

Federal Indian Boarding Schools Nationwide Historic Context Study

prepared for the
National Historic Landmarks Program
National Park Service
and
National Association of Tribal
Historic Preservation Officers

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Authors:
Marie Archambeault, M.A., Nesta Anderson, Ph.D., and Sammye Meadows (OSIYO Group)
with a Foreword by Edward Hall, III

WARNING: This Nationwide Historic Context addresses an extremely sensitive topic and contains information that could be triggering to some audiences. Federal Indian boarding school experiences vary among attendees over time and space, but shared trauma is a very real component of many student and family experiences. We encourage individuals who may be affected by this topic to seek support from the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, which maintains numerous resources for healing, counseling, and self-care.¹

Note on Terminology

The terms Indian, Native American, Tribal, and Native people are used in this document to intentionally reflect a source material's use of the terms. For example, Indian, the term by which Tribal sovereignty is recognized in the US Constitution, is used when referencing legal citations. The Department of the Interior investigations into the US policies related to residential education of Native people used the phrase "Federal Indian Boarding Schools."² This context also focuses on Federal Indian Boarding Schools, and as such, uses the same phrase. There is no universally preferred term for the places that kept Native children. Further, in this document, the term education refers to European American educational notions. The authors recognize education is

¹ National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition [NABS], accessed May 19, 2026, <https://boardingschoolhealing.org>, and Healing-Informed Resources for Self-Care, <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/healing-informed-resources-for-self-care/>.

² Bryan Newland, *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report*, Vols. I & II (U.S. Department of the Interior, May 2022 and May 2024) [hereafter Newland, Vols. I & II], see U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, <https://www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative>.

not universally restricted to a classroom environment, and as such, it is important to distinguish between the term used in this document and broader applications of the term.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express our deepest gratitude for each of the individuals, organizations, and families that have supported our efforts in developing this context. As implied in the warning above, the topic of this nationwide historic context is challenging on many levels. Researching, summarizing, and writing about the sensitive and triggering history of Indian boarding schools has profoundly impacted the authors, each of whom has relatives who were and are directly affected by these policies and places. The work is personal, and thankfully, our support network is strong. To all our relations – Wado.

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Executive Summary

In support of the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) program and Tribal leaders, this context study offers a framework through which to consider the national significance of the history of Federal Indian boarding schools, provides a baseline comparative analysis and a tool for evaluating associated cultural resources, and seeks to support the nomination of Indian boarding schools for designation as NHLs or for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Central to this effort are the goals of incorporating Native voices as primary sources and conducting an overview of current secondary literature.

The focus of this context is on federally supported Indian education, primarily boarding schools, both on and off reservation. Early schools in the Colonial era laid a foundation for the federal system to take hold after passage of the Civilization Fund Act of 1819. Following the definition set out by the Department of the Interior (DOI) in the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, the institution must have provided education and boarding, received federal support, and opened before 1969.

Part I – Historic Context includes an Introduction, Methodology, and a detailed Historic Timeline of US-Tribal Interactions, divided into the following time periods: Colonial Era (1500-1776); US Federal Era (1776-1830); Removal Era (1830-1871); Assimilation Era (1871-1934); Reorganization Era (1934-1953); Termination Era (1953-1968); and Self-Determination Era (1969-present). Analysis of each period includes key policy and legislation, and general discussion and specific examples of Federal Indian boarding schools.

Part II – Federal Designation of Historic Indian Boarding Schools includes case studies for the seven historic Indian boarding school properties currently designated as NHLs, advice on identifying Federal Indian boarding school historic resources for NHL or National Register nominations, a conclusion, and an extensive bibliography. The seven NHLs are Wheelock Academy (1832 and 1884); Shawnee Mission (1839); Sheldon Jackson School (1878); Hampton Institute (1868); Carlisle Indian School (1879); Haskell Institute (1884) and Fort Apache and Theodore Roosevelt School (1923).

Unlike the public policy aims of the DOI Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative and earlier government reports, this NHL context study takes a more academic approach to support the preparation of nomination materials for National Historic Landmark or National Register of Historic Places recognition. The necessarily broad approach of a nationwide historic context may appear oversimplified and is not intended to replace the need to record the vast and changing array of student experiences throughout the tenure of individual Indian boarding schools. All survivors and descendants of the Federal Indian Boarding School system have unique stories that are difficult to incorporate into a single historic context. Many of these stories are being gathered through the efforts of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS), created in 2012 to pursue understanding and address the ongoing trauma created by the US Indian boarding school policy.

Further, the recent DOI investigative reports contain an abundance of information that adds to our understanding of the system, including extensive lists of schools organized by state. Rather than duplicate those efforts, this context strives to provide a foundation for the evaluation of historic properties associated with the Federal Indian boarding school system, focusing on Native experiences and the continuing resilience and survival of Native communities. This historic context study does not provide an exhaustive or complete history of Native peoples in the US, but rather an overview to aid in considering the historic genesis and operation of the Federal Indian boarding school system and associated extant historic places.

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NHL Program Preface and Acknowledgments

Lisa Pfueller Davidson, Ph.D., NHL Program Manager

National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) are nationally significant historic places designated by the Secretary of the Interior as possessing exceptional value or quality in illustrating the history of the United States. As first authorized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935 and administered by the National Park Service, the NHL Program has overseen the designation of over 2,600 NHLs since 1960.³ NHL designation has been sought by private citizens or organizations; local, state, or Tribal governments; and federal agencies as the highest federal recognition of a property's historic, architectural, or archeological significance.

The NHL Program has a long practice of commissioning studies to help understand the broader context of important topics in our national history and prepare for evaluation of potential NHLs.⁴ For this nationwide historic context study of Federal Indian boarding schools, the NHL Program was pleased to partner with the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) and their consultants at the OSIYO Group. There is an inherent tension in trying to convey multifaceted Tribal history while working within the confines of the federal historic preservation system. We are grateful to our partners for their efforts to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and move us all towards a richer understanding of this topic.

There has been much recent public attention to the complicated and often tragic history of Indian boarding schools in the United States, largely through efforts such as the Department of the Interior's Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative (2021-24) and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS). Currently many historians, researchers, and advocates have generated a growing and robust academic and public history scholarship reconsidering these places and giving wider voice to the generational trauma well known in Indian Country. While this topic is deeply deserving of in-depth attention, the goals of this study are necessarily more modest.

NHL studies like this one seek to compile the latest scholarship into a historical overview of the topic, prepared in a scholarly manner using a variety of source materials. By considering schools nationwide from the Colonial era to the present, this study provides a broad lens with which to consider how the approach to establishing and administering Federal Indian boarding schools changed over the decades, and the ways these institutions both reflected and influenced general federal policy towards assimilation of Native peoples. With such an expansive chronological and geographic approach, many details and nuances are necessarily omitted. A limited selection of individual schools is discussed as examples, with particular attention to the handful of extant

³ For a complete list of designated NHLs see www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/list-of-nhls-by-state.htm.

⁴ For a complete list of NHL studies from the late 1950s to present see www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/studies.htm.

properties already designated as NHLs. This study does not provide comprehensive lists of historic boarding schools. Readers seeking this information should consult the extensive appendices in the 2024 DOI Investigative Report or ongoing research by NABS or other entities.⁵

It is hoped the insights in this context study will assist communities in assessing surviving boarding school properties and considering whether federal recognition, either as an NHL or through listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), is desired. Unlike an NHL theme study, this context does not provide a list of extant boarding school properties recommended for potential NHL designation. Not only was this research beyond the scope of the project, but we also wanted to avoid making these types of recommendations to instead welcome inquiries led by Native communities. It is also important to note that this context study is not intended to make policy recommendations or provide a means of restorative justice for families and communities impacted by Federal Indian boarding schools, although we hope those engaged in such endeavors find the information assembled here useful.

Since 1961, seven properties related to forced education of Native children by the federal government between 1819-1969 have been designated as NHLs. While each NHL is further discussed in this study, the age of these designations means the documentation is sometimes limited. Despite the history of recognizing a variety of Indian boarding schools as NHLs, our documentation does not reflect current standards or scholarship but hopefully can be improved in the future using the information in this context study.

Funding for this project was provided by the Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Sciences Directorate of the National Park Service, Washington, DC, led by Joy Beasley, Associate Director for Cultural Resources and Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. The NHL Program would also like to thank our NPS colleagues for their support of this project, including Serena Bellew (former Deputy Associate Director, CRPS), Brian Goeken (current acting Deputy Associate Director, CRPS), Sherry Frear (NR/NHL Chief and Deputy Keeper of the National Register), Alisha Deegan (NPS Tribal Affairs), Albert LeBeau (NPS Tribal Affairs), and many others. NHL Historian Astrid Liverman deserves special recognition for her extensive research, editing, and organizing in support of this project.

Much gratitude is also owed to our colleagues at NATHPO, Valerie Grussing (Executive Director), Melissa Madrigal (Chief of Staff), Stacy Laravie (Indigenization Director), and to Leigh Ann McGee, Roni Briggs, Sammye Meadows, Marie Archambeault, and Nesta Anderson at OSIYO Group. Their unwavering commitment to this challenging project speaks to their dedication to the ensuring this and all Tribal history receives the recognition it greatly deserves.

⁵ For the DOI Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative website see: www.bia.gov/service/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative

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Acronyms

ABCFM – American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions

AIM – American Indian Movement

AIRFA – American Indian Religious Freedom Act

BIA – Bureau of Indian Affairs

DOI – Department of the Interior

HCR – House Congressional Resolution

ICWA – Indian Child Welfare Act

NABS – National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

NAGPRA – Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

NATHPO – National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers

NCAI – National Congress of American Indians

NHL – National Historic Landmark

NHPA – National Historic Preservation Act

NRHP – National Register of Historic Places

NPS – National Park Service

OIA – Office of Indian Affairs

TCP – Traditional Cultural Places

THPO – Tribal Historic Preservation Officer

US – United States

Foreword

Edward Hall, III, President, Board of Directors, Carlisle Indian School Project, and National Trust for Historic Preservation Advisor⁶

Understanding the significance of seeking federal historic designation for Indian boarding schools requires comprehension of the schools' purpose and history in the context of the Indigenous civilizations that existed and prospered for centuries before colonization. Without this foundation, the boarding school era risks being remembered only as an episode of federal policy rather than what it truthfully was: a brutal, deliberate attempt to dismantle ancient, complex, thriving Indigenous nations whose social, political, and familial systems had flourished across the Western Hemisphere for tens of thousands of years.

Indigenous Nations Before Colonization

The Indigenous population of the Western Hemisphere prior to 1492, has been estimated at up to 100 million.⁷ The people were, and are, part of creation, sharing intricate and diverse relationships with the Earth, with the waters, with the plants and animals, with their ancestors, and with one another. Their cultures and languages come from the land. Nations were/are bound together through kinship networks that extend across regions and generations, rooted in responsibility, balance, and reciprocity. Indigenous peoples identified themselves not by the tribal names imposed later by colonizers, but by their own names, generally meaning “*The People*,” identities tied to land, language, and community. Examples include:

- Lenape (Delaware)
- Anishinaabe (Ojibwe/Chippewa)
- Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Iroquois Confederacy)
- Tsistsistas (Cheyenne)
- Diné (Navajo)
- Nimiipuu (Nez Perce)
- Absaroke (Crow)

Western Hemisphere civilizations were defined by abundance, cooperation, respect, trade, diplomacy, and sophisticated stewardship of the Earth. Indigenous nations developed complex

⁶ The viewpoint expressed in this foreword does not represent an official NPS position.

Edward Hall, III, served as an advisor to the project authors. Among select roles, Mr. Hall has also served as: Preserve Route 66 Advisory Council Member, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Indigenous Economic Development and Tourism Executive in Residence, International Institute of Tourism Studies, George Washington University, School of Business; Steering Committee, Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas; Past Advisor, White House Council on Native American Affairs; Tourism Coordinator and Transportation Advisor, Bureau of Indian Affairs; and recipient of the Tim Wapato Public Service Award, National Center for American Indian Economic Development.

⁷ Charlotte Williams, “Estimating Populations of the Americas pre-1492,” Penn-Mellon Just Futures Initiative, *Dispossessions in the Americas*, 2023, accessed May 19, 2026, <https://dia.upenn.edu/en/content/WilliamsC003/>.

oral histories and knowledge systems handed down for at least 30,000 years.⁸ Over the ages, they created self-sustaining economies, agricultural innovations, consensus-based governance systems, social and familial structures built around cooperation, and cities more populous and technologically advanced than most in Europe during the same eras.

Pre-colonial Trade Routes

Trade was one of the central organizing forces of Indigenous life. For thousands of years, well-traveled, interconnected land and water trade routes facilitated not only the exchange of goods, silver, copper, turquoise, obsidian, jade, mica, feathers, art, ceramics, jewelry, seashells, corn, beans, squash, tobacco, potatoes, tomatoes, fruits, food and medicine (and food was also considered medicine), languages, traditions, fun, and chocolate, but also the exchange of people, marriages, languages, innovation, diplomacy, medicinal and ceremonial knowledge, and ideas, blending cultures, traditions, families, communities, and cities.⁹

Predominant trading hubs included Cahokia, Chaco Canyon, Knife River Villages, Washoe, the Dalles, Teotihuacan, Tikal, Cusco—centers of commerce, political systems, agriculture, and ceremony. Cahokia, near modern-day St. Louis, featured astronomical alignments, urban planning, vast plazas, trade networks, and a rich cultural life. It housed nearly 20,000 people at its peak between 600 and 1400 CE, a population larger than London at that time.¹⁰ Teotihuacan held anywhere from 25,000 to 250,000 people and was among the largest cities in the world in the first millennium CE.¹¹ The Maya developed a highly refined hieroglyphic writing system.¹² Native nations engineered irrigation and water filtration techniques, built roads and bridges, practiced forest management, understood pharmacology, and maintained protocols of shared wealth and communal care.¹³ The advance of colonization followed the trade routes, and many modern-day highways have been built on top of them.

Governance

Governance alliances like the Haudenosaunee Confederacy developed representational forms of democracy that would later influence the U.S. Constitution.¹⁴ Coalitions such as the Muscogee

⁸ “The earliest Americans arrived in the New World 30,000 years ago,” University of Oxford, July 22, 2020, accessed May 19, 2026, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2020-07-22-earliest-americans-arrived-new-world-30000-years-ago>.

⁹ K. McIver Weatherford, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World* (Fawcett Columbine, 1988).

¹⁰ Cahokia Mounds Museum Society, accessed June 17, 2026, cahokiamounds.org.

¹¹ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Pre-Hispanic City of Teotihuacan,” accessed April 20, 2026, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/414/>.

¹² NOVA, “Ancient Maya Metropolis,” Season 48, Episode 22, January 26, 2022, Public Broadcasting System [53 min., 31 secs.], <https://www.pbs.org/video/ancient-maya-metropolis-eh1ay7/>.

¹³ A.M. Murrow, “21 Lost Native American Engineering Secrets the World almost Forgot,” *Unearth the Voyage*, December 11, 2025, <https://unearththevoyage.com/americas-indigenous-engineering-ancient-innovations-road-systems-sustainable-farming-civilization-building/>.

¹⁴ Haudenosaunee Confederacy, , accessed April 20, 2026, www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com.

Confederacy, the Caddo Confederacy, and others forged large-scale political cooperation long before European contact.

These trade networks and governance structures created dense social fabrics across nations. Families were interconnected. Cultural lines were porous. Children grew up in communities where they were taught by parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles, ceremonial leaders, and by the land itself. For many Indigenous peoples, decisions were made with the consideration of impacts for seven generations in the future to ensure future generations could enjoy the same or better quality of life. Mobility between communities was normal, and relationships between distant nations were maintained through travel, trade, and diplomacy.

Children at the Center of Indigenous Life

This vast web of relationships is essential to understanding the boarding school era because the federal government's strategy targeted not just children as individuals, it targeted the entire *infrastructure of Indigenous life and history*. To break nations, one had to break the kinship networks. To break kinship, one had to sever children from their families. To sever children, one had to interrupt the transmission of language, stories, responsibilities, teachings, and the intertribal relationships shaped through seasonal migrations and trade. The boarding schools were designed specifically to halt this intergenerational flow.

Indigenous children were considered sacred—the carriers of culture, future leaders, and gifts to the community. Their education was embedded in every aspect of life: land stewardship, stories, ceremonies, diplomacy, hunting, agriculture, and governance. Learning took place in relationship—with the land, with extended family, and with ancestral knowledge. This is precisely what the boarding school system sought to erase.

Colonization and the Assault on Indigenous Civilizations

When colonization entered this hemisphere, it confronted a world whose values—balance, reciprocity, kinship, shared land, collective responsibility, stood in direct contrast to European concepts of individual land ownership, extraction-based economies, religious dominance, and political control.

To impose these colonial paradigms, the United States deployed a coordinated system of policies aimed at undermining Indigenous sovereignty, identity, and continuity. Federal Indian Boarding Schools were one arrow in the U.S. government's quiver of weapons designed to engineer the destruction and elimination of the Western Hemisphere's Indigenous identity. They were not created simply to “educate” Indigenous children; they were created to stop the transmission of essential cultural practices such as:

- languages
- kinship systems

- trade and diplomatic relationships
- governance structures
- agricultural knowledge
- ceremonial practices
- land-based teachings
- familial roles
- the sense of belonging to “the people”

By forcibly removing children from the communities that raised them and grounded them in traditional lifeways, the federal government aimed to dismantle the interwoven cultural networks that had sustained Indigenous civilizations for tens of thousands of years.

[Why This Context Matters for NHL Designation or National Register of Historic Places Listing](#)

Only with an Indigenous-centered, context-rich narrative can we truly understand the magnitude of the boarding school era and its implications for families, communities, and future generations. The significance of these sites lies not only in the trauma they inflicted, but in the profound cultural worlds they sought to destroy, and in the resilience of the Indigenous peoples who continue to protect, revitalize, and teach their children today.¹⁵

¹⁵ National Museum of the American Indian, accessed April 20, 2026, <https://americanindian.si.edu>; Ken Burns, et al. “The American Revolution” [Episodes 1-6]. Public Broadcasting System. November 16, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/show/the-american-revolution/>.

PART I – Historic Context

Introduction

In support of the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) program and Tribal leaders, this document presents a contextual framework through which to consider the national significance of the history of Federal Indian Boarding Schools, provides a baseline comparative analysis and a tool for evaluating associated cultural resources, and seeks to support the nomination of Indian boarding schools for designation as NHLs or for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Central to this effort are the goals of incorporating Native voices as primary sources and conducting an overview of current secondary literature.

To understand the origins and motivations behind federal Indian education policies, it is essential to recognize the ideological and legal frameworks that shaped early US interactions with Indigenous Nations. The Declaration of Independence, the foundational document of US democracy, was adopted on July 4, 1776, and proclaimed that “all men are created equal.” Yet within the very same text, Native peoples were described as “merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”¹⁶ This contradiction makes clear that Indigenous peoples were never intended to be included in the promise of equality. They were not viewed as fully human within the emerging American political imagination. This dehumanization had tangible and devastating consequences. Throughout the colonial and early American periods, it was legal in many places to kill Native people for bounty, much like wolves and other animals classified as threats. Under Pennsylvania’s “Scalp Act” of 1756, the government paid settlers for the scalps of Native men, women, and children—literally placing a price on Indigenous lives.¹⁷

As federal policy developed under the US government, strong voices from Congress, the press, and religious leaders urged reforms relating to Indians. Numerous organizations and committees formed to address an undefined “Indian problem.” Accordingly, solutions were myriad and theoretical at best. Beginning with federally sponsored missionary schools, followed by government-supported schools after passage of the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, through the militarization of off and on reservation schools, the primary focus of Indian education was forced assimilation: the education of Native children in isolation from their families and community, converting them to Christianity, and transforming their identities to make them acceptable to mainstream American society. In their minds, assimilation was a way to “save” Native peoples from extinction.¹⁸ In reality, it furthered the deliberate dismantling of Indigenous cultures, families, and ways of life. When attendance at these boarding schools became mandatory in

¹⁶ U.S. Continental Congress, Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, NARA, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration>.

¹⁷ Project 1492, “1751 The Scalp Act,” accessed April 20, 2026, <https://project1492.org/origin-of-the-scalp-act/>.

¹⁸ Isabel C. Barrows, ed., *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian*, 1895 (Lake Mohonk Conference, 1896), see Lyman Abbott, “Empire and American Religion” [Address].

1891, the policies and regulations governing these places further supported the “militarized and identity-alternation methods to assimilate” Native children through education.¹⁹ By the late nineteenth century, a group of elite reformers known as the Friends of the Indian, played a significant role in coalescing development of federal Indian policy.²⁰ Their views were considered “benevolent” for the time because they concluded that Native people were indeed human and should therefore no longer be hunted for sport or bounty.

The history of Indian boarding schools in the United States is a complex and often painful narrative, one that necessitates the validation and incorporation of Native voices to fully comprehend its impact and legacy. This document emphasizes the critical importance of acknowledging Native perspectives and traditional knowledge as indispensable tools for understanding the broader historic context and the lived experiences of those who were, and continue to be, directly affected by past and present federal Indian education policies.

Methodology

An examination of the broader history of Native peoples within the present-day United States is critical to understanding the historic context of the Federal Indian boarding school era. At present, NPS does not have a dedicated historic context or thematic study addressing this history. Therefore, this document includes an overview to provide background for understanding the policies, attitudes, and perceptions of the period. The goals of this effort include incorporating Native voices and traditional knowledge as primary sources and conducting a review of government and individual school research materials related to boarding schools. Additionally, this document seeks to provide a framework for additional research on the history of Indian education in the US and facilitate the nomination of additional extant Indian boarding school properties as National Historic Landmarks or for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.²¹

The methodology for gathering information for this context began with listening to Native voices as they discussed their history. The authors spoke with Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs), elders, Tribal leaders, Federal Indian boarding school alumni, and descendants to hear their experiences with these schools. Existing scholarship pertaining to Indian boarding schools was reviewed and the terminology used carefully reviewed and considered. The authors aimed to incorporate Native scholarship pertaining to Indian boarding schools whenever possible.²²

¹⁹ Newland, Vol. II, 93.

²⁰ In 1883, the group first held its annual Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian in New Paltz, New York. “Friends of the Indian,” Digital History ID 724, University of Houston, 2021, accessed April 20, 2026, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/voices_content.cfm?vid=4.

²¹ Much of the information presented in this context will be applicable to other Indian boarding schools with no federal support, as well as Indian day schools, both federal and non-federal. Seven Federal Indian boarding schools are currently designated NHLs (see Part II for a complete list).

²² This research goal echoes “Approaches to Overcome Methodological Challenges,” in Brett Lee Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points: Current State of Research on History, Impacts, and Healing Related to the United States’ Indian Industrial/Boarding School Policy* (Native American Rights Fund, 2019), 80-81. The six approaches include: “1. Approach research from an Indigenous and strengths-based lens (...) 2. Consult community and existing literature to

Through this primary and secondary source research, it became clear that many variables must be considered in establishing a contextual framework, including individual experiences, the stated intentions of schools across timeframes or under varied religious or governmental policies, and an uneven historical record when considering specific locations. Each of the hundreds of Native Nations that have been here, in the place known today as the United States, since time immemorial, all have a unique culture and interacted with European Americans, and with individual schools, in specific and distinct ways.²³

Although each of the 575 federally recognized Tribes is a unique nation, with individualized cultural expressions ranging from distinct languages to unique community relations, these nations have many shared experiences of interactions with the US government. This historic context begins with some of the earliest Tribal Nation and non-Tribal government interactions that set the framework and informed the decisions made by the federal government during the Indian boarding school era, which officially begins in 1819 with passage of the Indian Civilization Fund Act and continues until 1969.²⁴ Setting the stage with discussion of earlier periods is important because until recently, much academic research has overlooked the lives of Native people from initial contact through pre-1776 government policies. Our understanding of the events leading up to 1819, the policies enacted between 1819-1969, and the actions of the federal government have changed over time, as research uncovers documents that highlight government intentions and hears detailed stories and recognizes resiliency efforts from survivors and descendants.

The federal policies supporting Indian education and the Federal Indian boarding school system directly touched the lives of all Native families. By 1926, it is estimated nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools.²⁵ The 1969 US Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare's Special Subcommittee on Indian Education report, usually known as the Kennedy Report, described three approaches to Indian education between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War:

ensure precise and meaningful language is used and is used consistently (...) 3. Think beyond statistical significance (...) 4. Consider supplementing self-reporting measures with additional measures (...) 5. Work to differentiate the ways in which historical trauma events impact well-being (...) 6. Use purposeful participant sampling to improve generalizability and to characterize a wider range of experiences."

²³ Time immemorial refers to "the deepest possible kind of human memory," and "beyond recorded history, beyond oral tradition, beyond oral memory - into what we call the deep past," as described by Philip J. Deloria, Yankton Dakota descent and Professor of History at Harvard University, in B. 'Toastie' Oaster, "What Does 'Time Immemorial' Really Mean?," *High Country News*, January 12, 2026, <https://www.hcn.org/issues/58-1/what-does-time-immemorial-really-mean/>.

²⁴ Government boarding school policy changed at the end of the 1969 calendar year, with many schools finishing out the academic year to close in the spring of 1970. The DOI reports also cite 1969 as the end of the Federal Indian boarding school period, although isolated schools, such as Stewart Indian School in Carson City, NV, continued operations through 1980. Note that Chemawa (opened 1880), Flandreau (originally established 1875, reopened 1893), Riverside (established 1871), and Sherman (established 1892) Indian Schools serve students even today. See U.S. Department of the Interior, "Off-Reservation Residential Schools," accessed February 24, 2026, <https://www.bie.edu/topic-page/reservation-residential-schools>.

²⁵ David W. Adams, *Education for Extinction* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 27.

1) the manual labor school, located in the Indian community, teaching “letters, labor and mechanic arts, and morals and Christianity”; 2) the mission school, patterned after the day schools of the whites; and 3) the tribal school, wholly or largely under tribal supervision, and maintained usually by tribal funds.²⁶

Following the Civil War and into the twentieth century, government-funded Native education facilities took one of four forms: public schools, day schools, on-reservation boarding schools, and off-reservation boarding schools.²⁷ Public schools, albeit historically segregated, provided general education to all school-aged children, including Native students. Day schools were schools where students attended during the day, returning to their families and homes in the evening. Boarding schools on-reservation enabled students to see their families more frequently than off-reservation boarding schools, but students were kept separate from their community. Each of these school types received financial support through religious institutions, federal funding, state funding, or some combination of these sources.

The focus of this context is on federally supported Indian education, primarily boarding schools, both on and off reservation. It includes brief discussions of early schools supported by Russia, France, England, and Spain in the Colonial Era that laid a foundation for the federal system to take hold. Many of these earliest schools utilized both government and religious organization funds. This approach follows the definition of Federal Indian Boarding Schools set out by the Department of the Interior (DOI) in 2022 in the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. In that formulation, the institution must have provided education and boarding, received federal support, and opened before 1969. Generally, documentation of government support prior to 1819 and passage of the Civilization Fund Act is limited. Each Federal Indian boarding school will have a unique period of significance, but trends in implementation of policies are recognizable in every Indian boarding school.²⁸

Many of the records informing this historic context stem from federal investigative reports and reports to Congress over the last 250 years, primarily focusing on federally funded education for Native children. Some investigations were conducted independently but funded with federal money. A review of these investigative reports and the US governmental policies directed at Native Nations as a whole provides a more in-depth understanding of not just the national

²⁶ Brewton Berry, *The Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, Prepared for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research (Research Foundation, The Ohio State University, December 1968), prepared for the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 91st Congress, first session, February 1969, 10.

²⁷ Some annual reports break the schools down into further groups (Government Boarding Schools, Government Day Schools, Government Industrial Training Schools, Specially appropriated, Contract Boarding Schools, Contract Day Schools); however, these were either boarding schools or day schools, on- or off-reservation, and are thus included in the broader categories. See, for example, *Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1888* (Government Printing Office, 1888).

²⁸ This study does not include stand-alone sanitariums, asylums, orphanages, dormitories, or jails, as they were not considered schools, although they often fell under the larger educational umbrella of the federal government and shared assimilationist goals. The DOI report includes twenty-three orphanages, three asylums, and one jail that did provide education, see Newland, Vols. I and II.

policies toward Native people, but also of the policies enacted at individual schools. National policy that set the rationale for action taken by individual superintendents was reflected in these reports as were the influence of religious organizations and the press. The reports and policies illuminate intended goals, whether overtly stated or not, of the Indian education system, as well as highlight areas of deficiencies and recommendations for improvements. Investigative reports provide informative insights into why specific governmental policies were employed and how they benefited the federal government, why certain methods were implemented in specific schools, and demonstrate the rationale behind changing approaches over time. Each one details the commitment of the federal government to provide education to Indians as required by numerous treaties signed in exchange for land.²⁹

However, when studying the history of Federal Indian boarding schools, major limitations exist with heavy reliance on US government reports, which were largely written by politicians or appointees, historically European American males, as the reports do not include the perspectives of Native students or their families. The committees gathering information were often biased in service of political agendas. In the case of Indian boarding schools, government reports do not provide a comprehensive view, nor do they include traditional knowledge or ways of knowing. The incorporation of Native voices can fill in gaps of knowledge, but pieces of the story are revealed slowly, in part due to the personal and sensitive nature of the information. The harm these places inflicted on Native people and their culture is well documented even in government reports. This trauma has affected Native voices who may be hesitant to revisit these moments, but their perspectives, experiences, and stories are essential to understanding the full complexity of the Federal Indian boarding school legacy in American history. Resources from the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS), presentations by Native students, scholars, and descendants on the school system and individual schools, and the personal experiences of the authors and contributors were valuable to this context.

Even given their limitations, several government reports used extensively in this context study are key to understanding Federal Indian Boarding School history. The Meriam Commission Report, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, was published in 1928 and prepared at the request of Secretary of the Interior (SOI) Hubert Work. It was touted as the first general study of Indian conditions since the 1850s. The report staff visited off- and on-reservation boarding schools, day schools, and public schools with Indian students. The report was initiated following federal assimilationist policy controversy in New Mexico surrounding Taos Pueblo's fight against the 1923 proposed Leavitt Bill (Dance Order), which aimed to ban traditional Pueblo dances. John Collier, later Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Franklin D. Roosevelt, founded the American Indian Defense Association (AIDA) the same year to protect Indian religious

²⁹ Almost every treaty between the US government and Tribal Nations between 1819 and 1868 included promises of providing or enabling Indian education in exchange for ceded lands. See Newland, Vol. II, Appendix J: List of Indian Treaties, [bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/vol_ii_appendix_j_list_of_indian_treaties_508_final.pdf](https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/vol_ii_appendix_j_list_of_indian_treaties_508_final.pdf).

freedom and land sovereignty. The AIDA was opposed to forced assimilation of Indians into European American society and promoted cultural pluralism, allowing Indians the choice to assimilate or live separately.

In a letter published in 1928, Dr. Haven Emerson, president of AIDA, accused the Secretary of the Interior of dissimulating the Meriam Report's recommendations and failing to act on its exposure of child endangerment, overcrowding in boarding schools, child starvation, and forced child labor.³⁰ AIDA strongly criticized the oversight of Office of Indian Affairs. By contrast to AIDA, the Indian Rights Association, established by non-Native men in 1882, advocated dismantling Tribal cultural traditions in favor of allotment of Tribal lands, industrial education, and citizenship, in the belief that these policies would lead to integration of Native people into American society.³¹ This fundamental difference in approaches was the backdrop of debate upon which the Meriam Commission's findings shed light.

In 1969, a Senate Special Subcommittee Report entitled *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, often referred to as the Kennedy Report, stated: "A careful review of the historical literature reveals that the dominant policy of the federal government toward the American Indian has been one of forced assimilation which has vacillated between the two extremes of coercion and persuasion. At the root of the assimilation policy has been a desire to divest the Indian of his land and resources."³² The Kennedy Report provided harsh critique of the day-to-day operations of American Indian education, including a detailed list of issues and recommendations for improvement.

In 2021, under the leadership of Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the DOI undertook a more detailed investigation of the Federal Indian boarding school system. The reports established parameters for what constituted a boarding school, then proceeded to provide a summary of each school identified. The DOI Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative reports included historic schools that met four criteria:

1. **Housing** – The institution has been described as providing on-site housing or overnight lodging. This includes dormitory, orphanage, asylum, residential, boarding, home, jail, and quarters.
2. **Education** – The institution has been described as providing formal academic or vocational training and instruction. This includes mission school, religious training, boarding school, and day school.

³⁰ Haven Emerson, *Our Indian Citizens Their Crisis: A Letter Addressed to the Presidential Candidates and A Supporting Statement* (The American Indian Defense Association, Inc., October 6, 1928). See also "Says Indian Bureau Murders Its Wards," *The New York Times*, December 14, 1928.

³¹ Beth A. Twiss Houting, "Indian Rights Association," *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, 2014, accessed January 31, 2026, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/indian-rights-associations/>.

³² Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman, Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge* (Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Pursuant to Senate Resolution 80, 91st Congress, 1st Session) (November 1969), 9 [hereafter Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*].

3. **Federal Support** – The institution has been described as receiving federal government funds or other federal support. This includes agency, independent, contract, mission, contract with white schools, government, semi-government, under superintendency, and land or buildings or funds or supplies or services provided.
4. **Timeframe** – The institution was operational before 1969 (prior to modern departmental Indian education programming including BIE [Bureau of Indian Education]).³³

The conservative accounting approach used in the investigation ensures we know the minimum number of schools of any given type. Research toward the 2022 and 2024 DOI reports were able to identify, by name, 18,624 children who entered the boarding school system between 1819 and 1969.³⁴

Additional research is needed to determine the totality of government-funded schools, which may have included additional boarding schools. Using government reports, historian David Wallace Adams tallied 19,157 unnamed Native children attending government boarding schools in 1925 alone.³⁵ Adams reported that an additional 7,280 students were enrolled in “mission, private, and state institutions – contract and non-contract.”³⁶ Several factors can account for variances in the data, including the fact many records from institutions not meeting each of the four criteria above were not included in the DOI investigative reports. For example, while 417 Federal Indian boarding schools met the criteria for inclusion, at least 1,025 other institutions, many following the same philosophies and policies, did not, but were included in an appendix.³⁷ In some cases, concrete evidence has not been identified linking some institutions to the Federal Indian boarding school system. Notwithstanding, the lived experiences of the schools and other institutions were varied but highly similar. As such, while this context study also focuses on the federal system, much of the information applies across schools and related properties that do not fall within the stricter DOI definition.

Overall, the DOI Federal Indian boarding school definition allows researchers to evaluate and consider different types of schools, with the deeper history also key to understanding the evolution of the system. Colonial-era Spanish, French, English, and Russian governments first supported Indian education with a goal of religious conversion. The US federal government began supporting Indian education as early as 1776 with “contract schools,” usually religious institutions that were supported by the federal government (by either land or funds). Boarding schools persist before and after the defined 1819 to 1969 period. As such, ongoing scholarship

³³ Newland, Vol. I, 17-18.

³⁴ Newland, Vol. II, 15.

³⁵ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 320.

³⁶ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 320.

³⁷ Newland, Vol. II, 15.

can contribute to a fuller accounting of the federal resources supporting the Federal Indian Boarding School system over decades.³⁸

Unlike the public policy aims of the DOI Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative and earlier government reports, this NHL context study takes a more academic approach to support the preparation of nomination materials for National Historic Landmark or National Register of Historic Places recognition. The necessarily broad approach of a nationwide historic context may appear oversimplified and is not intended to replace the need to record the vast and changing array student experiences throughout the tenure of individual Indian boarding schools. All survivors and descendants of the Federal Indian Boarding School system have unique stories that are difficult to incorporate into a single historic context. Many of these stories are being gathered through the efforts of the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS), created in 2012 to pursue understanding and address the ongoing trauma created by the US Indian boarding school policy.

Further, the recent DOI investigative reports contain an abundance of information that adds to our understanding of the system, including extensive lists of schools organized by state. Rather than duplicate those efforts, this context strives to provide a foundation for the evaluation of historic properties associated with the Federal Indian boarding school system, focusing on Native experiences and the continuing resilience and survival of Native communities. This historic context study does not provide an exhaustive or complete history of Native peoples in the US, but rather an overview to aid in considering the historic genesis and operation of the Federal Indian boarding school system and associated extant historic places.

Historic Timeline of US-Tribal Interactions

The following timeline provides a brief historic overview of US–Tribal interactions and the policies and environment that allowed the Federal Indian boarding school system to be implemented (Table 1). Policies reinforced the US legal position of how the federal government interacted with Native Nations and set the tone for actions directly affecting Native people. From earliest contact, Europeans classified Native people as inferior due to their different (non-Western, non-Christian) religious and social values. The first three eras of the US-Tribal interactions center stem from the 1493 Doctrine of Discovery.³⁹ Proffered by Europeans and then the US government, it and subsequent declarations provided what was considered legal justification for the taking of Native land, setting the stage for a series of assimilationist policies, including the boarding schools. The following summary reflects broad political history and

³⁸ The DOI report concluded, in part: “Funding for the Federal Indian boarding school system included both Federal funds through congressional appropriations and funds obtained from Tribal trust accounts for the benefit of Indians and maintained by the United States” (Newland, Vol. I, 92). Additional forensic accounting need to occur to differentiate between Tribal trust monies spent on boarding schools versus federally appropriated monies.

³⁹ In March 2023, the Vatican repudiated the decree as not part of the Catholic faith.

attitudes that shaped US policies governing the Federal Indian boarding school system, building on the list published in the DOI investigative report.⁴⁰

Table 1. General Timeline of US Indian Policy⁴¹

Dates	Era	Brief Description
1493	Doctrine of Discovery	Papal Bull <i>Inter Caetera</i> declares Christians rightful owners of any land of “discovery,” later cited in Supreme Court Marshall Trilogy Opinions (1823, 1831, 1832)
1500 - 1776	Colonial Era	Treaties with European countries: generally, land cessation in exchange for other lands, money, education, and/or goods
1776 - 1830	US Federal Era	Treaties continue under US government: generally, land cessation in exchange for other lands, money, education, and/or goods
1830 - 1871	Removal Era	Forced removal of Tribal Nations from traditional lands; Marshall Trilogy Opinions established only federal (not state) government as having jurisdiction over Tribes as domestic dependent nations
1871 - 1934	Assimilation Era	Forced integration policies under the guise of a “Peace Policy,” government-funded boarding schools rapidly increase, dismantling of reservation lands
1934 - 1953	Reorganization Era	Informed by 1928 Meriam Report; Tribes encouraged to establish formal governments that mimic US government, to include individual constitutions; Federal urban relocation programs begin
1953 - 1968	Termination Era	Reversal of federal policy of Tribal self-governance, forced integration through urban programs
1968 - present	Self-Determination Era	Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968; self-governance is strongly advocated; Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978; Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978; Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA); creation of Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) Program in 1992

Doctrine of Discovery (1493)

Although it predates the United States, the Doctrine of Discovery is one of the earliest principles cited in US court cases regarding US Tribal policy and law. On May 4, 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued the Papal bull *Inter Caetera*, or demarcation bull, declaring any land not currently in possession of any Christian king or prince was available to be “discovered,” claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers, and demarcating how land would be divided between Portugal and

⁴⁰ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix K: List of Federal Indian Policies Related to Federal Indian Boarding Schools.

⁴¹ The historic eras presented in this timeline reflect European historical terms. Individual Tribes may have different perspectives of these eras and may use different terms to define them.

Spain.⁴² The bull essentially dehumanized non-Christian peoples and shaped future interactions between European settlers and Indigenous nations across the globe.⁴³ The Papal bull was followed by a “right of discovery” declaration by King Henry VII of England in 1496.⁴⁴ Discussed further below, the US Supreme Court cited the Doctrine of Discovery as early as 1823 and as recently as 2005 as the foundation of US land rights.⁴⁵

Colonial Era (1500-1776)

The period from 1500 to 1776 is generally referred to as the Colonial Era, a time when European explorers reached North America and began “the colonization of America...in fulfillment of the covenant of grace with God.”⁴⁶ During this era, numerous additional declarations of European superiority and published legal opinions on rights of Europeans over Native populations were made by Spain, England, France, and Russia. Each published statement built on previous statements, thus continuing the justification of colonization and establishing a firm and legally defensible foundation for European actions against Native people.

In 1513, the Spaniard Juan Ponce de León was the first European explorer to land within the current boundaries of the US, in present-day Florida. In 1526, the earliest known mission attempted in what would become the US was established by the Catholic Church in St. Augustine. Over the next two and half centuries, France generally colonized northern land areas of present-day US and Canada, England the eastern seaboard, and Spain parts of the south and southwest. During this period, Tribes were afforded a similar status as colonial governments during treaty negotiations. Numerous treaties were signed to establish boundaries and regulate trade, and in many cases, treaties included government commitments to provide education to Native people. Many of those treaties with European nations were still in place at the founding of the US federal government. In parallel, early Christian missions continued attempts to assimilate and convert Native people. Relations between Native people and colonial settlers were complicated by different languages, ways of being, and the colonists’ desire for land.

Land Policy

Court decisions regarding land conflicts in Scotland and England influenced the policies and legal justifications for land ownership in the US colonies. In 1608, Lord Chief Justice Sir

⁴² Pope Alexander VI, *Inter Caetera: Division of the Undiscovered World between Spain and Portugal* (1493), Papal Encyclicals Online, accessed February 25, 2026, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/alex06/alex06inter.htm>; American Indian Law Alliance Online, “Doctrine of Discovery,” 2025, <https://aila.ngo/issues/doctrine-of-discovery/>.

⁴³ Holy See Press Office, “Joint Statement of the Dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development on the ‘Doctrine of Discovery,’” March 30, 2023, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/03/30/230330b.html>.

⁴⁴ American Indian Law Alliance, “Doctrine of Discovery,” accessed May 19, 2026, <https://aila.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/DOD5.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Bill Chappell, “The Vatican repudiates ‘Doctrine of Discovery,’ which was used to justify colonialism,” National Public Radio, March 30, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/03/30/1167056438/vatican-doctrine-of-discovery-colonialism-indigenous>.

⁴⁶ Robert A. Williams, Jr., *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 165.

Edward Coke pronounced a ruling in the land ownership conflict between Scotsman Robert Calvin and Englishmen Richard and Nicholas Smith, known as *Calvin's Case*, creating a distinction between “friendly aliens” in allegiance to or in league with England (in “amity”) and “enemy aliens for nations not in amity with England.”⁴⁷ In his opinion, Lord Coke declared “All infidels [non-Christians] are in law...perpetual enemies...for between them, as with devils, whose subjects they be, and the Christian, there is perpetual hostility, and can be no peace.”⁴⁸ Coke's opinion is but one example of early legal attempts to justify domination of Native people and colonization of the US.

Origins of Education

In May 1609, Virginia Council of the Virginia Company of London directed Governor Sir Thomas Gates Knight to oversee the conversion of Native people to Christianity, by means including:

(...) [to] procure from them some convenient number of their children to be brought up in your language and manners, and if you finde it convenient, we thinke it reasonable you first remove from them their Iniocasokes or Priestes by a surprise of them all and detaininge them prisoners, for they are so wrapped up in the fogge and miserie of their iniquity and so tirrified with their continuall tirrany, chained under the bond of deathe unto the divell that while they live amounge them to poison and infecte them their mindes, you shall never make any great progres into this glorious worke, nor have any civill peace or concurre with them. And in case of necessity or conveniency, we pronounce it not crueltie nor breach of charity to deale more sharply with them and to proceede even to dache [death?] (...) in your discrecion [sic].⁴⁹

In 1617, King James I requested every parish in England to give funds to found a college in Virginia “for the sons of Englishmen and Indians.”⁵⁰ In November 1618, the Virginia Company instructed Governor George Yeardly, in a document sometimes known as the Great Charter, that ten thousand acres of land should be set aside “for the training up of the children of the infidels in true religion, moral virtue and civility, and for other godly uses (...).”⁵¹ The Virginia Company directed the Governor to kidnap children and hold them in chains until they relented to the Christian faith and European language and manners.⁵²

⁴⁷ Williams, Jr., *American Indian in Western Legal Thought*, 200; *Calvin v. Smith*, “Calvin's Case,” 77 Engl. Rep. 377 (K.B. 1608), <https://i2i.org/wp-content/uploads/1608-Calvins-Case-77EngRep377.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Williams, Jr., *American Indian in Western Legal Thought*, 200; *Calvin v. Smith*, 77 Engl. Rep. 377 (K.B. 1608).

⁴⁹ Virginia Council, “Instruccions Orders and Constitucions...to Sr Thomas Gates Knight Governor of Virginia” (May 1609), in Virginia Company of London, *The Three Charters of the Virigina Company of London with Seven Related Documents, 1606-1621* (Virginia 350th Anniversary Celebration Corporation, 1957; Project Gutenberg EBook, 2011), 55-69.

⁵⁰ Danielle Moretti-Langholtz and Buck Woodard, *Building the Brafferton: The Founding, Funding, and Legacy of America's Indian School* (Muscarelle Museum of Art, The College of William & Mary, 2018), 28.

⁵¹ Virginia Council, “Instructions to George Yeardley,” November 18, 1618, in Virginia Company of London, *The Three Charters of the Virigina Company of London with Seven Related Documents, 1606-1621*, 95-108.

⁵² Virginia Council, “Instructions to George Yeardley.”

In 1620, George Thorpe, an English parliamentarian and major investor in the Virginia Company of London, was appointed to oversee the first chartered college in the English colonies, the College of Henricus, founded in 1619 (but never fully opened). The related short-lived preparatory East India School in Charles City, Virginia, by 1621 had thirty Indians in attendance.⁵³ These efforts abruptly ended after a series of conflicts with the Powhatan Confederacy led to the Anglo-Powhatan Wars. In a Powhatan offensive against English settlements coordinated by new leader Opechancanough on March 22, 1622, Thorpe and 347 English colonists were killed.⁵⁴ The principles, theories, and legal arguments behind the decisions to create the school, however, endured, as seen in the Anglican (Church of England) and Catholic missionary schools through the eighteenth century.

The Colonial Era also saw the establishment of the oldest school in what would become the US. The Boston Latin School was established in Massachusetts in April 1635, followed by the establishment of Harvard College in Cambridge in 1636. Both schools were privately funded. The first taxpayer-funded free public school was nearby Dedham Public School, opened January 1, 1644, under teacher Reverend Ralph Wheelock. While these schools were not initially open to Native people or women, the advent of public schools modelled the dedication of public monies to educational endeavors.

Colonial Era Schools

Colonial-era French, Spanish, English, and Russian missionaries, with the goal of “Christianization and civilization,” sought to educate Native people through biblical study and adoption of European cultural ways in terms of religion, dress, food production, domesticity, and social interactions. European political entities, both inside and outside of the church, called for forcible conversion. While debate surrounds the oldest such school within the current boundaries of the US, many scholars point to the **Jesuit mission school for Florida Indians (1568)**, founded in Havana, Cuba, as the oldest school established for one of the 575 federally recognized Indian Nations.⁵⁵ Historic accounts of early Catholic missions suggest various sects had differing approaches to establishing religious education: for instance, early Spanish Franciscans were more inclined than some French Jesuits to keep families together, instructing Native people in European irrigation and agricultural practices and in making arts and crafts for sale, in addition to basic academic subjects.⁵⁶ However, other scholarship suggests the opposite, and additional research regarding Native experiences in specific religious schools may prove helpful in understanding the earliest mission schools.⁵⁷ Regardless of intent, instruction provided

⁵³ Moretti-Langholtz and Woodard, *Building the Brafferton*, 28.

⁵⁴ For a more detailed account of the conflicts between the Pamunkey, Powhatan Confederacy, and colonists, please see Frederic W. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures* (University of Nebraska, 1997).

⁵⁵ Berry, *The Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 5-10. There are 575 federally recognized Tribes as of January 30, 2026.

⁵⁶ Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 10.

⁵⁷ Marie Therese Archambault, O.S.F., “Back to Back”: *Roman Catholicism Among the Brule at St. Francis Mission, South Dakota* (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Denver, 1995).

by the missions was heavily influenced by European traditions and ways of knowing. As discussed more in depth below, mission schools are also among the earliest documented educational institutions encouraging students to make and sell arts and crafts.

Other very early examples of Colonial-era religious schools were found in Massachusetts. The Charter of Massachusetts Bay in 1629 stated that conversion of Native people was a primary objective:

(...) our said People, Inhabitants there, may be soe religiously, peaceable, and civilly governed, as their good Life and orderlie Conversacon, maie wynn and incite the Natives of Country, to the Knowledg and Obedience of the onlie true God and Saulor of Mankinde, and the Christian Fayth, which in our Royal Intencon, and the Adventurers free Profession, is the principall Ende of this Plantacion.⁵⁸

Puritan missionary John Eliot founded, with Thomas Dudley, Roxbury Latin school in 1645, having brought “a few captives from the Pequot war” to Roxbury, where he provided them instruction.⁵⁹ Eliot translated the New Testament of the Geneva Bible into Natick or Wôpanâak (an Algonquian language) in 1661, followed by the Old Testament in 1663.⁶⁰ In 1689, he endowed land to expand the **Eliot School (1676)** in Jamaica Plain that also included Indian students.⁶¹ Historian Brewton Berry noted that Eliot “developed the plan of bringing the Indians together in self-governing towns, where they could be taught, along with their letters and Christian ethics, to various arts and crafts (...) After 30 years of this effort, Eliot had succeeded in establishing 14 towns of ‘praying Indians.’”⁶²

⁵⁸ “The Charter of Massachusetts Bay: 1629,” Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed September 2, 2025, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mass03.asp, reproduced from Francis Newton Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America*, compiled and edited under the Act of Congress of June 30, 1906 (Government Printing Office, 1909).

⁵⁹ Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 8; The Roxbury Latin School, “Rooted in History,” accessed February 26, 2026, <https://www.roxburylatin.org/about/history/>.

⁶⁰ *Mamusse wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblium God naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk Wusku Testament*, translated by John Eliot (Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson, 1663). Spanish and French missionaries also translated religious texts into Native languages. Jesuit priests especially were known for living among the Tribes and learning their languages and adopting local customs. However, Eliot’s translation is the earliest known full translation of the Bible into a Native American language. See also William Wallace Tooker, *John Eliot’s First Indian Teacher and Interpreter Cockenoe-de-Long Island and the Story of His Career from the Early Records* (Henry Stevens’ Son and Stiles, 1896).

⁶¹ Jamaica Plain Historical Society, “Eliot School in Session Here Since 1676,” accessed February 26, 2026, <https://www.jpshs.org/colonial-era/eliot-school-in-session-here-since-1676.html#gsc.tab=0>.

⁶² Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 12. For additional information regarding John Eliot, see Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot’s Mission to the Indians Before King Philip’s War* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Nehemiah Adams, *The life of John Eliot; with an account of the early missionary efforts among the Indians of New England* (Sabbath School Society, 1847), Archive.org; and History of Missiology, “Eliot, John (1604-1690),” Boston University School of Theology, <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/e-f/eliot-john-1604-1690/>, accessed June 2, 2026.

Along with Timothy Woodbridge, Eliot's great-grandson, Rev. John Sergeant emulated Eliot in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1734, establishing "a day school, a boarding school, and an experimental 'outing system,' whereby Indian pupils were placed in Puritan homes during the vacation periods."⁶³ In parallel, Sergeant also pursued translation of Christian prayers and learning the Mohegan language.⁶⁴ Known initially as Great Barrington, the **Stockbridge School (1734)** remained open through the Revolution. These were precursors to many Federal Indian boarding school practices implemented later. In the 1640s, a British missionary organization, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, supported the establishment of an institute of higher education for missionary training of Native people at Harvard University. Their financial support helped build the first brick building at Harvard in 1655.⁶⁵ The Harvard University Charter of 1650 promised "the education of English & Indian Youth of this Country in knowledge: and godliness."⁶⁶ The **Harvard Indian College (1655)** stood in Harvard Yard until 1698 (no longer extant). Based on current research, no federal funds were allocated to support this endeavor.

Perhaps the oldest still extant property related to Colonial Indian education is **Brafferton Hall (1723)** in Williamsburg, Virginia. In the late seventeenth century, the Virginia Company of London finally met the direction of the Great Charter of November 18, 1618. In 1693, the College of William & Mary was issued a Royal Charter, which included a mandate to educate and missionize the "Western Indians." Native communities feared enslavement and mistrusted the college, and in 1700, Governor Francis Nicholson promised young boys would receive food, clothing, books, and care, at no cost.⁶⁷ He requested that Tribes who were signatory to treaties, known as tributaries, to send up to four boys per Tribe, aged seven or eight, to the school.⁶⁸ Governor Nicholson had to assure the Tribes no Indian student would be enslaved. Notwithstanding, the first Native students to attend in 1702 were captives of the Catawba Nation and most likely from other more distant southern Tribes.⁶⁹ Little else is known of these four boys. The school made space for an older Native individual to serve as an adult chaperone.

⁶³ Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 12. In 1775, John Sergeant, Jr., took over control of Stockbridge Indian Mission and School: see "Sergeant, Sr., John," and "Sergeant, John, Jr., 1747-1824," Dartmouth Libraries Archives & Manuscripts; David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Cornell University Press, 2010); James Axtell, "The Rise and Fall of the Stockbridge Indian Schools," *The Massachusetts Review* 27, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 367-378..

⁶⁴ James Constantine Pilling, "Sergeant (Rev. John), the elder," in *Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages* (Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of Ethnology, 1891), 455-458.

⁶⁵ Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology excavated the remains of the building in 2009. See "Digging Veritas—The Indian College," accessed September 2, 2025, <https://peabody.harvard.edu/galleries/digging-veritas-indian-college>.

⁶⁶ Both Harvard University (founded in 1636) and Princeton University (founded in 1746) are referenced as having had concern for Indian education, see Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, 10.

⁶⁷ Buck Woodard, "Students of the Brafferton Indian School," in *Building the Brafferton: The Founding, Funding, and Legacy of America's Indian School*, eds. Danielle Moretti-Langholtz and Buck Woodard (Muscarella Museum of Art, The College of William & Mary, 2018), 114.

⁶⁸ "The Early Decades of the Brafferton Indian School, c. 1700-1740," William & Mary, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.wm.edu/sites/historiccampus/brafferton/indianschool/>.

⁶⁹ Woodward, *Building the Brafferton*.

Reportedly as many as eighty Indian students were brought there in succeeding years.⁷⁰ In 1705, after the main college building burned, students were taught and housed in town.

By 1716, “Indian and White students were educated and sheltered in the main building, now known as the Wren Building.”⁷¹ In 1723, separate housing was built on campus for Native students, known as the Brafferton Building, Brafferton Hall, or Brafferton Indian School, located within an area known as the Old College Yard. Designated a National Historic Landmark on October 9, 1960, the Wren Building, College of William and Mary NHL includes Brafferton and the President’s House, five reconstructed outbuildings, and one foundation.⁷² Brafferton Indian School is likely the oldest extant building associated with an Indian boarding school in the US. Brafferton Indian School closed at the start of the American Revolution in 1776.

Another still extant Colonial era school is **Moor’s Indian Charity School (later Moor’s Indian College) (1754)**, located in Lebanon, Connecticut. Congregational minister Rev. Eleazer Wheelock was another successor to Eliot. Wheelock began teaching Native students in his home before founding what would become Moor’s Indian College in Lebanon, Connecticut, in 1754. Wheelock followed a similar educational philosophy to remove children from their homes and surround them with Puritan European influences. By 1765, twenty-nine Indian boys attended alongside English boys. Ten Indian girls were enrolled and placed in homes for domestic training.⁷³

The first student, Samson Occom, of the Mohegan Tribe, was educated at Wheelock’s home. Occom later made fundraising tours of Britain between 1766 and 1768, raising £12,000 in donations. Rev. Wheelock took the money, moved the school to Hanover, New Hampshire, and used some or possibly all the funds to found Dartmouth College in 1769. Moor’s Indian College closed in 1770. The DOI investigative report includes Moor’s Indian College on the List of Other Institutions with housing and federal funding with notations for additional research.⁷⁴ Both Eliot and Wheelock later had Federal Indian boarding schools named after them in Mississippi and Oklahoma, respectively.

The actions and aggressions of the Colonial Era demonstrate the earliest attempts at educating Native populations through forced adaptation to European beliefs and customs and the eradication of Native lifeways and cultures. With few exceptions, missionaries led Indian

⁷⁰ Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 8; Woodward, *Building the Brafferton*, 116.

⁷¹ Woodward, *Building the Brafferton*, 117.

⁷² Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 8; Constance M. Greiff and Terrence W. Epperson, “Wren Building, College of William and Mary,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, July 1985), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/41679174>. While Brafferton Indian School was a boarding school that received land from the Colony of Virginia, it is not included in the DOI reports, as it was established and closed prior to the founding of the US, and therefore, no US federal funds supported the school.

⁷³ Leon Burr Richardson, *The History of Dartmouth College* (Dartmouth College Publications, 1932), 36-38.

⁷⁴ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix F, 5.

education during this period under the direction of European leaders with a focus on assimilation.

US Federal Era (1776-1830)

Many federal Indian policies stemmed from the onset of the new US government. In 1776, when the thirteen colonial governments declared independence from Britain, the US immediately began treaty-making with Tribal Nations. The Second Continental Congress established the Committee on Indian Affairs, headed by Benjamin Franklin, in 1775. Ratified in 1788, the US Constitution references “Indians” twice. The first occurrence is in the House of Representatives section, Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3, which states that Indians not taxed were excluded from the population totals determining the number of representatives per state.⁷⁵ The second occurrence is in the Commerce Clause, Article I, Section 8, Clause 3, which gives power to the Congress to “regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.” Additionally, Article VI states: “This Constitution, and the Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land.” Thus, the US Constitution recognizes Indian Tribes as pre-existing sovereign nations and considers the treaties made to be supreme law (also known as the Supremacy Clause).⁷⁶ Between 1776 and 1789, Congress spent \$580,103.41 (figure not adjusted for inflation) on negotiations with Tribes, a considerable amount for the time.⁷⁷

In 1789, the US Congress placed Native American relations within the Indian Office of the newly formed War Department.⁷⁸ In 1806, the Office of the Superintendent of Indian Trade was formed within the War Department, where it operated through 1823.⁷⁹

The US passed the *Trade and Nonintercourse Act of 1790*, which established rules and regulations for trade and interaction between Native people and citizens and inhabitants of the US.⁸⁰ Through this Act, Congress restricted all trade and land sales with Native people to only those with federally issued licenses and with federal approval. This was the first in a series of acts passed between 1790 and 1834 that, in addition to regulating trade, set boundaries for reservations, and promoted an American civilization. In March 1802, Congress appropriated

⁷⁵ United States Constitution [full text], National Constitution Center, <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/full-text>.

⁷⁶ Caleb Nelson and Kermit Roosevelt, “The Supremacy Clause: Common Interpretation,” accessed September 2, 2025, National Constitution Center, <https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/articles/article-vi/clauses/31>.

⁷⁷ S. Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1973), 36-37.

⁷⁸ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 313; David H. DeJong, “A Most Anonymous Position: Federal Indian Policy and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1824-2017,” in *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs: The United States Indian Service and the Making of the Federal Indian Policy, 1824-2017* (The University of Utah Press, 2020), 220-228.

⁷⁹ DeJong, “A Most Anonymous Position,” 221.

⁸⁰ “An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes,” Act of July 22, 1790, reproduced from *United States Statutes at Large*, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/na024.asp.

\$15,000 to support the most recent iteration of the Act, which replaced preceding versions and made the act permanent. Section 13 of the Act reads:

That in order to promote civilization among the friendly Indian tribes, and to secure the continuance of their friendship, it shall be lawful for the President of the United States to cause them to be furnished with useful domestic animals, and implements of husbandry, and with goods or money, as he shall judge proper, and to appoint such persons, from time to time, as temporary agents, to reside among the Indians as he see fit: *Provided* [emphasis original], that the whole amount of such presents, and allowances to such agents, shall not exceed fifteen thousand dollars per annum.⁸¹

This appropriation practically served as one of the earliest forms of federal Indian education policy towards assimilation.

Indian education at the outset of the Federal Era saw a continuation of missionary activities, followed by a dramatic increase in boarding schools funded or partially funded by the US government. The use of federal money is seen as early as 1775, when the Second Continental Congress appropriated \$500 to Rev. Wheelock for the education of Indians at the Indian Charity School (Moor's Indian Charity School) at Dartmouth. In 1779, Wheelock thanked Congress for its grant of \$925 to support Indian youth at the school, and five years later, Congress increased appropriations to \$5,000 for Dartmouth.⁸²

Treaties and Land Policy

Treaties during the Federal Era likewise focused on pushing European ideals of “civilization” (assimilation to European ways) and “conversion” (adopting the Christian faith and sedentary agriculture). The 1969 Kennedy report summarized:

The purpose of the treaties did not differ much from the reason behind the missionaries' activities. Both the government and the missionaries sought to civilize the Indian. But whereas the religious groups acted primarily out of altruism, the government thought more in terms of the value of possessing Indian lands. Government leaders recognized that if Indians could be converted from hunters into farmers, the Indians would require less land and would be easier to contain. Such a policy would naturally mean more land

⁸¹ “An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes, and to Preserve Peace on the Frontiers,” Act of March 30, 1802, Pub. L. No. 7-13, § 12, 2 Stat. 139, 143, reproduced from *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 2, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/na005.asp; National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, “Letters Sent by the Superintendent of Indian Trade, 1807-1823,” National Archives Microfilm Publications, Pamphlet Describing M16 (1974), accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.archives.gov/files/native-americans/bia/ml6.pdf>.

⁸² Continental Congress, “January 10, 1775,” edited from the Original Records in the Library of Congress by Worthington Chauncey Ford, in *Journal of the Continental Congress 1774-1789*, Vol. IV: 1776 (Government Printing Office, 1906), 45; Richardson, *The History of Dartmouth College*, 156. See also Colin G. Calloway, “Chapter 3: Dartmouth, Indians, and the American Revolution, 1775-1800,” in *The Indian History of an American Institution: Native Americans and Dartmouth* (Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 38-54.

available for settlement by white men. Education of Indians was seen as the means of accomplishing the conversion.⁸³

The Kennedy report asserted that the main goal of federal Indian education was land acquisition, which is supported by President Thomas Jefferson's first address to Congress in 1801, highlighting the federal policy of assimilation:

(...) I am happy to inform you that the continued efforts to introduce among them [our Indian neighbors] the implements and the practice of husbandry and the household arts have not been without success; that they are becoming more and more sensible of the superiority of this dependence for clothing and subsistence over the precarious resources of hunting and fishing; and already we are able to announce, that instead of that constant diminution of their numbers, produced by their wars and their wants, some of them begin to experience an increase of population.⁸⁴

In a personal letter to William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indian Territory, dated February 27, 1803, Jefferson further wrote:

Our system is to live in perpetual peace with the Indians (...) When they withdraw themselves to the culture of a small piece of land, they will perceive how useless to them are their extensive forests, and will be willing to pare them off from time to time in exchange for necessities for their farms and families. To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessities, which we have to spare and they want, we shall push our trading uses, and be glad to see the good and influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of lands.⁸⁵

Jefferson directly stated the goal to make Native people disinterested in large tracts of land and to promote dependency for goods, and even push debt, with the primary goal of acquiring Native land.

⁸³ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, 11. It should be noted that farming already provided a significant portion of Native diets; however, Native agricultural practices were more reflective of adaptation to the local environment. While European farming utilized less land, those agricultural practices were not appropriate for all regions of the US.

⁸⁴ President Thomas Jefferson, "First Annual Message to Congress (December 8, 1801)," in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents Prepared under the Direction of the Joint Committee on Printing, of the House and Senate, Pursuant to an Act of the Fifty-Second Congress of the United States, Vol. 1, Part III: Thomas Jefferson, March 4, 1801, to March 4, 1809*, ed. James D. Richardson (1897), 314. See also "eXplorations: Indian Removal," Digital History, 2021, accessed September 2, 2025, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/indian_removal/jefferson_policy.cfm.

⁸⁵ Francis Paul Prucha, *Documents of the United States Indian Policy*, 3rd ed. (University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 22.

Federal Era Schools

Several schools from this early period were identified in the 2024 DOI investigative report; in most cases additional research is needed to determine what related resources may still be extant. The oldest is **Spring Place Mission School (1801)** in Spring Place, Georgia, founded by United Brethren in Christ.⁸⁶ This school was also referred to as Springplace Moravian Mission School and Spring-place. The federal government supported Spring Place with an annual allowance of \$250 used in the education of sixty to seventy youth, primarily Cherokee individuals. Records indicate boarding was available for both male and female students.⁸⁷ The school closed in 1833. The mission elected to move with the Tribes during their forced relocation to Oklahoma during the Removal Era.⁸⁸

According to the 2024 DOI report, the next oldest schools were founded as early as 1817. The **Brainerd Mission School (1817)**, founded by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) in Chattanooga, Tennessee, educated about one hundred Cherokee youth and included lodging.⁸⁹ It was also known as Chickamauga Mission, reflecting the name of the adjacent creek. The mission may have had as many as thirty to forty buildings at one time, including cabins, mission house, barn, sawmill, and a graveyard. According to the DOI Report, students here were expected to work to defray their own expenses.⁹⁰ This is an early example of schools making students physically work and participate in the maintenance of physical infrastructure to cover the cost of their education. The mission closed the Tennessee location in 1838 and relocated to Oklahoma during the Removal Era. Brainerd Mission Cemetery was listed in the National Register at the state level of significance on December 6, 1979, with additional documentation to the national and local levels approved on November 2, 2006 (NRIS 79002435). No school buildings survive and the site is fully surrounded by commercial development.⁹¹

The **High Tower Mission School (1817)** in Cartersville, Georgia, was also run by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and received annual funds from the federal government.⁹² It was also referred to as Etowah Mission School and Etonee School, A range of

⁸⁶ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix B, 94.

⁸⁷ Rowena McClinton, *The Moravian Springplace Mission to the Cherokees* (University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 9. See also Ronnie H. Rogers, *Initial Testing of the Reported Site of Spring Place Mission Church, Murray County, Georgia*, Report Number 3468 (2003), <https://archaeology.uga.edu/gasf/report/3468>.

⁸⁸ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix A.

⁸⁹ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix B, 394.

⁹⁰ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix A, 52.

⁹¹ Dick Holland and Martha Carver, “Brainerd Mission Cemetery,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1979) and Sarah J. Martin and Carroll Van West, “Brainerd Mission Cemetery,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2006), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/135818494>; National Park Service, “Brainerd Mission Cemetery, Chattanooga,” Trail of Tears National Historic Trail, updated March 10, 2026, <https://www.nps.gov/places/brainerd-mission-cemetery-chattanooga.htm>. See also “Brainerd Mission,” The University of Tennessee Chattanooga, https://findingaids.utc.edu/agents/corporate_entities/17.

⁹² Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B, 157, and Vol. II, Appendix B, 93.

ten to thirty-one East Mississippian Cherokee students were provided education at High Tower, which closed in 1829.⁹³ While listed as a day school in 1817, students were boarded by 1829.⁹⁴

Another four schools were founded as early as 1818: **Choctaw Indian Academy (1818)** in Georgetown, Kentucky (discussed further below); **Eliot School (1818)** in Holcomb, Mississippi; **Seneca Mission and School (1818)** in Buffalo, New York; and **St. Regis Seminary (1818)** in Florissant, Missouri.⁹⁵ Eliot School, also known as Elliott Mission School, was founded by the ABCFM as the first in a series of thirteen missions among the Choctaw Nation and named after Puritan John Eliot.⁹⁶ It closed in 1833, following the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit and Choctaw removal.⁹⁷ Seneca Mission and School, founded in 1818 and closed in 1845, was associated with both the ABCFM and the Baptist General Convention.⁹⁸ It was also known as Buffalo Creek School, Buffalo Creek Mission.⁹⁹ Tribes identified in the DOI report are listed as New York Indians.¹⁰⁰ St. Regis Seminary, also known as St. Ferdinand de Florissant, Florissant Mission School, and St. Stanislaus Seminary, was founded by Catholic Jesuits.¹⁰¹ Volume I of the DOI report states the school opened in 1818; however, Volume II states 1823. The school remained open until 1971. Tribes associated with the school are: Iowa, Ioway, Bah-Kho-Je, Baxoje; Sac and Fox of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska; and Sac, Sauk.¹⁰²

Although founded in 1818 in the vicinity of Georgetown, Kentucky, **Choctaw Academy (1825)** was reestablished a short time later. Senator (later Vice President) and Baptist missionary Richard Mentor Johnson hosted and administered the residential school for Native boys and young men, which opened at his property, Blue Spring Farm in Scott County, Kentucky, in 1825.¹⁰³ Prior to relocating to nearby White Sulphur in 1831 (property no longer extant), Choctaw Indian Academy hosted more than six hundred students from seventeen tribes.

The Choctaw Nation signed the Treaty of Washington City with the US in January 1825, which provided \$6,000 of funds annually for a period of twenty years to the Nation to support education. In 1826, the Creek Tribe (Muscogee Nation) reserved part of their April 1826 funding for the education of their children at Choctaw Indian Academy. Over the course of the school's history, several Tribes elected to use treaty funds for education at the Academy. Choctaw,

⁹³ Sam'l S. Hamilton, "Report from the Office of Indian Affairs," November 24, 1827, in *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1826-1839* (Office of Indian Affairs, 1839), 144-147.

⁹⁴ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix A, 157.

⁹⁵ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix B.

⁹⁶ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B, 106, and Vol. II, Appendix B, 159.

⁹⁷ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B, 106, Vol. II, Appendix B, 159.

⁹⁸ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B, 309, and Vol. II, Appendix B, 241.

⁹⁹ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B, 309.

¹⁰⁰ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix B, 241.

¹⁰¹ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B, 372, and Vol. II, Appendix B, 164.

¹⁰² Newland, Vol. II, Appendix B, 164.

¹⁰³ Ella Wells Drake, "Choctaw Academy: Richard M. Johnson and the Business of Indian Education," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 91, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 260-297. Johnson previously opened a short-lived school in 1819 that closed in 1821. See Christina Snyder, *Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in the Ages of Jackson* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Chickasaw, Seminole (Floridas), Miami, Pottawattamie, Sac, Fox, and Ioway, Quapaw, Creek and East Creek, Omaha, Cherokee, Chippewa, and Ottawa students attended.¹⁰⁴ Some records indicate that non-Native children were also educated here.¹⁰⁵ Attendance was greatly affected by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and Tribal support eroded as early as 1829 due to financial management and student living conditions. By passage of the Choctaw Schools Act of 1842, no more students attended Choctaw Indian Academy, and the school closed by 1845.¹⁰⁶

The property retains an extant circa-1825 stone masonry dormitory and classroom building as well as an associated single-story stone building as well as a broader rural setting and small-scale contributing landscape features. Choctaw Academy appears to be a good candidate for nomination under NHL Criterion 1 as an early example of a boarding school with federal support developed by a religious mission in coordination with Tribal leaders.¹⁰⁷

Civilization Fund Act of 1819

As a successor to the Office of Indian Trade, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun administratively established the agency known today as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1824.¹⁰⁸ One of the main tasks of the Office of Indian Affairs or Indian Service was oversight of funds under the so-called Indian Civilization Act. It was thus the Department of War that issued the first government reports on schools for Native children.

Passed in 1819 forty-three years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Civilization Fund Act supported and facilitated schools and other programs whose primary goals were to teach Native children the English language and European American traditions, “habits and arts of civilization,” and methods of agriculture. Notably, the Act stated the “means of instruction can be introduced with their own [Native] consent.”¹⁰⁹ Several previously established missionary schools benefited from these new funds. A few Tribes helped facilitate the creation and operation of schools to improve relations between the US government and their people. A list of US-Indian treaties referencing the educational commitments of the federal government beginning in 1819 can be found in the 2024 DOI report, although Colonial and Pre-Colonial Era

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Hamilton, *Report of the Office of Indian Affairs 1827* (Department of War, November 1827), in *Annual report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the years 1826-1839*, 43-47, 140-145. Note: spelling of Tribal nations derived from original source.

¹⁰⁵ Ann B. Bevins, “Choctaw Indian Academy,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972); Anthony Vince and Thomas G. McDowell, “Conditions Assessment of Choctaw Academy on the Blue Run, Scott County, Kentucky” (2019), on file with the National Park Service.

¹⁰⁶ A constitutional revision created a Tribal school system, see *Constitution of the Choctaw Nation*, November 10, 1842, available at <https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/1842constitution.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Lisa Davidson, PhD, National Park Service, to Sean Jacobson, PhD, letter [response to NHL Letter of Inquiry], April 30, 2026, on file with the National Park Service, Washington, DC.

¹⁰⁸ In 1806, within the War Department, Congress created the Office of Indian Trade, which was abolished by a subsequent act in 1822.

¹⁰⁹ “An Act making provision for the civilization of the Indian tribes adjoining the frontier settlements,” *Acts of the Fifteenth Congress of the United States*, Statute II, Chap. LXXXV, March 3, 1819, Fifteenth Congress, Sess. II, Ch. 83, 84, 85, 516.

treaties also included educational support.¹¹⁰ The missionary schools that received federally allocated funds in support of Native education were called contract schools. As discussed above, at least one, Choctaw Academy, had the full backing of the associated Tribe. While the school modeled goals of assimilation, the investment of Tribal leadership enabled the school to take an educational approach more attuned to Tribal cultural values.

The 1822 Department of War report provides an account of visits to numerous Indian schools run by religious organizations, several which received federal funds.¹¹¹ The report further indicated that additional schools were in the process of being or were already established, appealing to the US government to furnish additional funds.¹¹² The 2024 DOI report only details eight of these eighteen schools as having received federal funds. At least three of those are described as day schools receiving federal funding. To date, no investigative report focuses on the Federal Indian day school programs, and more research is needed to fully understand how many received federal funds and how day schools may have differed from boarding schools. As Table 2 demonstrates, at least five Indian schools listed in the 1827 report were founded prior to the Civilization Fund Act of 1819.

Table 2. Government-Funded Indian Schools, 1827¹¹³

Name of Site and Station	Date Opened	Organization	Staff	Students	Government Funds
Spring Place, Cherokee Nation, GA	1801	United Brethren	7	11	\$200
Oochgeelogy, Cherokee Nation, GA	[day school]	United Brethren	5	18	-
Elliott, Choctaw Nation, MS	1818	American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions [ABCFM]	6	20	\$1,000*
Mayhew, Choctaw Nation, MS	1822	ABCFM	6	54	*
Bethel, Choctaw Nation, MS	1822	ABCFM	4	16	*
Emmaus, Choctaw Nation, MS	1823	ABCFM	4	25	*
Goshen, Choctaw Nation, MS	[day school]	ABCFM	6	14	*
Captain Harrison's, Choctaw Nation, MS	[day school]	ABCFM	1	13	*
Mr. Juzan's, Choctaw Nation, MS	[day school]	ABCFM	1	15	*

¹¹⁰ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix J.

¹¹¹ Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs, comprising a narrative of a tour performed in the summer of 1820* (Department of War, S. Converse, 1822).

¹¹² Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs, comprising a narrative of a tour performed in the summer of 1820*, 95-96.

¹¹³ Table populated from *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the year 1827*, 145 (B), and augmented with information from Newland, Vol. I, Appendices A and B, and Vol. II, Appendix A, B, and C. Notes on data: date opened derived from Newland, Vols. I & II. "Day" indicates Day School with unidentified start date. Staff included teachers, mechanics, and laborers. Each school had between one and three teachers. [Table notations: "-" indicates no data; however, it is likely shared with the school above. "*" schools at Choctaw Nation shared funds; Choctaw Academy had an additional one hundred students. "+" denoted for Brainerd, Carmel, Creek Path, and High Tower indicates report combined number of teachers and students from all four schools.

Name of Site and Station	Date Opened	Organization	Staff	Students	Government Funds
Ai-ik-hunna, Choctaw Nation, MS	[day school]	ABCFM	3	22	*
Colonel Folsom's, Choctaw Nation, MS	[day school]	ABCFM	1	7	*
Senecas, near Buffalo, NY	1818	ABCFM	8	45	\$200
Union, Osages, AR	[day school]	ABCFM	6	31	\$150
Harmony, Osage MO	1821	ABCFM	27	35	\$150
Tuscaroras, NY	[poss. day school]	ABCFM	-	45	\$200
Michillimackinac, MI	1823	ABCFM	-	50	\$300
Ottawas, Miami of the Lake	-	ABCFM	21	10	\$100
Brainerd, Cherokees, TN	1817	ABCFM	42+	84+	\$550
Carmel/Taloney, Cherokees, MS	Day	ABCFM	+	+	\$50
Creek Path, Cherokees, AL	Day	ABCFM	+	+	\$50
High Tower, Cherokees, GA	1817	ABCFM	+	+	\$50
Dwight, MS (possibly AR)	1820	ABCFM	15	50	\$200
Cataaugus, Senecas, NY	-	ABCFM	9	40	\$200
Carey, on the St. Joseph's River, among the Potawatamies, MI	1823	Baptist General Convention	14	70	\$300
Thomas, Grand River, Ottawas, MI	[poss. day school]	Baptist General Convention	8	20	-
Withington, Creek Nation, GA (poss. AL)	[day school]	Baptist General Convention	13	25	\$225
Valley-towns, Cherokees, MS	-	Baptist General Convention	8	50	\$175
Tensawatee, Cherokees, GA (poss. MS)	[day school]	Baptist General Convention	9	38	\$175
Tonawanda, Senecas, NY	[day school]	Baptist General Convention	-	30	\$175
Oneida Castle, Senecas, NY	[day school]	Protestant Episcopal Church, NY	3	30	\$250
Oneida, Senecas, NY	[day school]	Hamilton Baptist Missionary Society	5	35	\$200
Wyandots, near Upper Sandusky, OH	[day school]	Methodist Society	2	69	\$400
Asbury Mission, Creek Nation, AL (poss. GA)	1822	Methodist Society	6	23	\$100
Monroe, Chickasaw Nation, MS	[day school]	Synod of SC and GA	12	24	\$400
Tockshish, MS	[day school]	Synod of SC and GA	4	15	-
Cane Creek, SC	[day school]	Synod of SC and GA	6	28	-
Martyn, MS	1824	Synod of SC and GA	2	18	-
Florissant, MO	1818	Society of Jesuits	9	25	\$400
Charity Hall, Chickasaw Nation, MS	1820	Cumberland Missionary Board	9	26	\$250
Pleasant Point, Quaddy Indians, ME	[day school]	Society for Propagating the Gospel	1	60	\$150

Name of Site and Station	Date Opened	Organization	Staff	Students	Government Funds
		TOTAL		1,191	\$6,600
Other: Choctaw Academy				100	
Other: Bishop Chase, OH					\$200
Baptist General Convention, NY					\$350
Total student/funds for 1827				1,291	\$7,150

Each of the schools discussed in the previous sections were founded prior to the Civilization Fund Act of 1819. These early efforts informed subsequent decisions about the involvement of the federal government. In 1827, forty schools, all established by religious organizations, were listed as receiving appropriations under the Civilization Fund Act.¹¹⁴ School reports were filed alongside reports of military battles with Native Tribes. For instance, the 1827 government report describes “outrages being perpetrated by the Winnebago Tribe of Indians” whose actions “should be severely chastised for their insolence and violence.”¹¹⁵ Given that the Department of War managed school funds for Native children, it is perhaps unsurprising that schools quickly adopted militarized methods of assimilation, and the federal government may have rewarded schools for such implementation. The placement of the Office of Indian Affairs within the Department of War, knowingly or unknowingly, set the tone for engagement with Tribes.

According to a 1829 Indian Affairs report, forty-five schools, with 1,460 children received government-supported education, an increase of 169 students from the previous year.¹¹⁶ Throughout the US Federal Era, the government involved itself in the education of Native children, with a primary focus on religious conversion and cultural assimilation, followed by the elimination of a perceived threat and the use of Native children as a labor force (current and future).¹¹⁷

Removal Era (1830-1871)

The Removal Era was characterized by policies forcing Native people to leave their traditional homelands and settle on reservations. Three key Supreme Court rulings set the precedent of Indian Tribes as “domestic dependent nations” with the federal government having sole authority over these nations. As the federal government acquired additional land, such as through the Louisiana Purchase, additional Tribes fell under its jurisdiction. This “new” land was seen as an

¹¹⁴ “Report of the Office of Indian Affairs 1827,” in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the years 1826-1839* (Office of Indian Affairs, 1839), Vol. 1, 144-147, accessed March 2, 2026, <https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/AEYQML7XLRVXUT8C>.

¹¹⁵ James Barbour to Major Gen. E.P. Gaines, letter, August 3, 1827, in *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the year 1826-1839*, Vol. 1, 150.

¹¹⁶ *Annual Report of the Office of Indian Affairs 1829* (Department of War, November 17, 1829), in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the years 1826-1839* (Office of Indian Affairs, 1839), 162.

¹¹⁷ Until the creation of the Department of the Interior in 1849, the Department of War was the primary federal department to interact with Native populations. Removed to Interior in 1947, the Office of Indian Affairs or Indian Service was also renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

opportunity for relocation, which created conflict between the federal government and the Tribes without an established relationship with the government. It also created conflict among different Tribal Nations. Court decisions and government policies enacted during the Removal Era enabled increased federal investment in Indian education, as well as a more systematic and governmental approach to educational systems. While boarding schools existed at the beginning of this era, these schools differed fundamentally from what followed. Some were developed or managed by Tribal councils. However, removal policies had a direct impact on established missionary and government schools. When entire Tribal Nations were forcibly removed, so too were potential students. Some missionaries moved with Tribal Nations to Oklahoma. It is possible schools may have restarted under different names in Oklahoma. Additional research is needed to understand which schools restarted and which shuttered completely.

The Removal Era also encompasses several national events that had a direct impact on Native America but are only briefly discussed here in relation to Native education. Previously part of Mexico, the Republic of Texas was established March 1, 1836, and then annexed as a US state in December 1845, bringing additional Tribes into the union.¹¹⁸ The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war with Mexico, and additional southwestern Tribes came under US oversight. The Civil War (1861-1865) saw Native people on both sides of the conflict. The Reconstruction Era (1865-1877) diversely affected Tribes, somewhat dependent on the role they assumed during the Civil War. Some educational facilities established during Reconstruction to assist freedmen also opened their doors to Native students.

Indian Removal Act of 1830

Enacted by Congress and signed into law by President Andrew Jackson, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized the president to exchange lands with “tribes or nations of Indians.” The exchange was to include a promise that:

Sec. 3. (...) the United States will forever secure and guaranty to them, and their heirs or successors, the country so exchanged with them; and if they prefer it, that the United States will cause a patent or grant to be made and executed to them for the same:

Provided always [italics original], That such lands shall revert to the United States, if the Indians become extinct, or abandon the same.¹¹⁹

The Act was predicated on three Supreme Court decisions known as the Marshall Trilogy that centered on federal authority over Tribal Nations.

Marshall Trilogy Opinions

The first of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall’s Trilogy Opinions opened a legal means to support forced removal in the courts. In *Johnson v. McIntosh*, 21 U.S. 543 (1823), the

¹¹⁸ Official transfer of power occurred in February 1846.

¹¹⁹ 21st United States Congress, The Indian Removal Act of 1830, in *U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 4 -1835, 19th through 23rd Congress* (Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1846), <https://www.loc.gov/item/lsl-v4/>.

Supreme Court ruled Indians did not own land outright and did not have the right to sell property to individuals, and that states did not have legal standing to settle land claims with Indians. The Trilogy Opinions held that, based on the Doctrine of Discovery, European nations retained dominance over the land and the people on the land, thus setting a precedent that only the federal government has authority over Native Nations.

In the Compact of 1802 (Articles of Agreement and Cession), the State of Georgia agreed to cede its western lands in exchange for federal money and the promise of revocation of Native land title. With no action from the federal government, the Georgia legislature passed a removal act in 1828. After President Andrew Jackson's election, the Indian Removal Act, passed by Congress on May 28, 1830, forcibly removed all Tribes east of the Mississippi River. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. (5 Pet.) 1 (1831), the Supreme Court ruled the State of Georgia had no authority over Cherokee Nation. The Court concluded Georgia could not oust Cherokee Nation from its lands despite a treaty with the federal government. Marshall ruled the Tribe existed as a domestic dependent nation, with the relationship of the Tribe to the federal government being that of a "ward of the state." The court thereby ruled the state could not interfere with Cherokee Nation.

In *Worcester vs. Georgia*, 31 U.S. 515 (1832), the Supreme Court ruled Georgia had no right to extend its laws to Cherokee territory (i.e. the states do not have the right to impose regulations on Native lands) or abrogate rights under contracts such as treaties. Georgia did not acknowledge the decision, which President Andrew Jackson also declined to enforce. Notwithstanding, the decision set a precedent for political autonomy.

Marshall's Trilogy Opinions determined Native peoples to be "wards of the state," occupiers of reservation land, but politically self-governing. Each of these Supreme Court opinions continues to guide today's court decisions related to the interpretation of US governance over and with Tribal Nations. If the federal government viewed Native people as wards, then the care of Native people was an implied requirement. Many viewed "civilization," or the adaptation of European American ways, as the best way for the federal government to care for Native people. In this way, the Supreme Court opinion in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* was directly responsible for an increase in schools established to force the assimilation of Native children and indoctrinate them into European American modes of living.

Beyond the economic motive of more land, many promoters of forced removal "argued with great sincerity that only if the Indians were removed beyond contact with whites could the slow process of education, civilization, and Christianization take place."¹²⁰ Ultimately, the removal program resulted in the steady increase in violent frontier conflicts. Such conflicts have been reported in detail through several different sources, including Tribal oral histories and settler documentation.¹²¹ With forced removal policies in place, Tribal Nations had two choices –

¹²⁰ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 55.

¹²¹ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* (Beacon Press, 2014).

continue fighting or concede. Across the Seminole War of 1835-1842 to the Red River War of 1874-75, the June 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, and Nez Perce War of 1877, among myriad other examples, hundreds of Tribes fought removal and Westward expansion. While many battles were won, the overall wars were lost, and the Nations were forced to adopt European American lifeways or move onto reservations.

In the meantime, federal funds allocated for Indian education through the Civilization Fund Act of 1819 continued to increase the number of educational facilities for Indian children. By 1833, 835 students were enrolled in schools supported by the legislative funds. This does not include the 113 students at the Choctaw Academy, funded by the Tribe itself.¹²² The Choctaw Academy is noted in an 1833 report to have successfully employed mechanical instruction, sparking the suggestion “that, in addition to the usual branches taught at the school, instruction should be given to such as desired it, in those handicrafts most required among the Indian tribes (...) the department (...) appropriated \$500 for the erection of suitable buildings, and procurement of necessary tools.”¹²³ The report posits that if boys learned mechanical arts, they would be serviceable to and well regarded by their communities, and “an immediate and radical change would be made in the habits and character of the race, and civilization would achieve a victory as signals and complete as philanthropy could rejoice at or desire.”¹²⁴ The report also stated benevolent societies had made significant contributions and that combined efforts resulted in a perceivable interest in learning among the young. In the following decades, many Native families opted to send their children to schools on the promise of food, clothing, and overall education that might be able to help their Tribe. But the reality of these places was very different from what was promised.

Removal Era Schools

In 1832, federal support for mission schools east of the Mississippi River stopped. The overall number of schools operated by the government steadily increased as funds were utilized to expand federal landholdings west of the Mississippi. According to the 1969 Kennedy Report, “By 1838, the government was operating 16 manual schools, which served 800 students, and 87 boarding schools, which served about 2,900 students.”¹²⁵ By 1842, the government operated thirty-seven Indian schools, by 1881 106, and by 1968, 226.¹²⁶

Several examples of Removal Era schools are still extant and designated as NHLs. **Wheelock Academy (1832)** in McCurtain County, Oklahoma opened as a mission school. As with Choctaw Academy, Choctaw Nation supported Wheelock Academy. This arrangement became a prototype for other Tribes and other public education ventures. Wheelock Academy was

¹²² Elbert Herring, *Report from the Office of Indian Affairs 1833* (Department of War, November 28, 1833), in *Annual report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the years 1826-1839*, 183.

¹²³ Herring, *Report from the Office of Indian Affairs 1833*, 183.

¹²⁴ Herring, *Report from the Office of Indian Affairs 1833*, 183.

¹²⁵ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, Part I, 11.

¹²⁶ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, Part I, XII.

designated a National Historic Landmark in 1965 and is discussed more fully under the NHL case studies in Part II of this study.

Shawnee Mission (1839) in Fairway, Kansas, is another example of a Tribally supported school open until 1862. Also known as Shawnee Indian Manual Labor Boarding School and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968, the school was among the earliest and largest such institutions in the Louisiana Purchase land area. Shawnee is also discussed more fully in Part II.

In a review of the effectiveness of contemporary educational efforts, the 1850 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (now housed within the Department of the Interior) recorded that the Tribes used large portions of their own appropriations to compliment to government and missionary funds in support of educational endeavors, especially manual labor schools.¹²⁷

However by the post-Civil War years a shift was underway towards the more aggressively assimilationist Indian boarding school policies that emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Historian Kathleen DuVal has suggested that over one thousand Native-founded schools were taken over by the federal government and turned into English-only schools between 1865 and 1887.¹²⁸

Reservation Policies

The Removal Era in turn yielded to reservation policies and shifts in the definition of integration, ushering in a new phase of imposed assimilation. Scholar of American Indian policy studies David H. DeJong has described the shifting tensions:

In the early nineteenth century, federal policy vacillated between two contrasting braids: integration and extermination. The former was a cardinal braid in policy predating the founding of the United States and was reflected in the strands of Civilization, Christianization, emigration, reservations, severalty, citizenship, reorganization, and self-government. Each of these strands at its core was constructed on a philosophical foundation of social and political integration of Natives. The latter braid never represented official federal policy, notwithstanding the sentiments of those few people on the successive waves of the frontier who waged wars of extermination. The braid of cultural and political extermination, however, has long been a fixture of US policy, reflecting a braid that both salved the national conscience of what to do with Native people and justified the national annexation of indigenous land.¹²⁹

By 1851, federal government policies shifted to focus strongly on forcibly placing Tribes on reservations. With reservation policies firmly in place and Native lands being seized, federal policymakers began to shift their attention to integration. Following the Commissioner of Indian Affairs' move from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior in 1849, a stark

¹²⁷ Luke Lea, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, transmitted with the Message of the President at the Opening of the Second Session of the Thirty-Second Congress, 1850* (Office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1850), 8.

¹²⁸ Kathleen DuVal, *Native Nations: A Millennium in North America* (Random House, 2024), 513.

¹²⁹ DeJong, "A Most Anonymous Position," 222.

increase in regional conflicts between European American settlers and Native people occurred. Despite the shifting of bureaucratic control to a nonmilitary federal agency, during the mid-to-late nineteenth century both military and civilians participated in massacres of Native people. As summarized in the Kennedy Report, “[i]n the last three decades of the 19th century, Indians fought with great ferocity in the final defense of their homeland and freedom.”¹³⁰

Between 1861 and 1877, violence erupted in tragedies including the Dakota War, Apache Wars, Sand Creek Massacre, Plains Indian Wars, Red River War, Nez Perce War, among many others. Many of these events can be characterized as massacres rather than “wars.” Although the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and other Tribes had signed the 1851 Treaty of Fort Laramie (also known as the Horse Creek Treaty) with the US, European American settlers still viewed them as a threat and continued to covet Native lands. On November 29, 1864, Col. John M. Chivington and elements of the 1st Colorado Infantry Regiment of Volunteers (US) and 3rd Regiment of Colorado Cavalry Volunteers (US) opened fire on a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho encampment at Sand Creek (present-day Colorado), massacring and mutilating the bodies of around 230 predominantly elderly, women, and children.

In 1868, a Congressional Committee published a report discussing the poor conditions of the diminishing Indian population.¹³¹ The committee recommended education, Christianization, and civilization, which directly led to the 1870 Congressional appropriation of \$100,000 for the operation of federal industrial schools. Carlisle Indian Industrial School was the first funded under that policy.¹³²

Throughout his presidency between 1869 and 1877, Ulysses S. Grant firmly supported assimilation and advocated for the so-called “Peace Policy.” His administration began a new era of Indian policy, which continued forced removal, but shifted focus to assimilation and boarding schools. On March 4, 1869, during his inaugural address, Grant stated: “The proper treatment of the original occupants of this land—the Indians—[is] one deserving of careful study. I will favor any course toward them which tends to their civilization and ultimate citizenship.”¹³³ Ultimately, Grant’s policy initiated the industrial boarding school policy.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 147.

¹³¹ See also *Condition of the Indian tribes: Report of the Joint Special Committee, appointed under Joint Resolution of March 3, 1865* (Government Printing Office, 1867), 16, 469; Kerry R. Oman, “The Beginning of the End: The Indian Peace Commission of 1867-1868,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 35-51, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2353/>; House of Representatives, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, Ex. Doc. No. 97, *Report of Indian Peace Commissioners: Message from the President of the United States, transmitting Report of the Indian Peace Commissioners* (United States. Indian Peace Commission, January 7, 1868).

¹³² Carlisle Federal Indian Boarding School National Monument was designated on December 9, 2024.

¹³³ Ulysses S. Grant, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1869, The American Presidency Project, UC Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/203651>. See also “President Ulysses S. Grant and Federal Indian Policy,” Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, National Park Service, June 10, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/president-ulysses-s-grant-and-federal-indian-policy.htm>.

¹³⁴ Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*, 7.

In 1869 Congress created the Board of Indian Commissioners, an all-male Protestant board whom the President believed exercised great moral authority, to advise on federal policy and monitor funds allocated to the Office of Indian Affairs. Grant distributed the management of individual reservations to individual Christian denominations, a practice which continued into 1890.¹³⁵ These religious organizations were tasked with providing treaty-obligated Indian education, in direct contradiction to Grant's support of the separation of church and state. Some have argued Grant may have viewed Native people as distinct enough to warrant an exemption in the separation policy.¹³⁶ As historians David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark described: "Christian churches, by the late 1860s, were also assuming a dominant role in Indian lives, a clear indication that the separation of church and state outlined in the First Amendment was irrelevant insofar as tribal nations were concerns."¹³⁷ The government allocated land on reservations for religious schools, resulting in the reduction of reservation land.¹³⁸ By 1872, the Board of Indian Commissioners (BIC) reported the success of missionaries in the following terms: "When an Indian becomes a Christian, he abandons all the cherished customs and traditions of his nation, cuts off his scalp-lock, adopts civilized garments and goes to work for his living."¹³⁹

Under Grant's plan, the civilian BIC would advise the Office of Indian Affairs on funds for Indian administration while the operation of Indian agencies were given to missionary groups.¹⁴⁰ Historian Francis Paul Prucha described that "[i]n both of these new departures the Catholics were slighted."¹⁴¹ Guidance was that the agency should be assigned to the existing mission, but did not provide advice on competing claims. The restriction of one denomination per reservation resulted from conflicts that had resulted in some missionaries being pushed off the reservations, with little input from Tribal leaders. As a result of the all-Protestant orientation of the BIC and general anti-Catholic political views, only seven agencies were placed under Catholic missions; whereby, according to their calculations, the Catholic missions should have been appointed to

¹³⁵ Marshall Dwight Moody, "A History of the Board of Indian Commissioners and Its Relationship to the Administration of Indian Affairs, 1869-1900" (master's thesis, The American University, 1951), 43-44; James M. King, "Sectarian Indian Schools, or the Relation of the Churches to the General Government in the Education of the Indian Races [address]," (Office of the National League for the Protection of American Institutions, October 9, 1890), accessed March 2, 2026, <https://archive.org/details/sectarianindians00king/page/n1/mode/2up?ref=ol>.

¹³⁶ David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 3rd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 126. See Shelton, et al, *Trigger Points*, 7.

¹³⁷ Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*, 126.

¹³⁸ Alysha D. Zemanek, "Indiana School Days: Native American Education at St. Joseph's Indian Normal School and White's Manual Labor Institute" (master's thesis, Indiana University, 2017), 50.

¹³⁹ *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners to the President of the United States* (Government Printing Office, 1872), 5.

¹⁴⁰ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912* (University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 1.

¹⁴¹ Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 1.

thirty-eight agencies.¹⁴² In 1874, the Catholic Church, slighted by Grant's allocations, formed the Catholic Indian Bureau, establishing the Bureau of Indian Missionaries in 1879.¹⁴³

Oglala Lakota leader Red Cloud, confronting the harsh reality that federal policies would directly impact Native traditions, reportedly embraced Catholic allies, in part a result of his established relations with Catholic fur traders. His daughter Louise married a Catholic man, and longtime friend and adopted relative Baptiste "Big Bat" Pourier sometimes acted as an interpreter. Red Cloud traveled to the White House in September 1877 and asked President Rutherford B. Hayes to put the Jesuits in charge of the schools on the reservation later known as Pine Ridge.¹⁴⁴ Red Cloud himself converted to Catholicism in 1884.

Grant's Peace Policy also influenced the Indian Appropriations Act of 1871 that officially ended treaty-making with Indian Tribes; however, that legislation did not remove the federal government's obligation to honor previously made treaties. Between 1776 and 1871, over five hundred treaties were signed and 389 treaties ratified.¹⁴⁵ At least 171 treaties signed between 1819 and 1868 implicate the Federal Indian boarding school system.¹⁴⁶ The DOI investigative report provides a list of treaties that reference education generally and boarding schools specifically.

Grant's Peace Policy competed with post-Civil War Reconstruction for financial support and political attention. In 1881, the Peace Policy officially came to an end in response to pressure from religious organizations whose missions had been removed and/or terminated.¹⁴⁷ After the Peace Policy ended, and largely in response to the perceived success at Carlisle Indian School (see below), in July 1882, Congress authorized the Secretary of War to convert Army forts into Indian schools.¹⁴⁸ In 1890, Congress made appropriations to cover costs of tuition for Indians at these boarding schools. In 1917, all federal subsidies to religious groups ended.

¹⁴² Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 2; Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *The Indian To-Day: The Past and Future of the First American* (Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1915), 56, accessed April 24, 2026, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/27448>; Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*, 7.

¹⁴³ Peter J. Rahill, *The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy, 1870-1884* (Catholic University of America Press, 1954).

¹⁴⁴ Robert W. Galler, Jr., "A Triad of Alliances: The Roots of Holy Rosary Indian Mission," *South Dakota History* 38, no. 3 (1998): 156; Holy Rosary Mission-Red Cloud Indian School Records, Series 8, Federal Documents, Marquette University, Raynor Library, <https://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/Mss/HRM/HRM-sc.php>. Refer also to "District of Columbia - our Indian allies - interview of a delegation of Indian chiefs with President Hayes, in the East Room of the White House," *Frank Leslie's illustrated Newspaper* 45, no. 1150 (October 13, 1877): 81, on file with the Library of Congress, accessed January 13, 2025, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3c30325/?st=image>.

¹⁴⁵ Oklahoma State Universities Library, Tribal Treaties Database, 2025, <https://treaties.okstate.edu/>.

¹⁴⁶ Newland, Vol. II, Appendix J.

¹⁴⁷ Frances Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1976).

¹⁴⁸ Act of July 31, 1882, Ch. 363, codified as 25 USC § 276 ("Vacant military posts or barracks for schools")

Assimilation Era (1871-1934)

Forced integration policies, dismantling of reservation lands, and attempts to eradicate all cultural foundations of Tribal communities characterized the Assimilation Era.¹⁴⁹ The 1872 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis A. Walker reported,

No one will rejoice more heartily than the present Commissioner when the Indians of this country cease to be in a position to dictate, in any form or degree, to the Government; when, in fact, the last hostile tribe becomes reduced to the condition of suppliants for charity. This is, indeed, the only hope of salvation for the aborigines of the continent. If they stand up against the progress of civilization and industry, they must be relentlessly crushed. The westward course of population is neither to be denied nor delayed for the sake of all the Indians that ever called this country their home. They must yield or perish (...) This is the true permanent Indian policy of the Government.¹⁵⁰

The commissioner's view accurately represents the policies of this era – assimilate or perish. This period saw a widespread expansion of forced enrollment in a growing number of boarding schools. Much recent scholarship on Indian boarding schools has focused on this period. Some religious and secular reform organizations and politicians began to recognize and attempt to address concerns with Indian education during this roughly sixty-year period. The federal government published several reports that brought attention to reasons why the system was not working as proposed. This era saw fights on the battlefield diminishing and kidnappings of Native children and fights over the Indian classroom unfolding.

Several legal changes at the beginning of this period mark a new approach to Indian policy generally and Indian education. The 1819 Civilization Fund Act was revoked in 1873, in part due to Congress ending formal treaty-making with Indians in 1871. After the July 15, 1870, "Act making appropriation for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department," the superintendents of Indian Affairs and Indian agents were no longer required to be officers of the Army.¹⁵¹ This was a turning point in the administration of Indian education. The Homestead Act of March 3, 1875, extended to adult Indians the ability to claim land under the General Homestead Act of 1862, if they "have abandoned or shall abandon tribal relations."¹⁵² One experiment in resolving economic challenges on reservations resulted in the introduction of

¹⁴⁹ Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (University of Nebraska Press, 1982) identifies two subperiods of the Assimilation Era: 1880-1900 (idealistic phase of optimistic policy) and 1900-1920 (realistic/segregationist phase of diminished expectations).

¹⁵⁰ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1872* (Government Printing Office, 1872), 397-398.

¹⁵¹ Act of July 15, 1870, Ch. 296, § 16 Stat. 335, codified as 31 USC. § 691-693 ("Regulations for withholding rations for nonattendance at schools"); *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1872*, 460.

¹⁵² Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 90; *Federal Indian Law* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), 859. See also the Act of July 4, 1884, 23 Stat. 76, 96, that applied homestead provisions to Indians generally.

agriculture through farm implements and government-supplied livestock. In 1880, more than 78,000 head of cattle were in Indian ownership.¹⁵³

Schools during Assimilation Era reflected government policies and the militarized assimilation experiments of Richard Henry Pratt became the model. The goal of assimilation, to make Native people behave, speak, and look like European American people, became the primary goal of boarding schools.¹⁵⁴ Learning English was the primary focus for any new student, but once students began to understand English, teachers were added for other areas of curriculum, such as arithmetic, geography, natural studies, physiology, and US history.¹⁵⁵ As historian David Wallace Adams expressed: “Teaching U.S. history to Indians, speaking of savages, civilization, and manifest destiny, convincing pupils that the subjugation of their race was in their own best interest, posed definite problems for the conscientious teacher.”¹⁵⁶ The topics included were intended to support assimilation and prepare Native students for citizenship.

Richard Henry Pratt and the Fort Marion Experiment

With the end of the Red River War in spring 1875, Lieutenant Richard Henry Pratt was placed in charge of the military escort of seventy-two Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Caddo prisoners of war, who were never officially convicted of crimes, to Fort Marion (now known as Castillo San Marcos National Monument) in St. Augustine, Florida.¹⁵⁷ Pratt’s experimental treatment through 1878 of these Native prisoners became a precursor for change in Federal Indian Boarding school system policies and organizational structures. Here Pratt developed a military style of conversion education – military attire, short haircuts, drills, as well as harsh punishments and physical labor. Pratt’s Fort Marion activities can be viewed as a key event in the transition from armed conflict to boarding school education as a means to exert federal control over Native peoples.

Pratt sought to demonstrate the “public good” of his efforts by including formal academic curriculum (mostly language study), the creation of a prisoner craft economy, and public military parades for visitors.¹⁵⁸ Pratt observed that oppressive humidity, high temperatures, lack of movement during travel and imprisonment, and general lack of fresh air were having a physical

¹⁵³ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 90.

¹⁵⁴ *Report of Indian Peace Commissioners*; David H. DeJong, *Paternalism to Partnership: The Administration of Indian Affairs, 1786-2021* (University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 52.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 142-146; Estelle Reel, *Course of Study for the Indian Schools of the United States: Industrial and Literary* (Government Printing Office, 1901).

¹⁵⁶ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 147.

¹⁵⁷ Complete list of Indian prisoners confined in Fort Marion, St. Augustine, Florida, during May 1875, in J. Brett Cruse, *Battles of the Red River War* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008). Further information, including named individuals, is found at National Park Service, “Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Comanche & Caddo Incarceration,” Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, February 17, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/casa/learn/historyculture/plains-incarceration.htm>.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom: An Autobiography*, ed. Robert M. Utley (University of Oklahoma Press, 2023), 120.

effect on the prisoners, with considerable illness and death.¹⁵⁹ He appealed for more liberty of judgment in methods of prisoner care, including removing leg irons and allowing sleeping in the fresh air.¹⁶⁰ In addition to teaching the Native prisoners to care for their military garments, Pratt pushed for regular army drill exercises, which he later credited as a reason for improved health of prisoners. Fifty of the youngest prisoners were given old guns to guard themselves.

Pratt used visitor interest as a system of motivation and rewards for the Native prisoners. They were taught to make things for sale to visitors, mostly notably polished sea-beans and shells and later ledger book drawings.¹⁶¹ Pratt, noting the closest bakery was on the other side of town, had a bread oven built at Fort Marion for Native prisoners to bake and sell loaves.¹⁶² Pratt's autobiography also references the freedom to take prisoners camping on Anastasia Island and Matanzas Inlet and on manual labor outings, such as clearing land for a fee.¹⁶³

In addition to vocational instruction at the prison, Pratt had teachers conduct classes in English. The teachers included several Sisters of St. Joseph, who previously taught formerly enslaved children and adults, as well as Miss Sarah Ann Mather. Mather recruited Rebecca Lathrop Perit, along with Anna Pratt, Nannie Burt, Julia and Laura Gibbs, Amy Carruthers, and Harriet Beecher Stowe to teach English speech and writing. Four to six classes were almost constantly under instruction.¹⁶⁴ Mather would later teach at Carlisle Indian Industrial School, where she was included in photographs of the "first female class."

Pratt's experimentations at Fort Marion highlight his lack of understanding of Native culture, religious beliefs, and traditions. Perhaps most disturbing was the use of prison labor to remove three Native burial mounds in 1877, as described in his autobiography:

Professor Baird of the Smithsonian in Washington, with whom I was in correspondence and who, in company with Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont, visited Florida while the prisoners were there, wanted for the Smithsonian whatever of scientific value might be found in three Indian mounds not far from St. Augustine, and we undertook to carry out his wishes. Drawings of the mounds and their locations were first made, the trees and their proportions growing on each mound were noted, then all the earth was handled and all relics found were shipped to Washington. Several shipments in barrels were forwarded containing crania,

¹⁵⁹ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 97.

¹⁶⁰ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 119.

¹⁶¹ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 153.

¹⁶² Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 124.

¹⁶³ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 130.

¹⁶⁴ Mather and Lathrop Perit had started a school in St. Augustine for formerly enslaved persons before coming to Fort Marion. National Park Service, "Women's History in St. Augustine," Fort Matanzas National Monument, August 29, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/foma/learn/historyculture/women.htm>.

bones, shell implements and ornaments, pieces of pottery, and stone axes, all duly noted and accredited to the place where found.¹⁶⁵

Additional research is needed to identify the exact location of these mounds, which were likely on Anastasia Island or another area where the prisoners had camped. Regardless of his intentions, Pratt's pursuit of this endeavor represents harsh forced assimilation.¹⁶⁶ Given the religious and spiritual implications of digging up ancestors, one can only imagine the negative impacts to the well-being of the Native prisoners.

In spring 1878, the War Department released all Fort Marion prisoners to the Indian Bureau. At least seventeen remained east and became part of Pratt's future experiments, first at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and then at Carlisle Indian Industrial School. That year the Secretary of War sent Pratt to Dakota Territory to "recruit" Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota students, and others, and to report in turn to the Secretary of the Interior about the number of students he could recruit. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ezra Hayt selected these Tribes due to their resistance to ceding land to the US. Pratt observed that "[t]he children would be hostages for the good behavior of the people."¹⁶⁷

As David Wallace Adams summarized, "Pratt liked Indians, but had little use for Indian cultures."¹⁶⁸ Pratt disassociated Native culture from Native people and believed strongly that assimilation was the only way to ensure their survival.¹⁶⁹ His autobiography provides insight into his views on civilization efforts: "Reforming a drunkard by keeping him in a saloon would be quite as sensible as our method of trying to civilize and Americanize our Indians by keeping them separated in tribes on prison reservations excluded from all contact with our civilization and the advantages of our American life."¹⁷⁰ In 1892, Pratt delivered a speech at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections in Denver, Colorado, where he expressed his infamous phrase: "[T]hat all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man."¹⁷¹ This was the succinct explanation of his policies, which would be copied at Federal Indian boarding schools around the nation. His assimilationist views were evident in the experiments he undertook at Fort Marion and later Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

¹⁶⁵ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 130.

¹⁶⁶ Shelton, et al, *Trigger Points*, 12-13.

¹⁶⁷ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 202; Linda F. Witmer, *The Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1879-1918* (Cumberland County Historical Society, 1993), 11.

¹⁶⁸ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 51.

¹⁶⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 51.

¹⁷⁰ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 155.

¹⁷¹ R. H. Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, at the Nineteenth Annual Session held in Denver, Col., June 23-29, 1892*, ed. Isabel C. Barrows (Press of Geo. H. Ellis, 1892), 46.

Assimilation Era Schools

As federal efforts to force assimilation on Native communities increasingly turned to establishing boarding schools in the late nineteenth century, many of the institutions now commonly associated with Federal Indian boarding school policy were established. Although each has a distinct history, the administration of these places share many characteristics. Assimilation through boarding schools was based on the foundation of separation.¹⁷² When children were brought to boarding schools, they were separated from their communities and families. Once at school, they were separated from their clothes and personal items, and given uniforms to wear.¹⁷³ Then, they were separated from their hair, a deeply meaningful source of identity and power in many Native traditions. Then, children were given English names, first and last. The patterns followed for issuing new names were different at different locations – in one, English first names were matched with the English translation of a student's name (such as Robert Redhawk); in others, both names were new.¹⁷⁴

At boarding schools Native children were divided into groups according to English-speaking ability, age, and gender. A typical schedule involved half the day spent on academic instruction and half on industrial education, followed by religious training and personal appearance and housekeeping.¹⁷⁵ Child labor was regularly utilized in the running of day-to-day operations of boarding schools, as well as in the construction of new buildings.¹⁷⁶

The teachers at Assimilation Era schools varied greatly over time depending on school administrators and their goals. While the administrators were overwhelming White, Native teachers and staff were present during this era. As educator Anne Ruggles Gere describes:

In 1899, for example, Native Americans comprised 45 percent of the staff of the Indian School Service (...) Not all of these employees were teachers, but more than 15 percent of the total 1,160 Indian employees were. In addition, Indians comprised 39 percent of all industrial teachers, 65 percent of the school disciplinarians, and 4 percent of matrons. To put the numbers into perspective, enough Native American teachers existed to ensure that each of the 153 boarding school (both on- and off-reservation) then in existence could have had at least one.¹⁷⁷

Although a source of employment for Native adults, these institutions often required strict adherence to policies of assimilation from all involved.

Hampton Institute (1868) in Hampton, Virginia, is a key transitional example of an early school from this period. The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute provided industrial skills and

¹⁷² Newland, Vol. I, 51.

¹⁷³ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 100-112.

¹⁷⁴ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 108-110.

¹⁷⁵ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 108-110. See also Newland, Vol. I, 53.

¹⁷⁶ Adams, *Education for Extinction*; Newland, Vol. I.

¹⁷⁷ Anne Ruggles Gere, "Indian Heart/White Man's Head: Native-American Teachers in Indian Schools 1880-1930," *History of Education Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 38-65, 39.

trades in the post-Civil War era to Black students who worked on campus to pay their way. Hampton is perhaps better known for this aspect of its history, which was recognized with NHL designation in 1974. In April 1878, the school admitted forty-nine Native students, including seventeen former Fort Marion prisoners of war. Pratt recruited the other students from the Upper Missouri agencies.¹⁷⁸ However, Pratt did not believe the Hampton school environment would allow for Indians to become civilized and actively advocated for a separate school for Indians.¹⁷⁹ While records indicate federal funds were initially appropriated, additional research is needed to identify how much and how many years that Hampton received funding in support of Indian education. The 1888 Commissioner of Indian Affairs annual report stated that Hampton received \$19,641 in federal funds to accommodate approximately 118 students and thirty-one employees.¹⁸⁰ Additional information on Hampton Institute NHL can be found as a case study in Part II.

After his experiment at Hampton Institute, Pratt successfully argued for transforming a surplus military installation in Pennsylvania known as Carlisle Barracks, founded in 1757, into a school for Native students.¹⁸¹ With several buildings available, the property was uniquely suited to Pratt's purposes. **Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879)** was quickly followed by four other off-reservation boarding schools. Pratt's management of Native prisoners of war at Fort Marion is well recorded in his memoirs, as is the establishment of Carlisle. Most, if not all, of Pratt's actions at Fort Marion were replicated at Carlisle. The school's first class included eighty-four Lakota students, fifty-two Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Pawnee students, and eleven Apache students.¹⁸² Carlisle Indian Industrial School was designated an NHL in 1961 and is also discussed further in Part II.

While Carlisle is a particularly well-known example of a Federal boarding school, these schools encompassed many forms throughout the lengthy period of their operation. As highlighted throughout this context, the federal government was involved in numerous Native boarding school efforts beginning in the Colonial Era. The 1879 annual report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs states that in 1878, forty-nine boarding schools and 119 day schools were in operation. In 1879 the number of boarding schools increased to fifty-two, while day schools decreased to 107.¹⁸³

From this point forward, schools following military models began to surpass schools following a missionary model, with rapid growth in the number of schools overall. By 1896, there were enough nonreservation [off-reservation] schools to be grouped into two classes: "general schools

¹⁷⁸ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B.

¹⁷⁹ Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 47-49.

¹⁸⁰ *Fifty-seventh Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Government Printing Office, 1888), xiii.

¹⁸¹ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 88.

¹⁸² Witmer, *The Indian Industrial School*, 77.

¹⁸³ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1879* (Government Printing Office, 1879), 73.

with full reservation school course of study” (including Carson school in Nevada, Flandreau in South Dakota, and Fort Lewis in Colorado, among sixteen total) and “nonreservation schools with facilities for special instruction in agriculture, stock breeding, the mechanic arts, the domestic arts, normal training, commercial training, and other subjects to be added as occasion may require” (including Albuquerque, New Mexico, Carlisle, and Chilocco in Oklahoma, among ten total schools).¹⁸⁴

The federal government saw many benefits in supporting assimilation efforts, including rounding up their perceived enemies, claiming their lands and natural resources, and generally profiting from the removal of Native people. The DOI investigative reports used four criteria in the consideration of identifying a Federal Indian boarding school—the use of a dormitory, education for Native peoples, appropriation of federal funds, and founding prior to 1969.¹⁸⁵ Many contract schools met these criteria and were well established by the time Carlisle was founded.

Carlisle nevertheless represented a structural turning point in the operation of Federal Indian boarding schools, in that military methods of discipline and education were implemented as the new and dominant model. Carlisle was the first boarding school founded and directly overseen by the federal government, as opposed to government support of missionary educational efforts or more distant oversight. The decades after the founding of Carlisle saw a dramatic increase in the reports of abuse, although the historical record before and after Carlisle remains incomplete. Limited federal government records are a challenge to efforts to understand the comparative numbers of children who became ill, injured, or died while at Carlisle and subsequent military-style schools as compared to earlier mission/contract schools, or even contemporary mission-led schools.¹⁸⁶ The health of Native students at Carlisle was almost entirely left to family and local concern: “Many of the matters that we think of as being in the province of city or county government were left to the tribes to take care of as internal problems.”¹⁸⁷ In 1882, a federally funded hospital was completed adjacent to the Carlisle School.¹⁸⁸ Ultimately, all schools contributed to the interruption and even elimination of some Native cultural traditions, societal structures, and intertribal relationships. Harsh and degrading punishments became common and somewhat better documented after the opening of Carlisle.

¹⁸⁴ For a list, see U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, “Rules and Regulations Concerning the Transfer of Children from Indian Reservation Day Schools and Reservation Schools to Non-Reservation Schools, as Well as from Non-Reservation Schools of Class 1 to Non-Reservation Schools of Class 2,” March 7, 1906, 2-4, Native Americans Reference Collection, Documents Collected by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1840-1948, Vol. 75, 1905-1908, <https://www.proquest.com/archival-materials/rules-regulations-concerning-transfer-children/docview/3052839487/se-2>. Note: a full reservation course of study meant that the same academic coursework and levels were available as at an on-reservation boarding school.

¹⁸⁵ Newland, Vols. I and II.

¹⁸⁶ Newland, Vols. I and II.

¹⁸⁷ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 90.

¹⁸⁸ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 90; R. H. Pratt, in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the year 1881* (Government Printing Office, 1881), 184-191.

Pratt's Propaganda

Pratt is prominently associated with the assimilation boarding school experiment. His actions demonstrate he saw no value in Native cultures, traditions, or languages. In order to promote his agenda and provide government officials, reformers, and other interested groups with examples of his success, Pratt relied on multiple outlets to manufacture his narrative.

At Carlisle, Pratt frequently commissioned John Nicholas Choate (and by extension his Puyallup student apprentice John Leslie between 1894 and 1896), to photograph students' transformation in appearance to demonstrate his success at assimilation.¹⁸⁹ Pratt also commissioned a number of photographs of the campus that appear staged. The staging is more obvious in the colorized postcard version, where the image is clearly meant to evoke a Western conception of a supposedly proper and idyllic setting. Segregated by gender, students (too distant to be individualized) are shown lounging or strolling on the lawns. The American flag waves high above with campus buildings arranged neatly in the background.

Pratt regularly invited visitors to tour campus, parading students before them and demonstrating their "successes." Pratt instituted periodicals, *The School News* (1880-1883), *The Morning Star* (1882-1887), *Indian Helper* (1885-1900), and *Red Man* (1888-1917) at Carlisle, which were distributed nationally.¹⁹⁰ Educator Jessica Enoch describes how "[t]hey [these periodicals] provided a discursive space that promoted and perpetuated an educational narrative for white readers that legitimized the operations of the school."¹⁹¹ Pratt used these papers to convince an audience of public and elected officials of the positive nature of off-reservation boarding schools.¹⁹² For Indian students, teachers, and alumni, the papers were "(...) pedagogical tools that taught current and former Carlisle students the rules of etiquette, English, and white behavior (...) not only were current students expected to read these publications, but once students left the school they were also to subscribe to and save these publications to continue the learning (and assimilation) process begun at Carlisle."¹⁹³ The periodicals were imbued with a tone of discipline and surveillance in service to a standard of behavior imposed at Carlisle.¹⁹⁴

These actions were repeated at many campuses throughout the Indian boarding school system. Schools were regularly open to visitors, leaving the students effectively on display while at school. Public performances such as dances, plays, Dedication Days, recitations, and exhibits were common and designed to demonstrate and reinforce American civic values. In addition, model Indian schools were presented at the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and

¹⁸⁹ Laura Turner, "John Nicholas Choate and the Production of Photography at the Carlisle Indian School," in *Visualizing a Mission: Artifacts and Imagery of the Carlisle Indian School, 1879-1918* [exhibition catalogue, January 30-February 28, 2004], Molly Fraust, et al., eds. (The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, 2004), 14-18.

¹⁹⁰ Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, Archives & Special Collections, Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College, accessed April 20, 2026, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>.

¹⁹¹ Jessica Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education: Zitkala Ša and the Carlisle Indian School," *College English* 65, No. 2 (November 2002): 117-141, 123.

¹⁹² Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education," 122.

¹⁹³ Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education," 122.

¹⁹⁴ Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education," 123.

the 1904 World's Fair in Saint Louis, Missouri, reinforcing the public perception that Native culture, including at schools, was entertainment for non-Native audiences.¹⁹⁵ All of these efforts were highly publicized to demonstrate the assimilation experiment's success.

Zitkala Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin)

A narrative contrary to Pratt's periodicals was written by Zitkala Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), Yankton Sioux, accomplished violinist, and a Carlisle teacher from 1897 to 1899.¹⁹⁶ Zitkala Ša directed a series of essays in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900 to reformers, sympathizers, and financiers.¹⁹⁷ She was able to speak as a Native woman who had attended Indian boarding schools and taught at Carlisle, and "(...) railed against the policies, procedures, and personnel of that school."¹⁹⁸

Zitkala Ša wrote about her childhood memories with her mother, her memories as an Indian school girl, and then her accounts of being an Indian teacher. In her "*The School Days of an Indian Girl*" essay, she wrote about the journey on the "iron horse" at eight years old to White's Manual Labor Institute in Wabash, Indiana, where she stayed for three years before returning home to her mother.¹⁹⁹ Zitkala Ša shared the story of her hair being cut: "[My friend] had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!"²⁰⁰ She ran and hid under her bed until she was:

(...) dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's!²⁰¹

When she returned home, she did not feel like she belonged in her Yankton community, as the community had adopted the ways of the palefaces. "I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one."²⁰²

¹⁹⁵ For additional discussion, see John R. Gram, "Acting Out Assimilation: Playing Indian and Becoming American in the Federal Indian Boarding Schools," *American Indian Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 251-273.

¹⁹⁶ "Zitkala-Ša (Red Bird / Gertrude Simmons Bonnin)," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/people/zitkala-sa.htm>, accessed April 17, 2026.

¹⁹⁷ Enoch, "Resisting the Script of Indian Education," 123.

¹⁹⁸ Gere, "Indian Heart/White Man's Head," 44.

¹⁹⁹ Reproduced in Zitkala Ša (Gertrude Bonnin), *American Indian Stories* (Hayworth Publishing House, 1921), accessed April 17, 2026; "Zitkala-Ša (Red Bird / Gertrude Simmons Bonnin)".

²⁰⁰ Zitkala Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 54.

²⁰¹ Zitkala Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 55-56.

²⁰² Zitkala Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 69.

Before Zitkala Ša returned to White's at age fifteen, she met with a respected medicine man who gave her roots that "(...) assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year."²⁰³ Her belief in the medicine man's protections and the act of carrying of the buckskin bag containing the roots demonstrate resistance to stopping her traditional beliefs and resilience to persevere and carry the pouch in a space that did not allow individuality. At White's, she studied violin and piano then began teaching when the music teacher resigned. She graduated from White's in 1895 and, without the approval of her mother, attended Earlham College, where she became well known for her oration skills. She became ill and had to leave just before graduation in 1897.

In the fall of 1897, she accepted a position at Carlisle teaching music. Carlisle records indicate she was hired as an assistant teacher. In "An Indian Teacher among Indians," Zitkala Ša describes arriving at Carlisle and meeting Pratt, who after one month sent her west to her village to recruit students. Upon returning to Carlisle, she began to realize:

(...) that the large army of white teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected. It was one which included self-preservation quite as much as Indian education. When I saw an opium-eater holding a position as teacher of Indians, I did not understand what good was expected, until a Christian in power replied that this pumpkin-colored creature had a feeble mother to support. An inebriate paleface sat stupid in a doctor's chair, while Indian patients carried their ailments to untimely graves, because his fair wife was dependent upon him for her daily food. (...) a teacher who tortured an ambitious Indian youth by frequently reminding the brave changeling that he was nothing but a "government pauper."²⁰⁴

Though Zitkala Ša and others brought attention to these concerns, no help was offered.

Zitkala Ša shared more stories about Carlisle and the constant droves of visitors, writing:

I remember how, from morning till evening, many specimens of civilized peoples visited the Indian school. The city folks with canes and eyeglasses, the countrymen with sunburnt cheeks and clumsy feet, forgot their relative social ranks in an ignorant curiosity. Both sorts of these Christian palefaces were alike astounded at seeing the children of savage warriors so docile and industrious.²⁰⁵

Her memories demonstrate that Pratt was turning students into a live exhibit, much like he did at Fort Marion. After months of trying to reconcile feeling trapped and helpless, she resigned, declaring a desire to continue her music education. In a letter dated December 3, 1898, Pratt wrote to Commissioner W.A. Jones requesting that funds from general appropriations be provided to support her desire for continued education: "Miss Simmons, having this exceptional musical talent and being already well advanced, and having the endorsement and urgency of the

²⁰³ Zitkala Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 75.

²⁰⁴ Zitkala Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 95.

²⁰⁵ Zitkala Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 98.

best instructors to go ahead and develop her talent, encourages me to believe that she is one of the specially qualified cases [of genius].”²⁰⁶ After Zitkala Ša published her accounts of the school, Pratt tried to discredit her and said she was fired for inappropriate behavior with students.²⁰⁷ After leaving Carlisle, she continued to advocate for Native rights, educational reform, and health care improvements in different roles throughout the rest of her life, including co-founding the National Council of American Indians with her husband in 1926.²⁰⁸

Outing Programs (ca. 1734-1950)

Since as early as 1734, the administrators of Indian boarding schools utilized outing programs as a primary means of assimilation. These had a substantial impact on student experiences and vocations, further shaping federal policy, and may contribute to the national significance of individual schools.²⁰⁹ Many Federal Indian boarding schools established formal outing programs that sent students off campus into non-Native communities to work in domestic and agricultural labor.²¹⁰ With early assimilation policies, the programs focused on vocational skills, language acquisition, and acculturation. The centrality of “practical work” or the girls’ domestic arts curriculum, promoted by Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Indian Schools between 1898 and 1910, can be seen as directly related to domestic worker outing placements. These programs often placed students in urban areas at great distances from their schools and homes, such as the San Francisco Bay area. Female students worked under the supervision of Office of Indian Affairs field matrons, who monitored both their work and behavior. These field agents also worked with the girls to negotiate rates, which were typically low wages.²¹¹ Girls were placed as domestic help often in larger cities, foreshadowing the 1950s BIA voluntary urban relocation program

²⁰⁶ “Follow Up on Gertrude Simmons’ Request for Additional Training,” December 3, 1898, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>.

²⁰⁷ “Pratt Responds to Office Inquiry Regarding Gertrude Simmons,” July 28, 1900, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>.

²⁰⁸ The National Council of American Indians operated through 1942 and is not the same organization as the National Congress of American Indians (founded in 1944).

²⁰⁹ Kimberly Richards, “Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation: How American Indian Education was Developed to Force American Indians into the United States Economy as Reserve Laborers” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017); Joseph Watras, “Progressive Education and Native American Schools, 1929-1950,” *Educational Foundations* (Summer-Fall 2004): 81-104.

²¹⁰ Berry, *Education of the American Indian: A Survey of the Literature*, 12.

²¹¹ Margaret D. Jacobs, “Working on the Domestic Frontier: American Indian Domestic Servants in White Women’s Households in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1920-1940,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Woman Studies* 27, nos. 1-2 (2007): 176; Robert A. Trennert, “From Carlisle to Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of the Indian Outing System, 1878-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 52, no. 3 (Aug 1983): 267-291; Kevin Whalen, “Indian School, Company Town: Outing Workers from Sherman Institute at Fontana Farms Company, 1907-1930,” *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (May 2017): 290-321; William Willard, “Outing, Relocation, and Employment Assistance: The Impact of Federal Indian Population Dispersal Programs in the Bay Area,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 29-46; K. Tsianina Lomawaima and T. Tsianina Lomawaima, “Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1898-1910: Politics, Curriculum, and Land,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 35, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 5-31; K. Tsianina Lomawaima, “Domesticity in the Federal Indian Schools: The Power of Authority over Mind and Body,” *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 2 (May 1993): 227-240.

during the Termination Era. Boys, by contrast, were often sent to rural farms and ranches for agricultural work. Interestingly, those students sent to larger cities more frequently encountered Native students from other schools and Tribes, and in the Self-Determination era, their interactions and friendships contributed to the formation of a pan-Indian identity.²¹²

Carlisle's Outing System

Pratt's civilization experiments included an outing program, which sent students out of the school and into the homes or farms of non-Native families to learn domestic or agricultural skills. Reporting on Carlisle's outing programs in 1915, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells stated that nineteen boys would be receiving training at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, Michigan, with others working as apprentices at General Electric, Co., in Lynn, Massachusetts. Twelve boys and girls attended summer school at the State Normal School at Millersville, Pennsylvania.²¹³

Dickinson College hosts an online database of archival records related to the work of students from Carlisle Indian Industrial School.²¹⁴ Records include work locations, the "patrons" who hosted students, and required work tasks, as well as correspondence about daily life and work. These records shed light on student experiences, working conditions, use of leisure, wage rates, and outcomes, as well as the related role of the field matrons in the larger project to assimilate Native youth.

While stories from the outing program frequently supported Pratt's narrative of contributing to economic improvement of all participants, correspondence available through the Carlisle archives suggest deeper issues. In 1895 student Ralph Armstrong requested a new assignment owing to the treatment he received during his placement. Armstrong complained that his patron wanted a smaller boy that he could pay less, while also expecting him to work two farms for \$10: "Gracious life, a woman gets more than \$10. a month for housekeeping. I would rather be a housekeeper than work on two farms for \$10. a month."²¹⁵

School administration also sought to teach the value of money by paying out students according to the level of difficulty of a specific task. Students were strongly encouraged to save with bank books to track their funds.²¹⁶ The idea was to incentivize working hard and saving money to be used after school. The Superintendent, however, retained oversight of earnings, and sometimes the earnings were turned over to the agency superintendent of the home reservation for

²¹² Jacobs, "Working on the Domestic Frontier," 129

²¹³ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1915* (Government Printing Office, 1915), 8.

²¹⁴ Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>. See also Records Group 75, NARA, for student work records.

²¹⁵ Ralph Armstrong to Richard Henry Pratt, letter, ca. 1895, "Armstrong Complaint Regarding Outing Patron," accessed April 20, 2026, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/armstrong-complaint-regarding-outing-patron>.

²¹⁶ R. H. Pratt, "Report of School at Carlisle," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the year 1881* (Government Printing Office, 1881), 188.

management, rather than to the student. In 1891, correspondence between R.H. Pratt and Joseph Schanandore, the parent of a former student, clearly demonstrates that Pratt had ultimate control over the student's account. Schanandore had to request the Office of Indian Affairs' assistance to receive the account balance. Carlisle's digital records do not include information on the resolution.

On August 3, 1900, Pratt informed outing patrons of a new system of handling outing pay, specifically stating that the current system has led to "too free use of money (...) that liberality on the part of patrons is the prime cause for many boys running away."²¹⁷ Pratt states that money given directly to students will not be considered part of their pay, and that all pay would be managed by the school Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent.

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Francis E. Leupp, issued formal rules governing individual student bank accounts on April 4, 1907, attempting to address the perceived mishandling of student earnings; however, later records indicate that agents and superintendents often confiscated earnings left by students who ran away from the Carlisle school.²¹⁸ In a letter from the Office of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, dated March 3, 1911, those funds were cited as totaling \$1,139.66, and referenced as "slush funds" to cover "incidentals and miscellaneous articles for the schools and students which were not otherwise provided for."²¹⁹

On March 4, 1911, the Office of Indian Affairs cited: "Under the Act of July 1, 1898, which provides that Indian agents 'shall account for all moneys coming into their hands as custodians from any source whatever [emphasis original], and be responsible therefor under their official bonds,' all disbursing officers are required to include in their regular accounts individual Indian moneys or miscellaneous receipts of any class or kind (...)." ²²⁰ Ultimately the response from Carlisle was they could not account for the individual funds, so the Office of Indian Affairs approved the school's use of the runaway students' money under miscellaneous receipts.²²¹

In other cases, some students were deemed incompetent to manage their funds. John Jackson attended Carlisle between 1899 and 1913 and was placed on ten separate outing assignments. At the age of twenty-four, he withdrew from school citing sore eyes, a complaint he had made as early as 1908. Upon withdrawing, he requested the total of his savings account – \$141.70. The

²¹⁷ R. H. Pratt, "To the Outing Patrons of the Carlisle School," Letter, August 3, 1900, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/notice-change-outing-pay>.

²¹⁸ Francis E. Leupp to Acting Superintendent, Carlisle Indian School, memo, April 4, 1907, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/documents/final-rules-governing-individual-student-bank-accounts>; correspondence, Carlisle Superintendent Moses Friedman, Commissioner R. G. Valentine, and Second Assistant Commissioner C.F. Hauke, "Policy of Confiscating Runaway Students' Earned Money," (January 28, March 3, March 4, and March 15, 1911), accessed April 9, 2026, on file with NARA, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-documents/NARA_RG75_CCF_b013_f10_7792.pdf.

²¹⁹ Valentine to Secretary of the Interior, letter [Recommendation disposition of Carlisle Emergency Fund and similar slush accruals], March 3, 1911, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.

²²⁰ Valentine to All Disbursing Officers of the Indian Service, memo [Circular #511, Accounting for all moneys], March 4, 1911, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.

²²¹ Hauke to Friedman, letter [Emergency Fund], March 15, 1911.

request was denied on the grounds that: “he is not very bright and rather weak in business ability.”²²² The Commissioner and Superintendent only agreed to send him \$25. After several months of back-and-forth communications, the remainder was sent; however, in 1917, the school found another \$1.72 in his account.²²³ Another student, Leo Archambault, who attended Carlisle from October 6, 1912, to February 24, 1914, received a letter three years later (in May 1917) stating that Carlisle maintained a back account for him with \$42.38.²²⁴ While not exactly timely in their notification, the money was accounted for.

Indian Reform Movement (1870s-1930s)

In the last few decades of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, groups of “Indian sympathizers” began to organize and rally government for support of Native Americans. One such group calling themselves the “Friends of the Indian,” pushed for more education and were a large part of the assimilation movement.²²⁵ Founded in 1879 by two Philadelphia women, the Women’s National Indian Association (WNIA), based in Christian missionary ideals, recognized the urgent needs of Native communities and mobilized national support for legal rights, land control, education, and treaty protections. These groups influenced public opinion, church groups, and lawmakers, ultimately contributing to the Dawes Act of 1887 (see below for more information on Dawes Act).

In 1882, after visiting the Dakota Territory and learning of Sioux living conditions and corruption in the Indian Bureau, a group of forty non-Native men in Philadelphia formed the Indian Rights Association.²²⁶ The group is largely credited with advocacy for the Citizenship Act of 1924. While the Indian Rights Association lobbied, the WNIA focused on assimilation through Christian education and reservation elimination. Both groups represent the growing attempts to exert control over Native communities in the guise of reform that developed in parallel with the expanding numbers of federal Indian boarding schools.

After his Tribe was forcibly removed to the Nebraska Territory in 1877, Chief Standing Bear, of the Ponca Tribe, sued for writ of *habeas corpus* (unlawful detention) against General George Crook. Chief Standing Bear had been arrested while trying to leave the Nebraska Territory to bury his son in his ancestral home. At the end of his trial, before a verdict had been rendered, Chief Standing Bear delivered a powerful speech. Journalist Joe Starita described the scene:

²²² Superintendent [Frideman] to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, letter, October 1, 1913, and Hauke to Friedman, letter, October 31, 1913, “John Jackson Student File,” on file with NARA, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, accessed April 24, 2026, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/student_files/john-jackson-student-file-0.

²²³ “John Jackson Student File.”

²²⁴ Superintendent to Leo Archambault, letter, May 10, 1917, “Leo Archambault Student File,” on file with NARA, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, accessed May 5, 2025, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/student_files/leo-archambault-student-file.

²²⁵ Francis Paul Prucha, *Americanizing the American Indian: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian,” 1880-1900* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

²²⁶ Twiss Houting, “Indian Rights Association.”

They saw him rising slowly from his seat, and they could see the eagle feather in the braided hair wrapped in otter fur, the bold blue shirt trimmed in red cloth, the blue flannel leggings and deer-skin moccasins, the red and blue blanket, the Thomas Jefferson medallion, the necklace of bear claws. When he got to the front, he stopped and faced the audience and extended his right hand, holding it still for a long time. After a while, it is said, he turned to the bench and began to speak in a low voice, his words conveyed to the judge and the large crowd by the interpreter.

“That hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be of the same color as yours. I am a man. The same God made us both.”

Then he turned and faced the audience, pausing for a moment, staring in silence out a courtroom window, describing after a time what he saw when he looked outside.

“I seem to stand on the bank of a river. My wife and little girl are beside me. In front the river is wide and impassable.” He sees there are steep cliffs all around, the waters rapidly rising. In desperation, he scans the cliffs and finally spots a steep, rocky path to safety. “I turn to my wife and child with a shout that we are saved. We will return to the Swift Running Water that pours down between the green islands. There are the graves of my fathers.”

So they hurriedly climb the path, getting closer and closer to safety, the waters rushing in behind them. “But a man bars the passage...If he says that I cannot pass, I cannot. The long struggle will have been in vain. My wife and child and I must return and sink beneath the flood. We are weak and faint and sick. I cannot fight.”

He stopped and turned, facing the judge, speaking softly.

“You are that man.”²²⁷

Chief Standing Bear’s speech was powerful and resonated with many. Government actions over the next half century; however, continued to ignore the legal rights of Native men and women, including those of parents.

When Chief Standing Bear won his court case, officially being declared a person under US law, he toured the northeastern US delivering speeches. After hearing his speech in Boston, poet and novelist Helen Hunt Jackson began her advocacy efforts in support of Indian rights. In 1881, she published the seminal *A Century of Dishonor*, which exposed the brutal treatment of Native peoples and called for significant federal government policy reform.²²⁸ While the book did not have an immediate effect, it strongly informed future advocacy efforts.

²²⁷ Joe Starita, “The Case of Standing Bear: Establishing Personhood Under the Law,” *Court Review: Journal of the American Judges Association* 45, nos. 1-2 (2009): 4-11.

²²⁸ H. H. [Helen Hunt Jackson], *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government’s Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (Harper & Brothers, 1881).

The Code of Indian Offenses (1883)

With assimilation efforts underway through Indian boarding schools, US government officials turned their attention to Native adults. At the direction of Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller, in 1883, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price instituted the Code of Indian Offenses and established the Courts of Indian Offenses. Also known as the Indian Religious Crimes Code, the code outlawed religious ceremonies and cultural traditions of Native people, representing an attempt to extend the institutional control exercised upon Native boarding school students more broadly, including forbidding sun dances and feasts and outlawing the seeking of spiritual advice or medicine from within the Tribe, among other cultural restrictions. The sentences for violating the code included withholding food and rations for more than two weeks, hard labor, or prison time.²²⁹ These prohibitions effectively remained in place through 1934, when Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier reversed the policy of interference with Native religion. However, traditional practices still met with legal resistance frequently enough that Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act in 1978 (amended in 1994).

Dawes Act (1887)

The Dawes Act of 1887, also known as the General Allotment or Dawes Severalty Act, allotted 160 acres of farmland or 320 acres of grazing lands to each Native head of family, so as to facilitate the sale of “surplus” land.²³⁰ After more than forty years of reservation life, this act split reservation lands into individual allotments, effectively allowing the sale of additional reservation lands to European American settlers, in particular during the land rushes of the 1890s. The act weakened Native community life, promoted the enduring political aim of assimilation through agriculture to the dominant culture, and legally facilitated the further loss of vast tracts of Native land.²³¹ Allotted titles were held in trust for twenty-five years (to prevent their sale), until the Native individual had proven “competent” settlement. Although the means of assessment was not described, if the individual “has adopted the habits of civilized life,” American citizenship was thus conferred. A few Tribes situated on more arid reservations were able to avoid large-scale severalty.²³²

²²⁹ *Regulations of the Indian Department, with An Appendix Containing the Forms Used* (Government Printing Office, 1884), accessed April 11, 2026, <https://www.narf.org/nill/documents/1884regulations.pdf>.

²³⁰ National Park Service, “The Dawes Act,” Badlands National Park, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm>; NARA, “Dawes Act (1887),” <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/dawes-act>; Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (University of Nebraska Press, 1982; Bison Books, 2001); Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887-1934* (Indiana University Press, 1991); Kathleen Washburn, “Dawes Severalty Act,” Oxford Bibliographies, August 26, 2014, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0149.xml>.

²³¹ See also Elliott West, *Continental Reckoning: The American West in the Age of Expansion* (University of Nebraska Press, 2023); Donald L. Parman, “Chapter 1: The Heritage of Severalty,” in *Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century* (Indiana University Press, 1994).

²³² See the case of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and Southern Ute Indian Tribe, which split over the issue of allotment. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe lost 523,000 acres after 1899, recovered in part in 1938 after passage of

The Kennedy Report provided a stark summary of the turn of the nineteenth century:

The last three decades of the 19th century were years of anguish for the Indian, as he fought in vain to defend his homeland from first plundering settlers, and then, the might of the U.S. Cavalry. With the murder of Sitting Bull and the massacre of a Sioux band at Wounded Knee, S. Dak. in 1890, the conquest of the Indian was complete.²³³

Three years prior to the final battle, though, the U.S. Government had initiated a means of dissolving the Indian land base legislatively. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 provided for land allotment to individual Indians as a means of breaking up the tribal structure and giving Indians an opportunity for a more civilized life. The actual results of the law were a diminishing of the Indian tribal economic base from 140 million acres to about 50 million acres, and severe social disorganization of the Indian family. This land policy was directly related to the Government's Indian education policy because proceeds from the destruction of the Indian land base were to be used to pay the costs of taking Indian children from their homes and placing them in federal boarding schools---a system designed to dissolve the Indian social structure.²³⁴

By 1888, there were 233 schools ranging from boarding schools to day schools and industrial training schools either controlled by, or contracted and supported by, the Office of Indian Affairs (see Table 3). That fiscal year the Indian Bureau invested \$875,016 in government schools, and another \$259,119 in contract schools, itemized as follows.²³⁵

Table 3. Report on Indian Education in 1888 ²³⁶

School Type	No.	Capacity	Enrollment	Average attendance	No. of employees [sic]	Cost to Government
Government Boarding Schools	*69	5,372	5,647	4,341	637	\$580,954.29
Government Day Schools	85	3,344	3,175	1,929	112	\$58,162.75
Government Industrial Training Schools	5	1,500	1,570	1,388	179	\$235,899.12
Total Government Schools	159	10,216	10,392	7,658	928	\$875,016.16
Specially appropriated for	3	610	512	478	81	\$75,278.66
Contract Boarding Schools	49	4,207	3,015	2,498	489	\$244,587.56

the Indian Reorganization Act. Colorado Encyclopedia, "Dawes Act (General Allotment Act)," accessed March 3, 2026, <https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/dawes-act-general-allotment-act>.

²³³ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 12.

²³⁴ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 12.

²³⁵ *Fifty-seventh Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior*, xi.

²³⁶ Table 8, reproduced from *Fifty-seventh Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior*, xi: "Showing number of schools, school-house capacity, enrollment, average attendance, number of employees [sic], and cost during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1888." Table note: "*Four of these schools (having 32 employees) [sic] are managed by religious organizations, and are assisted by the Government which issues clothing and subsistence to the pupils."

School Type	No.	Capacity	Enrollment	Average attendance	No. of employees [sic]	Cost to Government
Contract Day Schools	22	1,431	1,293	786	39	\$14,532.17
Total Contract Schools	71	5,638	4,308	3,284	528	\$259,119.73
Aggregate	233	16,464	15,212	11,420	1,537	\$1,209,414.55

Compulsory Attendance Law (1891)

Through much of the nineteenth century, US government officials forcefully recruited children for school attendance, both through appeals to Tribal leaders, but also through coercion and forced removal, at times effectively kidnapping children without parental consent. As described in *A History of Indian Policy*, “Indian Service traditions suggest that ‘unusual’ methods were sometimes used to be certain that there were enough children available to fill the quotas established for the various- schools. The growth in attendance may thus have been partially ‘force-fed’ to justify the increase in expenditure for education.”²³⁷ Unusual methods could include allowing prisoners of war to be “released” to boarding schools and taking children against their families’ wishes.²³⁸ Pratt dismissively described opposition to removal of children, writing: “One of the most noted missionaries to one of our largest tribes, whose parents were missionaries and he therefore [was] born to the idea of holding the Indians together as tribes, wrote a four-column article for our leading educational journal opposing the Carlisle aim of giving the Indians citizenship ability through citizen environment, opportunities, and rights.”²³⁹

Between 1858 and 1871, eleven treaties were ratified that contained compulsory attendance provisions.²⁴⁰ In 1891, the US government extended compulsory attendance law that allowed federal officers to forcibly take Native children from their homes and reservations.²⁴¹ The argument for compulsory attendance was based in the Marshall Trilogy Opinions that characterized Indians as wards of the state. The 1891 legislation was active until 1929, when attendance authority passed to states. The governing rules of federal Indian compulsory attendance law are presented below. In many states deference was given to parental preference on location of school; however, kidnapping children ages five to eighteen was legitimized when the government deemed necessary.

The Indian appropriations act approved March 3, 1891, read: “The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to make and enforce such rules and regulations as may be necessary to secure the

²³⁷ Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 90.

²³⁸ Newland, Vols. I and II; Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*.

²³⁹ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 270.

²⁴⁰ Robert Laurence, “Indian Education: Federal Compulsory School Attendance Law Applicable to American Indians: The Treaty-Making Period: 1857-1871,” *American Indian Law Review* 5, no. 2 (January 1977): 393-413. The rules were omitted as obsolete due to the subsequent enactment of section 282 of this title, which provided that the Secretary of the Interior issue and enforce regulations, see Feb. 14, 1920, ch. 75, § 1, 41 Stat. 410.

²⁴¹ July 13, 1892, ch. 164, §1, 27 Stat. 143 (25 USC, ch 7, §282-284), repealed or omitted.

enrollment and regular attendance of eligible Indian children who are wards of the Government in schools maintained for their benefit by the United States or in public schools.”²⁴² The October 30, 1891, “Rules in Regard to Attendance of Indian Youth at School” enabled the following:

“In order to give the full force and effect to the above enactment, the following rules and regulations are hereby promulgated (...)

1. The law applies to all Indians, whether on or off reservations, who are subject to the absolute control, and are under the special protection of the United States Government.*
[*Note—The law is not held to be applicable to the so-called Five Civilized Tribes, the Indians residing in New York, the Pueblos of New Mexico, and the Indians residing in States who have become citizens of the United States.]
2. The object of the law is to secure to all Indian youth the benefits of a practical education, which shall fit them for the duties of the United States citizenship, and it requires that every Indian child of suitable age and health shall attend some school. So far as practicable the preferences of Indian parents, or guardians, or of Indian youth of sufficient maturity and judgement, will be regarded as to whether the attendance shall be at Government, public or private schools.²⁴³
3. “Children of suitable age” is defined to include all those over 5 and under 18 years of age.
4. The “suitable health” of a child, as a condition of being sent to school, is to be determined by a medical examination and the certificate of a physician.
5. Indian children will attend the day school or boarding schools established for their benefit on their respective reservations; but in case such schools are lacking, or they are already filled with pupils, or if for other reasons the good of the children shall clearly require that they be sent away from home to school, they will be placed in non-reservation schools.
6. The consent of parents shall, ordinarily, first be secured, if practicable, for placing children in non-reservation schools.
7. Cases of refusal to allow children to be sent to schools, either on or off reservations, or of opposition to the proper officers in their attempts to secure the school attendance of Indian children, shall be referred to the Indian Office, accompanied by explicit statements setting forth the circumstances of each case. Such punishment or penalties as the circumstances may seem to call for will be prescribed by this office.

²⁴² July 13, 1892, ch. 164, §1, 27 Stat. 143 (25 USC §282), omitted in 1920.

²⁴³ Government refers to Native-only schools, typically boarding; public refers to integrated general public education; and private refers to religious missions, which may have been Native only or integrated.

8. It is hereby made the duty of agents, special agents, and supervisors of education, to use their authority wherever necessary to secure the attendance at school of all Indian children within their reach.
9. It shall be proper for agents, after reporting the facts and being specially authorized, to use the Indian police force to compel attendance at school, wherever necessary.
10. The sole purpose of this legislation is to secure the highest good of the rising generation of Indians, in order that they may no longer remain savage, uncivilized, uneducated, or dependent. It is therefore earnestly hoped that both the Indians and all interested in their welfare will cooperate in every practicable way to secure the attendance of all Indian children of suitable age and health at such institutions and for such length of time as shall be necessary to equip them for life's duties.²⁴⁴

When Congressional goals were not met, the Act of March 3, 1893, authorized the Secretary of the Interior to withhold rations or annuities from Indian families with children ages eight to twenty-one who refused to place their children in school the preceding year.²⁴⁵ To meet the growing demand, numerous boarding schools opened during this era, modeled largely after Carlisle with heavy military influence.

The 1893 report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs highlights that the structure of a system where off-reservation boarding schools were intended to be secondary schools to on-reservation primary schools, with instruction in various trades (or vocational training) as part of the off-reservation curriculum.²⁴⁶ This was reiterated in the 1918 Commissioner report, which continued to stress the importance of a vocational curriculum, such as in agriculture, mechanics, and domestic arts, and limiting nonessential topics such “(...) as powers and roots, ratios, and average, approximations, divisibility, foreign money, metric system (...)” [etc.].²⁴⁷

Burke Act (1906)

Aspects of Indian law not explicitly connected to education served nevertheless, by extension, to impact Native rights regarding educational decisions for their own children. As a continuation of policies that questioned the competency of Native people, the 1906 Burke Act (General Allotment Act Amendment) authorized the Secretary of the Interior, at his discretion, to assess whether “an Indian allottee is competent and capable of managing his or her affairs” before issuing fee simple land patents pursuant to severalty (excluding the former Indian Territory).²⁴⁸ Fee simple patent conveyed absolute ownership of land from a government to a private

²⁴⁴ *Sixtieth Annual Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs* to the Secretary of the Interior (Government Printing Office, 1891), Appendix, 158-159.

²⁴⁵ Newland, Vol. I, 35; Act of March 3, 1893, ch. 209, § 1, 27 Stat. 628, 635, codified as 25 USC §283 (“Regulations for withholding rations for nonattendance at schools”).

²⁴⁶ *Sixty-second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Government Printing Office, 1893), 9.

²⁴⁷ *Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1918* (Government Printing Office, 1918), 25.

²⁴⁸ Burke Act of May 8, 1906, ch. 2348, §6, 34 Stat. 182; Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 753.

individual.²⁴⁹ Once Native individuals received fee simple patent, they could become citizens. But individuals deemed in need of guardianship were not enfranchised as citizens. As law historian Kenneth Bobroff described, following the issuance of fee patents, “almost invariably (and usually immediately) resulted in the transfer for land from Indians to whites, either through sale (often fraudulent), mortgage followed by default and foreclosure, or confiscation for failure to pay state taxes.”²⁵⁰

Commissioner Sells’s Transformation of Indian Health and Education (1914-1917)

The federal policy apparatus around Indian education continued to expand in the early twentieth century, often taking a paternalistic approach linked to Progressive Era educational and health reforms, and the general policy around control of Tribal people. In the Indian appropriation act of 1914, Congress allocated a budget of up to \$20,000 for tuition of Indian children enrolled in general education in public schools.²⁵¹ This was one of the first times public schools received federal funding for Native students.

Cato Sells, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1921, was responsible for accelerating the rate of Indian land lease and sale via the Declaration of Policy in the Administration of Indian Affairs, 1917.²⁵² In 1915, Commissioner Sells gathered a committee of eight experienced teachers representing various courses of study and boarding schools to prepare a new uniform curriculum that would incorporate vocational training and align with public school education.²⁵³ This new curriculum was fully introduced by February 1, 1916:

A study of this synopsis shows that the course of study is separated into three divisions – (1) primary, (2) prevocational, and (3) vocational. The primary division includes the first three grades, the prevocational division includes the next three grades, and the vocational division contemplates a four-year course above the sixth grade. The first group is the

²⁴⁹ Burke Act of May 8, 1906; M. Kaye Tatro, “Burke Act (1906),” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, January 15, 2010, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=BU010>.

²⁵⁰ Kenneth H. Bobroff, “Retelling Allotment: Indian Property Rights and the Myth of Common Ownership,” *Vanderbilt Law Review* 54, no. 4 (May 2001): 1610-1611.

²⁵¹ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1915*, 8.

²⁵² DeJong, *Paternalism to Partnership*, 247; Francis Paul Prucha, “Chapter 20: The Indians’ Land,” in *Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (University of Nebraska Press, 1986): 295-310; McDonnell, “Chapter 8: Declaration of Policy,” in *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887-1934*, 103-110. DeJong stated, “In his effort at compromise, [Secretary of the Interior] Sells issued his ‘Declaration of Policy.’ For those deemed ‘competent,’ Sells issued fee patents and ended federal guardianship, emancipating this class of Indians from federal supervision. This, Sells argued, would enable the Indian Service to give ‘closer attention’ to the incompetent so that they might eventually be freed of federal oversight. All healthy adult Indians with less than 50 percent Indian blood and who were Indian school graduates demonstrating competency, were to be emancipated from federal control upon reaching the age of twenty-one. Those with greater than 50 percent Indian blood were deemed incompetent and remained under federal guardianship. The old and feeble deemed incompetent were allowed to sell their land and given unrestricted control over their money held in trust by the United States. Those owning inherited lands were encouraged to sell it, with the proceeds to be used to develop their homestead.”

²⁵³ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916* (Government Printing Office, 1916), 9-23.

beginning stage, the second group is the finding stage, and the third group is the fitting stage.²⁵⁴

In day schools, in addition to English, reading, writing, “manners and right conduct,” and music, first graders spent sixty minutes in “industrial work” and eighty-five minutes in “occupation and study.”²⁵⁵ In boarding schools, 240 minutes were spent on “industrial work,” with notation that “small and young pupils should not be required to work full time.”²⁵⁶ The third graders were to spend ninety minutes a day in industrial work, defined as gardening, repair work, sanitation, sewing, cooking, and housekeeping.²⁵⁷ All students in first and second grades who were ten years old were also to be given this work.

The 1916 report does not provide information on day school curriculum after third grade. Fourth graders in boarding school (first year of the prevocational division) were likewise to spend 240 minutes each day on industrial work, with a breakdown of thirty minutes of instruction and 210 minutes of production.²⁵⁸ By the fourth year of vocational training in boarding schools, students were to spend four hours per day, six days per week, in industrial work, with a breakdown of instruction time of 1.5 hours per week, and application of 22.5 hours per week.

In 1916, Commissioner Sells also reported on health issues on reservations. Illnesses such as tuberculosis, trachoma, and other epidemics (smallpox, diphtheria, rabies, measles, and whooping cough) were fairly common in boarding schools as well. Additionally, three out of ten children at Indian boarding schools were infected with trachoma, an eye infection that could lead to blindness, while the tuberculosis incidence rate was four times that of the general population, and other contagious diseases were double or triple national rates.²⁵⁹ Treatment for trachoma was compulsory in day and boarding schools.²⁶⁰

Infant mortality was high among Native communities, which Sells responded to with a “save the babies” campaign. In 1916, under Sells’s leadership, the Office of Indian Affairs published a pamphlet entitled, *Indian Babies: how to keep them well*.²⁶¹ In an address to the Congress on Indian Progress the preceding year, Sells stated:

²⁵⁴ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916*, 21.

²⁵⁵ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916*, 21.

²⁵⁶ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916*, 13.

²⁵⁷ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916*, 12.

²⁵⁸ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916*, 15.

²⁵⁹ David H. DeJong, “‘Unless They are Kept Alive,’ Federal Indian Schools and Student Health, 1878-1918,” *American Indian Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 258.

²⁶⁰ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1916*, 17.

²⁶¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, *Indian Babies: How to Keep Them Well* (Government Printing Office, 1916).

It is our chief duty to protect the Indian's health and to save him from premature death. Before we educate him, before we conserve his property, we should save his life. If he is to be perpetuated, we must care for the children (...) We cannot solve the Indian problem without Indians. We cannot educate their children unless they are kept alive.²⁶²

While the tone of the pamphlet is paternalistic and placed blame on mothers, it was an open government acknowledgement that one out of every three Indian babies died before reaching the age of three.²⁶³ Pamphlet imagery promoted fresh air and allowing babies to sleep outside.²⁶⁴

Sells's 1916 report to the Secretary of the Interior further stated:

I have great satisfaction in announcing the fact that the influence of the medicine man is fast being eliminated. He has everywhere been a destructive element. To the extent that he has flourished his tribesmen have been nonprogressive, never reaching their possibilities, suffering for want of the hospital, physician, nurse, and field matron. He has been a constant menace to the progress, prosperity, morals, and health of the Indian race. The medicine man is no longer dominant, neither is he now a large factor in the life of many tribes, although he is still found here and there in decreasing numbers.²⁶⁵

Knowing that the eradication of traditional healers was a primary contemporary goal of the Office of Indian Affairs highlights that the schools were likely supporting this same agenda. As part of the elimination of Native culture, the elimination of religion and non-Western medicine was deemed an important goal.

On April 17, 1917, Commissioner Sells issued a Declaration of Policy in the Administration of Indian Affairs published in the Report of the Commissioner. This policy declared that rapid progress had been made in the improvement of health conditions, suppression of liquor, improvement of industrial conditions, improvement of vocational training, and protection of property.²⁶⁶ As such, the policy declared that guardianship was no longer needed for "competent Indians."²⁶⁷ The policy put forth six rules, (abbreviated to focus on their relevance to education):

1. *Patents in fee.* — To all able-bodied adult Indians of less than one-half Indian blood, there will be given as far as may be under the law full and complete control of all their property. Patents in fee shall be issued to all adult Indians of one-half or more Indian blood who may, after careful investigation, be found competent, provided, that where deemed advisable patents in fee shall be withheld for not to exceed 40 acres as a home. Indian students, when they are 21 years of age, or over, who complete the full

²⁶² Office of Indian Affairs, *Indian Babies: How to Keep Them Well*, 27-29.

²⁶³ Office of Indian Affairs, *Indian Babies: How to Keep Them Well*, 3.

²⁶⁴ Office of Indian Affairs, *Indian Babies: How to Keep Them Well*, 17.

²⁶⁵ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1917* (Government Printing Office, 1917), 20-21.

²⁶⁶ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1917*, 3-5.

²⁶⁷ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1917*, 4.

course of instruction in the Government schools, receive diplomas and have demonstrated competency will be so declared.

2. *Sale of lands.* — A liberal ruling will be adopted in the matter of passing upon applications for the sale of inherited Indian lands (...).
3. *Certificates of competency.* — The rules which are made to apply in the granting of patents in fee and sale of lands will be made equally applicable in the matter of issuing certificates of competency.
4. *Individual Indian moneys.* — Indians will be given unrestricted control of all their individual Indian moneys upon issuance of patents in fee or certificates of competency. Strict limitations will not be placed upon the use of funds of the old, the indigent, and the invalid.
5. *Pro-rate shares – trust funds.* — As speedily as possible their pro rata shares in tribal trust or other funds shall be paid to all Indians who have been declared competent (...).
6. *Elimination of ineligible pupils from the Government Indian schools.* — In many of our boarding schools, Indian children are being educated at Government expense whose parents are amply able to pay for their education and have public school facilities at or near their homes. Such children shall not hereafter be enrolled in Government Indian schools supported by gratuity appropriations, except on payment of actual per capita cost and transportation.²⁶⁸

The new policy explicitly linked US government education with competency, whereupon trust monies hinged. Without a declaration of competency, US government officials retained control over Indian lands and allocated funding. Educational level and blood quantum were key elements of the Office of Indian Affairs definition of competency. Military service and contributions to the US were also considered.

During fiscal year 1917, Sells reported on the distribution between government and mission schools of the 84,375 Native children eligible for school attendance (Table 4). In 1917, children were equally divided between government and public schools. In 1917, 45.1 percent of children attended government schools, while 45.7 percent attended public schools. By contrast, in 1888 68.3 percent attended government schools, while 28.3 percent attended contract schools (see Table 3).

²⁶⁸ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1917*, 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Indian Students among Different School Types as reported for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1917.²⁶⁹

School Type	Numbers	Totals
Government Schools		
Non-reservation boarding	11,298	
Reservation Boarding	10,902	
Day	6,558	
Total in Government Schools		28,758
Mission and Private Schools		
Mission Contract Boarding	1,667	
Mission Noncontract Boarding	3,296	
Mission Noncontract Day	726	
Private Contract Boarding	148	
Total in Mission and Private Schools		5,837
Public Schools		29,173
Total Number of Indian Children in School		63,768

Native Language Code during World War I (1917-1918)

In resistance to boarding schools' assimilation goals, many Native students retained their culture and language. For example, in this period it is documented that Indian boarding school alumni continued speaking in their native languages, even while serving in the military during World War I.

In 1917, when the US entered the conflict, Native individuals from over sixty Tribes volunteered for military service, enlisting at a higher rate than any other minority group, and most did so despite lacking US citizenship.²⁷⁰ Over twelve thousand Native people participated in World War I, or approximately twenty-five percent of all Native American men at the time.²⁷¹ Most of these soldiers had attended government boarding schools. Military recruiters regularly visited boarding schools such as Haskell, Chilocco, and Phoenix. Commissioner Sells's 1917 Indian Affairs report also documented how Native individuals volunteered for service.

The growing attitude of the Indian toward the world war is a credit to his race. A well-nigh limitless devastation and conflict is bringing him its profound lesson that the highest authority and best social welfare must spring from a free and self-governing people. This awakening is especially noticeable among the younger generation, largely the product of our Indian schools,

²⁶⁹ Reproduced from *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1917*, 151. Note also the "number eligible children not in school" was identified as 16,789 (includes eligible and ineligible children not reported in Oklahoma).

²⁷⁰ William C. Meadows, *The First Code Talkers* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 14.

²⁷¹ Meadows, *The First Code Talkers*, 14. As compared to about 23% of the general population through the draft. See "Researching Individuals in WW1 Records," NARA, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.archives.gov/research/genealogy/wwi>.

who are quick to catch the spirit of a new era. Reports on file indicate that a large number of voluntary enlistments have been made in the Army, Navy, and National Guard, or in some branch of the Military Establishment, by Indian students and ex-students alone. Many of the schools report 20 or 30, some from 40-50 enlistments. Among them is represented practically every tribe. Several enlisted for the aviation service and some were admitted to officers' training camps.²⁷²

Commissioner Sells, among other political and military leaders, actively opposed all-Native units on the basis that assimilation and English fluency were required for their advancement and civilization.²⁷³ However, toward the end of the war, during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in France between September 26 and November 11, 1918, German forces listened to Allied Forces' military transmissions and easily decoded and translated messages, and thus communications between units were limited.²⁷⁴ It would be Native languages that enabled forces to relay communications in languages completely unknown to German forces.

In April 1918, over six thousand Natives from sixty Tribes were serving in at least 20 US Divisions.²⁷⁵ Nearly six hundred of those Native men speaking twenty-six distinct languages and dialects served in the 36th Infantry Division. While the Choctaw soldiers of the 36th Infantry Division, 142nd Infantry Regiment are credited with creating coded words for military terms, other languages were used in more conversational communications. They translated messages that allowed Allied forces to regain control of the war. Without the help and unique skills of these Native men, many more lives would have been lost.²⁷⁶ Other World War I references to the coded use of Native languages include Comanche, Lakota and Yankton Sioux, Cheyenne, Osage, and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago).²⁷⁷

Ironically, students that survived a school system designed to eradicate Native culture and languages became the soldiers credited with using their Native languages as a tool to aid the success of the Allied Forces. The military environment of many boarding schools, whether intentionally or unintentionally, prepared many young Native men for military service. Ben Carterby, one of the Choctaw Code Talkers of the 36th Division, 142nd Infantry, Company E, wrote "Indian School Training" on his draft card.²⁷⁸ As a result of the success of coded

²⁷² *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1917*, 6.

²⁷³ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1918* (Government Printing Office, 1918).

²⁷⁴ Meadows, *The First Code Talkers*, 43-121.

²⁷⁵ Meadows, *The First Code Talkers*, 14.

²⁷⁶ Meadows, *The First Code Talkers*, 43-121.

²⁷⁷ William C. Meadows, "Native American Code Talkers of World War I," United States World War One Centennial Commission, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/american-indians-in-ww1-code-talkers.html> (accessed September 15, 2025); Choctaw Nation, "Choctaw Code Talkers," Choctaw Nation Historic Projects, <https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/code-talkers-educational-booklet.pdf> (accessed September 15, 2025).

²⁷⁸ Carterby attended Armstrong Academy. "Carterby, Ben. Page 1," US, WWI, Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, available via Fold3. Handwritten entry reads "Indian School Training."

communication in World War I, the US military utilized other Native languages to code messages during World War II, including Comanche, Lakota, Muscogee, Mohawk, Navajo, Hopi, and many others.²⁷⁹

The Meriam Report and Federal Indian Policy During the 1920s

Decades of assimilationist federal policy since the Dawes Act, including the maturation of a system of off-reservation boarding schools and compulsory attendance laws, culminated in several key actions in the 1920s. The **1921 Snyder Act**, sponsored by Representative Homer P. Snyder of New York, effectively expanded the responsibilities of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (as it was becoming known informally) with a defined role (under the supervision of the Secretary of the Interior) to allocate funds, including for “general support and civilization, including education” and “for relief of distress and conservation of health.”²⁸⁰ The agency was further authorized to provide support for building assistance, development of water supplies, and administration of Indian property, among other roles. This act permanently authorized federal Tribal programs, including education.

Perhaps even more consequential was Congressional passage of the **Indian Citizenship Act** (also known as the Curtis Act or the Snyder Act) on June 2, 1924, ensuring citizenship for all Native Americans born within the US.²⁸¹ While Native participation in World War I played a role in the legislation’s passage, some government officials saw the act as another tool of assimilation. Citizenship and self-reliance became the central focus of boarding school curriculum.²⁸² Forced upon Tribes without consultation, the Act did not in reality grant equal rights, such as the right to vote, governed by state law, to Native people. It also did not remove the Compulsory Attendance Law of 1891.

When *The Problem of Indian Administration*, also known as the Meriam Report, was published in 1928, it provided Congress with an in-depth analysis of the Indian educational system. The Meriam Report found “wide variation between the best and the worst” of the educational system available to Native people.²⁸³ The report pointed at the shameful policies of Indian Service administration, especially in regard to discipline and overcrowding at boarding schools. This special commission was organized by the Institute for Government Research (later known as the Brookings Institution) and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, rather than by a government agency or agent. In 1926, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work selected public administrator Lewis Meriam to supervise the so-called “Indian Survey.” Meriam’s team gathered information over seven months, visiting the twenty-three states with the highest recorded Native population estimates (the top three being Oklahoma, Arizona, and South Dakota) and ninety-five

²⁷⁹ NARA, “Code Talkers,” accessed September 15, 2025, <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/military/code-talkers.html>.

²⁸⁰ Snyder Act of 1921, ch. 115 of the 67th Congress, approved November 2, 1921, 42 Stat. 208.

²⁸¹ Indian veterans of WWI were granted citizenship in 1919; Pub. L. 175, U.S. Statutes at Large 43 (1924): 253.

²⁸² Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 146-149.

²⁸³ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, vii.

reservations, agencies, hospitals, and schools.²⁸⁴ The Secretary of the Interior insisted work be completed within one year. Meriam's team included specialists from a wide variety of backgrounds.²⁸⁵

The report asserted that the government needed close oversight of secular education provided by missionaries.²⁸⁶ Missionary schools were not as closely evaluated, however, in the report, as: "(...) the members of the staff did not feel that they were authorized to go into the missionary activities in the same detail as they did the government work. They appreciated that they were received at the missions purely as a matter of courtesy and that they ought to depend entirely on this courtesy for the information which they secured."²⁸⁷ This highlights a significant deficiency in the report as not all federal monies were fully audited during the analysis, with the research teams only presented with self-selected information that must be considered carefully as potentially subjective and almost certainly incomplete.

The report concluded that "any policy for Indians based on the notion that they can or should be kept permanently isolated from other Americans is bound to fail."²⁸⁸ In the report, the survey team included extensive recommendations for the correction of deficiencies, notably in health, education, and government cooperation on legal and social issues. To improve economic productivity, the Meriam report proposed the employment of area specialists by the Indian Service, such as agricultural specialists to assist cattle and sheep raising activities, marketing and production specialists to improve sales of Native goods, public health specialists to improve physical health; as well as improvement of salaries and employment benefits for the Indian Service.²⁸⁹

In education, the Meriam report pushed for higher grade levels and an accreditation program for high schools on par with general public education: "The promising Indian boy or girl who has attended an Indian boarding school and who desires to go on with his education should not encounter any educational barrier because of the limitations of the Indian boarding schools."²⁹⁰

²⁸⁴ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, vii; "Dr. Lewis Meriam" [obituary], *The New York Times*, November 3, 1972, 42.

²⁸⁵ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 59. The team included Ray A. Brown, Assistant Professor of Law, University of Wisconsin (legal aspects); Henry Roe Cloud, President of the American Indian Institute (Indian adviser); Edward Everett Dale, Chair of History, University of Oklahoma (economic conditions); Emma Duke (Indian migration to urban areas); Dr. Herbert R. Edwards, Director, Bureau of Tuberculosis Control, New Haven Department of Health (health); Fayette Avery McKenzie, Professor of Sociology and Dean of Men, Juanita College (source materials); Mary Louise Mark, Professor of Sociology, Ohio State University (family life and activities of women); W. Carson Ryan, Jr., Professor of Education, Swarthmore College (education); and William J. Spillman, Agricultural Economist, US Department of Agriculture (agriculture).

²⁸⁶ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 819.

²⁸⁷ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 817.

²⁸⁸ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (University of Nebraska, 1984), 287.

²⁸⁹ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 25-51.

²⁹⁰ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 35.

Immediate recommendations also included improvements to the quality, quantity, and variety of diets available to children in boarding schools.²⁹¹

Regarding health, the report stated: “Absence in the past of adequately trained and supported public health physicians is nowhere more apparent than in the boarding schools maintained by the government.”²⁹² The Meriam report goes further to provide a list of five specific failings, all of which are carefully described:

1. The Indian children in boarding schools are generally below normal in health as compared with standards for white children.
2. The appropriations for food for these children are not sufficient to secure for them a suitable, balanced diet for well children, much less for children whose health is below normal.
3. The boarding schools are generally crowded beyond their capacity so that the individual child does not have sufficient light and air.
4. The boarding school dormitories are generally of the congregate institutional type so that those who are below par in health cannot be isolated from the others. Contagious diseases under these circumstances have almost free scope.
5. The normal day at the boarding schools, with its marked industrial features, is a heavy day even for well, strong children. It is too much for a child below normal. Added to the insufficiency of diet and over-crowding, it may be an explanation of the low general health among children in Indian boarding schools.²⁹³

The two most common health problems identified were tuberculosis (with an estimated prevalence of one out ten infected in the general Tribal population) and trachoma (described as the second most prevalent disease among Tribes).²⁹⁴ The report highlighted that children were not examined periodically to detect cases, with sick children frequently sent home without medical care, sometimes spreading contagion further. As early as 1923, on-campus eye surgery was conducted on students with trachoma, but by surgeons with little training.²⁹⁵ Historian Todd Benson reported: “Official OIA statistics indicate that between the fiscal years 1925 and 1927, a total of 22,626 eye surgeries were performed.”²⁹⁶ However, with no standard diagnostic classifications, conditions as simple as conjunctivitis were treated as trachoma.²⁹⁷ The Meriam report documented that these surgeries were being conducted on very young children, even

²⁹¹ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 52-55.

²⁹² Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 191-192.

²⁹³ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 192.

²⁹⁴ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 189-345. Trachoma was so common, that specific schools, such as Fort Defiance, were set aside for students identified with the disease.

²⁹⁵ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 212.

²⁹⁶ Todd Benson, “Blinded with Science: American Indians, the Office of Indian Affairs, and the Federal Campaign against Trachoma, 1924-1927,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 3 (1996): 129.

²⁹⁷ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 209.

though medical research was still in development: “These operations were performed on the promise that the surgical process used would cure the disease once and for all without after care.”²⁹⁸ These medical procedures were performed on children without the consent of their parents, many of whom under the Burke Act were deemed incompetent to make decisions.

The Meriam Report was the most prominent of several investigations conducted in this and the following era.²⁹⁹ Each report discusses ways to address what is chronically described as the “Indian Problem.” All reports recognized the economic poverty on the reservations and called out a lack of opportunities as the cause. In 1969, the Kennedy Report summarized Meriam’s findings as “(1) Indians were excluded from management of their own affairs, and (2) Indians were receiving a poor quality of services (especially health and education) from public officials who were supposed to be serving their needs.” The report further noted that “these two findings remain just as valid today as they did more than 40 years ago,” suggesting that despite the recommendations of and actions since the Meriam report, conditions remained poor.³⁰⁰ Overcrowding in Indian boarding schools, limited medical care and supplies, and poor and limited nutrition were regular factors in health and wellness throughout the Indian boarding school system.

Advocacy by Indians for Indians During Assimilation Era

Many Native people used their education to advocate for Native rights and services. Some like Zitkala Ša focused efforts on educational policy; others like Susan La Flesche Picotte focused on improving medical services. Born on the Omaha Reservation in 1865 to Chief Joseph La Flesche (Iron Eye was Ponca and French Canadian) and his wife Mary (One Woman was Omaha, Otoe, Iowa, and European), Picotte was raised culturally as Omaha. She attended the school at the Omaha Reservation until age fourteen.³⁰¹ Picotte was deeply affected by a local doctor refusing to visit a sick, elderly Native woman, who said “it was only an Indian, it did not matter.”³⁰²

Picotte sought to pursue medicine to serve all people. From 1879 until 1882, she studied at the Elizabeth Institute in New Jersey.³⁰³ She continued her education at Hampton Institute between 1884 and 1886, graduating as salutatorian before entering the Woman’s Medical College of

²⁹⁸ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 214-215.

²⁹⁹ Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government [Herbert Hoover, et al.], *Social Security-Education-Indian Affairs: A Report to the Congress* (March 1949); Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*; etc.

³⁰⁰ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I, 13. Additional research on physical and mental health within the Indian boarding school system is recommended to further contextualize the extent of medical experimentation, trauma, and contagiousness of specific diseases, among other topics.

³⁰¹ Picotte would have been fourteen in 1879. Based on information from the DOI investigative report, the only school open on the Omaha Reservation that year was Omaha Indian School.

³⁰² “Story of Dr. Susan: Succeeding against the Current,” Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Center, accessed April 24, 2026, <https://picottecenter.org/dr-susan>.

³⁰³ Benson Tong, *Susan La Flesche Picotte, MD: Omaha Indian Leader and Reformer* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). Elizabeth Institute, New Jersey, was founded in 1861.

Pennsylvania in 1886. After just three years, she graduated in 1889 as valedictorian.³⁰⁴ Picotte is considered the first Native woman to earn a Western medical degree.³⁰⁵ When she returned to serve her community, she appears to have served not only as the physician of the Omaha boarding school, but the larger reservation.³⁰⁶ Among the students, Picotte “(...) raised awareness about health issues such as good hygiene and food sanitation. She treated tuberculosis, banned communal drinking cups, and insisted on window screens for good ventilation and to keep out disease-carrying flies. These simple changes made a huge difference in the mortality rates of her people.”³⁰⁷ She fought for many years to get a hospital established on the Omaha reservation. On January 10, 1913, Picotte “(...) finally witnessed the dedication – complete with speeches, a lavish banquet, and prayers in the Omaha language—of her long-awaited hospital.”³⁰⁸ She was known to have combined traditional medicine with Western practices, and her ability to speak Omaha further enabled her abilities to assist her community.

Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohíyesa), Santee Dakota, English, and Frenchman, was a writer, advocate, and physician who embodied a complicated legacy.³⁰⁹ He was born in 1858, near Redwood Falls, Minnesota, to Wakantankawin (Sacred Woman, also known as Mary Nancy Eastman) and Ite Wakanhdi (Many Lightnings, also known as Jacob Eastman).³¹⁰ Eastman attended Indian schools at Flandreau Mission and Santee Normal School in Nebraska, as well as the typically non-Indian schools Beloit College, Knox College, and Dartmouth College.³¹¹ He graduated from Dartmouth in 1887. Eastman completed medical school at Boston University

³⁰⁴ “Story of Dr. Susan,” Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Center; “Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte: Native American, French Canadian, Physician, Omaha Reservation,” Americans All, accessed April 24, 2026, <https://americansall.org/legacy-story-individual/susan-picotte>; Joe Starita, *A Warrior of the People: How Susan La Flesche Overcame Racial and Gender Inequality to Become America's First Indian Doctor* (St. Martin's Press, 2016).

³⁰⁵ Starita, *A Warrior of the People*, 2016; “Story of Dr. Susan,” Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Center. Joel Barrow, 1844 graduate of Transylvania University in medicine and Choctaw Academy alumnus, may be the first Native man to earn a Western medical degree, see: Stan Ingold, “Push to save boarding school of first Native American to get Western medical degree,” Morning Edition, National Public Radio, April 28, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/04/28/nx-s1-5771719/push-to-save-boarding-school-of-first-native-american-to-get-western-medical-degree>.

³⁰⁶ Jill S. Mesirow and Page Putnam Miller, “Dr. Susan Laflesche Picotte Memorial Hospital,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1992), 10; Tong, *Susan La Flesche Picotte, MD*, 5; “Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte,” *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior* (Government Printing Office, 1893), 197.

³⁰⁷ “Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte,” Americans All.

³⁰⁸ Tong, *Susan La Flesche Picotte, MD*, 187. The Dr. Susan Picotte Memorial Hospital was designated an NHL on April 19, 1993 (NHRIS 88002762).

³⁰⁹ Eastman's English name is used first, as this is the name he adopted after he converted to Christianity at age fifteen. As a child he was named Hakadah.

³¹⁰ Molly Huber, “Ohíyesa (Charles Eastman),” Minnesota Historical Society, accessed April 24, 2026, <https://www.mnhs.org/usdakotawar/stories/history/ohiyesa-charles-eastman>; Raymond Wilson, *Ohíyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux* (University of Illinois Press, 1983, 1999), 12.

³¹¹ Wilson, *Ohíyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*, 21-37.

School of Medicine, graduating in 1890.³¹² Unlike Picotte, Eastman did not value traditional medicine, calling practitioners “quacks” who distributed “fake medicine;” however, he did continue to speak his Santee Dakota language throughout his life.³¹³ Beginning his medical career with the Office of Indian Affairs, serving at Pine Ridge Agency in South Dakota, Eastman was both an eyewitness and physician for the Native Americans injured in the US Army’s massacre at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890.³¹⁴ Historian Emily Huber observed: “As the reservation’s resident physician, he provided medical assistance to the day’s few survivors and found his confidence in white culture severely shaken.”³¹⁵ Eastman left Pine Ridge in 1893, after conflicts with the Indian agent, and attempted an unsuccessful private practice in St. Paul, Minnesota.³¹⁶ He served as Indian Secretary for the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), while also beginning to advocate for Santee land claims and annuities.³¹⁷ Eastman became outing agent and recruiter for Carlisle in 1899.³¹⁸ Returning to medicine in 1900, Eastman served as physician for the Crow Creek Reservation, but again, conflict with supervisors led to his resignation.³¹⁹ Eastman’s greatest influence stems from his many publications. He and his non-Native wife, Elaine Goodale, published thirteen books, both fiction and non-fiction, many retelling stories of his youth and others on Indian policy.³²⁰ In 1910, he worked as the Indian advisor to the Boy Scouts of America and was an active reformer and co-founder of the Society of American Indians. Later in his career, he became a US Indian Inspector. In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge invited him to serve on the Committee of One Hundred (Advisory Council on Indian Affairs), the recommendations contributed to development of the Meriam Report and reorganization of the Office of Indian Affairs.³²¹

³¹² Eastman graduated one year after Picotte. Carlos Montezuma, a Yavapai Apache physician, graduated the same year (1899) as Picotte from Chicago Medical College. Montezuma served as the physician at Carlisle from 1895 to 1897.

³¹³ Eastman, Charles A. (Ohiyesa), *The Indian To-Day: The Past and Future of the First American* (Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1915), 120.

³¹⁴ “Charles Alexander Eastman (1858-1939): Native American M.D., Author,” National Library of Medicine, accessed April 24, 2026, https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/if_you_knew/ifyouknew_11.html. For more information about Wounded Knee, see Jerome A. Greene, *American Carnage: Wounded Knee, 1890* (University of Oklahoma Press 2014). Wounded Knee was designated a National Historic Landmark on December 21, 1965, with updated documentation approved on March 31, 2001.

³¹⁵ Huber, “Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman).”

³¹⁶ Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*, 82.

³¹⁷ Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*, 82-92.

³¹⁸ Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*, 105.

³¹⁹ Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*, 97.

³²⁰ Goodale served as a teacher at Hampton Institute beginning in 1883, later becoming the first government teacher at White River camp on the Great Sioux Reservation before becoming supervisor of education in Dakota Territory in 1890, see: “Eastman, Elaine [Goodale] (1863-1953), Boston University School of Theology: History of Missiology, accessed June 7, 2026, <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/eastman-elaine-goodale-1863-1953/> Huber, “Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman);” “Charles Eastman: The Amherst Years [Kiara Vigil and Julie Dobrow in conversation],” Amherst College, January 21, 2025, accessed June 7, 2026, <https://www.amherst.edu/news/magazine/issues/2025-winter/charles-eastman-the-amherst-years>.

³²¹ Wilson, *Ohiyesa: Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux*, 59; Colleen Shogan, “Calvin Coolidge and Native Americans: A Complex History,” The White House Historical Association, October 26, 2021, accessed June 7, 2026, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/calvin-coolidge-and-native-americans>.

Reorganization Era (1934-1953)

Reorganization Era policies were greatly informed by the Meriam Report of 1928 and by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's appointment of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a position he served in from 1933 to 1945. Collier had worked for change in Native communities since the 1920s. He, supported by many other Native and non-Native advocates, initiated new approaches to overhaul federal Indian policy. The **Indian Reorganization Act (IRA)**, or the Wheeler-Howard Act of June 18, 1934, sought to restore elements of Tribal sovereignty lost during the Assimilation Era, specifically focusing on protecting remaining Tribal land (ending allotment), reestablishing and recognizing Tribal governments, and setting aside funds for Indian education.³²² The act was often referred to as the "Indian New Deal," as its policies paralleled President Franklin D. Roosevelt's national New Deal programs.

Tribes were encouraged to establish formal governments and constitutions modeled on the US government system. By 1938, eight-two Tribes had established constitutions and fifty-seven had become incorporated under federal charters.³²³ The Office of Indian Affairs closely oversaw Tribes' constitutional work for approval by the Department of the Interior, with some (but not all) Tribes provided templates, rather than allowing true development of models most relevant to or reflective of Native cultures.³²⁴ The US model was dictated in part to facilitate the federal government's approach to working with Tribal governments; meanwhile, reorganization in many ways also undermined Tribal sovereignty by not prioritizing traditional polities. While the Indian Reorganization Act restored "held in trust" reservation land, the damage wrought by the allotment had severely reduced Tribal lands.

The Indian Reorganization Act did lay the groundwork for more autonomous Tribal self-governance, such that the Kennedy Report referred to it as "the Indian Bill of Rights."³²⁵ The IRA also spurred reorganization of federal Indian services and pushed for increasing employment of Native people in official and unofficial roles within the systems.³²⁶

Reorganization Era Schools

The educational system was likewise being reorganized, partially in response to the Meriam Report and partially a result of Collier and other reformers. During Collier's term as Commissioner, he instituted bilingual and adult education, and the training of more Native teachers (as organized and implemented by non-Native teachers) for Native students. He focused

³²² Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act) of 1934, Pub. L. No. 73-383, 48 Stat. 984 (1934).

³²³ *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1938* (Government Printing Office, 1938), VI.

³²⁴ Regarding the administrative history of the process, Felix S. Cohen, *On the Drafting of Tribal Constitutions* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), xxvi-xxix. See also Elmer R. Rusco, *A Fateful Time: The Background and Legislative History of the Indian Reorganization Act*, Wilbur S. Shepperson Series in History and the Humanities (University of Nevada Press, 2000).

³²⁵ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I, 13.

³²⁶ DeJong, *Paternalism to Partnership*, 273-282.

on reducing the number of boarding schools, closing sixteen while opening eighty-four day schools.³²⁷ According to the report, “Whereas in 1933, three-quarters of Indian students were enrolled in boarding schools, in 1943, two-thirds were attending day schools.”³²⁸ Collier also embraced adjusting school programs to meet the needs of Indian communities, including allowing Native language use and recognizing and preserving significant factors in Indian life. However, as historians such as K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty observed:

[Collier]... has been criticized for replacing federal paternalism that denigrated Native societies with a paternalism that romanticized them. Both versions of paternalism elevated federal over tribal powers, and we see federal control as a critical continuity linking educational policy and practice across the earlier decades of the century through the ‘Indian New Deal.’³²⁹

While Collier’s efforts were seen as an improvement in some areas, they note that “(...) certain ideas persisted: Indians were suited for manual labor, and higher education should be reserved for select classes who would lead in the marketplace.”³³⁰ According to Lomawaima and McCarty, New Deal educational reform policies also actually perpetuated an old approach by simultaneously promoting the new idea that schools should serve the needs and interests of Native students with the status quo that federal policymakers should define those needs and interests.³³¹ One such example was the establishment of the Indian Arts and Craft Board to promote arts and crafts as an economic development plan as well as educational focus for American Indians and Alaska Natives.³³²

Haskell Indian School, founded in 1884, was one school directly impacted by the changes in education policy. In an effort to take advantage of federal funds made available for apprenticeship programs under Roosevelt’s 1934 Executive Order (6750-c), Haskell officials, led by superintendent Dr. Henry Roe Cloud, proposed to focus educational efforts on vocational training.³³³ In the process, they eliminated the hard-won accreditation earned from the State of Kansas in 1927. As Lomawaima and McCarty reported: “Students at Haskell (...) were outraged

³²⁷ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I, 13. See also DeJong, *Paternalism to Partnership*, 273-282.

³²⁸ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I, 13.

³²⁹ K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, “*To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (Teachers College Press, 2006), 68.

³³⁰ Lomawaima and McCarty, “*To Remain an Indian*,” 73.

³³¹ Lomawaima and McCarty, “*To Remain an Indian*,” 69.

³³² The Indian Arts and Crafts Board, created August 27, 1935, see 49 Stat. 891, 74th Congress, Sess. I, chs. 747-748, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-49/pdf/STATUTE-49-Pg891.pdf>. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-644) codifies enforcement and support of the act. See “Record Group 435: Indian Arts and Crafts Board,” NARA, accessed April 24, 2026, <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/indian-arts-and-crafts-board>.

³³³ David J. Wishart, “Roe Cloud, Henry (1884-1950),” *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, accessed June 18, 2026, <https://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.edu.034.html>.

that the new plan resulted in their schools' loss of accreditation, and many agitated to transfer."³³⁴

Collier is also credited with 1933 establishment of the Indian Emergency Conservation Work (IECW), a corollary to Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration. In 1937, the program was officially renamed the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division (CCC-ID).³³⁵ Created to reduce unemployment and provide vocational training among Native communities, the CCC-ID cleared land, built trails, dams, and cabins, fought fires, constructed on-reservation hospitals, and learned basic first aid. By deactivation in 1942, the CCC-ID employed eighty-five thousand Native men and women.³³⁶ The Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported: "Vocational training was provided in 55 different occupations. Eight thousand Indians earned the rating of skilled workmen. Forty thousand were classed as semi-skilled in job performance."³³⁷ As seen in the Termination Era, Collier's progress was curtailed by the advent of World War II and a shifting of congressional attitude back to "de-Indianizing the Indian."³³⁸ However, the schools did adapt to address wartime needs. For example, older men were able to use school shops in parallel with the CCC and Indian Service Extension Division. School gardens increased as did horse-breeding programs.³³⁹

Johnson-O'Malley Act (1934)

The 1934 Johnson-O'Malley Act directed the Secretary of the Interior to contract with states (except Oklahoma) and territories to provide education, health, and social services in existing facilities and with delineated minimum standards to Native students living within their borders.³⁴⁰ Through this act, federal funds could be used to support Native students in general education in public schools.³⁴¹ In 1938, he reported that of the 65,166 children enrolled in school, a little over half were enrolled in public schools (see Table 5).³⁴² In 1939, Collier

³³⁴ Lomawaima and McCarty, "To Remain an Indian," 70.

³³⁵ Daniel Temples, "An Assessment of The Indian Reorganization Act and the Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division," *The Alexandrian* IX, no. 1 (2020); Cody White, "The CCC Indian Division," NARA, *Genealogy Notes* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2016), accessed June 7, 2026, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/ccc-id.html>.

³³⁶ Temples, "An Assessment of The Indian Reorganization Act and the Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division," 6. The relationship between the CCC-ID and education initiatives is a topic that warrants additional research, for instance, regarding its role in school construction.

³³⁷ John Collier, "Office of Indian Affairs," in *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior* (Government Printing Office, 1942), 242-243.

³³⁸ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I, 13.

³³⁹ Collier, "Office of Indian Affairs" [1942], 243-244.

³⁴⁰ DeJong, *Paternalism to Partnership*, 274; An Act: Authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to arrange with States or Territories for the education, medical attention, relief of distress, and social welfare of Indians, and for other purposes, April 16, 1934, 48 Stat. 596, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-48/pdf/STATUTE-48-Pg596-2.pdf#page=1>; U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Education, "Johnson-O'Malley," accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.bie.edu/jom>. Note: under different revisions the Act required a specific degree of Indian blood and/or Tribal membership to qualify benefits.

³⁴¹ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*.

³⁴² John Collier, "Office of Indian Affairs," in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1938* (Government Printing Office, 1938), 245.

reported that under the act contracts were negotiated with California, Washington, and Minnesota for education.³⁴³ In 1941, despite Collier's efforts to close boarding schools, 14,500 students were still enrolled in forty-nine Federal Indian boarding schools.³⁴⁴ As a result of increased funding and more community involvement due to the Johnson-O'Malley Act, over the next thirty-four years, a shift from one-half of Native students attending public schools to two-thirds of Native students attending public schools occurred.³⁴⁵ In 1969, contracts with eighteen states were in place.³⁴⁶ The Act has been amended several times (Johnson-O'Malley Supplemental Indian Education Program Modernization Act) and now includes Oklahoma, but its basic premise is still in effect today.³⁴⁷

Table 5. Native Children between the Ages of Six and Eighteen Enrolled by School Type³⁴⁸

School Type	Number of Children
Public school	33,645
Federal day school	13,797
Federal reservation school	4,769
Federal non-reservation school	5,412
Mission, private, and State day schools	2,039
Mission, private, and State boarding schools	4,936
Other	568
TOTAL	65,166

Special Navajo Program (1946-1964)

The Special Navajo Program began in 1946 in response to several factors originating with the Navajo Treaty of 1868 stipulation that the federal government provide Western education for

³⁴³ John Collier, "Office of Indian Affairs," in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1939* (Government Printing Office, 1939), 64.

³⁴⁴ Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*, 15.

³⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I: Subcommittee Findings, 47.

³⁴⁶ In 1969 state contracts existed with Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, Part I: Subcommittee Findings, 46.

³⁴⁷ Johnson-O'Malley Supplemental Indian Education Program Modernization Act, amended several times between June 4, 1936 (49 Stat. 1458) and December 31, 2018, 25 USC 5301, 132 Stat. 5349, Pub. L. 115-404.

³⁴⁸ Collier, "Office of Indian Affairs" [1938], 245. Additional details provided in original table, including information not available, with 10,290 children indicated as not enrolled.

Navajo youth.³⁴⁹ By 1908, only ten percent of Navajo (Diné) were enrolled in school. In the 1930s, John Collier commissioned a study to determine the ecological limits of grazing on the Navajo reservation, unilaterally introducing the Stock Reduction Program, drastically impacting traditional Navajo life.³⁵⁰ Sheep herding had been the primary economic enterprise for the Navajo people and this change affected livelihoods in addition to traditions and practices. The resulting deep distrust of federal government policies translated into distrust in schools.³⁵¹

By 1942, during WWII, almost all able-bodied Native men aged twenty-one to forty-four had registered for the draft.³⁵² However, dismissals and deferrals due to poor literacy and lack of English-language skills were common among Seminole of Florida and Navajo enlistees.³⁵³ Eighty-eight percent of Navajo men legally could not enlist or be drafted because they were considered “illiterate” in English.³⁵⁴ Commissioner John Collier noted in his annual report that the dismissals impacted the entire Tribe.³⁵⁵ Those soldiers and nurses who did enlist in the military wrote letters home describing their experiences, which made Tribal leaders realize the necessity of government education. At the same time as the Navajo population was experiencing growth, money to fund schools on reservation was drying up, likely due to the war effort, and of the forty-six reservation schools open in 1936, only twenty-seven were left by 1946.³⁵⁶

The Navajo Nation responded by developing pre-enlistment training to perfect its members’ use of English, which also aided other Navajo individuals in participating in civilian activities to support the war effort.³⁵⁷ As discussed above, Native languages were once again employed in WWII, including Navajo. The BIA sent Dr. George Sánchez to evaluate school resources on the reservation. He determined it would cost ninety million dollars to overhaul the system and

³⁴⁹ Article VI reads: “In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially of such of them as may be settled on said agricultural parts of this reservation, and they therefore pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that, for every thirty children (...) a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education (...).” See “Treaty with the Navajo, 1868,” in Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (Government Printing Office, 1904). See also Rachael Renee Johnson, “Navajo Special Program in the Pacific Northwest: Educating Navajo Students at Chemawa Indian Boarding School, 1946-1957” (master’s thesis, Washington State University, 2010); Monique Davila, “Diné (Navajo) Youth Experiences in Education from 1928 to 1946,” *Footnotes: A Journal of History* 4 (2020): 130-149.

³⁵⁰ Johnson, “Navajo Special Program in the Pacific Northwest,” 9; Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books (University of Washington Press, 2011); Robert S. McPherson, “Navajo Livestock Reduction in Southeastern Utah, 1933-46: History Repeats Itself,” *American Indian Quarterly* 22, nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1998): 1-18.

³⁵¹ Johnson, “Navajo Special Program in the Pacific Northwest,” 118; Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 44.

³⁵² William C. Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers of World War II* (The University of Texas, 2002), 38.

³⁵³ Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers of World War II*, 38.

³⁵⁴ Thomas D. Morgan, “Native Americans in World War II,” *Army History* 35 (Fall 1995): 22-27.

³⁵⁵ Collier, “Office of Indian Affairs” [1942], 239-240.

³⁵⁶ Johnson, “Navajo Special Program in the Pacific Northwest,” 15; Hildegard Thompson, *The Navajos’ Long Walk for Education: A History of Navajo Education* (Navajo Community College Press, 1975).

³⁵⁷ Collier, “Office of Indian Affairs” [1942], 243.

educate up to three-quarters of the children.³⁵⁸ The economically viable solution for the federal government was to send children to boarding schools, though most did not speak English. The median time spent in school for the entire Navajo population in 1948 was one year.

In 1946, at least eighteen thousand Navajo children did not attend school. A relatively small percentage of Navajo people spoke or understood English, and even fewer could read or write it.³⁵⁹ Following World War II, the BIA began efforts to address the high number of Navajo children not enrolled in school. A five-year course of study was developed for children twelve years or older with no English speaking or literacy skills and without previous school experience.³⁶⁰ The Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, where some Navajo students previously attended, made room to accommodate two hundred students in this special program. The course had three aims: 1) teach social skills needed to live in non-Navajo culture; 2) teach English speaking, reading, writing needed to live in the non-Navajo world; and 3) teach a marketable vocational skill. Uniquely, it was determined that instruction would be delivered in both Navajo and English languages.³⁶¹

The **Sherman Institute** at Riverside California was the first school to institute the Navajo Special Program in 1946. In September, 208 Navajo pupils arrived at Sherman Institute, joined in October by another 127 Navajo pupils for whom the school found additional space.³⁶² After formal testing, forty-five of these students were deemed educationally advanced enough to join the regular graded program: “The remaining 290 comprised the Special Navajo Program and of these 35 percent were completely unschooled, 45 percent ranged from grades 1 to 4 so far as academic achievement was concerned, and 10 percent were at fifth or sixth-grade level.”³⁶³

Sherman accepted children between twelve and eighteen years of age (individual student exceptions up to age twenty) and sought to collapse twelve years of curriculum into six years. This meant the Navajo students only worked one and half hours per day on vocational subjects. In the first year of the program, students demonstrated academic progression of up to three years and nine months, firmly demonstrating success to the BIA. In 1947, the BIA extended the program with new units at **Chilocco Indian School** in northern Oklahoma, **Phoenix Indian**

³⁵⁸ George Isidore Sánchez, “*The People*”: *A Study of the Navajos* (U.S. Indian Service, 1948). See also *The Navajo: A Long-Range Program for Navajo Rehabilitation: Report of J. A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior* (U.S. Department of the Interior, March 1948), https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Navajo/E6MH2IX7bKcC?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=education.

³⁵⁹ L. Madison Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light: The Story of The Special Navajo Education Program* (U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1962), 14.

³⁶⁰ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 18.

³⁶¹ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 18. As noted above, Collier supported bilingual education, see: “(...) the Indian Service Summer School, organized in 1936, at its first regular session offered classes in the Sioux and Navajo languages, and there were also special demonstration classes in methods of meeting bilingual problems. The Bureau of Indian Affairs also initiated efforts at adult basic education during this period and published a few bilingual curriculum materials.” See Arnold H. Leibowitz, “A History of Language Policy in American Indian Schools,” in Office of Education Programs, United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, *Bilingual Education for American Indians* Curriculum Bulletin No. 3 (1971): 5.

³⁶² Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 28.

³⁶³ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 28.

School in Arizona, and **Carson Indian School** (also known as Stewart Indian School) in Nevada. The following year, three additional schools joined the program: **Albuquerque Indian School** in New Mexico, **Chemawa Indian School** near Salem, Oregon, and the **Cheyenne-Arapaho school** near El Reno, Oklahoma.³⁶⁴ In spring 1949, 1,650 Navajo students were enrolled in the program across the seven different schools.³⁶⁵ Teachers worked through interpreters, who taught in the Navajo language. Teachers and interpreters received special instruction to help Navajo Special Program students adjust. Staff was charged with treating Navajo culture with “respect and understanding,” manifested in such details as periodically serving meals including traditional foods, such as frybread and mutton stew.³⁶⁶ The first class of the Navajo Special Program graduated in 1951.³⁶⁷

The program supported Navajo cultural expression—language, weaving, and other cultural elements were integrated into the curriculum.³⁶⁸ While this program focused on teaching Western academic skills, it allowed for some degree of respectful consideration of Navajo cultural identity. This did not go unnoticed by non-Diné students in the same schools, who continued to be punished for using their Native languages. Oral histories of Stewart Indian School students shared the experience of being hit for speaking their Native language, while the Navajo were allowed to do so.³⁶⁹ This dichotomy of privilege created divisions between students, and resulted in isolation of some non-Navajo students.

As the program developed, more emphasis was placed on the vocational component of Navajo education. Initially, administrators expected Navajo students would not have enough time to develop a high level of skill in a trade, an assumption that was soon proved wrong.³⁷⁰ Navajo students had many vocations to choose from in their training, and in the event the school they attended did not have a program for that vocation, they were allowed to transfer to a school that did.³⁷¹

The Special Navajo Program began to wind down in the early 1960s as the Self-Determination Era emerged. Graduation rates indicated that most Navajo students did not complete the Navajo Special Program, with BIA figures estimating a total of a six percent graduation rate. Historian Samantha Williams notes that this likely reflects a complicated situation in which a variety of factors influenced completion, notably that the Diné preferred to obtain their education and to

³⁶⁴ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 47. See also Bushnell General Hospital, Brigham City, UT, which became the Intermountain School in 1950: Coombs, 103.

³⁶⁵ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 47.

³⁶⁶ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 22, 31.

³⁶⁷ The first class of the special program graduated in 1951, see Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 133. Through 1959, 3,362 students attended, and by 1961 an additional one thousand were enrolled.

³⁶⁸ Richards, “Ancillary Citizenship and Stratified Assimilation,” 74, 137, Watras, “Progressive Education and Native American Schools, 1929-1950,” 90.

³⁶⁹ Interview, Mr. Frank Joe with Authors, August 27, 2024, Carson City, NV.

³⁷⁰ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 82.

³⁷¹ Coombs, *Doorway Toward the Light*, 79-83.

maintain their Tribal connections at home.³⁷² In the 1960s, the Navajo Nation invested in building schools on their reservation (with federal assistance), and became a leading Tribe in the trend of community education that emphasized Indian-controlled schools.³⁷³ Despite graduation rates, the Special Navajo Program continued as a success through 1964, when it ceased.

Post-World War II Period

The US financial crisis that followed World War II drove severe cuts to federal funding with negative impacts on Native communities. Politicians demanded “the final solution of the Indian Problem.”³⁷⁴ During 1943-1944, a House Select Committee on Indian Affairs held hearings to consider whether the changed status of Indians required any revisions to laws or regulations. Proponents of revision argued that wardship was not required, and that Indians should be “emancipated.”³⁷⁵ Just as Collier sought to defend the Indian Reorganization Act, as Commissioner he also met with criticism, as recorded in testimony.³⁷⁶ With a great deal of focus on resolution of Indian claims, Collier testified to the committee that a new tribunal was certain to “move, and help Congress and the Indian Service to move, toward the final solution and terminating of the Indian problem.”³⁷⁷ No clear definition of the “Indian Problem” was provided, but several issues were raised, none of which had simple solutions. The hearings criticized Indian education as having: “a tendency in many reservation day schools to ‘adapt the education to the Indian and to his reservation way of life’ rather than to ‘adapt the Indian to the habits and requirements he must develop to succeed as an independent citizen earning his own way off the reservation.’”³⁷⁸

³⁷² Samantha M. Williams, *Assimilation, Resilience, and Survival: A History of the Stewart Indian School 1890-2020* (University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 152.

³⁷³ Johnson, “Navajo Special Program in the Pacific Northwest,” 116-118.

³⁷⁴ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166: A Bill to Authorize and Direct and Conduct an Investigation to Determine Whether the Changed Status of the Indian Requires a Revision of the Laws and Regulations Affecting the American Indian* (Government Printing Office, 1944), Part 4 [December 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13, 1944], 342, accessed June 8, 2026, HathiTrust.

³⁷⁵ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166*, Part 3 [July 22 to August 8; October 1-3 and November 9-22, 1944], 15.

³⁷⁶ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166*, Part I [March 23, 1943] 106. In his statement supplied as Exhibit No. 8, Collier stated: “What in the last 10 or 12 years we have tried to do is to energize the individual Indian and the group, and the equip individual and group with knowledge and skills to enable them to go into the white world successfully if they want to or to hold their own and make their way where they are if they want to. That is the meaning and purpose of the Indian Reorganization Act and all the other major things we have been working at (...) That is how the Indian school system is being used. It does nobody anything but harm to be told expressly or by implication that he and his ancestry, his heritage, and his native ideals, are inferior and doomed to extinction and that he must hurriedly put on new spiritual clothes and conceal the existence of his winner ell-springs of life. We now try to do exactly the opposite of that with Indians. They are a great race, with an admirable past, with mental endowment as good as any in the world, with great capacities not yet fully used.”

³⁷⁷ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166*, Part 2 [February 2, 9, 16, and 25, 1944], 52.

³⁷⁸ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166*, Part 4 [December 13, 1944], 340.

Ultimately, after days of testimony, the committee's recommendations included:

The Indian Bureau is tending to place too much emphasis on the day school located on the Indian reservation as compared with the opportunities afforded Indian children in off-the-reservation boarding schools where they can acquire an education in healthful and cultural surroundings without the handicaps of having to spend their out-of-school hours in tepees, in shacks with dirt floors and no windows, in tents, in wickiups, in hogans, or in surroundings where English is never spoken, where there is a complete lack of furniture, and where there is sometimes an active antagonism or an abysmal indifference to the virtues of education.³⁷⁹

The committee found that the system should better position reservation day school eight-grade graduates to enter high schools on or off reservation, in turn enabling them to enter State university, colleges, or other advanced schools. The committee recommended that scholarships and other "educational stimuli" be provided to support students in pursuing higher education in greater numbers. It found compulsory school attendance should continue to be enforced. Finally, the committee expounded: "The goal of Indian education should be to make the Indian child a better American rather than to equip him simply to be a better Indian. The goal of our whole Indian program should be (...) to develop better Indian Americans rather than to perpetuate and develop better American Indians. The present Indian education program tends to operate too much in the direction of perpetuating the Indian as a special-status individual rather than preparing him for independent citizenship."³⁸⁰

Based on the special committee's recommendations and in consideration of the growing national post-war debt, in 1947 President Harry S. Truman subsequently convened a commission headed by former President Herbert Hoover to review social security and education in Indian Affairs. That commission's 1949 report called for progressive assimilation measures through transfer of Trust land to Indian-owned corporations, ceasing federal funding for separate education opportunities, termination of tax exemption, and ceasing special treatment or recognition of sovereign status.³⁸¹ The report suggested that a lack of opportunity, especially owing to poor educational levels, had kept Native people economically disadvantaged.

Three voices on the commission dissented against the dissolution of the Bureau of Indian Affairs into the Federal Security Agency and readoption of an assimilationist policy. Vice Chairman Dean Acheson cited the Marshall Trilogy in his caution against moving Indian Affairs to a different department and eliminating services, citing the already painful history of assimilation efforts. Another cited Congress's lack of authority over the Executive branch of government. The report's condemnation of Indian education led many parents to send their children to general

³⁷⁹ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166, Part 4, 342.*

³⁸⁰ *Hearings Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, House of Representatives, Seventy-Eighth Congress, First Session on H. Res. 166, Part 4, 341-342.*

³⁸¹ Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government [Herbert Hoover, et al.], *Social Security-Education-Indian Affairs*, 66.

public schools, which came with its own challenges.³⁸² These included societal rejection of Native children, as well as transportation issues due to the fact that general schools were usually located long distances from reservations.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) had organized in 1944, “in response to this imminent threat of termination.”³⁸³ The NCAI’s initial gathering in Denver, Colorado, included nearly eighty delegates from fifty Tribes and associations in twenty-seven states. NCAI would prove to be one of the most prominent inter-tribal organizations moving forward, supporting Tribal sovereignty and cultural and religious rights. In 2026, NCAI counts nearly 650 member Tribes and associations across twelve regions.

Termination Era (1953-1968)

During the Termination Era, the US government completely reversed federal policy on Reorganization Era Tribal self-governance. Federal politicians experimented with an alternative approach to resolve the perceived troubles in Indian communities. Often considered a single principle, the ideas behind Termination Era policies were promoted by many of Collier’s opponents to directly counter programs established under his administration.³⁸⁴ As historian Francis Paul Prucha stated:

The rhetoric of the new age was varied. There was talk of *freeing or emancipating* the Indians from a status that bound them by special laws and regulations and placing them instead on an absolutely equal footing with white citizens. The other side of the coin was *withdrawal or termination* of federal responsibility and federal programs for Indian groups and Indian individuals. At one time the Bureau of Indian Affairs preferred the word *readjustment*, in an attempt to avoid words that had developed emotional overtones. But overall, it was termination that best described the movement, and the word came to be used not only of the government's responsibilities toward the Indians but of the Indians themselves. It became common, thus, to speak of terminated Indians and tribes.³⁸⁵

Policies enacted during this time represented the effort to terminate the special trust relationship between the federal government and Tribes.³⁸⁶

³⁸² It should be noted that the trend toward larger enrollment of Native children in general public schools began prior to the hearings report; however, it served as an additional catalyst.

³⁸³ National Congress of American Indian, “History,” accessed April 14, 2026, www.ncai.org.

³⁸⁴ DeJong, “A Most Anonymous Position.”

³⁸⁵ Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (University of Nebraska, 1984, 1986), 340.

³⁸⁶ “A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States: The Termination Era (1953-1968),” Vernon E. Jordan Law Library, Howard University School of Law, accessed September 16, 2025, <https://library.law.howard.edu/civilrightshistory/indigenous/termination>.

Termination Era Schools

The termination of federally recognized Indian Tribes had a direct effect on education. Public schools would no longer receive the federal support provided under the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934 for each Native student once their Tribe was terminated. Termination essentially tossed out centuries of treaties and previously standing governmental agreements. As regards boarding schools as a type, the era continued the trend of contraction and closure in favor of non-residential schools.

Legal Attempts to Eliminate Tribes in the 1950s

On August 1, 1953, House Concurrent Resolution 108 (HCR-108) announced the Termination policy, meant to liberate Tribes from federal control so they were no longer wards of the state.³⁸⁷ HCR-108 sought to “(...) make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship (...).”³⁸⁸ HCR-108 called for the immediate termination of the Flathead Tribe of Montana, Klamath Tribe of Oregon, Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, Potawatomi Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, and Turtle Mountain Chippewa of North Dakota, as well as all Tribes in the states of California, New York, Florida, and Texas.³⁸⁹ Additionally, HCR-108 explicitly stated that all BIA offices in the states of California, New York, Florida, and Texas, should be abolished.³⁹⁰ Not included in the text of the resolution, but as a by-product of the actions, Native individuals living within those states were also affected. BIA offices provide support for all Natives, which means individuals in California had to travel farther to obtain BIA services, as promised in government-to-government Treaties. With the termination of these Tribes, approximately 2.5 million acres of Trust land were thus removed from protected status and much of it sold to non-Natives.

By 1970, more than sixty Tribal governments were abolished under this policy, although some reports state that up to one hundred Tribes were eliminated.³⁹¹ According to a January 1954 DOI memo, the Termination bills affected sixty-six thousand Native Americans, who comprised one-seventh (or about fourteen percent) of the Native population in the US.³⁹² Numerous acts and policies implemented during this era had generational impacts on Native communities.

³⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, House, House Concurrent Resolution 108, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., passed August 1, 1953, 67 Stat. B132, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-67/pdf/STATUTE-67-PgB132-2.pdf>.

³⁸⁸ House Concurrent Resolution 108, August 1, 1953.

³⁸⁹ House Concurrent Resolution 108, August 1, 1953.

³⁹⁰ House Concurrent Resolution 108, August 1, 1953.

³⁹¹ DeJong, *Paternalism to Partnership*, 302-304; Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 172-181; Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 125; “Bureau of Indian Affairs Records: Termination,” NARA, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/bia/termination#historical-overview>.

³⁹² U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, “Legislation Terminating Federal Controls Over Eight Indian Groups Submitted to Congress” [press release], January 21, 1954.

On August 15, 1953, in a reversal of longstanding precedent, Public Law 83-280 (67 Stat. 588) (commonly referred to as Public Law 280), transferred civil and criminal jurisdiction over Native American communities to certain state governments --California, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Alaska (upon statehood). Additional states elected to assume full or partial jurisdiction: Arizona (1967), Florida (1961), Idaho (1963, subject to Tribal consent), Iowa (1967), Montana (1963), Nevada (1955), North Dakota (1963, subject to Tribal consent), South Dakota (1957-1961), Utah (1971), and Washington (1957-1963).³⁹³ However, DOI has noted: “[s]ubsequent acts of Congress, court decisions, and state actions to retrocede jurisdiction back to the Federal Government have muted some of the effects of the 1953 law, and strengthened the tribes’ jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters on their reservations.”³⁹⁴ Public Law 280 made state regulations, including as regards education, applicable to Indians.³⁹⁵

In 1956, the Indian Relocation Act (Public Law 959), established under the Secretary of the Interior a vocational training program transporting Native individuals and families to job locations off reservation, rather than supporting them within their communities.³⁹⁶ Effectively resulting in urban relocation, this had the result of further eroding family and community centers, although it also led to development of new urban Native communities, often referred to as Pan-Indianism. Relocation propelled Native children into general public schools in even larger numbers.

Perhaps even more detrimental to Native rights in this period was the Indian Adoption Project initiated in 1958 and active until 1967 which sought to adopt Native children out of Tribal communities and into White families.³⁹⁷ Although officially reversed in 1978 with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), the damage to Native communities was already done.³⁹⁸ Families were torn apart; children no longer knew who they were, having lost connections with their culture, identity, and all continuity of heritage and community. In many ways, this adaptation policy was deeply parallel to boarding school assimilation policies.

Although the Termination Era lasted only fifteen years, its impacts are still felt today. As exemplified by the overturning of the Indian Adoption Project, many Termination policies were reversed through later legislation or policy changes during the Self-Determination Era.

³⁹³ U.S. Department of Interior, Indian Affairs, “What is Public Law 280 and where does it apply?”, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.bia.gov/faqs/what-public-law-280-and-where-does-it-apply>.

³⁹⁴ U.S. Department of Interior, Indian Affairs, “What is Public Law 280 and where does it apply?”

³⁹⁵ “Public Law 280,” Tribal Law and Policy Institute, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.tribal-institute.org/lists/pl280.htm>.

³⁹⁶ Pub. L. 959, An Act Relative to employment for certain adult Indians on or near Indian reservations, August 3, 1956, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-70/pdf/STATUTE-70-Pg986.pdf>.

³⁹⁷ Regarding adoption outside of Native families and for more on the administration of the program, see: “Indian Adoption Project,” The Adoption History Project, Department of History, University of Oregon, February 2012, accessed March 3, 2026, <https://pages.uoregon.edu/adoption/topics/IAP.html>; Margaret D. Jacobs, “Remembering the ‘Forgotten Child’: The American Indian Child Welfare Crisis of the 1960s and 1970s,” *American Indian Quarterly* 37, nos. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2013): 136-159; Margaret D. Jacobs, *A Generation Removed: The Fostering and Adoption of Indigenous Children in the Postwar World* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

³⁹⁸ Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, Pub. L. No. 95-608, 92 Stat. 3069.

Self-Determination Era (1968 – present)

The Self-Determination Era is seen as the Indian Civil Rights era when self-governance and government-to-government consultation are strongly advocated. The 1969 Kennedy Report detailed significant problems with the Indian education system, much of which reflected issues previously identified in the 1928 Meriam Report. While this era continues to evolve in the present, the appointment of Deb Haaland, a citizen of Laguna Pueblo, as Secretary of the Interior (2021-2025), and the US government’s formal apology on October 26, 2024, for the Federal Indian boarding school system, strongly emphasized Native identity and self-determination.³⁹⁹ Many boarding schools closed during this time, while Tribally directed experimental schools with federal funding support opened, such as the Navajo-operated Rough Rock Demonstration School (now Community School) in Chinle, Arizona, in 1970.

The Indian Civil Rights Act (1968) and the American Indian Movement

The Indian Civil Rights Act (25 U.S.C. §§ 1301-1304), enacted April 11, 1968, gave Native people and Tribal governments access to certain provisions of the US Bill of Rights and authorized federal courts to oversee enforcement of those rights. As the political systems of Tribal Nations never agreed to the terms of the Constitution, an outstanding question was if the Bill of Rights applied to Native individuals. The Indian Civil Rights Act codified Native rights.

Also in 1968, the American Indian Movement (AIM) organized in Minnesota to address police brutality, although their mission changed over time to highlight the federal treatment of Native people, specifically the taking of land and efforts to destroy Native cultures. AIM implemented highly publicized protests during a movement sometimes called Red Power. In November 1969, AIM occupied Alcatraz prison in San Francisco, California, citing the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty clause that surplus federal land could return to the Sioux. As Alcatraz was essentially abandoned, AIM occupied the island for nineteen months.⁴⁰⁰

Another highly publicized occupation occurred at the Pine Ridge Reservation in February 1973. AIM members and about 250 Oglala Sioux launched a seventy-one-day occupation at Wounded Knee, the location of the 1890 massacre. The occupation protested corruption within the Tribal government and demanded federal investigation into corruption on the reservation and in neighboring communities, which included covering up murders and financial theft.⁴⁰¹ The Nixon

³⁹⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior, “Deb Haaland: The Impact of President Biden’s Apology to Indian Country” [press release], January 6, 2025, <https://www.doi.gov/blog/deb-haaland-impact-president-bidens-apology-indian-country>.

⁴⁰⁰ Cindy Barbosa, “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of the American Indian Movement (1969-1971),” *The Nonviolence Project*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, December 6, 2024, <https://thenonviolenceproject.wisc.edu/2024/12/06/the-occupation-of-alcatraz-island-roots-of-the-american-indian-movement-1969-1971/>; Troy Johnson, “The Alcatraz Indian Occupation,” Alcatraz Island, National Park Service, updated April 8, 2025, accessed June 8, 2026, <https://www.nps.gov/alca/learn/historyculture/we-hold-the-rock.htm>.

⁴⁰¹ Philip D. Roos, Dowell H. Smith, Stephen Langley, and James McDonald, “The Impact of the American Indian Movement on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation,” *Phylon* 41, no. 1 (1980): 89-99.

administration declared it wanted to end this “revolutionary Indian element” before it spread.⁴⁰² AIM’s occupations instead ignited generations of American Indians to engage more actively in civil rights and Tribal affairs.⁴⁰³

Many AIM leaders are survivors of the Federal Indian boarding school system. For example, Leonard Peltier (b. 1944), member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribe, was taken to Wahpeton Indian School at age nine, leaving only at age twelve. Dennis Banks (1937-2017), Anishinaabe-Ojibwe from the Leech Lake Reservation, was taken from his reservation at age five and sent to Pipestone Indian Boarding School in Minnesota, which closed in 1953. He regularly ran away to be with his family. Russell Means (1939-2012), Oglala Sioux from the Pine Ridge Reservation, was not sent to boarding school, but federal urban relocation programs resulted in his family being sent to San Francisco. These individuals shared experiences similar to thousands of other Native people who were forcibly displaced, separated from family and culture.

Kennedy Report (1969)

The 1969 investigative report, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge*, fulfilled 91st Congressional (1st Session) Senate Resolution 80. Chaired by Senator Edward Kennedy, the report is often referred to as the Kennedy Report.

In the foreword, Kennedy revealed: “We have concluded that our national policies for educating American Indians are a failure of major proportions.”⁴⁰⁴ The report summary stated:

We are shocked at what we discovered. Others before us were shocked. They recommended and made changes. Others after us will likely be shocked, too – despite our recommendations and efforts at reform. For there is so much to do – wrongs to right, omissions to fill, untruths to correct – that our own recommendations, concerned as they are with education alone, need supplementation across the whole board of Indian life.⁴⁰⁵

These curt statements provide insight into the subcommittee findings, which resulted in a major overhaul of the Federal Indian boarding school system. For some schools, this meant closure; for others, this meant drastic redirection or shift of focus. The latter often resulted in a period of reclamation, whereby Tribal leaders reasserted control of the education of Indian youth. This was one of the report’s major recommendations: “One theme running through all our recommendations is increased Indian participation and control of their own education programs.”⁴⁰⁶ Another recommendation was the improvement of vocational education programs in the BIA, to improve “(...) employment and economic opportunities available for those Indians

⁴⁰² Alys Landry, “Native History: AIM Occupation of Wounded Knee Begins,” *Indian Country Times*, February 27, 2017, <https://icnews.org/archive/native-history-aim-occupation-of-wounded-knee-begins/>.

⁴⁰³ Dean J. Kotlowski, “Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond: The Nixon and Ford Administrations Respond to Native American Protest,” *Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 2 (May 2003): 201-227.

⁴⁰⁴ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, IX.

⁴⁰⁵ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, XI

⁴⁰⁶ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, XIII.

who may wish to remain on the reservation or live close to it.”⁴⁰⁷ Others pointed to the need for counseling and guidance programs, financial scholarships, and investment in parental and community involvement.⁴⁰⁸

The two-year special Senate subcommittee investigation collected testimonies and published numerous sub-reports. Field investigations evaluated fourteen boarding schools: Albuquerque Indian School (New Mexico), Busby Boarding School (Montana), Chilocco Indian School (Oklahoma), Flandreau Indian School (South Dakota), Haskell Institute (Kansas), Inter Mountain Indian School (Utah), Magdalena, BIA Dormitory (New Mexico), Mt. Edgcumbe and Wrangell Institute (Alaska), Oglala Community School (South Dakota), Phoenix Boarding School (Arizona), Pierre Boarding School (South Dakota), Seneca Boarding School/Jones Academy (Oklahoma), Sherman Institute (California), and Stewart Indian School (Nevada). The report found that “of the 160,000 Indian children in schools – public, private, mission, and federal – one-third are in federally operated institutions.”⁴⁰⁹ Further, in 1968, “the education of Indian children in California, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin was the total responsibility of the State and not the federal government.”⁴¹⁰

Legal Reform and Federal Education Efforts after the 1969 Kennedy Report

Some Termination Era policies continued, even after the Kennedy Report, including the removal of Native children from their homes for placement outside their communities. Public Law 280 and relocation programs also continued. During the 1970s, several Congressional Acts were passed that reestablished self-determination policies. In 1970, the Native American Rights Fund was organized as a non-profit to provide legal assistance to Native American Tribes, organizations, and individuals nationwide.⁴¹¹

The direct result of the Kennedy Report, the 1972 **Indian Education Act** established the Office of Indian Education Programs and provided funds for education of Native children in public and Indian-controlled schools. The Act empowered Native parents to have a voice in their child’s school. As described by the Native American Rights Fund, in 1974 the BIA “(...) published guidelines for student rights, including the right to freedom of religion and culture, the right of symbolic expression, and freedom from discrimination.”⁴¹² Education Amendments in 1974 and 1978, augmented available professional programs and broadened pilot projects, teacher training,

⁴⁰⁷ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 124.

⁴⁰⁸ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 105-136.

⁴⁰⁹ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, IX.

⁴¹⁰ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, XII.

⁴¹¹ The Native American Rights Fund (NARF) has created such initiatives as the Indian Educational Legal Support Project, with reports including Melody L. McCoy, “Federal and State Laws regarding Tribal Education Departments, 1984-1999” (The Native American Rights Fund, October 1999), see “Tribalizing Indian Education Series,” <https://narf.org/resources/tribalizing-education/>; Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*.

⁴¹² Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*, 16.

and fellowship opportunities.⁴¹³ Also in 1978, the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act provided structure and funding mechanisms for a Tribal system to expand educational opportunities.⁴¹⁴ However, change was slow, and stories from students from this period demonstrate that “(...) [r]everberations from prior policy eras continued to echo in the schools.”⁴¹⁵

A series of laws passed in the 1970s began to reverse some of the most damaging early legislation and restore civil rights to Native people. In 1975, the **Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act** officially put the Indian educational system into the hands of Indian people.⁴¹⁶ The mission of the Bureau of Indian Education (previously the Office of Indian Education Programs, renamed on August 29, 2006) “is to provide quality education opportunities from early childhood through life in accordance with a tribe’s needs for cultural and economic well-being, in keeping with the wide diversity of Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages as distinct cultural and governmental entities.”⁴¹⁷ The act facilitated a path for Tribal entities to contract for funding programs more easily.

In 1978, the **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)** set federal standards regarding custody proceedings for Native children, specifically prioritizing placement within their family, extended family, or Tribe.⁴¹⁸ Not only was this a reversal of the Indian Adoption Project, but a stark policy change from the 1891 compulsory attendance regulations vacating Native parental rights.

The **American Indian Religious Freedom Act** of August 11, 1978, commonly abbreviated as AIRFA (42 USC § 1996), was enacted by a joint resolution of Congress. Prior to the act, many Native American religions and sacred ceremonies had been prohibited by law. AIRFA guaranteed the right to practice Native religions unimpeded by the federal government. The act states: “It shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions of the American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut, and Native Hawaiians, including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites.”⁴¹⁹ AIRFA nullified the 1883 Code of Indian Offenses. Native people are the only group who have required specific religious freedom legislation outside of the First Amendment to the US Constitution.

⁴¹³ U.S. Department of Education, “The Indian Education Act of 1972: Answers to Your Questions” [pamphlet] (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975, rev. 1976, 1980), accessed June 8, 2026, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED196637.pdf>.

⁴¹⁴ Pub. L. 95-471, 95th Congress, 92 Stat. 1325, October 17, 1978

⁴¹⁵ Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*, 16.

⁴¹⁶ Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, 25 USC § 450 (1982), Pub. L. 93-638.

⁴¹⁷ Title 25 CFR §32.3, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-25/chapter-I/subchapter-E/part-32/section-32.3>

⁴¹⁸ Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, Pub. L. No. 95-608, 92 Stat. 3069 (Nov. 8, 1978), codified under 25 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.; Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*, 17.

⁴¹⁹ 42 USC §1996: Protection and preservation of traditional religions of Native Americans, Pub. L. 95-341, §1, August 11, 1978, 92 Stat. 469, <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-1994-title42-section1996&num=0&edition=1994>.

Beyond the group of 1970s laws passed more immediately after the Kennedy Report, a handful of important laws and policies from the 1990s onward have shaped the relationship between Indian Country and the federal government, with important consequences for understanding the history of Indian boarding schools. The 1990 **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act** (or NAGPRA) addressed how Native burials were historically routinely dehumanized, often treated as specimens rather than ancestors.⁴²⁰ Until this law was enacted, Native American burials and items of cultural patrimony were deemed to belong to the museum or collector, rather than the descendant family, Tribe, or Native Hawaiian Organization. NAGPRA facilitated the protection and return of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony, usually decades later. In 2023, the regulations governing NAGPRA were revised to strengthen the repatriation process, placing greater emphasis on Indigenous knowledge and requiring explicit Tribal consent for research, access, and exhibition of Native human remains or sacred objects. Known cemeteries and unknown burial locations exist at Federal Indian boarding schools.⁴²¹ Many families did not have a choice in the location of where their child or other relative would be buried, nor did they have a choice in the manner in which those individuals would be buried.⁴²² NAGPRA may facilitate repatriation.⁴²³

Historic preservation policy has also changed in recent decades to acknowledge Tribal perspectives. While the National Historic Preservation Act was enacted on October 15, 1966, it was only in 1992 that Congress amended it to create the Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO) program.⁴²⁴ This codified Tribes' role in the legal management and preservation of their cultural heritage. This was another turning point in the self-determination and self-regulation of Native rights. THPO programs require a Tribe invest its own resources in the establishment of these programs. Once established, federal funds are usually available on an annual basis. Currently, 228 of the 575 federally recognized Tribes have a THPO program. In 1998, the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) was created as a THPO membership organization to support and encourage Tribal Historic Preservation Programs. Many THPOs and other Tribal representatives are actively engaged in research and preservation of

⁴²⁰ 25 USC §3001 et seq., and 43 CFR Part 10—Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Regulations, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-43/subtitle-A/part-10>; National Park Service, “Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,” updated April 24, 2024, accessed June 8, 2026, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>.

⁴²¹ Newland, Vol. II, 5. At least seventy-four marked and unmarked burial sites at sixty-five different sites are confirmed as of 2024.

⁴²² Newland, Vols. I and II.

⁴²³ *Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska V. Department of Army* [Opinion], United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, July 25, 2025, accessed June 22, 2026, <https://www.ca4.uscourts.gov/opinions/242081.P.pdf>.

⁴²⁴ Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, “The National Historic Preservation Act, as amended through December 16, 2016, and codified in Title 54 of the United States Code” [full text], <https://www.achp.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/nhpa.pdf>.

Indian boarding schools closely affiliated with their Tribe.⁴²⁵ Further, many within THPO programs are involved in the NABS Healing Coalition efforts to support the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of survivors, descendants, alumni, and community members.

In 1990 the term Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) was officially coined in *National Register Bulletin 38: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* to describe a place that might be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places “because of its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community that (a) are rooted in that community’s history, and (b) are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.”⁴²⁶ Places that meet this definition were listed in the National Register as early as its creation in 1966, but nominations did not utilize the term until the 1990 publication. The bulletin provided much-needed guidance that the National Register recognizes these places as significant. The National Register bulletin was revised in 1992 in response to National Historic Preservation Act amendments to address specific concerns that places of importance to Tribes and Native Hawaiian Organizations were being excluded. In 1998, the Bulletin was revised again to reiterate that TCPs are not a separate historic property type, but rather can be classified as object, district, site, building, or structure for the purposes of National Register listing and should be evaluated in accordance with the National Register criteria or for the purposes of nomination. In 2024, the National Register TCP guidelines were updated, and among the revisions, the term “property” was replaced with “place” to remove any implication of commodification, a concept not supported by many communities.⁴²⁷ The guidance further describes that the individuals or associated community(ies) that ascribe value to a TCP are the authoritative experts on that place.⁴²⁸

Recognition of the Role of Traditional or Indigenous Knowledge

In 2007, the United Nations adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, often referred to as UNDRIP.⁴²⁹ Among other rights recognized, Article 10 references the right to “free, prior, and informed consent,” as a foundation of Indigenous-focused research and policy. The recent revisions to NAGPRA reflect this acknowledged right with the Duty of Care provision, which requires prior consent for any research on, exhibition of, or access to human

⁴²⁵ While the list of THPOs working on recordation of Indian boarding schools is too long to list here, without the THPO program, these efforts would be less organized, less supported, and less focused on Tribally centered research goals.

⁴²⁶ Patricia L. Parker and Thomas F. King, *National Register Bulletin 38: Guidelines for Evaluating, and Documenting Traditional Cultural Places* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1990, rev. 1992), 1.

⁴²⁷ *National Register Bulletin: Identifying, Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Places* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2024), 29, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/713282,8-9>.

⁴²⁸ *National Register Bulletin: Identifying, Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Places*, 29.

⁴²⁹ United Nations, *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, adopted by the General Assembly on September 13, 2007, accessed April 15, 2026, https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf.

remains.⁴³⁰ On December 5, 2023, the DOI issued Departmental manual 301 DM 7, *Departmental Responsibilities for Consideration and Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Departmental Actions and Scientific Research*, which outlines how the department will incorporate Indigenous Knowledge [IK] with free, prior, and informed consent.⁴³¹ The policy states that the Department will “(...) Elevate IK in the creation, selection, development, and implementation of Departmental actions, programs, and scientific research by inviting Indigenous Peoples to identify the IK they consider pertinent to the action or scientific research under consideration.”⁴³² Through this consultation-focused engagement, IK is recognized as one of many knowledge systems that should be included to facilitate our collective understanding. The elevated status of IK has brought attention to the importance of the education systems that were in place within Native communities prior to the implementation of the Federal Indian boarding school system.

Boarding Schools for Native Children in Alaska and Hawai‘i

Indian boarding schools in Alaska and Hawai‘i possess comparatively unique historic contexts. Indeed, an historic context for each state would be necessary to fully expound on the histories and cultures of the Indigenous populations, their interactions with outside political and religious influences, and their sovereign status. As such, only a brief introduction to some of the unique circumstances of each state is provided here.⁴³³ While the first foreign missionaries did not arrive in Hawai‘i until 1820, Indigenous contact with non-Indigenous peoples in Alaska occurred in the early eighteenth century with Russian colonization. In 1793, Empress of Russia Catherine II directed Russian Orthodox missionaries to provide education for Alaska Natives in the North American Colony.⁴³⁴ The US acquired the Alaska territory in 1867, and, following the illegal overthrow of Hawaiian Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1893, ultimately annexed Hawai‘i in 1898. The DOI investigative report lists twenty-two Federal boarding schools in Alaska, and seven in Hawai‘i (some at multiple locations).⁴³⁵ Alaska and Hawai‘i schools are discussed in greater detail below. Notwithstanding, additional research, largely beyond the scope of this current study, is necessary to place these schools in the specific historic, political, and demographic contexts of Hawai‘i and Alaska. Ideally, separate state-specific reports are warranted.

⁴³⁰ 43 CFR § 10.1(d).

⁴³¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, “301 DM 7: Departmental Responsibilities for Consideration and Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in Departmental Actions and Scientific Research”, December 5, 2023, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/departamental-manual/301-dm-7-departamental-responsibilities-consideration-and>.

⁴³² U.S. Department of the Interior, 301 DM 7, 7.7 (A).

⁴³³ See Newland, Vols. I and II regarding Federal Indian boarding schools in Alaska and Hawai‘i.

⁴³⁴ Newland, Vol. I, 65.

⁴³⁵ Newland, Vol. II, 13.

Alaska

In 1732, Russia laid claim to the area today known as Alaska. The Russian empire controlled the area until 1867, when the US government purchased the land. Alaska remained a US territory until its statehood in 1959. The DOI report references schools operated by the Russian-American Fur Company on behalf of the Russian government.⁴³⁶ In 1793, Catherine II, Empress of Russia, had also directed Orthodox missionaries to provide education for Alaska Native children in the North American Colony.⁴³⁷ Between 1867 and 1884, only religious mission schools operated in Alaska, as other schools were previously associated with the Russia government.⁴³⁸

In July 1870, Congress approved the twenty-year lease of “Seal Islands” [today known as Pribilof Islands] to the Alaska Commercial Company, Section 6 of which included a provision for education and other needs of Alaska Native people.⁴³⁹ The company regulations made additional educational commitments to provide free schools eight months of the year, four hours per day, except Sundays and holidays, and provide books, paper, and other school needs.⁴⁴⁰

Of the twenty-five Federal Indian boarding schools identified in the DOI report, eight were founded between 1883 and 1899.⁴⁴¹ In 1876, missionary educator Sheldon Jackson reported a school founded at Fort Wrangel. By 1883, it was receiving federal support as the earliest Federal Indian boarding school in Alaska.⁴⁴² When the Sheldon Jackson School in Sitka, Alaska, was founded in 1878 (see NHL case studies), parents, who themselves learned to read and write in Russian schools, were eager to enroll their children such that capacity became an issue.⁴⁴³

When federal support for schools came to Alaska in 1881, they represented a “collaboration between the US military and religious institutions, and organizations for Indian education.”⁴⁴⁴ While many in the Native community were seeking education, the federal government sought to ensure forced compliance. In February 1881, Navy Captain Henry Glass established a rule requiring Indian children to attend day school (boarders would also be accommodated). Glass ordered labels made for each child to be worn around their necks, which included house number and child (ex. H 38, B1 represented boy 1 in house 38).⁴⁴⁵ This allowed Glass to summon parents

⁴³⁶ Newland, Vol. I, 65. Mission schools with boarding were present in Alaska before 1819.

⁴³⁷ Newland, Vol. I, 65.

⁴³⁸ Newland, Vol. I, 65.

⁴³⁹ Sheldon Jackson, *Education in Alaska* (Government Printing Office, 1881); Newland, Vol. I, 65; *North American Commercial Co. v. United States*, 171 U.S. 110 (1898), Justia: U.S. Supreme Court, accessed June 22, 2026, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/171/110/>.

⁴⁴⁰ H. W. Elliott, *The Seal-Islands of Alaska* (Government Printing Office, 1881), 107.

⁴⁴¹ Newland, Vol. II, 68-69. Seven other DOI-identified schools are Anvik Mission (1892), Fort Wrangell Tlingit Industrial School (1883), Friends High School (1887), Holy Cross Boarding School (1888), Jesse Lee Home for Children (1890), St. Mary Mission School-Akulurak (1898), and Woody Island Mission and Orphanage (1893).

⁴⁴² Newland, Vols. I and II.

⁴⁴³ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 4; Newland, Vol. I, 65.

⁴⁴⁴ Newland, Vol. I, 66.

⁴⁴⁵ Sheldon Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska* (Thomas McGill & Co, Law Printers, 1886), 6-7.

to answer for absences. Native parents were held accountable through fees and even imprisonment if their child was absent.⁴⁴⁶

Jackson modeled the Sheldon Jackson School after Carlisle, adopting military discipline and self-sufficiency. And, like Carlisle, the school adopted the practice of punishing children for speaking their Native languages – a policy that remained in force until 1968, almost completely severing the generational transference of Indigenous Alaskan languages. At least some of the students were required to make five-year commitments, which were held up in courts as legally binding.⁴⁴⁷ Jackson sought federal support under the argument that “it is both cheaper and more humane to give them educational facilities now than to fight them hereafter at a largely increased cost.”⁴⁴⁸ In 1882, Congress allocated \$50,000 specifically for education of Alaska Native children.⁴⁴⁹

Alaska was largely ignored in the 1928 Meriam Report, with the only mention of the state or its Indigenous population seen in the general recommendations. Indeed, the report accuses the Indian Service of not “(...) developing cooperative relationships with other organizations, public and private, which can be of material aid to it in educational developmental work for Indians,” specifically referencing the need for a survey of schools in Alaska.⁴⁵⁰ The report points to the Indian Service’s failure to cooperate with the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Education, charged with the care for the “Indians of Alaska” since the 1884 Organic Act provision for a Territorial government.⁴⁵¹ Rev. Dr. Sheldon Jackson served as the “general agent of education for Alaska beginning the following year, with contract mission schools being the dominant school type through 1894. After Alaska became a Territory in 1912, the Uniform School Act of 1917 authorized the Territorial Department of Education.⁴⁵² It was not until 1931 that the Office of Indian Affairs (as the Alaska Indian Service) assumed oversight of Native Alaska education.

The 1969 Kennedy Report addressed ways to provide “an equal educational opportunity for the Alaskan Native.” The report highlights that Alaska Natives “number approximately 53,000, or one-fifth of the total population of the State. (...) that reservations as such (other than two) do not exist; it is a system of villages and towns.”⁴⁵³ The report outlines the poor economy, high mortality, substandard housing conditions, and educational levels among Native Alaskans. Regarding education, it directs readers to comments made during subcommittee hearings by Arthur E. Hippler of the University of Alaska, which highlight the historical effects of “generations of school teachers and missionaries (...) [that] have overtly and covertly attacked

⁴⁴⁶ Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska*, 6-7.

⁴⁴⁷ Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska*, 10.

⁴⁴⁸ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 20.

⁴⁴⁹ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 18.

⁴⁵⁰ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 19-20.

⁴⁵¹ Meriam, et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*, 20. The Uniform School Act of 1917 authorized the Territorial Department of Education.

⁴⁵² Annette Rosenstiel, “The Changing Focus of Native Education in Alaska,” *Arctic and Alpine Research* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1971): 189, 191.

⁴⁵³ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 29.

native life ways, attitudes, values, religion, and family life. Moreover, expectations by teachers that natives would do poorly have become in many cases self-fulfilling prophecies.”⁴⁵⁴ The report shares his three recommendations to provide more trained and higher quality educators, teach Alaska Natives something about their history to instill pride in identity, and “adapt educational materials to the native community.”⁴⁵⁵

The Kennedy Report highlights that Alaska Native children were sent to Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma, “(...) because there are no school facilities nearer their home.”⁴⁵⁶ As such, parents wanted more emphasis on instruction applicable to Alaska: “There appears to be no valid reason for sending students from Alaska to Chilocco, Okla. If schooling is not currently available in Alaska, it should be made available, and soon.”⁴⁵⁷ Alaska Native children were sent to other schools in the contiguous states, including, but not limited to, Kansas, New Mexico, Oregon, and Pennsylvania.

Hawai‘i

Native Hawaiian education in a boarding school context is likewise distinctive from either Alaska or the mainland United States. Today, the United States honors a special political and trust relationship with the Native Hawaiian community as an inherent sovereign authority neither abrogated nor relinquished.⁴⁵⁸ Settled as early as 300 CE, the archipelago’s first Western contact occurred with British Royal Navy officer Captain James Cook’s arrival in 1778. A combination of events, including prophecies and cultural disruption due to contact, lead to civil unrest in the islands. In 1810, King Kamehameha I unified four independent chiefdoms under the Kingdom of Hawai‘i.

With its opening in 1817, several Native Hawaiian students, including Heneri Opukaha‘ia (anglicized as Henry Obookiah) attended the Cornwall Foreign Mission School in Connecticut.⁴⁵⁹ In addition to Oneida, Cherokee, Choctaw, White, and other students, by 1821 at least five Hawaiian youth from O‘ahu and Maui were students at the school.⁴⁶⁰ While Cornwall does not appear in the DOI investigative reports, in 1822, the Department of War noted an

⁴⁵⁴ Arthur Hippler, *Barrow and Kotzebue: An Exploratory Comparison of Acculturation and Education in Two Large Northwestern Alaska Villages* (University of Minnesota, 1969), 7.

⁴⁵⁵ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 105-106.

⁴⁵⁶ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 300.

⁴⁵⁷ Kennedy, *Indian Education: A National Tragedy*, 299-301.

⁴⁵⁸ Office of the Secretary of the Interior, “Procedures for Reestablishing a Formal Government-to-Government Relationship with the Native Hawaiian Community [Final rule],” 43 CFR Part 50, *Federal Register* 81, no. 1999 (October 14, 2016): 71278-71323.

⁴⁵⁹ “An Experiment in Evangelization: Cornwall’s Foreign Mission School,” *Connecticut History*, November 10, 2020, accessed June 10, 2026, <https://connecticuthistory.org/an-experiment-in-evangelization-cornwalls-foreign-mission-school/>; *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah, A Native of Owhyhee, and Member of the Foreign Mission School; Who Died at Cornwall, Conn. Feb. 17, 1818, Aged 26 Years* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830).

⁴⁶⁰ Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs*, 264-266.

allowance of \$1,438 to Cornwall.⁴⁶¹ In other words, even though the ABCFM operated the school, federal monies supported the effort.

The first foreign missionaries arrived in the Hawaiian Islands in 1820 from the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM). In 1822, American Protestant Elisha Loomis printed a systematic Hawaiian syllabary (*pī'āpā Hawai'i*) on a mission press to promote religious conversion efforts as well as Hawaiian language literacy.⁴⁶² Liholiho, King Kamehameha II decreed literacy should be restricted to those with rank, in good favor, or the wives and children of European or Russian men.⁴⁶³ This decree was lifted in 1825, when his young brother Kūikeyaouli, as Kamehameha III, declared that commoners (*maka'āinana*) should become literate. A widespread literacy initiative for both children and adults, government common free schools with Native Hawaiian teachers, and the rise of a Hawaiian language press followed.⁴⁶⁴ In 1831, the Lahainaluna Seminary was established by missionaries to train Native Hawaiians as teachers, which shifted by 1834 to boarding younger students.⁴⁶⁵ In 1836, the Hilo Boarding School for Native Hawaiian male children formed, in part to prepare students to transfer to Lahainaluna and later serving as a model for Hampton Institute.⁴⁶⁶ The earliest instruction at each of these institutions included religious instruction and literacy, with later curriculums adding farming and mechanical skills. Of seven Federal Indian boarding schools identified in the DOI report, four were established before 1900.⁴⁶⁷

In 1840, the first Constitution of the Kingdom of Hawai'i (*Kumu Kanawai no ko Hawai'i nei Pae 'Aina*) was enacted, along with the Declaration of Rights developed by Kamehameha III and provisions for public education under control of the Kingdom. Until the early 1850s, English was

⁴⁶¹ Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs*, 393.

⁴⁶² "The First Printing: A Written Hawaiian Language," Historic Hawai'i Foundation, August 25, 2022, reproduced from Hawaiian Mission Houses, accessed September 3, 2025, <https://historichawaii.org/article/the-first-printing-a-written-hawaiian-language/>.

⁴⁶³ David B. Walch, "The Historical Development of the Hawaiian Alphabet," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 76, no. 3 (1967): 353-366.

⁴⁶⁴ David A. Chang, "'We Will Be Comparable to the Indian Peoples': Recognizing Likeness between Native Hawaiians and American Indians, 1834-1923," *American Quarterly* 67, no. 3, Special Issue: Pacific Currents (September 2015): 859-886; Paul Lyons, "'They Will Eat Us Up': Remembering Hawai'i," *American Literary History* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 543-557.

⁴⁶⁵ Newland, Vol. I, 72. Lahainaluna Seminary was formally converted to a manual training school in 1899 and rebuilt and rededicated in 1904 as a technical high school, see Carl Kalani Beyer, "Manual and Industrial Education for Hawaiians during the 19th Century," *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 38 (2001): 26.

⁴⁶⁶ Newland, Vol. I, 72. These buildings were demolished circa 1972, see Peter T. Young, "Hilo Boarding School," Images of Old Hawai'i, October 2, 2019, accessed June 11, 2026, <https://imagesofoldhawaii.com/hilo-boarding-school/>. C. Kalani Beyer, "The Connection of Samuel Chapman Armstrong as Both Borrower and Architect of Education in Hawai'i," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (Feb 2007): 23-48.

⁴⁶⁷ Newland, Vols. I and II, cited as Lahainaluna Seminary (opened 1831), Hilo Boarding School (1836-1972), Industrial and Reformatory School (Keone'ula, Kapalama) (1864-1903), and Kamehameha Schools (opened 1887). Regarding community critique of these findings, see Maile Arvin, "Native Hawaiians are confronting the Legacies of 'Indian Boarding Schools,'" *Truthout*, May 26, 2022.

not taught in public schools in favor of Hawaiian language.⁴⁶⁸ Kamehameha III also established the Hawaiian Chiefs' Children's School (or Royal School) to provide Western education to ali'i (chiefly) children. With a daily life controlled by missionaries Amos and Juliette Cooke, the school structure and teachings gravely disrupted the cultural traditions and physical wellbeing of the monarchical succession.⁴⁶⁹

In parallel, in 1850 the Hawai'i Masters and Servants Act under Kamehameha III's government legalized the contract labor system, or the indentured servitude of Native Hawaiian and foreign adult workers, with children over the age of ten forced into indentured apprenticeships.⁴⁷⁰

On December 30, 1864, Kamehameha V (Lot Kamehameha or Lot Kapuāiwa) passed an act "authorizing the board of education to establish an industrial and reformatory school, for the care and education of helpless and neglected children, as also for the reformation of juvenile offenders."⁴⁷¹ In 1865, the Keone'ula Industrial and Reformatory School opened at Kapālana on O'ahu, effectively modeled on a European workhouse. The school operated as a co-ed reformatory and changed names several times. In 1870, a separate school opened for girls. The Keone'ula boys' school continued until 1903, when it was reorganized under US government supervision as the Waiale'e Industrial School for boys.⁴⁷²

In 1893, a group of non-Native sugar plantation owners led by Sanford B. Dole, with a show of force by the US Marines, overthrew the Kingdom of Hawai'i. The Republic of Hawai'i declared Dole as president. Promulgated in 1896 under the Republic of Hawai'i, Act 57 made English the "medium and basis of instruction" for all schools in Hawai'i, with any other language, to wit Hawaiian, instruction requiring authorization from the Department of Public Instruction.⁴⁷³ In 1897, more than half of the Native Hawaiian population signed an anti-annexation petition (21,269 out of the 39,000 reported in census). Nevertheless, Hawai'i became a US territory in 1898, and a state in 1959.

⁴⁶⁸ Larry K. Kimura and William Wilson, *Report on the Culture, Needs and Concerns of Native Hawaiians Pursuant to Public Law 96-565, Title III*, Final Report: Vol. 1 (U.S. Department of the Interior, Native Hawaiians Study Commission, 1983), 124.

⁴⁶⁹ Julie Kaomea, "Education for Elimination in Nineteenth-century Hawai'i: Settler Colonialism and the Native Hawaiian Chiefs' Children's Boarding School," *History of Education Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (May 2014): 123-144.

⁴⁷⁰ An Act for the Government of Masters and Servants [He Kanawai No Ka Hoomalu Ana I Na Haku A Me Na Kauwa], 1850, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, accessed June 11, 2026, <https://dspace.lib.hawaii.edu/items/cf04b5b5-f75a-427d-ad32-4fad093cd46e>.

⁴⁷¹ *Laws of His Majesty Kamehameha V, King of the Hawaiian Islands, Passed by the Legislative Assembly, at its session, 1870* (1870; Statute Law Book Co., 1930), 59.

⁴⁷² Newland, Vol. I, Appendix A, 170; Maile Arvin, "Research Webinar: Exploring the Legacy of Boarding Schools," Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition [NABS], May 9, 2024; Ku'uwehi Hiraishi, "Researchers begin to uncover what really happened at the Waiale'e Boys School," Hawai'i Public Radio, May 3, 2024, accessed September 3, 2025, <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2024-05-03/researchers-begin-to-uncover-what-really-happened-at-the-waialee-boys-school>. In 1963 the Waiale'e school re-opened as the Hawaiian Youth Correctional Facility.

⁴⁷³ "Act 57," *Laws of the Republic of Hawaii passed by the Legislature at its Session, 1896* (Hawaiian Gazette Company's Print, 1896), 189.

As reported in the DOI report, a total of seven federally supported boarding schools (some comprising multiple sites) operated in the unique context of Hawai‘i.⁴⁷⁴ Only children deemed “delinquent, immoral, or wayward” were institutionalized in government-run facilities.⁴⁷⁵ While Native Hawaiians were disproportionately represented in these institutions, other non-White racial groups were detained as well. Other private schools were available to parents opting to send their children to a boarding institution.⁴⁷⁶ Several Hawaiian schools in this environment were largely reformatory. Neither the Meriam nor Kennedy reports focus on education in Hawai‘i, however. This is in part because either private institutions or the Hawaiian Department of Public Instruction oversaw and funded many schools, in part because of the different history and relationship of Hawai‘i and Native Hawaiians to the United States, lending to a unique context.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Newland, Vol. I, 69. Historian Maile Arvin’s Nā Lei Poina ‘Ole project, examining reformatory and industrial schools in Hawai‘i between 1865 and 1959), considers the Reformatory and Training School at Keone‘ula, Waiale‘e Industrial Schools for Boys (1903-1950), Industrial School for Girls at Mō‘ili‘ili (1913-1929), Waimano Home (1921-1959), Kawailoa Industrial School for Girls (1929-1963), and Ko‘olau Training School for Boys (1950-1963), accessed June 11, 2026, <https://naleipoinaole.com/> See also Maile Arvin, “Research Webinar: Exploring the Legacy of Boarding Schools,” Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, May 9, 2024.

⁴⁷⁵ “Delinquent, immoral, or wayward” was loosely defined and included minor infractions such as lying. Arvin, “Research Webinar: Exploring the Legacy of Boarding Schools.”

⁴⁷⁶ Arvin, “Research Webinar: Exploring the Legacy of Boarding Schools.”

⁴⁷⁷ Derek Taira, *Forward without Fear: Native Hawaiians and American Education in Territorial Hawai‘i, 1900-1941*, Studies in Pacific Worlds (University of Nebraska Press, 2024), 78 [among Taira’s other scholarship]: “Territorial public schools were not federal institutions like the boarding schools that had aimed to achieve ‘education for extinction’ in the 1870s. Native Hawaiians were not subjected to the same physically traumatic experiences as Native Americans: forced removal to government boarding schools, military discipline, or twenty-four-hour observation. Nevertheless, they shared strikingly similar experiences. The repression of Indigenous language and culture, subjection to a foreign curriculum, denial of their cultural heritage and history, and the unequal balance of power between oppressor and oppressed experienced in schools and society represented common occurrences highlighting their mutually painful past. And like their American Indian counterparts, Native Hawaiians also subverted their colonial schooling by defying the goals of white authorities and imposing their own.”

PART II – Federal Designation of Historic Indian Boarding Schools

While every Indian boarding school is an important place, the process for designation as an NHL is codified by program guidance.⁴⁷⁸ NHL designation by the Secretary of the Interior requires an historic property to be of exceptional significance at a national level. An initial letter of inquiry introduces NHL program staff to a property so they can advise on potential nomination. A qualitative framework specified in the NHL Program regulations (36 CFR 65) is used to evaluate: 1) national significance, through the application of one or more of the six NHL Criteria (see below); 2) high degree of historic integrity; and 3) comparative analysis that supports a property's exceptional value as an illustrative or interpretive example relative to other similar properties.⁴⁷⁹ Integrity, which measures the physical ability of a property to convey its significance, is an essential factor for NHL designation. Comparative analysis of similar properties evaluates whether the nominated property is among the best to convey a nationally significant theme, context, or topic in history, considering both the significance and integrity. For additional information regarding the nomination process, it is advised to work closely with NHL program staff and carefully review the NHL Bulletin guidance.

Part II of this study highlights themes associated with Federal Indian boarding schools currently designated as NHLs. In some cases, NHL designations reference an NHL theme study, a series of which the NHL Program has produced since the 1950s to provide context on various aspects of history and to identify potential properties for nomination. As some of these designations represent older documentation, the theme studies or historic contexts associated with their original nominations often do not include the same level or understanding of information as more recent scholarship. Boundaries or complete inventories of contributing and noncontributing resources may also be lacking.⁴⁸⁰

For a Federal Indian boarding school to be considered for designation as an NHL, it must demonstrate its national significance in a larger context. While important individuals from Tribes, the government, or other organizations played a role in the development of these places, not every person, organization, or place will meet the threshold for national significance and high degree of integrity within the comparative context. With boarding school properties, Tribal voices and perspectives should be a critical component in seeking designation and creating a successful nomination. As such, this study does not propose potential new NHLs related to the history of Indian boarding schools. Instead, it offers general information about the NHL criteria and themes, case studies of current NHLs related to the history of Indian boarding schools, and broad guidance on identifying relevant historic resources.

⁴⁷⁸ *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations* (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2023), <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/nhl-bulletin.html>.

⁴⁷⁹ *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations*, 11.

⁴⁸⁰ *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations*, 36.

There are six NHL criteria that can be applied to evaluate national significance. While only one criterion is required when making an argument for the national significance of a property, nominations can apply multiple criteria. For more detailed guidance regarding applying these criteria or exceptions below, please refer to the NHL Bulletin.

Criterion 1: Properties that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained.

Criterion 2: Properties that are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States.

Criterion 3: Properties that represent some great idea or ideal of the American people.

Criterion 4: Properties that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for a study of a period, style, or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

Criterion 5: Properties that are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture.

Criterion 6: Properties that have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.

Further, there are eight circumstances, known as NHL exceptions, which require special consideration in order to be designated as NHLs. If a property is eligible for an exception, that property generally has to meet higher standards in its other criteria for designation.

Exception 1: Properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes either historically or currently.

Exception 2: Buildings or structures that have been moved from their original historic location. Exception 2 is most frequently used to justify contributing status of moved buildings within a district.

Exception 3: Site of a building or structure no longer standing.

Exception 4: Birthplaces and graves of historical figures.

Exception 5: Cemeteries.

Exception 6: Reconstructed buildings or grouping of buildings.

Exception 7: Properties that are primarily commemorative in nature.

Exception 8: Properties that have achieved national significance within the past 50 years.

For the older nominations with limited documentation, specific NHL criteria were not cited but based on current practice most Federal Indian boarding schools would first be evaluated for designation under NHL Criterion 1 (broad national patterns of US history). National Register nominations related to Federal Indian boarding schools may first consider Criterion A for properties “that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history . . . , in addition to other possible NRHP criteria. National Register listing includes significance at the local, state, or national levels that can accommodate a wider selection of surviving boarding school properties than the stricter NHL standards. Please consult *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* and the appropriate nominating authority (THPO or SHPO) for additional information.⁴⁸¹

Although NHL nominations foreground national significance arguments built around one or more NHL criteria, the National Park Service Thematic Framework is referenced in the documentation. The thematic framework is also commonly used in National Register nominations. First conceived in 1936 and last revised in 1996, the NPS Thematic Framework categorizes nominated properties broadly under eight major themes and accommodates multi-layered and intersecting, complex histories.⁴⁸² Given national policies of forced civilization and assimilation through federal government boarding schools, three key themes from the framework are likely to be applicable for associated properties. Additional topics may also be relevant.

One possible theme is the Peopling Places theme (I. Peopling Places (subtheme 6. Encounters, conflicts, and colonization) which examines the human population and communities through family organization, connections to land and community, access to nutrition, and exposure to disease. The subtheme can be applied to how forced migrations, forced removal of children from communities, and forced changes to physical appearance have impacted the way people engaged in daily activities at boarding schools, but also upon their return home. The boarding school experience has had generational effects on family and Tribal dynamics that are fundamentally intertwined the national significance of these places.

The Expressing Cultural Values theme (III. Expressing Cultural Values (subtheme 1. Educational and intellectual currents) focuses on cultural identity, and its subtheme, Educational and intellectual currents, highlights formative experiences. At a national scale, the Federal Indian boarding schools prioritized eradication of culture. Curriculum actively sought to suppress

⁴⁸¹ *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register, History, and Education, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 1990, revised 1991, 1995, 1997.

⁴⁸² “NHL Thematic Framework,” National Historic Landmarks Program, National Park Service, updated February 13, 2025, accessed June 16, 2026, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/nhl-thematic-framework.htm>.

Native languages, prohibiting Native cultural artistic expressions (unless these could be marketed), and abolishing Native religion and religious expressions.

The third possible theme, Shaping the Political Landscape (IV. Shaping the Political Landscape (4. Political ideas, cultures, and theories), focuses on politics in its myriad expressions, from political ideas, to protests, the military, and government institutions. As federal government facilities developed around the goal of cultural assimilation, Federal Indian boarding schools were inherently political in nature, with federal policy shifts represented variously through individual properties.

This historic context is intended to provide a specific framework for individual boarding schools to be nominated as National Historic Landmarks, should associated communities and property owners express interest. It can also support contextualization of the boarding school system for other research into Indian education or nominations to the National Register. The following is not a comprehensive summary of all potential themes associated with these designated Federal Indian boarding schools but can serve as a starting point for discussion.

NHL Case Studies

These brief case studies of current NHL designations recognizing Federal Indian boarding schools can serve as a comparative analysis starting point for other properties seeking nomination. These seven NHL designated schools all fall within the 1819 -1969 period that is the principal focus of this study and are presented in order of their date of school establishment, although documented periods of national significance may differ. Numerous additional Indian boarding school properties are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and many more associated with Indian education writ broadly are potentially eligible for listing at the local, state, or national levels of significance. As of 2025, there were approximately fifty historic Indian school properties (including mission schools) listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Although authorized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935, the first NHL designations date to 1960. Carlisle Indian School and Haskell Institute NHLs were designated on July 4, 1961. Consequently, these NHLs were administratively listed in the National Register of Historic Places with its creation in 1966. For the earliest NHLs, documentation in the form of an NHL boundary study prepared on a National Register form was prepared later, but it still often only contains the limited information required at the time.⁴⁸³ As noted, a total of seven Federal Indian boarding schools from the defined period are designated NHLs, with variations in level of documentation and themes discussed in their nominations (see Table 6). Most earlier

⁴⁸³ Until 2016, NHL nominations were completed on modified National Register forms. With the creation of the National Register in 1966, all properties designated as NHLs were administratively listed in the National Register.

nominations warrant updated documentation to better reflect key understanding of themes, historic context, and recent scholarship surrounding Federal Indian boarding schools.

Table 6. Federal Indian Boarding School NHLs: Designations Summary⁴⁸⁴

Federal Indian Boarding School National Historic Landmark	NHL Designation Date	NRHP Designation Date
Wheelock Academy	December 21, 1965 (documentation approved 1978)	October 15, 1966 (administrative listing)
Shawnee Mission	May 23, 1968 (documentation approved 1978)	May 23, 1968 (administrative listing)
Sheldon Jackson School	August 7, 2001	February 23, 1972
Hampton Institute	May 30, 1974	November 12, 1969
Carlisle Indian Industrial School	July 4, 1961 (documentation approved 1984)	October 15, 1966 (administrative listing)
Haskell Institute	July 4, 1961 (documentation approved 1987)	October 15, 1966 (administrative listing)
Fort Apache and Theodore Roosevelt School	March 2, 2012	October 14, 1976

1832 and 1884 – Wheelock Academy (NHL)

Located in Millerton, McCurtain County, Oklahoma, Wheelock Academy was designated an NHL on December 21, 1965 (administratively listed in the National Register October 15, 1966, NRIS 66000949).⁴⁸⁵ Consisting of six principal buildings built between 1880 and 1884 (following an 1869 fire), the property was designated under NHL Criterion 1 as the archetype of the school system established by the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory.⁴⁸⁶ Wheelock is a thirty-five-acre district owned and managed by Choctaw Nation. The extant built resources date from circa 1880 and were in use through 1955.

Other names historically associated with the property are Wheelock Female Seminary, Wheelock Orphan Academy, and Wheelock Female Indian Academy.⁴⁸⁷ Wheelock's chronology offers unique insight into the progression of Native education within Choctaw Nation.⁴⁸⁸ When the

⁴⁸⁴ Other NHLs related to Native education include Brafferton Indian School (contributing building to Wren Building, College of William and Mary), Sage Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, Ganado Mission (NRIS 09000082, designated January 16, 2009), Sequoyah's Cabin (NRIS 66000634, designated December 21, 1965), and Steward's House, Foreign Mission School (NRIS 16000858, designated October 31, 2016).

⁴⁸⁵ Joseph Scott Mendinghall, "Wheelock Academy," National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1978), https://catalog.archives.gov/medialz/electronic-records/rg-079/NPS_OK/66000949_NHL.pdf.

⁴⁸⁶ Although the NHL nomination is silent, the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings documentation (1959, updated 1965) reference the themes *Westward Expansion and Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898*, subtheme *Military and Indian Affairs* (1959) and *Arts and Sciences*, subtheme *Education* (1960, 1965 supplement): see NHL Administrative File, NARA.

⁴⁸⁷ Newland, Vol. I, Appendices A and B.

⁴⁸⁸ For more information, see Dawn Standridge, *A History of Wheelock Academy*, Virtual Presentation, August 5, 2021, <https://www.choctawnation.com/news/chahta-toshi/a-history-of-wheelock-academy/>.

Indian Removal Act forced Choctaw Nation to move to southeastern Oklahoma, a missionary couple followed the Tribe from Mississippi to resume their work among the Tribes in their new home. In 1832, sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Alfred and Harriet Wright established a Congregationalist mission station, day school, and church. Wright named the station after his mentor, Eleazer Wheelock, founder of Dartmouth College and Moor's Indian College. In 1839, the first dormitory was built. In 1842, the school became the Wheelock Female Seminary.

Chickasaw Nation was forced on to Choctaw Nation lands following removal. In 1838, Chickasaw Nation and Choctaw Nation developed a constitution bringing the two under one government.⁴⁸⁹ In 1842, the Nations revised the constitution to include funds set aside annually for educational purposes, authorizing their General Council to govern schools.⁴⁹⁰ Council passed the National Education Act of 1842, which established a boarding school system. Wheelock Academy became the first Choctaw Nation Academy, the prototype for the six other schools in their system as well as future schools at other Tribal Nations. Positions at these schools were preferentially granted to Tribal members; however, outside instructors and administrators were required to meet demand.⁴⁹¹

The church at Wheelock was constructed between 1844 and 1847.⁴⁹² Wheelock was partially funded by Choctaw Nation through its closure in 1861 due to the Civil War. Between 1865 and 1869, it operated as a day school until the fire. Wheelock reopened in 1884 with the help of the Southern Presbyterian Church. While formal management changed over subsequent decades, the school remained supported by and under the control of the Choctaw Nation until 1932, when it became a United States Indian School through its closure in 1955.

NPS completed a National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings form for Wheelock Academy in 1959, leading to its NHL designation in 1965. In 1977, the property was officially considered endangered due to stabilization needs for many of the buildings. NHL documentation completed in 1978 noted that the Choctaw Nation's National Education Act of 1842 was the first Tribal law enacted to support education. Choctaw Nation had supported Western educational endeavors since at least 1825 (see Choctaw Academy above). If updated NHL documentation is prepared, additional detail should be included regarding the Native student experience and Choctaw administration of this school, in addition to clarifying if any additional resources also represent the earlier period of the school's existence at this site.

⁴⁸⁹ Ryan Spring, "A New Chahta Homeland: A History by the Decade, 1840-1850," *Iti Fabvssa* (March 2021), <https://www.choctawnation.com/news/iti-fabvssa/a-new-chahta-homeland-a-history-by-the-decade-1840-1850/>.

⁴⁹⁰ Constitution of the Choctaw Nation, November 10, 1842, Section 19-20, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://www.choctawnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/1842constitution.pdf>.

⁴⁹¹ Spring, "A New Chahta Homeland."

⁴⁹² Wheelock Church (NRIS 72001464) was listed individually in the National Register on November 9, 1972. The church was integrally related to the function of the Academy, as was its cemetery, where many students, teachers, and founder Rev. Alfred White are buried.

1839 – Shawnee Mission (NHL)

Shawnee Mission in Fairway, Kansas, was designated an NHL on May 23, 1968 (administratively listed in the National Register concurrently, NRIS 66000345) under NHL Criterion 1 as one of the earliest mission schools in the Louisiana Purchase area.⁴⁹³ The period of significance extends for the duration of school use from 1839 to 1862. The property is also known as Shawnee Methodist Mission, Shawnee Indian Manual Labor Boarding School, and Fort Leavenworth Indian Manual Labor (or Training) School. Three historic buildings remain extant, with a boundary encompassing twelve acres. The property is managed by the Kansas Historical Society and City of Fairway.⁴⁹⁴

Shawnee Mission was among the earliest and largest such institutions in the Louisiana Purchase area.⁴⁹⁵ Located along the historic Santa Fe and Oregon trails, the mission was first established in 1830, in Turner, Kansas, relocating to Fairway in 1838. Reverend Thomas Johnson and the Methodist Episcopal Church established the manual labor school with federal support, with the stipulation the school be on Indian land.⁴⁹⁶ Two hundred students from different Tribes enrolled at the height of the school's operation. The property originally encompassed 2,240 acres and sixteen buildings, abundant farmlands, a flour mill, and sawmill. Boys were instructed in agriculture, blacksmithing, wagonmaking, and shoemaking. Girls were instructed in domestic arts, such as spinning, weaving, and sewing. Federal government financing, \$5300 annually, was matched or exceeded by the Missionary Society at the rate of \$4,000 to \$10,000 annually.⁴⁹⁷ In 1848, Johnson added a "Western Academy," including classes in Latin and Greek. The program attracted men and women, Indian and non-Indian from across the Missouri area.

Simultaneously with the boarding school operations, the first territorial governor of Kansas used the mission for his executive offices in 1854, and the legislature met there in 1855. Shortly afterward the state government moved to Lecompton.

Overall, Shawnee Tribe exercised some control over the school. After several years expressing dissatisfaction with its operation, Shawnee Tribal Council withdrew funding, and the Shawnee Manual Labor School closed in 1862. The contract between the church and the federal government was annulled. The school was abandoned in 1864, and for the next sixty years, the US Army used it as barracks.

Initial NPS interest in the property in 1938-40 for its nationally significant association with historic trails did not result in acquisition for NPS management. A 1959 National Survey of

⁴⁹³ Stephen Lissandrello, "Shawnee Mission," National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1978), Section 8, https://catalog.archives.gov/medialz/electronic-records/rg-079/NPS_KS/66000345_NHL.pdf

⁴⁹⁴ For additional information, see Save the Shawnee Indian Mission, accessed June 15, 2026, <https://www.saveshawneeindianmission.com/>.

⁴⁹⁵ George S. Cattnach, Jr., "Special Report: Shawnee Mission, Kansas" (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, March 21, 1968).

⁴⁹⁶ Cattnach, "Special Report," 2.

⁴⁹⁷ Cattnach, "Special Report," 5.

Historic Sites and Buildings form for Shawnee Methodist Mission listed the themes *Westward Expansion*, subtheme *Military and Indian Affairs*, and *Arts & Sciences*, subtheme *Education*. NHL documentation was accepted in 1978. In recent years, Shawnee Nation has openly declared this property also to be a sacred site.⁴⁹⁸

The Shawnee Indian Manual Labor Boarding School was developed on a vocational training model, and updated documentation could further contextualize how the property fit under the federal Indian policies that influenced the development of schools.

1878 – Sheldon Jackson School (NHL)

The Sheldon Jackson School in Sitka, Alaska, was listed in the National Register on February 23, 1972 (NRIS 72000193) and designated an NHL on August 7, 2001.⁴⁹⁹ Only one building and one acre of land were originally listed, while seventeen buildings and one site contribute to the NHL designation. The property is also known as the Industrial Home for Boys (1882), Sitka Industrial Training School (1885), Sheldon Jackson Institute (1880s), and Sheldon Jackson College (1917).⁵⁰⁰

This was not the first boarding school in Alaska; however, it was the first US Federal Indian boarding school in Alaska. Designated under NHL Criterion 1 (with Criterion Exception 2 for a moved property), Sheldon Jackson School is considered “nationally significant for its important role in the education of Native Alaskans during the first half of the twentieth century and in the transformation of Southeast Native Alaskan cultures during this period.”⁵⁰¹ Although the school opened in 1878, the national period of significance is identified as 1910, “when contractors and the school’s Native students began construction of the campus’s principal buildings,” to 1944 when it became a junior college and began admitting non-Native students for the first time.⁵⁰² Many original campus buildings were torn down in 1910, so the period of significance aligns the extant buildings of the existing campus. Like most Federal Indian boarding schools, Alaska Native students were regularly made to provide manual labor toward school development and maintenance.

In 1878, Reverend Sheldon Jackson, with support of the Presbyterian Women’s Board of Home Missions, founded Sitka Mission, which included industrial instruction for Indigenous boys. An advocate of Native education, Jackson was appointed General Agent of Education for Alaska in

⁴⁹⁸ Margaret Littman, “The Legacy and Future of Shawnee Indian Manual Labor Boarding School,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, November 13, 2023, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/the-legacy-and-future-of-shawnee-indian-manual-labor-boarding-school>.

⁴⁹⁹ Alice E. Postell, “Sheldon Jackson Museum,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, August 1971).

⁵⁰⁰ For additional information, see “Voices of Sheldon Jackson School and College” (Sitka Fine Arts Camp, supported by funding by the Alaska Humanities Forum and the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Rasmuson Foundation, 2017), <https://www.sjvoices.org/>; National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive.

⁵⁰¹ Janet Clemens, et al., “Sheldon Jackson School,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2001), 15.

⁵⁰² Clemens, et al., “Sheldon Jackson School,” 15.

1884.⁵⁰³ The first school lasted from only April to December.⁵⁰⁴ On April 5, 1880, the mission school reopened under the direction of Olinda Austin with 103 male students. In 1882, a girls' department opened.⁵⁰⁵ Children (whose parents had been educated in Russian schools) were soon turned away due to lack of capacity. In July, the school moved to the former hospital building in the abandoned barracks of the former Russian capital. By the end of the year, students began applying for permission to live at the schoolhouse, citing unfavorable study conditions at home.⁵⁰⁶ As no dormitories existed, seven male students, aged thirteen and fourteen, "voluntarily left their homes and took up their abode in a vacant room of one of the government buildings. Thus commenced the boarding department of the Sitka school."⁵⁰⁷

Navy Captain Henry Glass's efforts to hold parents responsible for their child's attendance pushed capacity to 230 students on average, with the largest attendance of 250 students plus twenty-one adults.⁵⁰⁸ The former hospital-turned-school building burned down in January 1882, and twenty-five boarding students were forced to find temporary housing in a barn.⁵⁰⁹ Rev. Jackson changed the name of the school several times, possibly owing to legal challenges.⁵¹⁰ The first change was the Sheldon Jackson Institute, which opened in 1881. By 1889, the school had two dormitories (girls' and boys'), an industrial arts building, blacksmith shop, steam laundry, bakery, hospital, and six model cottages.⁵¹¹ In 1917, Sheldon Jackson became a high school, while the younger grades moved to Haines House, an orphanage. A few non-Native students attended. In 1944, the school added a small four-year college. In 1959, the Junior College recorded two-thirds Native students and one-third non-Native; the high school enrolled three-fourths Native students and one-fourth non-Native.⁵¹² When the school closed in 2007, locals repurposed the buildings.

1868 – Hampton Institute (NHL)

Located in Hampton, Virginia, the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute was listed in the National Register on November 12, 1969 (NRIS 69000323) and designated an NHL on May 30, 1974.⁵¹³ The property was designated under NHL Criterion 1 with a focus on Black education, the school's primary function during the nineteenth century. Hampton served as a model for

⁵⁰³ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*.

⁵⁰⁴ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 6.

⁵⁰⁵ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 6.

⁵⁰⁶ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 6.

⁵⁰⁷ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 6.

⁵⁰⁸ Jackson, *Education in Alaska*, 7.

⁵⁰⁹ Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska*, 82.

⁵¹⁰ For additional information on the tumultuous years 1882-1887, see Jackson, *Report on Education in Alaska*. Within his self-published report are several sworn testimonies justifying his actions and condemning criticism. The publication includes several stories about conflicts with specific unnamed students and challenges to their "voluntary" enrollment. Jackson's stories are one-sided but demonstrate both the European American attitudes toward Natives and the challenges arising from linguistic and cultural differences.

⁵¹¹ Rebecca Poulson, "Voices of Sheldon Jackson School and College," 2020.

⁵¹² Poulson, "Voices of Sheldon Jackson School and College."

⁵¹³ Carol Ann Poh, "Hampton Institute," National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1974).

subsequent Black industrial schools founded to aid freedmen. Although the National Register district included two hundred acres and over one hundred buildings, the 1976 NHL boundaries delineated fifteen acres and five contributing buildings, one structure, and one object representing the origins of the university.⁵¹⁴ The school was also known as Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, and Hampton Indian School. The NHL nomination form focuses on 1868, the year of the school's founding, and its operation during the nineteenth century.⁵¹⁵ Founded in 1868, the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute provided industrial skills and trades in the post-Civil War Era to Black youth, who would work trades on campus to pay their way. The school opened with two teachers and fifteen students.⁵¹⁶

Two years later, in April 1878, the school admitted forty-nine Native students, including seventeen "young Indians," imprisoned men from Fort Marion at the request of Colonel Richard Henry Pratt.⁵¹⁷ Pratt recruited other students from the Upper Missouri agencies.⁵¹⁸ While records indicate federal funds were initially appropriated, additional research is needed to identify what funds went to Hampton for Indian education in 1878. By 1886, Congress provided \$19,735.39 for the education of 120 Indian pupils.⁵¹⁹ Hampton was considered a contract school. To accommodate Native students, the school built additional dormitory space known as "the Wigwam." Booker T. Washington assumed charge of the dormitory in 1879, describing his experiences in his autobiography.⁵²⁰ The Wigwam is one of the five buildings contributing to the NHL. In a letter dated January 14, 1879, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Pratt reported planning outing placements for the Fort Marion men:

The school is overloaded with boys, having as you must know fifty seven. To unload, and, as I believe accomplish more for the boys and the Indian cause in general, I propose

⁵¹⁴ Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, "Hampton Institute," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1969). The NRHP administrative file includes a multi-year discussion regarding boundaries, with the ultimate decision to retain the larger NRHP boundaries.

⁵¹⁵ Poh, "Hampton Institute," Section 8, 1.

⁵¹⁶ S. Allen Chambers, Jr., *National Landmarks, America's Treasures* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 2000), 480. Hampton counted Booker T. Washington among its graduates. The campus includes such notable buildings as Virginia Hall, designed by Richard Morris Hunt and constructed by students in 1873.

⁵¹⁷ Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom*, 191-204.

⁵¹⁸ For more information, see "History of Hampton University," <https://home.hamptonu.edu/about/history/>; Donal F. Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877-1923* (University of Illinois Press, 1995); Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>.

⁵¹⁹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1886* (Government Printing Office, 1886), LXIV.

⁵²⁰ In Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1901), Washington shared two memories of his experiences with Native students at Hampton: "The things they disliked most, I think, were to have their long hair cut, to give up wearing their blankets, and to cease smoking; but no white American ever thinks that any other race is wholly civilized until he wears the white man's clothes, eats the white man's food, speaks the white man's language, and professes the white man's religion" (p. 99). He further shared his experiences traveling with a Native student and the difference in treatment he received versus the Native student. Both in a steamboat dining room and in a hotel, Washington was told his Native charge could be served, but that Washington could not (p. 102).

to find places for most of the Florida boys, where they will be under good trades or agricultural training, and, as much as possible, isolated from each other. To give them six months of this kind of life, or even more, each of the two remaining years, will, to my mind accomplish more than persistent books and school routines (...) Independence, self-reliance, and better English-speaking will all be forwarded more by separation.⁵²¹

This forwarded Pratt's desire to advocate for separate education for Indians.

The Hampton school cemetery is located southeast of the NHL boundary but acknowledged in the nomination as the place where "many of the first Indian students at Hampton are buried."⁵²² Several references suggest the Native students arrived with or developed tuberculosis and died at the school.

By 1888, the Commission on Indian Affairs reported Hampton received \$19,641.11 in federal funds that provided for an average of 118 students and thirty-one employees. By 1899, of the one thousand students enrolled at Hampton, 135 were Indians.⁵²³ The Hampton Indian School closed in 1923, but the historic campus continuously operates, now as Hampton University.

Although Hampton primarily functioned for the education of Black students, Hampton's role in Indian education is mentioned in the nomination: "(...) Hampton for many years also educated small groups of Indians."⁵²⁴ NHL updated documentation should include additional information about Hampton's role as an assimilationist Federal Indian boarding school during the Era of Reconstruction.⁵²⁵

1879 – Carlisle Indian School (NHL)

Located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, the Carlisle Indian School was designated an NHL on July 4, 1961 (administratively listed in the National Register October 15, 1966, NRIS 66000658). The property is considered nationally significant under NHL Criteria 1 and 2:

(...) a renowned and controversial landmark of American reform: assimilation of Native Americans into mainstream American life, vocational training, and athletics (...) [U.S. Army Brigadier General Richard H.] Pratt's vision was premised on the belief that the best treatment for his students was to "civilize" them in the white man's ways and that the most effective means was to educate young Native Americans in controlled settings remote from their reservations and their own cultures. His beliefs were ethnocentric and anthropologically naive, yet they also were a strong shift away from the general hostility

⁵²¹ Letter, Richard Henry Pratt to Indian Commissioner Ezra Hayt, January 14, 1879, accessed April 7, 2026, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-documents/NARA_m234_r482_0507.pdf.

⁵²² Poh, "Hampton Institute," Section 7, 2. Note Hampton University Cemetery is separate from the Hampton National Cemetery, located 40 meters northeast, and its addition, located 750 meters east. Burials at the national cemetery began in 1862 for Federal soldiers, but it also has a section for Confederate soldiers. Samuel Chapman Armstrong, founder of Hampton Institute, was also buried in the school cemetery in 1893.

⁵²³ Poh, "Hampton Institute," Section 8, 7.

⁵²⁴ Poh, "Hampton Institute," Section 8, 2.

⁵²⁵ Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, *The Era of Reconstruction 1861-1900: A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study* (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017).

toward Native Americans that prevailed among a wide portion of the American public. The Indian School may have been the most conspicuously successful embodiment of this reform. National significance is also attached to the school's place in athletic history. The skill that students developed in mechanical arts is still evident from the quality of the buildings they constructed on the campus. Their skill in fine and decorative arts is represented by the studio they built to showcase it. Jim Thorpe and "Pop" Warner, who earned their reputations at the Carlisle Indian School, remain widely renowned figures in the history of American sports.⁵²⁶

The period of significance for the 24.5-acre district is 1879 to 1918, encompassing the entire school period and multiple buildings. Carlisle was initially established as the US military reservation Carlisle Barracks before being converted into an Indian school with a heavy emphasis on a military-style discipline. Carlisle served as the assimilationist model for later Federal Indian boarding schools. Well-known athletes, Olympian Jim Thorpe, professional baseball player Joseph "Chief" Bender, and athletic director Glen S. "Pop" Warner are strongly associated with the history of the school.

When Pratt assumed command of Carlisle Barracks, the property had been a military installation for almost 125 years. The school's outing program is possibly the best known within the Federal Indian boarding school system. As stated in Part I, outing programs were not new, however, Carlisle invested in placing Native students within European American households or industrial environments removed from their families.

1884 – Haskell Institute (NHL)

Haskell Institute, located in Lawrence, Kansas, was designated an NHL on July 4, 1961 (administratively listed in the National Register October 15, 1966, NRIS 66000342).⁵²⁷

Significant under what is now defined as NHL Criterion 1, the district includes twelve individual resources with discontiguous boundaries. The school was also known historically as Haskell Indian Junior College and today as Haskell Indian Nations University.

The period of national significance is described as 1884, the date of its founding, through 1935, with the departure of first Native superintendent Henry Roe Cloud, the advent of the Indian New Deal, and following passage of the 1934 Johnson-O'Malley Act providing funding for Native students to attend public schools.⁵²⁸ Haskell educated Native children from the southern Plains and upper Midwest.⁵²⁹

One of the first large off-reservation Federal Indian boarding schools, Haskell (then known as US Industrial Training School) was modeled on the perceived "success" of Carlisle's military approach. In 1884, twelve students were brought to the campus for a minimum of a four-year

⁵²⁶ Robert W. Craig, Constance M. Greiff, and Richard W. Hunter, "Carlisle Indian Industrial School," National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984), Section 8, 1.

⁵²⁷ Stephen Lissandresslo, Cecil McKithen, and Sarah J. Pearce, with updates by Julie Corona, "Haskell Institute," National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986)

⁵²⁸ Lissandrello, et al., "Haskell Institute," Section 8, 3.

⁵²⁹ Chambers, *National Landmarks, America's Treasures*, 387.

term, with most students ultimately having to stay for three to four terms (twelve to sixteen years).⁵³⁰ The earliest students were made to construct the campus.⁵³¹

Photographs from 1890 demonstrate children as young as three or four were forced to attend. With a special emphasis on agricultural training, students raised and sold crops. Students were forbidden from speaking their Native language or practicing their Native religion or culture. The Haskell Cultural Center & Museum described: “There were severe physical and emotional consequences applied to the children for failing to abide by these new rules. They were often subjected to inadequate food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. Later, in the period from 1910-1933, they would have been incarcerated in the Haskell jail, but prior to its construction, fruit storage cellars were used to punish students.”⁵³²

The school was named after Dudley C. Haskell, a politician from Kansas, who served as chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs and was responsible for bringing the school to Lawrence.⁵³³ By 1886, 296 students were enrolled.⁵³⁴ Haskell’s enrollment peaked in 1931 at 1,240 students.

Dr. Henry Roe Cloud, (Wonah'ilayhunka), Ho-Chunk of Winnebago Reservation, was the first Native American Superintendent of Haskell Institute, from 1933-1936.⁵³⁵ He attended the Genoa Indian School, Santee Mission School, and Dwight Moody’s Academy, before graduating from Yale University in 1910.⁵³⁶ According to the Haskell Cultural Center & Museum, Cloud “transformed Haskell’s environment from militaristic assimilation to one of re-organization, and finally to the emergence of an Indigenous voice.”⁵³⁷ This approach transformed the expectations of the school administration and student body. Haskell graduated its final high school class in 1965, becoming Haskell Indian Junior College in 1970. In 1993, Haskell became a university.⁵³⁸

Federal Indian boarding schools created new communities while simultaneously destroying others. As the Haskell NHL documentation summarizes:

The Indians, nonetheless, tended to retain much of their own culture within American society. Then caught between two ways of life they fit into neither. Skills or trades students had learned at boarding schools were not needed on the reservations they had left behind. On the other hand, Haskell Institute graduates generally were not accepted into white society. The exposure to the dominant white culture was beneficial in one regard, however. Many “educated” Indians exposed to this dominant culture recognized

⁵³⁰ Haskell Cultural Center & Museum, “Haskell History,” accessed June 15, 2026, <https://www.haskellhistory.com/history>.

⁵³¹ Haskell Cultural Center & Museum, “Haskell History”.

⁵³² Haskell Cultural Center & Museum, “Haskell History”.

⁵³³ “Haskell History,” Haskell Indian Nations University, accessed April 20, 2026, <https://haskell.edu/about/history/>.

⁵³⁴ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1886*.

⁵³⁵ Harvey Markowitz and Carole A. Barrett, eds., *American Indian Biographies* (Salem Press, 2005).

⁵³⁶ Markowitz and Barrett, *American Indian Biographies*, 97-98.

⁵³⁷ Haskell Cultural Center & Museum, “Haskell History”.

⁵³⁸ Haskell Cultural Center & Museum, “Haskell History”.

the need to join with the Indians outside their own tribes for cultural solidarity in the conservation of distinctive Indian mores and traditions. It would be graduates of the boarding schools who generally took on important responsibilities in associations which promoted multi-tribal or pan-Indian activities taking participants beyond the confines of the reservation; in the early 20th century, examples of such associations would include the Society of American Indians and the Native American Church.⁵³⁹

Pan-Indian activities created community support for Native people living in urban areas. The term “pan-Indian” encompasses a spectrum of experience ranging from “inappropriate homogenization of Indigenous peoples and cultures” as well as “historical intertribal coalitions.”⁵⁴⁰ By this paradoxical definition, the actions of national-level Native rights organizations in the 1930s are pan-Indian activities, as are intertribal powwows. In the context of Indian boarding schools, the homogenization of Native children led to shared experiences creating a new pan-Indian community. When urbanization policies were enacted, these shared intertribal boarding school experiences geographically brought students from different Nations back together again.

1923 – Fort Apache and Theodore Roosevelt School (NHL)

Located in Whiteriver, Arizona, the Fort Apache Historic District, which includes the Theodore Roosevelt Indian Boarding School, was listed in the National Register on October 14, 1976 (NRIS 76000377).⁵⁴¹ Fort Apache and Theodore Roosevelt School NHL was designated on March 2, 2012, under NHL Criterion 1:

As a fort that became a school, Fort Apache/TR [Theodore Roosevelt] School provides an unparalleled site for a nuanced interpretation of the complex processes and dynamics that both shaped the Federal government’s interactions with Native Americans and laid the foundations for the policies, institutions, and attitudes that define and distinguish Indian Country and much of the American West. (...) Among the 14 forts that became schools, Fort Apache/TR School’s significant role in the history of the West marks it as one of the best sites for preserving and illustrating the strong connections between shifting and seemingly diverse Federal policies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ Corona, “Haskell Institute,” Section 8, 1

⁵⁴⁰ Sydney Ann Beckmann, “The Pan-Indian Problem: Relationality Within and Beyond Colonialism” (PhD diss, (University of Arizona, 2024), 5. See also “Overview,” National Urban Indian Family Coalition, accessed April 26, 2026, <https://www.nuifc.org/resurgence-overview>; The Red Road Project, accessed April 26, 2026, <https://redroadproject.com/>.

⁵⁴¹ John M. Treeful, “Fort Apache Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1975).

⁵⁴² John Welch, “Fort Apache and Theodore Roosevelt School,” National Historic Landmark Nomination Form (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2011), 49. For additional information see T.R.S. Warriors, <https://trswarriors.com/>; Arizona Memory Project, “Theodore Roosevelt Indian Boarding School,” accessed April 20, 2026, <https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/248643>; National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive.

The NHL theme study *Soldier and Brave: Historic Places Associated with Indian Affairs and the Indian Wars in the Trans-Mississippi West* provided context for consideration of the 288-acre district's national significance.⁵⁴³

The national period of significance is identified as 1870, with the founding of the Army post, to 1948, with the transition of the Reorganization (1934-1948) to Termination (1948-1970) periods. Theodore Roosevelt School has a complex and layered history, like many Federal Indian boarding schools. It originally served as the Fort Apache military camp from 1872 to 1922. Fort Apache began as a temporary camp established on May 16, 1870, and on July 1, 1879, became a permanent fort. Buildings 1 (officer's quarters), 15 (adjutant's office), and 18 (stone guardhouse) date to the earliest period; all other buildings have been lost to fire or replaced. Three masonry and four frame buildings from the fort era are extant and were assigned new uses upon the 1923 transfer of the property to BIA control. Successive renovations provided electricity, kitchens, and plumbing. Beyond the military campus, the property included stables and a warehouse. The main school buildings create a third distinct architectural group, which the nomination describes as evocative of changes in federal Indian policy. By 1929, the main classroom and administrative buildings lined the parade ground, and a gymnasium complimented the campus architecture.

Theodore Roosevelt Indian boarding school is today a Bureau of Indian Education school with a residential component and sixth through eighth grade curriculum. Since 2007, the White Mountain Apache Tribe and Fort Apache Heritage Foundation steward the fort, school, and archeological sites.

Identifying Federal Indian Boarding School Historic Resources

Written historical records for Federal Indian boarding schools may be limited through loss over time, the selective nature of what authorities recorded and documented, and even, in the case of boarding schools, limited by language. Omissions in official or government reports highlight the critical importance of examining all possible sources of data, including oral histories, archeological investigation, cultural landscape inventory, and personal accounts wherever possible. The nomination of Federal Indian boarding schools can best be informed by the Native communities associated with the particular resource or place. Tribal consultation is essential in understanding the perspectives of former students and descendant communities.

Establishing Nomination Boundaries

All NHLs and National Register listed properties are required to have a boundary specified in the nomination. Period of significance, land ownership, and relationship and association of contributing properties are primary factors when determining NHL or National Register

⁵⁴³ Robert G. Ferris, ed., *Soldier and Brave: Historic Places Associated with Indian Affairs and the Indian Wars in the Trans-Mississippi West*, The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, Vol. XII (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971).

boundaries.⁵⁴⁴ With an archaeological site, one defines the boundaries based on the presence or absence of archeological materials. Tribal communities may consider Indian boarding schools to be sacred sites that have tangible or intangible boundaries that may or may not be included in the nomination boundary. Tribal sovereignty should be acknowledged from the start of any NHL designation involving Tribal resources. If Tribal lands are involved, then Tribal representatives should lead the process. Historic resources may hold different meanings and memories for Tribal members that will need to be acknowledged and treated with sensitivity.

In addition to school campuses, these institutions often had agricultural operations and industrial shops with additional acreage that were sometimes discontiguous. Boarding schools also historically operated outing programs that sent students into towns or agricultural lands for the summers to work. Additionally, during later decades, some schools permitted students to go into town on the weekend. These places were just as much a part of the student experience as dormitories and classroom buildings. However, these indirectly associated resources may be harder to include in an NHL boundary, although experiences at these places can be referenced in the nomination narrative.

Historic Resources and Features

Districts

Buildings, structures, sites, and objects, usually grouped as a district, can help demonstrate how a school developed over time, how different policies or superintendents influenced decisions, and how both government administrators and Native students impacted the built environment or landscape through modification and use. An evaluation of the extant resources can reveal much about the development of and daily life at a Federal Indian boarding school.

Typical building types can include classrooms, dormitories, administration, gymnasiums, hospitals and clinics, vocational shops, staff housing, model cottages, auditoriums, practice halls, craft shops, and support facilities. Classrooms may include any space utilized for academic or trade instruction. Dormitories may include any place used for students to sleep. Administration buildings include administrative and faculty offices and other spaces used primarily by staff. Students were rarely allowed in these spaces, although in some schools, special events were held in these buildings with students serving guests. Gymnasiums, stadiums, tracks, or other sport and recreation facilities should be considered for inclusion. Hospitals or infirmaries may be any structure or building where medical treatment was provided, with or without consent. Infrastructure, both above and below ground, such as steam tunnels or irrigation canals can also be considered.

⁵⁴⁴ For additional information on delineation of nomination boundaries, see: *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations*; J. Timothy Keller and Genevieve P. Keller, *National Register Bulletin: How to Evaluate and Nominate Designed Historic Landscapes* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987); Donna J. Seifert, with Barbara J. Little, Beth L. Savage, and John H. Sprinkle, Jr., *National Register Bulletin: Defining Boundaries for National Register Properties* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995, rev. 1997), available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/publications.htm>.

Landscape Features

A Federal Indian boarding school site or district may be a landscape purposely created by a single designer or multiple designers or one that took shape more informally through changing use or function. Even absent a fully conceived designed landscape, the campus setting may retain character-defining features that contribute integrally as historic components that should be described as part of the overall site.⁵⁴⁵ Character-defining features may include existing topography and grading, circulation system of roads or paths, spatial relationship and orientations, views and vistas, vegetation, dividers such as walls, fences, or hedges, site furnishings, and other features. Discrete component landscapes may include recreational areas, such as sports practice fields, running tracks, or parade grounds. Survivors and alumni of later schools frequently credit recreational areas as critical to their personal development and as a source of pride. Landscape organization and facilities vary greatly. Schools may have originated as military posts or may have had a superintendent particularly interested in architecture and horticulture. Shifts in use may have occurred with school growth.

Core campus complexes may include vegetable gardens, fields for crops or grazing, chicken coops, loafing sheds, or other dairying and livestock facilities. More purely aesthetic features may also be present, such as allées or other mature tree plantings, graveled paths, ornamental beds, planters, flagpoles, signage, fountains or water features, and masonry walls. Vegetation species, whether native or non-native (which may have in turn warranted irrigation systems), should be referenced in a nomination.

Archeological Resources

Archeological resources may exist at every boarding school property. Archeological evidence of previous buildings, structures, student gathering places, and other school activity zones should be considered when possible. Archeological resources are most likely to support Criteria 1 or 5 designation as contributing sites.⁵⁴⁶ A body of research demonstrating nationally significant information potential would be required for NHL designation under Criterion 6. Regardless, the buildings and structures associated with Indian boarding schools may no longer be standing; however, intact archeological deposits can aid in our understanding of a site and may reveal significant information about the Indian boarding school system as a whole or the individual understanding of specific features. For example, the government records of the use of an outbuilding may differ significantly from the cultural materials uncovered around that built resource and provide a very different interpretation of its use.

⁵⁴⁵ National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, “Best Practices Review: Looking at the Landscape,” Issue 14, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/754836>.

⁵⁴⁶ *NHL Bulletin: Guidelines for Preparing National Historic Landmark Nominations*, 47.

Cemeteries and Unmarked Graves

Marked or unmarked burials at Federal Indian boarding schools often exist, as research has demonstrated.⁵⁴⁷ In several cases, multiple unmarked graves, isolated graves, or multiple cemeteries have been located. Areas that should be considered for unmarked graves include hospitals, marked cemeteries, orchards, among other locations. Archival resources may help identify potential locations and should be reviewed with sensitivity.

The known purpose for the establishment of the Federal Indian boarding school system was cultural assimilation, divorcing Indigenous children from familial and cultural ways of life. The DOI investigative report identified “at least 53 different burial sites across the Federal Indian boarding school system and leads to an expectation that there are many more burial sites that will be identified with further research.”⁵⁴⁸ The concern for unmarked burials at each boarding school should be paramount in planning or management that may follow designation Indian boarding schools are both evidence of the government’s attempt to eradicate Indigenous populations, as well as the survival of Indigenous traditions in the face of such severe cruelty. Children died and were buried at these schools, making these sites sacred to communities. Community and descendants should be consulted when locating burials. For any land held by the federal or Tribal government, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) may apply. A forthcoming handbook will provide guidance for repatriation of remains from Federal Indian boarding school properties.

Tribal perspectives should be incorporated into any archeological investigation at former Federal Indian boarding schools. As early as 1927, Tribal members from the Pyramid Lake Reservation requested no archeological investigations at a nearby site viewed by the Tribe as sacred.⁵⁴⁹ They wanted no disturbance, so as not to negatively affect the lifecycle of the site in accordance with the Tribe’s cultural and spiritual beliefs. Likewise, during an archeological investigation at Stewart Indian School, the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California requested excavated archeological materials be returned to the ground.⁵⁵⁰

Oral Histories and Cultural Continuity

Oral histories are primary sources and potentially include first-person accounts of student life at boarding schools. With these perspectives often not documented in federal government records, oral histories gathered by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

⁵⁴⁷ Newland, Vol. I, Appendix B; Newland, Vol. II, Appendix B.

⁵⁴⁸ Newland, Vol. I, 93.

⁵⁴⁹ Elmer R. Rusco, “Formation of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribal Council, 1934-1936,” *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (July 1988): 191-192.

⁵⁵⁰ Sarah E. Cowie and Diane L. Teeman, “Navigating Entanglements and Mitigating Intergenerational Trauma in Two Collaborative Projects: Stewart Indian School and ‘Our Ancestors’ Walk of Sorrow’ Forced Removal Trail,” in *Archaeologies of Indigenous Presence*, edited by Tsim D. Scheider and Lee M. Panich (University Press of Florida, 2022).

(NABS) and others should be reconciled with these official records.⁵⁵¹ Government records should be viewed as but a cross section of what occurred at these Federal Indian boarding schools. They only begin to provide insight into the depth of hidden traumas, such as abuse by authority figures, illness epidemics, removal from family support, lack of availability of traditional medicine, weakened spirits, and adverse student mental health.⁵⁵² Student and cultural resilience in the face of these conditions is a critical part of the story and significance of Federal Indian boarding schools.

It is important and meaningful that any Federal Indian boarding school nomination recognize that boarding schools forced Native children into a European American built environment and cultural behaviors. Native children persisted and resisted in behaviors reflective of their desire for cultural continuity in spite of their removal from family and community. Oral stories, shared through NABS and other Native-led efforts, document the resiliency of students who persevered and continued to speak their Native languages away from school officials, prayed the ways their elders taught them, and created a unique culture that lived between both Native and non-Native worlds.⁵⁵³ Zitkala Ša shared her own stories in periodicals. Cultural anthropologist Morris E. Opler documented examples of this counterculture as presented to him by a Mescalero Apache informant.⁵⁵⁴ The informant shared the ritualistic approach a boy at the boarding school followed of tying towhee feathers to his bed. He went on to describe how the associated beliefs brought a spiritual guide and protector to the boy. These significant actions may or may not have left a tangible mark on the property.

The living community associated with Federal Indian boarding schools includes students and alumni and multiple generations of survivors, their descendants and families, and the broader Tribal communities affected by cultural displacement and erasure. Their experiences are characterized by survivance, resistance, and resilience. The lived experiences elevate these places beyond their tangible cultural resources. The intangible connections can only be identified by the individuals or associated communities that ascribe cultural value or significance to a place. These places may reflect spiritual, cultural, and Tribal traditions that persisted at these sites and remain significant today.

Oral histories are best able to capture manifestations of cultural persistence at these places and provide documentation of the places associated with these intangible cultural practices when seeking federal recognition. The National Register defines Traditional Cultural Place (TCP) as a “building, structure, object, site, or district that may be listed or eligible for listing...for its

⁵⁵¹ Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*; NABS Oral History Project, accessed April 15, 2026, <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/oral-history-project/>.

⁵⁵² Shelton, et al., *Trigger Points*.

⁵⁵³ For examples, see NABS website, including Research Webinars, Oral Histories, and Digital Archives, accessed April 7, 2026, <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/nibsda/>; Stewart Indian School alumni videos, accessed April 7, 2026, <https://stewartindianschool.com/>; and Eve Ball, *Indeh, an Apache Odyssey* (Brigham Young University Press, 1980).

⁵⁵⁴ Morris Edward Opler, with an introduction by Philip J. Greenfield *Apache Odyssey: A Journey between Two Worlds* (Bison Books, 1969, 2002), 126-127, reproduced in Adams, *Education for Extinction*.

significance to a living community because of its association with cultural beliefs, customs, or practices that are rooted in the community's history and that are important in maintaining the community's cultural identity.”⁵⁵⁵ Many properties defined as TCPs are included in the National Register at the local and state levels of significance, with a period of significance that extends into the present. Because of the difficulty of documenting cultural beliefs, customs, or practices for national significance, the NHL Program does not recommend including a TCP argument with a nomination.⁵⁵⁶ If desired by communities supporting an NHL nomination, discussion of intangible cultural meaning can be included within NHL Criterion justifications and the contextual narrative.

Historic Federal Indian boarding school properties may be able to play a unique role in healing efforts. Stewart Indian School, for example, hosts annual reunion powwows, allowing the Stewart community to gather in support and recognition of this history and Tribal heritage. Many schools serve as a place of reverence. Some former school campuses continue to provide education – either through museums and cultural centers or continuing as a school.

Conclusion: Legacy and Healing

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative identified 417 Federal Indian boarding schools, where at least 18,624 children entered, plus an additional 1,025 other institutions, however:

This information is not complete and does not count children who: attending a Federal Indian boarding school outside of 1819-1969, may be listed as an attendee on records not available to the Department including those of religious institutions and organizations, or may be listed as an attendee of an Other Institution including Indian day schools, sanitariums, asylums, orphanages, stand-alone dormitories, and Indian boarding schools operated by religious institutions and organizations that receive no US Government support.⁵⁵⁷

The information collected thus far, to be complimented by the missing records, is central to understanding a more complete picture of the Indian boarding school system in the US.

Federal Indian boarding schools as they operated through the twentieth century were markedly different from the common conception of what schools entail. As such, it is inappropriate to evaluate extant properties simply as schools. Indeed, they mainly functioned as institutions designed to cast the minds and hearts of Native children into a different, non-Native place, divorced from individual Tribal cultures, languages, traditions, and world views, with a goal towards assimilation into the dominant culture. As findings summarized in the second volume of the DOI report:

⁵⁵⁵ *National Register Bulletin: Identifying, Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Places*, 7.

⁵⁵⁶ The updated NHL documentation for Medicine Mountain NHL in Wyoming describes it as a TCP. This 2011 update to a 1970 designation is currently the only such NHL example.

⁵⁵⁷ Newland, Vol. II, 92.

[Federal Indian boarding schools often] deployed militarized and identity-alteration methods to assimilate American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people – primarily children – through education. The Federal Indian boarding school system predominately used the manual labor of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children to compensate for the poor conditions of school facilities and lack of financial support from the US Government. The Federal Indian boarding school system discouraged or prevented the use of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian languages or cultural or religious practices through punishment, including corporal punishment.⁵⁵⁸

Ongoing efforts led by Tribal communities to understand, document, and reclaim these places are essential for recognizing and addressing the enduring negative impacts of federal policies on Indigenous peoples. Organizations like the Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) are focusing attention on healing efforts as well as archival research and meaningful community engagement. At the heart of healing is acknowledging the full story. Each survivor and alumni had unique individual experiences that stayed with them for the rest of their lives. Even a sampling of more recent survivors and alumni from the 1950s share memories of vastly different experiences. Those identifying as alumni share stories of pride and moments of joy at the school, such as band performances out of town or football state championships; while those identifying as survivors share stories of horror – having their hair cut, their clothes taken, being marched into scalding hot showers, dowsed with DDT, assaults, abuse, and neglect.⁵⁵⁹ While some stories may be difficult to share or hear, oral histories and first-person narratives enrich preservation efforts, and serve as primary sources centering significance. Indeed, some well-known Native American advocates were forced into these boarding schools.

Stories of resistance, resilience, and retaliation demonstrate the strength of the cultural traditions that Indian boarding schools actively sought to silence and destroy. Efforts to reclaim and strengthen language, religion, prayer, food ways, and lifeways are founded in the knowledge of, understanding of, and healing from these shared histories. Efforts to revitalize language, grow ancient crops from preserved seeds, recenter traditional food sources, and celebrate individual traditions can be seen from each of the 575 Nations. The purpose, intent, and short- and long-term effects of the Federal Indian boarding school system are actively being studied from many angles, although much may never be fully known. Ultimately, education was used as both a weapon and a tool. Children were forcibly removed from family and community by the federal government, and many did not return home. Cemeteries built on or adjacent to campuses speak to shocking levels of child mortality in these schools. The act of burying Native students far from their homes was a final, enduring act of forced assimilation. Designation of historic properties

⁵⁵⁸ Newland, Vol. II, 93.

⁵⁵⁹ Stewart Indian School alumni videos, accessed April 7, 2026, <https://stewartindianschool.com/>; Leonard Peltier, “Exclusive: Leonard Peltier Shares His Indian Boarding School Story,” *Native News Online*, June 1, 2022, <https://nativenewsonline.net/sovereignty/exclusive-leonard-peltier-shares-his-indian-boarding-school-story/>.

associated with this history promotes greater understanding of the national significance of the legacy of federal policies and their continued impacts on Native communities today.

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