Article Author: Rubenstein, Bruce

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To Destroy a Culture: Indian Education in Michigan, 1855-1900

BY BRUCE RUBENSTEIN

American education in the nineteenth century was, to a great extent, an extension of principles set forth by clergymen in their sermons. Development of character through moral training was considered the primary object of teachers; academic and practical skills were deemed less important in a society in which vocational training was acquired by serving an apprenticeship. Since denominational groups were active in the operation of school systems throughout the country, and in missionary work among "red savages," Interior Department officials thought it a logical extension of church activities to entrust them with the educational, as well as religious, training of the Indians. The goal of the government was to assimilate Indians into white society, but to accomplish this the "heathens" had to be painstakingly tutored in the values of a culture based on a belief in one God, the inherent good of manual labor, and obedience, and personal accumulation of material wealth, all of which were alien to the Indians' way of life. The task was formidable, but missionary societies accepted it with zeal.

In all missionary activities insistence upon superficial conformity to white standards was demanded. All children upon enrollment were given Christian names, almost always biblical; this enabled the teacher to eliminate the necessity of struggling with difficult Indian names, as well as to undermine parental control at the most elementary level, e.g. naming their offspring. Children were bathed and given clothing furnished by missionary societies in a further effort to give them at least the appearance of being civilized. This visible transformation was essential as mission teachers considered training impossible.

Bruce A. Rubenstein is an assistant professor at the University of Michigan—Flint.
until the children had ceased to be "savage," one missionary related, "our first work is to unlearn, and of all lessons that of unlearning is the hardest."

The first members of an Indian band urged to attend the new schools were the mixed-bloods who had previous contact with white society and were less hostile toward it. They were requested to impress upon the leaders of their bands the benefits afforded by accepting the white man's education; if persuasion failed, missionaries urged them to overthrow recalcitrant chiefs and headmen. Leaflets were distributed for publication in local newspapers, purportedly expressing the sentiments of entire bands, explaining how the Indians wished to "become men of knowledge and education." Typical of such appeals was that made by forty-two half-blood Ottawas and Chippewas of Michigan in 1855:

We must educate! We must educate! or will sink into the vortex of desolation! In order to reap the greatest advantage in connection with the propagation of the true religion and true enlightenment, we must educate and become acquainted with the arts and sciences, language, manners, and customs of the white man. We hope there is a day coming when we shall be truly enlightened and truly educated like the white people.  

Such propagandizing proved successful and great numbers of mission schools were established; few children were not within five miles of a mission teacher.

Missionary societies furnished their governmental patron glowing reports of their abilities to convert heathens toward acceptance of white culture. Peter Dougherty, a Presbyterian minister who labored thirty three years among the Ottawa and Chippewa of Grand Traverse region, reported that his boarding school at Grove Hill taught Indian boys and girls reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and grammar, and that the

2. "An appeal to the Citizens of the United States by the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan," November 22, 1855, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs From the Mackinac Agency, Record Group 75, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 405 (hereafter referred to as N.A.).
students were capable of drawing accurate maps and doing mathematical problems in fractions. Frederic Baraga, Bishop of Upper Michigan and superintendent of the Catholic Indian schools at Sault Ste. Marie, stated in 1855 that the Catholic Church operated two schools at the Sault and one each at Mackinac, St. Ignace, Cross Village, Little Traverse, Cheboygan, and Eagle-town, with a total enrollment of 419 children. Subjects taught included spelling, reading, English composition, sewing, knitting, and trimming clothes with porcupine quills. The Baptist missionary at the Sault, Abel Bingham, who had been in charge of the mission since its opening in 1828, maintained a boarding school housing but seven students in 1855. Bingham, aided by his wife, taught arithmetic, geography, English grammar, history, composition, and "sacred" vocal and instrumental music.  

Despite optimistic reports of increased enrollment and steady progress received by the Indian Department, by mid-century the Department was becoming dissatisfied with the operation of the Indian education system. Since mission schools were funded by the government with money for maintenance and supplies being given directly to missionary boards for distribution, the Indian Department considered that it alone had the prerogative to dictate the manner in which funds were utilized; missionary societies, however, disagreed. To the government, education was a tool of assimilation, whose main function was to undermine the beliefs of Indian children in their native culture. This, it was thought, could best be achieved in stages, beginning with abolition of the Indian language. Mission teachers viewed the role of education more in the spiritual sense of spreading the Word of God. Reverend Mr. Dougherty described his view of the requirements of a mission teacher thus:

While we aim, by means of study and labor, to develop and strengthen the Indians' intellectual and physical powers, we feel the right improvement of the moral powers is all important to their becoming good members of society and useful citizens of the State. We,

Born to an aristocratic Slovakian family, Frederic Baraga came to Michigan in 1835. Here, he labored for many years and was consecrated Bishop of Upper Michigan in 1853—a position that he held until his death in 1868. Also an educator, he was superintendent of the Catholic Indian schools at Sault Ste. Marie and made a dictionary which helped translate Indian languages texts and Bibles into the native dialect.

therefore, carefully teach them the truths of the benign religion of the Saviour, and it is to be hoped the youth who go forth from the institution will be qualified to advance in the path of civilization and improvement.

To accomplish their goals missionaries were willing to use in their teaching Indian language texts and bibles translated into native dialect by Bishop Baraga. Governmental protests could not deter mission teachers from spreading the gospel in all possible fashions. Moreover, missionaries could not understand the government's insistence on eliminating Indian language in the schools since Article Four, Section Two of the Treaty of Washington (1836) promised the Ottawa and Chippewa tribe in Michigan five thousand dollars annually for twenty years "for the purposes of education, teachers, school houses, and books in their own language." Section Three of the

4. Ibid., 355-356. Agent Andrew M. Fitch, in a letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs James W. Denver January 28, 1859, explained that "it has always been the policy of this office to discourage the teaching of the Indian language in the schools under its charge and to have taught in them the English language altogether." N.A. Roll 406.
same article provided for an additional $3,000.00 to pay missionaries to operate the schools. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs, however, ignored all protests based on these treaty provisions, and, in 1853, informed the churches that at the expiration of the treaty their control over Indian education would cease.

The Indian Department was further strengthened in its determination to remove education from the direct control of missionary boards by reports received from agents and Indians who attended mission schools. Agent Henry C. Gilbert, in his annual report of 1855, expressed his reasons for requesting that education monies be distributed through his office rather than by the churches:

None of these funds have ever been disbursed through the medium of the agency and the agents, and consequently the government has never taken much interest in, or bestowed much attention on, educational matters. The Indians are never informed how their money is expended, and they will now be very slow to believe that all the money due them from the United States under this head has ever been appro-


By the mid-1850s, the Indian Department was becoming dissatisfied with the operation of the Indian education system, as operated by the missionaries. In his annual report of 1855, agent Henry C. Gilbert argued for tighter government control of Indian schools. Declaring that the "Indians are never informed how their money is expended," he advocated that tight control be maintained to ensure that funds be judiciously expended.
priated. I have myself but very recently been informed as to the disposition of this fund, and regret to say that, in my judgment, much of it has been very injudiciously expended. One school has received, for twenty years, from $1,600.00 to $1,800.00 per annum, at a point and under circumstances where $600.00 would have been a liberal allowance. Another school has been sustained by an appropriation of $1,300.00 per annum when $400.00, judiciously expended, would have secured more beneficial results. The Indians have now been so far civilized that they will no longer acquiesce in any such policy, and I earnestly recommend that it may not be continued. If there is one fund more sacred than another, it is that provided for the education of the children, and good faith towards the Indians requires that the government should know, from the personal examination and official transactions of its agents, that every dollar is legitimately and judiciously expended.¹

Indians echoed the agent’s sentiment, complaining that their educational fund had been “carried on under blind-dealing already too long,” and that no one cared enough about their welfare to tell them, as the 1836 treaty stipulated, how the funds were to be expended. Their primary complaint, however, was that educational funds given bishops and clergy in the Roman Catholic Church were used to educate white children, not Indians. The Ottawa and Chippewa claimed that “not one Indian youth had been educated as it had been reported” in the missionaries’ annual statements. It was impossible, they said, for Indians to be instructed in English, mathematics, grammar, and spelling at mission schools because teachers were either European-born Catholic priests who spoke only broken English, or Indians, catechised in their native tongue, who could “neither read nor speak a word of English.” For the Catholic Church to claim it taught porcupine quill decoration, they asserted, was “perfectly absurd and ridiculous,” as Indians had been doing such trimming for centuries. Only the few Indians who were allowed to attend white schools

received an adequate education. The Ottawa and Chippewa were so incensed that they invited the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to visit Michigan to see if he could discover any truth in the school reports; in fact, they challenged him to find a single Indian who attended a mission school who could even spell "baker." To remedy this situation they requested the government to cease direct payments to churches and to permit either the Indians or the agent to hire teachers and administer the schools.\(^7\)

Armed with this evidence, the Indian Department, in negotiating the Treaty of Detroit (1855) with the Ottawa and Chippewa tribe, removed educational training from the auspices of mission societies and transferred it to the agent, who was free to recommend rehiring of missionaries as teachers provided that they agreed to abide by governmental requirements. Article Two, Section One of this treaty stated that the United States would provide eighty thousand dollars in ten equal annual installments for the employment of teachers and the management of schools; it further promised that Indians would be "consulted" in educational matters and that "their views and wishes" would be adopted "so far as they might be just and reasonable."\(^8\) Missionaries were outraged, citing possible injury to Indian youth, but government officials and Indians were open in expressing their mutual satisfaction with the new arrangements.

Upon receiving direct control of Indian education in 1857, the Mackinac Agency closed all church-operated boarding schools in Michigan. In their place were established day schools, which were to be open weekdays 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. with instruction in reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic. Until 1885, with the reopening of the privately funded Catholic Otchipewa Boarding School in Schoolcraft County in the Upper Peninsula, all Indian schools were day schools, financed entirely by the federal government, with teachers appointed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs upon recommendation.

7. Andrew J. Blackbird et al., to George W. Manyenny, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 22, 1855, N.A. Roll 405. Catholic priests in Michigan during the nineteenth century were almost entirely foreign-born; in 1870 seventy-four of the state's seventy-eight Catholic priests were European. Everett Clapsy, *The Potawatomi Indians of Southwestern Michigan* (Dowagiac: n.p., 1966), 20.

of the agent. Since the Mackinac agents were chosen upon recommendation of the Methodist Mission Board during these years, Catholic control over the education of Indian youth, which previously had been extensive, was reduced to near extinction. Seven years after the implementation of this new system only four schools, with 187 pupils, remained under the influence of Catholic teachers.

Indian day schools generally were stark, cheerless buildings. Standard dimensions of the single story frame schoolhouses were 30' x 20' with a 30' x 24' lean-to adjoining to serve as the teacher's residence. Some, such as those at Little Traverse and Saginaw, were constructed well "from hewed and squared logs, clapboarded over on the outside, and lathed and painted inside," but most were shoddily built at the lowest possible cost. As many of the schools were located on the shores of Lakes Michigan and Superior, strong winds, mixed with rain and snow, caused the buildings to deteriorate quickly. Constant repair of shingles, window glass, and plaster was required to afford teachers and pupils even the most rudimentary comforts.

Inside the one-room school house were rows of wooden tables and benches to accommodate as many as fifty students. Walls were bare except for a flag and possibly one or two patriotic pictures. Despite agents' pleas for maps, alphabet and spelling charts, and similar visual learning aids, the Indian Bureau, citing "fiscal distress," steadfastly refused to furnish them. Not until 1879 did the Department provide seventy-two dollars for the purchase of globes for each of the eight remaining schools in Michigan. A stove provided heat for the building, but nothing was furnished to augment natural light on gloomy overcast days.9

9. Henry C. Gilbert to George W. Manypenny, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 14, 1856, N.A. Roll 405; James W. Long to Ely S. Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 3, 1871, N.A. Roll 409; George W. Lee to Rowland E. Trowbridge, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 1, 1880, N.A. Roll 415.

10. James W. Long to Ely S. Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 3, 1871, N.A. Roll 409; George W. Lee to Ezra A. Hayt, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 4, 1878, N.A. Roll 413; Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior, to Ezra A. Hayt, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 11, 1879, N.A. Roll 414. Agent Lee described the condition of the Middle Village schoolhouse in 1877 thus: The
Because Michigan's Indians were peaceful, semi-civilized, and apparently desirous of obtaining an education to prepare themselves for self-sufficiency in the white man's world, Indian Department officials chose the Mackinac Agency as a testing ground for the day school program. Accordingly, Michigan received a disproportionate share of school facilities; in 1863, of the forty-eight day schools supported by the federal government throughout the country thirty were in the Mackinac Agency. 11

Schools were situated as near as possible to each Indian village and reservation. The Chippewa of Lake Superior had access to two schools at L'Anse, one Methodist and the other Catholic, located on the east and west shores respectively of L'Anse Bay. In 1863 the Ottawa and Chippewa tribe received the services of twenty schools situated in Onamweceneeville, Eagletown, Grove Hill, Pine River, Bear River, Little Traverse, Middle Village, Cross Village, Cheboygan, Iroquois Point, Sugar Island, Garden Island, and Isabella, Mason, and Oceana counties. With the expiration of treaty financial support and the increased availability of public education many of these Indian schools closed; by 1889 only those at Middle Village and Iroquois Point remained open, but their attendance was only half that of 1863. Six schools, built at Saganing, Naubetung, Nepissing, Longwood, Bradley Station, and the Isabella Reservation, were open for the Chippewa of Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River. Neither the small Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi tribe nor the equally tiny tribe of Potawatomi of Huron ever received federal education facilities as they were not provided for in any treaty.

Teacher quality in the day schools was surprisingly high. In an effort to afford the new system every possible advantage, the government, in uncharacteristic fashion, opened its purse-strings and authorized payment of lucrative salaries to instructors. In Michigan the annual salary for all teachers, male and

plaster was almost entirely off, the chimney was in a dangerous condition, the foundation, which was wooden blocks, twenty years old, was rotted away, making it altogether unsuitable for school purposes in this rigorous climate. (N.A. Roll 412).

female, in the Indian Service during the period 1860-1889 was four hundred dollars. Teachers working for the public schools, in the same vicinity as Indian schools, received much lower stipends; in 1878 average yearly income for male teachers was $254.00, while females received only $164.00. During the early 1880s in the city of Saginaw, a wealthy lumbering community, male instructors were paid seven dollars per week and females four dollars. Consequently, many teachers, especially women, chose to leave public schools and work for the government, even though it meant personal hardship; often the teacher was the sole white in an Indian village fifteen or twenty miles from the nearest settlement. Job competition was fierce. Applicants would request appointment a year or more in advance, accompanying their letters with recommendations solicited from congressmen and senators. Thus, Indian agents in Michigan had the pleasant task of selecting from a long list of prospects, nearly all of whom had experience, were highly qualified, and were certified by the State Board of Public Instruction. An agent boasted in his quarterly report that one of his teachers had taught in Grand Rapids, another in the best schools in populous Lenawee County, and another had had "years of experience in teaching and the best of testimonials." Following the Civil War the Mackinac Agency operated the finest Indian education system in the country: quality of instruction was so superior to that of the public schools that many white parents chose to send their children to Indian schools.


13. George W. Lee to John Q. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 10, 1877, N.A. Roll 412; George W. Lee to Rowland E. Trowbridge, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 1, 1880, N.A. Roll 415. Sixty-three per cent of all teachers hired by the Mackinac Agency during the period 1855-1889 were women.

The Indian Department was willing to expend large sums for teachers because it believed, as did the agents, that money spent for educational instruction was of more benefit in attaining the ultimate goal of assimilation than that spent for any other purpose. As one agent explained, "early education of the Indian is the greatest factor in his ultimate and complete civilization and usefulness." Indian Department officials believed that day schools were the initial step in indoctrinating Indian children to accept civilization. Ideally the system would work in simple stages: first, children would return home from school and report their newly acquired knowledge to interested parents who would grow increasingly enthusiastic in their support of white education; next, enlightened parents would urge their children to attend boarding schools to obtain more sophisticated skills; and finally, parents, to keep pace with their offspring, would attend night schools taught either by whites or educated Indians. Thus, successful assimilation depended upon successful day schools.

Since the Mackinac Agency was the field laboratory for the day school system its Indians received unique benefits from costly experimental programs. In the Grand Traverse region a federally financed lunch program was instituted in the early 1880s, a local Methodist mission being contracted to provide Indian students "a generous lunch every day at noon." This proved to be a notable success as it eliminated absenteeism previously caused by the failure of pupils to return for afternoon classes following the lunch hour; it also provided an incentive for attendance, especially during the winter when Indians were in a constant state of near-starvation. Another innovation designed to increase attendance was the promise of Christmas trees for each school, with presents of "books and other suitable toys" for the pupils. One agent reported that the "hope of participating" in school Christmas parties always yielded "large returns" as it created increased "interest and attendance" among the children. An early experiment was the

provision of free pens, paper, and texts to all Indian school children. In the opinion of Indian Department officials, this program was not a complete success for Indians later demanded, and received, the continuance of free supplies, in addition to tuition, as a condition of their children attending public schools. As Chief James Nauk-cheke-mu wrote Agent George W. Lee:

> There is school money for children we know. We want you to get money from the President to give our children. Whenever we ask you this way, we want you do just as we say to you.

A final trial program was free transportation for children living too far away to walk to school. This was discontinued after one year for day schools, but remained available to students wishing to attend any of the three federally supported boarding schools in Michigan.

The number of pupils varied, enrollment ranging from 1,068 pupils in 1863 to 149 when the agency closed in 1889. Approximately forty-five per cent of Indian students attending school did so regularly, which compares favorably with the forty-four per cent regular attendance reported for white children in public schools. Agents, however, complained that attendance was "too irregular." Children came and went as they pleased, and parents withdrew them from school during planting, trapping, harvesting, and berry-picking seasons. To the success-

18. Many of the supplies furnished were religious, as evidenced by the order request sent by the teacher of the Shaw-shaw-na-beee day school, George S. Wilcox, to agent Richard M. Smith, September 8, 1871: I would respectfully ask that you send us books as follows: 12 New Testaments, 12 Sunday School Singing Books, a quantity of cards, each one having a passage of scripture printed thereon, such as are used in all our Sabbath schools (N.A. Roll 410). Also, Indians had precedent for demanding tuition payment for attending white schools since local Indian Department officials from the days of Lewis Cass had paid for the education of qualified Indian children, usually the eldest son of a chief.


oriented agent such occurrences were obstacles to progress, but as one put it, they seemed "to a great extent irremediable."22

Indian behavior patterns led most observers to conclude that they were apathetic or hostile to educational benefits. Even agent Richard M. Smith, a zealous believer in the Indians' potential to become civilized, sensed a lack of enthusiasm among them:

From my own observations I have reason to believe that some progress is still being made in the education of their children, but it is slow, and by no means what it ought to be, the principal difficulty being with the Indians themselves in not sending more of their children to school.23

A school inspector viewed Michigan's Indian schools as "almost an entire failure" because of absenteeism, and considered their continuation "a most absurd and profligate waste of their [Indians'] money." He believed that day schools would always fail because children returned each evening to their savage environment; to remedy this he proposed suspending all day schools and placing the students in boarding schools throughout the country.24 One citizen of Sault Ste. Marie used a comparative approach to condemn Indians by stating his belief that Indians were inferior to Negroes in their desire to become educated and civilized.25

Indians, however, did not consider themselves apathetic or hostile. They desired to become educated, especially in the skills of reading and arithmetic, and expressed gratitude to the government for furnishing schools. They attempted to explain how Indian parents doted upon their children and indulged their wants; thus, if a child wished to stay home from school, it would be unthinkable to refuse the request. Conversely, if the child wanted to attend, no obstacle was too great for the parents to overcome. One woman carried on her

25. A.H.P. to Editor, Detroit Daily Post, February 3, 1872.
shoulders her ten year old son, who had broken both legs in an accident during summer vacation, to the school at Bear

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Note: All missing tabulations represent data which was not submitted by the agent.

Source: The tabulation is based on teachers' monthly reports and is not absolutely accurate as to the precise numbers of children attending school; it does, however, indicate trends in Indian education. The drastic reduction of schools in 1868 resulted from expiration of the 1855 treaty provisions for education. Data for 1874 represents the number of Indian school buildings, but only eight were open. The increase in 1884 indicates an attempt to establish night schools for adults; the failure of this plan is reflected by the lower number of schools reported in 1887. This data shows that approximately twenty per cent of school-age children attended day schools; this does not reflect the literacy rate of the Indian population, however, as children often taught their parents and other relatives how to read and write.
River, nearly three-quarters of a mile from their home, because he expressed a desire not to miss classes.\footnote{26}

Indian children were often conscientious students who appeared voluntarily to receive instruction. Agent James W. Long, never a sympathetic friend of the Indians, noted after visiting an Indian school on the Isabella Reservation:

I was really surprised at their advancement; their writing, I can truthfully say, cannot be excelled by any little boys of their age in the village [Mount Pleasant] school. Not that I wish to say that the scholars in our school here have not had the proper training, but I think those little fellows take hold of this branch of study with more zeal and interest.\footnote{27}

Absences were great in Indian schools during agricultural seasons because the children helped the family plant and harvest crops, just as white children did. Public school records do not show high absenteeism during these seasons only because the schools did not open until at least mid-October and closed in early March. The three to six month school year in the public system was in sharp contrast to the early September through June calendar of Indian schools.

To the Indians of Michigan education was a tool of survival. They had to be able to read and understand deeds, abstracts, and newspaper advertisements to avoid having their land stolen; understanding and speaking English was essential to obtain employment in the white world; and knowing arithmetic was necessary to prevent being defrauded in everyday business transactions. Seldom, if ever, did a day school in Michigan close without vigorous protests from the band it had served. Often schools were reopened or new ones, built by Indians, were instituted. Unfortunately, to a government which neither attempted, nor wanted, to understand Indian culture such protests reflected an increased Indian desire to become assimilated; Indians had seen the error of their ways and were begging for another opportunity to learn white culture. In real-


\footnote{27} Isabella County Enterprise, April 28, 1875.
ity, Indians only wished to learn enough to survive in the culture, not to become part of it. For example, by 1880 nearly all adults and children were bilingual, yet in their homes only the Indian tongue was spoken. More than once dishonest merchants discovered too late that the Indian who entered their stores and pointed to the merchandise he wanted was capable of reading and speaking English and of doing simple arithmetic; feigned ignorance was the best way for Indians to discover who their friends were.

After nearly three decades of costly experimentation Indian Department officials concluded that day schools were a failure because Indians were still only semi-civilized; Indians thought them a perfect success, however, and were much distressed when the government closed many day schools and urged Indian youth to attend public schools. Government officials hoped that forced “mingling of the children would facilitate their education” and instill in the minds of the Indians the absolute necessity for becoming assimilated into white society. But Indian children were timid in the presence of so many white children who ridiculed their appearance and taunted them with the epithets “savage” and “Injun Joe.” Indian parents resented the ridicule, and soon discovered that the only thing their children learned at the school was profanity, taught them by white children. Consequently, many parents with-


30. George W. Lee to John Q. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 5, 1876, N.A. Roll 411.

31. George W. Lee to Ezra A. Hayt, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 11, 1877, N.A. Roll 412; Sagatoo, Thirty-three Years
drew their children in hopes of forcing a reopening of all day schools. Some Indians even established private schools for their children; as one woman explained, "white man have school, so can Indian."83

Alarmed by a possible reversion "to a condition as bad, if not worse, than the Indians' primitive barbarism," the Indian Department determined to establish new schools for the Indians in Michigan.84 No longer would they be day schools, however; manual labor boarding schools, long considered by educators as the best means for training Indians, were to be instituted in the Mackinac Agency.

Among the Indians, 99; Andrew J. Blackbird, History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan (Ypsilanti: Ypsilanti Job Printing House, 1887), 25. Special Agent Edwin J. Brooks wrote Commissioner Hayt on January 12, 1878 that while Indian children in Michigan "have access to the public schools, the feeling is such as not to lead them to patronize the same," and that often public school teachers "repelled" Indian children from their schools. (N.A. Roll 419).

Mark Stevens, a Flint Democrat, was an advocate of the belief that manual labor boarding schools would be the best means for training Michigan's Indians. Following his appointment as Indian agent in 1885, he began a flow of correspondence to officials in Washington expressing concern over the number of Indian children "growing up in ignorance." To him and to others of his ilk, boarding schools seemed the only solution.
Manual labor schools had been recommended for Michigan as early as 1822 by Lewis Cass, but it was not until 1887 that agent Mark W. Stevens, a Flint Democrat, could persuade the Indian Department to establish them within his agency. Following his appointment in 1885, Stevens began an immediate flow of correspondence to officials in Washington expressing concern over the number of Indian children “growing up in ignorance” because they were either unable or unwilling to attend public schools. More day schools were not feasible as a solution since the children were sparsely scattered throughout the state. Boarding schools seemed the only answer. In his annual reports for 1887 and 1888 Stevens claimed that he had “conferred with many of the Indians with reference to an industrial and training school, and with one accord, they all think favorably of it;” he concluded, “I have no doubt [that such a school] would be cheerfully attended by two or three hundred children.” Commissioner of Indian Affairs John H. Oberly, a former Superintendent of Government Indian Schools

concered with Stevens and authorized federal sponsorship, by contract, of boarding schools in Michigan in his 1887 annual report.

Three boarding schools were ultimately established. The Catholic Otsippewa Boarding School was made a government contract school in 1888 to serve primarily the L'Anse and Vieux Desert bands of Chippewa of Lake Superior. Under this contract the government agreed to pay tuition and all other expenses incurred by Indian children attending the private boarding school. The Otsippewa school was open the entire year, and in 1888 had a capacity to sixty students, but an enrollment of only twenty-four; it employed two white persons as teachers, and received $1,232.47 or nine dollars per Indian child per month, from the government. By 1891 the capacity had risen to one hundred, enrollment to forty-eight, twenty whites were employed as staff personnel, and the government paid $4,536.00 or $8.40 per capita; the Catholic Church contributed more than the government, however, paying $5,164.00 or $9.56 per child. In 1889 a contract was signed with a private school in Harbor Springs to train as many as 125 Ottawa and Chippewa children. This school received a flat rate of $8,100.00 until 1891 when a re-negotiated agreement established per capita financing. Enrollment was exceptionally good, reaching 122 in 1891. A staff of ten persons, all white, ran the institution.

The most impressive school was located at Mount Pleasant in Isabella County. It was owned and operated by the federal government and was the only non-contract boarding school in Michigan. Opening in 1888 with a capacity of one hundred and an enrollment of fifty-nine, the school expanded rapidly, tripling its capacity and boosting attendance to 230 at the turn of the century. The Mount Pleasant school was nearly a self-contained modern city, having its own laundry, shops, hospital, power plants, and farms; by 1900 every building was fully electrified and nearly all buildings had indoor plumbing.35

The most impressive of manual boarding schools for Indians in Michigan was at Mount Pleasant. Owned and operated by the federal government, it was nearly a self-contained modern city, where Indian children were taught the white man’s ways.

The purpose of manual labor, or industrial, schools was to teach Indian youths “how to read and write, how to think, how to live, and how to work.”36 Andrew Spencer, superintendent of the Mount Pleasant school in 1894, when asked to justify the need for his institution when public education was available to Indian children, replied:

In most cases the poverty of the parent prevents the child from having suitable or sufficient clothing for attending school. A large majority of them would have to be shut out on account of want of cleanliness if they should apply for admission to the public schools.

Even if it were possible to secure their attendance at the public schools, the literary training which they would receive there is not the education that they most need. It is more important that we develop cleanly

tracted with public schools in Isabella and Lapeer Counties to educate no more than fifty Indian children in those school systems; by 1900 eighteen per cent (forty-five of two hundred forty-six) of all Indian children in contract schools were in Michigan. Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1900 (Washington: G.P.O., 1900), 21.

habits, a desire for neat appearance in person and in home, a taste for better and more wholesome food, than that we give them literary training, even in so important branches as the three R's. The boys need to learn better methods of agriculture, how to care for stock, how to handle the now indispensable farm machinery, and the care and use of the more common tools. The girls must learn better methods of cooking, how to make and repair their clothing, neatness in their housework, and simple means of making their homes attractive. The young need to be brought to a true appreciation of the universally accepted principles of morality, to be made more trustworthy and reliable, more faithful to promises, more obedient to law. These are things that can be inculcated only by constant oversight and restraint. They cannot be learned with constant influences of Indian life about them. They need a restraining hand and a higher example. Too much of the anarchy and license of the camp yet clings to the life of their isolated huts. They must be kept, as far as possible, from acquiring those traits of Indian character which have given these people their unenviable reputation among their neighbors. The work of educating them, then, must be left to the boarding schools.87

Most Indian parents disagreed with the need for such schools, realizing that they were more interested in cultural destruction than education. Yet, faced with no alternative means of learning basic academic skills needed for self-preservation, they grudgingly sent their children to the new schools.

Upon arrival children were bathed and the boys given short haircuts; the latter was a source of humiliation to proud youths who had been told by their parents that long hair was a mark of masculinity. Boys were given blue denim trousers, one flannel shirt, shoes and socks for daily wear, and a tan "Buster Brown" suit and cap for dress occasions. Girls received one good maroon dress and one grey cotton work dress, similar to a prison uniform, shoes, and black stockings; such garb made identification of escapees easy. If the children appeared sloppy

and dishevelled severe discipline was used; one teacher explained, "the rod is not spared and the child is not spoiled; the plan is to reward the good Indians and thrash the bad ones until they can see the beauty of goodness."  

Strict discipline was foreign to Indian children whose home training had been based upon respect and example, rather than parental authority or physical force; thus, to find themselves in a situation where matrons slapped and choked them merely for peeling potatoes improperly was terrifying. The daily regimen of rising at 5 A.M., eating at six, working for five hours, eating lunch, and going to classes for three hours quickly discouraged the carefree children, and many tried to run away. Soon homesickness became a common ailment; many lonely children cried themselves to sleep, only to be warned by matrons that they must forget about their homes.

Indian children could not comprehend the need for marching everywhere they went in formations of twos and threes. They felt totally confined in buildings with heavy screens sealing the windows and boundary lines marking restricted areas even on the playground. Few Indians who attended Michigan's manual labor schools would have disagreed with Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan, who in 1891 described the work and operation of these schools as similar to that of the State Reform School in Lansing, the New York Juvenile Asylum, the Gatesburg, Texas, House of Correction, and the Jamesburg, New Jersey, Reform School for Juvenile Delinquents.

Possibly the major weakness of these schools was that they were based on a faulty premise. Manual labor was undesirable and unattractive to Indian children who had seen their parents fish, hunt, and plant small gardens only for subsistence. Physical labor, in the white man's sense of the term, was considered

38. Interview with Mrs. Louella King Bailey, March 7, 1973. Mrs. Bailey, an Ottawa, her two sisters and a brother all attended the Mount Pleasant Industrial School (hereafter referred to as "Bailey Interview"); Miller and Seeley, Faces and Places Familiar; Finity, "Our Indian Schools," 574.
39. "Bailey Interview."
40. Ibid.; Miller and Seeley, Faces and Places Familiar.
by most Indians as something to be avoided unless necessitated by dire economic straits. Aversion to labor which was not deemed necessary for survival resulted partly from apathy and partly from past experiences in which Indian laborers were cheated by white employers. For example, Indian stevedores unloaded tons of raw ore from barges for the Leland Iron Company in 1870 at a wage of twenty-five cents per day, and Indian lumberjacks received only half the pay of their white counterparts.\textsuperscript{42} Knowing this, Indian boys saw little use in learning engineering, carpentry, forging, or metal work, as they believed the training would not help them financially in white society; selling berries, moccasins, and bows seemed a much more lucrative prospect. Girls, likewise, felt a sense of uselessness in learning sewing, laundering, clay modelling, and paper folding. In short, industrial schools offered little which Indians considered important. Children attended, not to learn a vocational skill but rather to acquire, from the only source available to them, basic academic training.

Both agents and Indians considered education important and both felt that the governmental system had failed to provide adequate instruction, but they interpreted the failure differently. The government wished to remake Indians into "red-white men" through education. It cajoled, threatened, and even begged Indians to become disciplined in the ways of white society, yet Indian children attending the schools never seemed to progress beyond a level of semi-civilization. Consequently, agents concluded that their Indians were untrainable and lazy, and that "nothing with work connected to it would be countenanced or supported" by them.\textsuperscript{43}

Indians, on the other hand, viewed the system as a failure because it considered neither their desires in education nor goals for life in white society. They sought education to supplement, not supplant, their culture. Unlike their white educators, Indians did not believe that health, appearance, religion, and culture were essential aspects of academic training. Even day schools, which were consistently supported by Indians

\textsuperscript{42} Edmund M. Littell, \textit{One Hundred Years in Leelanau: A History of Leelanau County, Michigan} (Leland: The Print Shop, 1965), 38; George B. Engberg, "Who Were the Lumberjacks?" \textit{Michigan History}, (September, 1948), 245.

\textsuperscript{43} James W. Long to Ely S. Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 3, 1871, N.A. Roll 409.
because the curriculum stressed fundamental academic skills, fell into disfavor whenever they attempted to advance into moral or cultural areas. The Indians of Michigan did not wish to be remodelled in the image of the white man; they wanted merely to broaden their opportunities for success, as Indians, in a white culture. All attempts, therefore, to destroy Indian language and social customs met with firm resistance. Indians were willing to alter their material, not social, culture. Since neither the government nor the Indians would submit to, or compromise with, the other's position, Indian education in Michigan was stalemated into a cultural struggle in which there could be no victor.