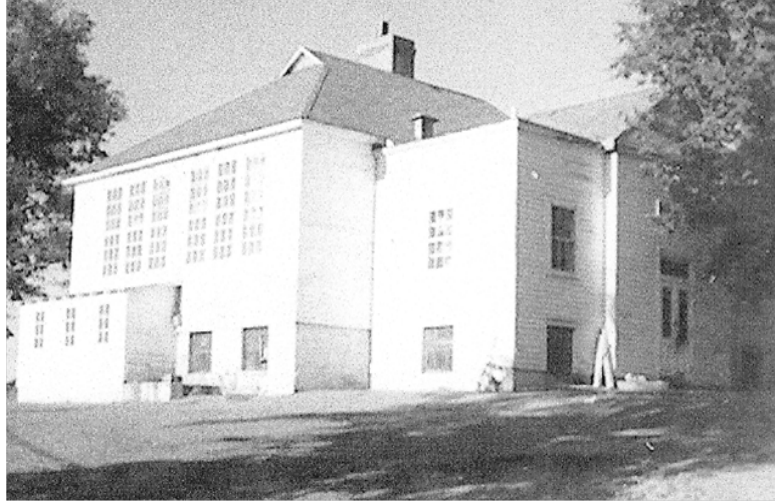


Figure 10. New Kinnamon School, courtesy of the LCO Living Memories team.

The second Kinnamon School began being built in 1934; the original school was no longer large enough to deal with the influx of students that were arriving from the closed boarding school. Here is a point of contention in my research. The project was started by the BIA as Public Works, Federal Project No. 286, but abandoned in 1935 with the school at 69 percent complete.⁴⁴ However, the school was finished and students began attending it in 1937. I could not find where the funding came from to finish the school, but Kinnamon continued to be a public school. It was one of the first buildings on the reservation with electricity, from an electric generator, and indoor plumbing. At the time the new Kinnamon School was state of the art; a two room school house with steam heat, a kitchen, indoor bathrooms, and living quarters for the teacher.⁴⁵ The building is in disrepair today but still stands, efforts are being made to restore the building as a historic landmark.

Other schools on the reservation were also built around this time. An identical school to Kinnamon was built at the same time nearby in Reserve, though the school was short lived and is

⁴⁴ Great Lakes Consolidated Undescribed Records, Letter from agent regarding abandonment of project.

⁴⁵ Moeller Brother's interview.

no longer standing. In 1933 the Whitefish community had their own two room schoolhouse that educated children for many years, and is a residence today.⁴⁶ In 1948 New Post got a school built. Prior to this school, children living in New Post had to be bused 60 miles round trip to attend school in Hayward.⁴⁷



Figure 11. Children celebrating the end of a school year at a dayschool. This picture is of the 1942 Fifth Grade Graduation Whitefish School, courtesy of Bertena Wolfe.

The significance of these schools is profound; the ability for LCO children to go home every night can not be underestimated. Sadly not all children got to attend day schools, though the Boarding School Era had ended, some LCO children were still sent to boarding schools in Tomah, Flandreau and Haskell. These schools had been reformed, but were still criticized for their harsh treatment and disconnection from tribal values.

⁴⁶ Bertena Wolfe, interview by author, on October, 25 2009.

⁴⁷ Wisconsin State Records. Letters to the Superintendent, General Correspondences.

Equally valuable was the empowerment gained from the children being able to be around each other in a non-hostile environment and developing bonds in an environment where it was safe to think for themselves. It was this generation of children in the post boarding school era of the 1940's and the 1950's that brought about revolutionary change with the "Red Power" movement of the 1960's and 1970's⁴⁸. In Wisconsin it was this generation that occupied the Winter Dam that led to tribal ownership of that dam, and it was Mike and Fred Tribble, from that generation that started the events that led to the Voight decision that restored hunting and fishing rights in the ceded territories to the Ojibwe people. Truly the education of LCO children in the 1940's and the 1950's became the foundation of the tribes' successes today.



Figure 12. Current photo of the Whitefish School. Photo taken by author

⁴⁸ Margret Connell Szasz, "Listening to the Native Voice: American Indian Schooling in the Twentieth Century", *The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 39, no. 3, 1989, p.45.

Conclusion

During the earliest contacts between Europeans and Native Americans there was a lot of misunderstanding. Those misunderstandings mixed with colonization, epidemic, genocide, and forced assimilation brought citizens of the United States and Native Americans to a tipping point, something had to give. Much like the Black Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the Native American Civil Rights movement was violent and sensationalized. Both movements were led by strong leaders with firm foundations in education. Both movements brought awareness of their plight to the world, and both movements made great strides to eradicate prejudices in this country. In the formative, early education years of life much of what a person will be is created and solidified. If a person is abused and marginalized in these years it is easier for them to be subjugated and dismissed, as was the case in the boarding schools. However if a person is taught self respect and properly educated in those years, they will be more prepared to resist domination and stand up for their rights.

The history of Native American education in Sawyer County, and throughout the United States, was a dynamic of push and pull. An effort was made to assimilate Native Americans, or to use a metaphor, push the Native Americans into the melting pot. This would be followed by a progressive reform to protect Native Americans' rights, or a pull back out of the melting pot. All of this pushing and pulling was a result of changes in the atmosphere of the BIA, the realities of the federal budget and the attitudes of Congressmen and Senators. Native Americans were trapped in the balance, unable to actively affect the changes that were being thrust upon them. As a country it would take generations for Native American education to truly improve, and it still is unsatisfactory today. What happened in education at LCO in the 1940s and 1950s was tremendous and the result is tangible on the reservation today.

That is why the years of education in the day schools and at the mission school was so important to LCO children after the boarding school closed. No longer were they treated as minorities in school, they became the dominant culture. Their language and their culture were respected in their schools before their culture was accepted anywhere else. The day schools and mission school created a buffer protecting LCO children from absorbing negative stereotypical images and attitudes from the outside dominant culture, while creating a nurturing environment that embraced academic achievement as an additional cultural value. The schools changed the culture of subjugation and assimilation, to pride and confidence. An inner strength was developed that has never been broken. Future leaders were being formed in those schools, and their education was no longer being used as a tool to remove their tribal identity.

On the subject of the 1940s and 1950s education on the LCO reservation there is a lot of work yet to be done. Statistical analysis of where students were attending and grade reports could yield some interesting findings. Studying census numbers from the 1940's and 1950's up to the 1970's and 1980's could also be a worthwhile component to determine the growth of the tribe. In addition some comparative work with the other reservations in Wisconsin during the post boarding school era would allow for a more comprehensive look at the significance or lack thereof for education at LCO.

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