

# *Indian Education and Bureaucracy*

## The School at Morris

---

1887-1909

---



*THE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL run by the sisters of the Sacred Heart Mission at Morris, shown here in the late 1880s*

FIFTEEN buildings sat empty on a wind-swept knoll in western Minnesota during the winter of 1910. Freshly planted trees and shrubs as well as the new brick facades on the two most substantial buildings gave the grounds an air of expectancy rather than abandonment. Yet both moods were appropriate. These buildings and the associated 292 acres of campus on the eastern edge of Morris in Stevens County were soon to become the University of Minnesota's West Central School of Agriculture and Experimental Station, a new venture in ag-

ricultural education. During the preceding two decades, they had served a different enterprise.

These buildings — the earliest dated back to the fall of 1887 — had been constructed as the Morris Indian School. It did not last long. After 22 years, the federal government abandoned the school and the policies that created it, suggesting the stillbirth of a comprehensive national system of Indian education. In its score of years, however, the Morris Indian School reflected dramatic shifts in federal Indian policy and the role of education in that policy. Moreover, in the history of this school, one can see, writ small, implications of the emergence of the modern nation-state.

The dreams of Mother Mary Joseph Lynch and her companions in the Convent of Mercy at Morris gave birth to the first Indian school in Morris. Born in Ireland in 1826, Mother Joseph had joined the Sisters of Mercy at the age of 20. She had served with Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War and in 1860 came to America, where she established an industrial school in Brooklyn, New York, and taught in it for 15 years. She then led missions to Michigan and to Minnesota. Independence and determination marked her path. As T. S. Ansley, an inspector for the Department of Interior, observed: "Mother Joseph is a genuine specimen of an Old Country farm woman: a worker, a manager and a close calculator; one who works hard herself and expects everyone around her to do likewise."<sup>1</sup>

The Sisters of Mercy traveled to Morris in 1886 at the invitation of the local parish priest, Father Francis Watry. He wanted them to staff a parochial school, but they came because the Morris location brought them closer to the Indian children with whom they wished to work. The examples of the Benedictines at Collegeville and St. Joseph, the Franciscans at Clontarf, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet at Graceville encouraged them to try blending education for white and Indian children. For the Sisters of Mercy, genteel education of prosperous young ladies never had the attraction that mission work for "benighted" Indian children held. Mother Joseph envisioned an industrial training school for Indian girls from 12 to 16 years of age. "More can be done for them at that age," she told the commissioner of Indian affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Her plan coincided with a dramatic shift in federal Indian policy. Even as the costly conquest of the tribes of the Great Plains moved ahead, Indian policy reformers grew influential. These self-styled "Friends of

<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to the graduate school and the Morris campus of the University of Minnesota for grant support and to the staffs of Record Group 75, National Archives, at Marquette University, and at the Rodney Briggs Library, Morris.

Ansley to Commissioner of Indian Affairs (CIA), March 17, 1892, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), letters received, National Archives Record Group (NARG) 75, copy in the Morris Indian School Records, 1884-1909, West Central Minnesota History Center (WCMHC), Morris. This collection of duplicates of NARG 75 documents relating to the school will hereinafter be cited as MISR. Information about Mother Mary Joseph Lynch comes from the author's correspondence with the late Sister Cecilia M. Barry, R.S.M., historical researcher for the Sisters of Mercy, Omaha, Nebr., and from Mother Joseph's communications with the Office of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C., and with the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM), whose archives are in the Marquette University Archives, Milwaukee, Wis., hereinafter cited as ABCIM. See especially Mother Joseph to Father Joseph A. Stephan, March 19, July 9, 1896, and Mother Joseph to the Reverend E. H. Fitzgerald, November 25, 1896, both in ABCIM.

<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire, Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary Church, Morris, in James A. Reardon Papers, Catholic Historical Society, St. Paul; *Morris Tribune*, March 5, 1885, September 19, 1947; Sue Irvin, "The Sisters of Mercy and Sectarian Indian Education," 3, unpublished manuscript, 1973, WCMHC; Mother Joseph to CIA, July [?], 1884, letters received, NARG 75; Sisters of Mercy to Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan, August 21, 1890, MISR; Mother Joseph to Father Stephan, March 24, 1887, ABCIM. The work of schools at Collegeville, St. Joseph, Clontarf, and Graceville, all in Minnesota, is reported in annual reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs (ARCIA) for this era.

*Mr. Ahern, who received his doctorate from Northwestern University, is professor of history and director of the West Central Minnesota Historical Center at the University of Minnesota-Morris. This study of the Morris Indian School parallels his work in progress on northern reformers, racial minorities, and the school.*



MOTHER Mary Joseph Lynch in the Convent of Mercy garden in Brooklyn, before her move to Morris

the Indian" advocated assimilation into American culture. The General Allotment Act of 1887 dramatically highlighted the move to destroy tribal relations, but the faith of the reformers in education had the most significant implications for the Office of Indian Affairs. Education had long received lip service from federal policymakers, and most treaties had committed the government to provide schools to the tribes. Beginning with the "peace policy" of President Ulysses S. Grant, however, the school evolved as the linchpin of Indian policy. By 1886 attendance in the Indian schools had more than tripled, and appropriations devoted for them were almost 50 times greater, growing from \$37,597.31 in 1873 to \$1,788,967.10 in 1886 (in constant 1873 dollars).<sup>3</sup>

THE DISPARITY between enrollment and appropriations underscored the difficulty of creating a federal system of education within little more than a decade. Not only the magnitude of the task but prevailing definitions of the role of government mandated that non-governmental agencies, mainly the churches, play an essential role in the first stages of the expansion of Indian education. In 1887 the various religious denominations still managed 35 percent of the Indian boarding schools through contracts with the federal government. The Roman Catholic church educated more Indian students than any other denomination and was responsible for all federally sponsored Indian schools in Minnesota.<sup>4</sup>

At Christmastime 1886, the Reverend Joseph A. Stephan, director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM), gave Mother Joseph some good news. She had received a contract for 12 students from the Sisseton and Rosebud agencies. With "a thousand thanks," Mother Joseph revealed a grander scheme. She immediately requested permission to expand en-

rollment to 50 and began plans to build an Indian school on the edge of Morris.<sup>5</sup>

Although her first trip to South Dakota in April, 1887, recruited only three young children, she enrolled 12 within a few months. South Dakota, however, was not the best source for students. The reservations at Pine Ridge and Rosebud were too far removed. Despite being located at Lake Traverse, only 60 miles west of Morris, the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux showed little enthusiasm for sending their children away from home. Both their growing disillusionment with the United States failure to recognize its obligations to them and their lengthy experience with missionary schools encouraged them to keep the schools for their children close to home. In this they had the support of their Indian agent who wished to fill the government school on the reservation. Moreover, those who wanted a Roman Catholic education found the school at Graceville more attractive since it was only half as far away as Morris.<sup>6</sup>

By 1889, however, Mother Joseph discovered an interested community in the Turtle Mountain Ojibway of north-central North Dakota. The longtime presence of French traders among the Pembina Ojibway had resulted in their almost universal conversion to Roman Catholicism. In addition, extraordinary poverty had struck these people by the late 1880s. Many of them were métis who had moved to the region following the failure of the second Riel rebellion of 1885 in Manitoba.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman, Okla., 1976) offers the most recent and comprehensive treatment of this stage of American Indian policy and the influence of the "Friends of the Indian." See also his valuable collection of primary sources, *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian," 1880-1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973). Wilbert H. Ahern, "Assimilationist Racism: The Case of the 'Friends of the Indian,'" in *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 4:23-32 (Summer, 1976), examines the central role of education in this phase. Paul Stuart, *The Indian Office*, 127 (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1978).

<sup>4</sup> ARCIA, 50 Congress, 1 session, 1887-88, *House Executive Documents*, vol. 2, p. 13-17, 758, 799 (serial 2542). Francis Paul Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1979), especially chapters 1-3, provides the most complete and balanced analysis of the role of the churches in Indian education and the controversies that arose from this.

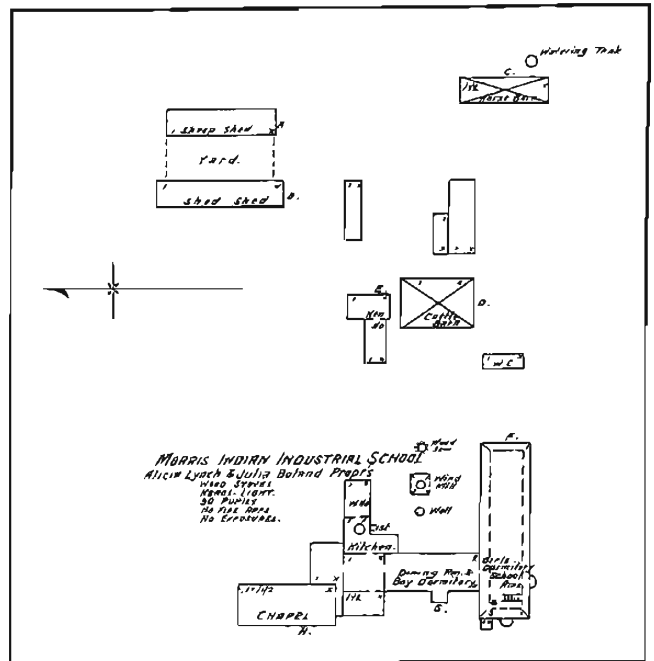
<sup>5</sup> Stephan to Mother Superior, Morris, December 22, 1886, and Mother Joseph to Stephan, December 27, 1886, both in ABCIM.

<sup>6</sup> Stephan to Mother Superior, Morris, December 22, 1886, July 11, 1887, Mother Joseph to Stephan, April 12, August 24, October 1, 1887, March 12, May 19, June 21, 28, September 19, 1888, Mother Joseph to Charles Lusk, September 8, 1888, all in ABCIM; Mother Joseph to Thomas J. Morgan, CIA, January 6, 1892, MISR; Roy W. Meyer, *History of the Santee Sioux: United States Indian Policy on Trial, 198-219* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1967).

This population growth came on the heels of a drastic reduction in the geographic boundaries of the reservation occasioned by an arbitrary federal action in 1882. Thus the prospect of sending children and orphans to a place where they would receive room and board as well as acceptable religious instruction must have been attractive to many of the parents and guardians.<sup>7</sup>

In any case, Turtle Mountain students became the mainstay of the school. They arrived in greater numbers than the government was willing to subsidize, stayed for the full terms, and even re-enrolled. To be sure, the sisters' paternalism alienated some of the parents and led to some complaints that they were keeping the children too long. Yet, relative to the subsequent history of the school, complaints were few. No record remains of disciplinary problems or runaways, two common signs of student resistance to the schools. Perhaps this was because Mother Joseph emphasized persuasion rather than coercion and allowed no corporal punishment of the students. The material conditions also were attractive. The food was above standard, with at least one meal per day including meat. By 1893 the dormitories were well-ventilated, and each child had his or her own bed, wash basin, soap, and towels. The sisters had invested all their energy and resources into their program.<sup>8</sup>

The school had grown rapidly in five years and now offered a three-year course of study with a staff of 15. The 85 children spent half of their day in the classroom and the other half at work learning "industries." The boys worked in the fields and with the livestock under



PLAN of Morris Indian School under Mother Joseph's administration, 1892

the supervision of a hired farmer. The girls were trained in cooking, laundry, sewing machine work, making clothes for the boys and themselves, knitting, crocheting, spinning, and weaving. The sisters had acquired 220 acres which were in cultivation, and they rented 160 acres for hay. A new three-story dormitory and classroom building costing \$9,000 was added to bring the capacity of the school to 150 students. Of the \$13,110.80 operating budget, the federal subsidy provided \$8,772.55 at the rate of \$27 per student per quarter. The remainder of the income came from the proceeds of the farm and donations. By 1895 the staff included 24 sisters and a man hired to supervise the Indian boys. The student body of 103 was 13 more than the contract allowed, making it the largest contract Indian school in Minnesota. The students, primarily girls, were older than in other schools. Mother Joseph took pride in their work; samples of their stitchery appeared in the Atlanta Exposition of 1895.<sup>9</sup>

Visiting the school later in that year, James McLaughlin, a special agent for the Secretary of Interior and an experienced member of the Indian service, praised it and the work of the sisters. He concluded: "Everything pertaining to the school and its educational work is wisely and economically conducted with no extravagant notions inculcated, while the pupils manifest a cheerfulness and application in their classroom work and other duties in the respective departments that is remarkable." He went on to recommend that the courses of study be extended from three to five years.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Mother Joseph to Lusk, September 8, 1888, to G. L. Willard, February 26, 1889, both in ABCIM. For more on the federal actions in 1882, see David P. Delorme, "History of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians," in *North Dakota History*, 22:121-134 (July, 1955).

<sup>8</sup> Of the 101 students present in March, 1892, the average length of stay at the school was two and one-third years; in June, 1896, 16 of the students sent home had been in attendance in March, 1892. See Morris Indian School statement of attendance, March 31, 1892, and Mother Joseph to Daniel M. Browning, CIA, July 13, 1896, both in MISR. For Turtle Mountain community tensions over duration of students' terms and other matters, see Mother Joseph to Morgan, July 21, 1892, to CIA, July 6, 1893, May 1, 1894, February 16, 1896, to William N. Hailmann, January 28, 1895, all in MISR; James A. Cooper to CIA, April 16, June 26, 1890, Ansley to CIA, March 17, 1892, Mother Joseph to Downing [Browning], late April, 1893, James McLaughlin to Secretary of the Interior, November 25, 1895, all in MISR; Mother Joseph to Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, [May, 1893], in ABCIM.

<sup>9</sup> Morris Indian School annual report, July, 1892, Mother Joseph to Hailmann, January 28, 1895, to CIA, April 5, 1895, Browning to Mother Joseph, August 21, 1895, all in MISR; ARCIA, 53 Congress, 3 session, 1894-95, *House Executive Documents*, 501 (serial 3306).

<sup>10</sup> McLaughlin to Secretary of the Interior, November 25, 1895, MISR.

WITHIN A YEAR the school was closed. While this action stands in sharp contrast to the tone of the reports from Mother Joseph or Agent McLaughlin, the progress of the school had not been smooth. McLaughlin's visit there had even been occasioned by complaints. In fact, the statistics of its growth obscured several problems with which the staff constantly struggled. The final closing reflected but one of the problems — a change in the direction of federal policy toward contract schools.

To blame the end of Mother Joseph's dream on Protestant nativism, as some did, is too simple. To be sure, Protestant-Catholic tensions had long complicated American policy toward Indian peoples, but now at work were new forces unleashed by the emergence of a more interdependent, national society. Most relevant to the story of the Morris Indian School, this era inspired some to look toward a more comprehensive, integrated system of schooling, confident that it could incorporate diverse peoples into one nation. If nativism had been the basic determinant of Indian policy, the Morris school should have disappeared in 1889 when Thomas Jefferson Morgan became commissioner of Indian affairs. A Baptist minister and educator whose confirmation as commissioner was fought by the BCIM from fear of his anti-Catholicism, Morgan actually awarded the Sisters of Mercy their largest contracts at Morris. His advocacy of education as the basis for Indian policy overrode his qualms about some sectarian schools.<sup>11</sup>

Morgan came into the office with faith that a comprehensive system of schooling for Indians, as for the nation's children as a whole, was the key to civilization and progress. He unveiled his plan at the annual fall meeting of the Lake Mohonk, New York, Conference of the Friends of the Indian. The central component of his system was the grammar school, a boarding school where the greatest number of children would be from 10 to 15 years old. They would be taught the meaning of citizenship, the importance of work, diligence, and thrift, and the value of Christian civilization, as well as the academic studies "ordinarily pursued in similar white schools." As he described the location and plant of such institutions, the appropriateness of the Morris school became apparent: "The schools should be located in the midst of a farming community, remote from reservations, and in the vicinity of railroads and some thriving village or city. The students would thus be free from the great downpull of the camp, and be able to mingle with the civilized people that surround them, and to participate in their civilization. . . . The plant required for a grammar school should include suitable dormitories, school buildings, and shops, and a farm with all needed appointments."<sup>12</sup>

The only way in which the Sisters of Mercy school did not fit was in its sectarian nature. Morgan declared, as one of his general principles, that the "system should



THOMAS JEFFERSON MORGAN

be conformed, so far as practicable, to the common-school system now universally adopted in all the States. It should be non-partisan, *non-sectarian*." Yet the phrase, "so far as practicable," was important. He would need an annual appropriation of \$3,102,500 to maintain the operation of such a program for the 36,000 school-age Indian children. On top of that would come the cost of construction and maintenance. The 1889 appropriation for Indian education, however, which was higher than ever before and an increase of 14 percent over the previous year, stood only at \$1,348,015.

TO ABANDON CONTRACTS with the sectarian schools in the face of those budgetary realities would have meant not simply a standstill but a drastic reduction because of the loss of school buildings and inexpensive faculty. Rather than cancel contracts with such schools, therefore, Morgan expanded them. For the short run, at least, he was more interested in bringing schools to more children than in assuring their nonsectarian, let alone their non-Roman Catholic, nature.

<sup>11</sup> Even Prucha's balanced treatment of the struggle between Morgan and the BCIM in his *Churches and the Indian Schools* fails to predict an increase in contracts while Morgan was commissioner. For a discussion of the emergence of an interdependent national society, see Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> Here and below, Thomas J. Morgan, "Supplemental Report on Indian Education," in Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indians*, 221-238, quotations from 231, 230, 234, 224 (emphasis added to "nonsectarian").

Thus the Morris Indian school blossomed during the early 1890s.<sup>13</sup>

By 1895, however, the contract system was eroding. In that fiscal year, Congress began reducing the appropriations that could go to sectarian schools. These cut-backs accompanied a depression-born reduction in the over-all appropriations that aggravated the loss to these institutions.<sup>14</sup>

Mother Joseph and her Sisters absorbed successive reductions of 10 and then 15 students in 1894 and 1895, respectively. The 1895 retrenchment placed their school in a precarious financial position. They had built and struggled to maintain a plant with a capacity for 150 students. Twenty-five sisters now taught there. The limits to the income from the farm, even in a good year, and from the subsidies for only 65 students would push them deeper into debt. Yet Mother Joseph was committed to continuing. Special Agent McLaughlin's inspection of the school in November, 1895, gave her hope. Not only did he call for an expansion of the course of study, but he recommended that it be one of the last contract schools to have its contracts reduced. Instead, the Office of Indian Affairs canceled all contracts with the school as of July 1, 1896.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> From 1889 to 1892 the budget allotment for Roman Catholic contract schools increased by 13.5 percent from \$347,672 to \$394,756. While this was less than the over-all increase for contract schools of 15.4 percent, the Catholic share of the 1892 budget was 64.5 percent. ARCIA, 53 Congress, 2 session, 1893-94, *House Executive Documents*, 19 (serial 3210).

<sup>14</sup> Harry J. Sievers, "The Catholic Indian School Issue and the Presidential Election of 1892," in *Catholic Historical Review*, 38:129-155 (July, 1952); ARCIA, 54 Congress, 1 session, 1895-96, *House Documents*, 10 (serial 3382); *Reports for the Department of the Interior for 1912*, 214 (serial 6409); Frederick E. Hoxie, "The End of the Savage: Indian Policy in the United States Senate, 1880-1900," in *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 55:157-190, especially 173, 175-179 (Summer, 1977), suggests that Democratic disinterest in Indian education was more important than their affinity to the contract school issue. While his conclusion that the 1890s saw a basic shift in Indian policy is important, the contradiction between the Democratic opposition to federal programs and the elimination of the nonfederal component of Indian education under the Cleveland administration needs more explanation.

<sup>15</sup> CIA to Mother Joseph, August 10, 1894, July 2, 1896. Mother Joseph to Hailmann, June 19, 1895, all in MISR; McLaughlin to Secretary of the Interior, 1896, in ABCIM.

<sup>16</sup> ARCIA, 54 Congress, 2 session, 1896-97, *House Documents*, no. 13, p. 14, 15-17 (serial 3489); Fitzgerald to Mother Joseph, July 8, 1896, ABCIM.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in Howe, ed., *Victorian America*, 3-28 (Philadelphia, 1976), and Prucha, *American Indian Policy*, chapter 5, support the interpretation in this paragraph. The analysis of congressional motivation has received too little attention.

<sup>18</sup> Ansley to CIA, March 17, 1892, MISR.

This action reflected no dissatisfaction with features peculiar to the Morris school or its staff. In 1896 Congress declared it "to be the settled policy of the Government to hereafter make no appropriation whatever for education in any sectarian school." Some mission schools located on reservations where no government schools existed were allowed to continue, albeit with a reduced subsidy. No Catholic nonreservation boarding schools received further contracts. The commissioner of Indian affairs tersely explained the policy shift. When government nonreservation schools were available, sectarian institutions required federal dollars for travel expenses as well as subsidies. To eliminate them saved the most money.<sup>16</sup>

Unstated, however, was the larger rationale behind congressional action that could be traced back to the sentiments articulated by Morgan and other "Friends of the Indian." Fearful of "a distended society," these reformers became more insistent on the separation of church and state. The force behind this action was more than anti-Catholicism. The government must give no aid to forces for diversity such as sectarian schools. The schools must, instead, be a force for homogenizing a population frightening to Victorian Americans in its heterogeneity.<sup>17</sup>

Another expression of this trend was the call for expertise. As government schools took the place of mission schools, professionally trained teachers were to replace missionaries and clerics. Inspector Ansley's criticism of a sister at the Morris school for having a brogue so thick as to be incomprehensible was neither simply anti-Catholic nor picayune. It represented a concern that foreign-born teachers, unless demonstrably assimilated in terms of language and education, could not inculcate American civilization. The struggle for including the staff of Indian schools under civil service regulations reflected an effort to have a trained American corps of teachers.<sup>18</sup>

By 1896, then, a public system of Indian education emerged that had no place for the Sisters of Mercy. Yet to portray the bureaucratization as a smooth evolution would obscure some important dimensions of the Morris Indian School and of the transformation of Indian education. Sectarian opposition in Congress, as well as procedural inefficiencies within the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), obstructed both the implementation of a rational system and the work of the Sisters of Mercy.

The difficulties appeared most clearly in finances. Partisan wrangles in Congress slowed down the schedule of budget increases called for by the advocates of an educational system. The actual payments of subsidies twice created a severe problem. In 1890 disagreement over the general appropriation bill caused the subsidies to be late. The payment for the July-September, 1890,

term did not arrive until February 16, 1891, a delay that could not have come at a worse time for the Morris school. A hailstorm the previous summer destroyed most of its crop, and a severe winter both added to expenses and prevented the sisters from visiting parishes to make collections on behalf of the schools. On top of this, the addition of a \$9,000 building had expanded their debt. By early February Mother Joseph feared that the sisters and the school would succumb to their creditors. A short-term loan of \$500 from the BCIM and understanding creditors allowed the school to survive. Yet the sisters' record of indebtedness, coupled with the tightening of credit in 1893, made them even less prepared to weather the delay in contracts that occurred in that year. Only a good harvest allowed them to survive.<sup>19</sup>

These delays in subsidy payments were unusual and reflected moments of exceptional parsimony on the part of Congress. A more consistent sign of federal penny-pinching came in travel expenses. The government was supposed to reimburse the school for the cost of travel incurred in bringing and returning students from home to school. Receiving reimbursements was a constant problem for Mother Joseph. Until she received money in advance, she delayed in sending students home. This angered Indian parents and students but was apparently fully acceptable to the OIA. Indeed, the delay in these reimbursements was compatible with the federal office's effort to keep children separated from their homes. The correspondence suggests, however, that, especially during the mid-1890s, austerity rather than policy was the paramount factor. For the long run, the bitterness of parents and students was probably a more important consequence than the frustration experienced by Mother Joseph and the BCIM.<sup>20</sup>

The fledgling bureaucrats stumbled also in student enrollment. The Office of Indian Affairs attempted to distribute educational resources more efficiently by specifying the reservations from which the schools could secure students. But how exactly to assign the reservations? To the government, geographic proximity and community need, as measured by expressions of interest by Indians or their agents, were decisive factors. When Commissioner Morgan further rationalized the system, he added the new ingredient of level of educational achievement. To contract schools interest was more important than proximity. A related factor, of course, was the influence of the particular religious denomination on the reservation. As a recitation of these factors should suggest, the designation of eligible recruitment areas was crucial to the survival of the schools. The contracts, after all, provided subsidies only for those students actually enrolled.

For Mother Joseph, a struggle to achieve access to favorable communities began with the first contract in

1887 and continued until 1896. While it would seem that both the government and the schools would be interested in continuity in contracts, practice did not reflect this. For whatever reasons, the Office of Indian Affairs made several changes in contracts over the years. Mother Joseph sought to counteract this disruption by clinging to a clause that allowed students already enrolled to continue. The composition of the student body in 1896, when the school was closed, testified to the success of her approach. Although all contracts after 1891 disallowed recruitment of students from Turtle Mountain, almost all of the students sent home in 1896 were from the North Dakota reservation.<sup>21</sup>

A RECITAL of the difficulties the Sisters of Mercy encountered gives force to Mother Joseph's claim that her group was engaged in Indian education because of love and a sense of mission. To fill the gap between federal subsidies and the cost of educating the students, the sisters exhausted not only their energy but their capital. Thus, the frustrations that came from working with a federal agency struggling to rationalize itself were not enough to cause Mother Joseph to welcome the termination of her ties to the OIA.

The cancellation of the contracts for the Morris school shocked Mother Joseph. Upon receipt of the notice of termination from the OIA, she wrote to Father Stephan at the Catholic bureau, "What to do we do not know. We have expended over \$25,000 and have a lovely place. We have no school but this and will have nothing to do now. . . I feel wretched to have to send away seventy-three children . . . I hope our Lord will keep me in *my mind* for I never before had such a disappointment."<sup>22</sup>

The shift in federal policy had indeed left Mother Joseph with few alternatives. Without any source of revenue, these autonomous Sisters of Mercy could not

---

<sup>19</sup> Stephan to Superintendents, Catholic Indian Schools, August 4, 1890, St. Paul Industrial School Records, Catholic Historical Society; Mother Joseph to Stephan, December 1, 1890, February 4, 26, 28, 1891, December 5, 1893, all in ABCIM; Mother Joseph to Frank C. Armstrong, December 7, 1893, MISR.

<sup>20</sup> Mother Joseph to Stephan, June 21, 1888, February 19, 1890, to Lusk, December 28, 1888, to Bishop M. Marty, December 31, 1891, all in ABCIM; Mother Joseph to CIA, August 24, September 9, 1892, August 20, 1894, CIA to Mother Joseph, September 17, 1892, John H. Waugh to CIA, July 16, 1892 (with enclosures), all in MISR.

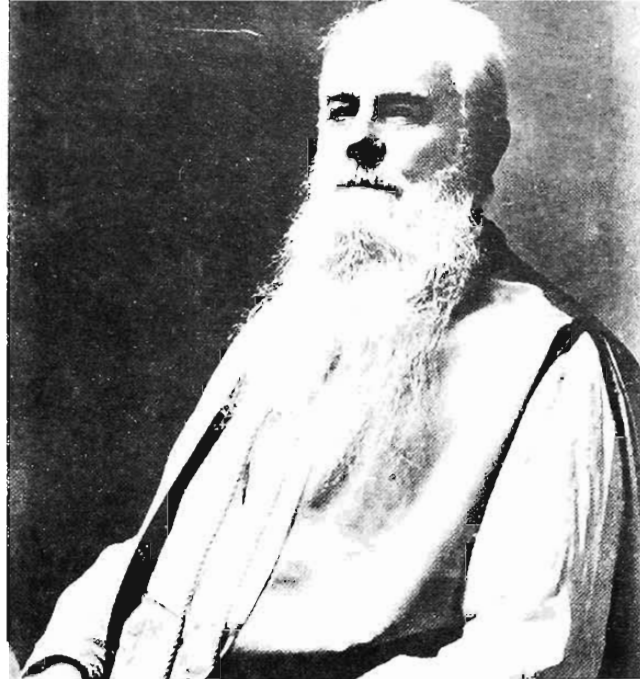
<sup>21</sup> George L. Willard to Mother Joseph, February 19, 26, March 12, November 20, 1889, Mother Joseph to Willard, April 6, 1889, Stephan to Morgan, February 13, 1891, all in ABCIM; Acting CIA to director, BCIM, Washington, D. C., November 29, 1890, Morgan to Mother Joseph, October 26, 1891, Mother Joseph to Browning, July 12, 1896, all in MISR.

<sup>22</sup> Mother Joseph to Stephan, July 6, 1896, ABCIM.

continue their work in Indian education. While her religion disqualified her from affiliation with a national system, Mother Joseph's parochialism in regard to the church reduced the aid from that quarter. She did not work well with either the area bishop or the BCIM. Both her independent spirit and her Irishness in a predominantly German archdiocese had led the vicariate to provide neither financial nor moral support from early on in her work. Her disinclination to bow her will or to cede the deed for the school to the BCIM sapped the enthusiasm with which its director would fight on her behalf. The bureau would not provide the revenues to allow the school to continue.<sup>23</sup>

The bureau staff did assist Mother Joseph in achieving her only alternative, the sale of the school to the federal government. Sectarian schools, despite a steady decline following Morgan's move toward a wholly federal system, still had a significant enrollment. The 10 whose contracts were terminated had enrolled more than 600 students in the previous year. With encouragement from the BCIM, the federal Indian Office decided to buy five nonreservation mission schools and continue their work. The Morris school was the only one of the five located in Minnesota.<sup>24</sup>

THE TRANSITION from contract to government school was an uneasy one because of the congressional decision to implement immediately what had begun as a gradual revision in policy. Launching of the government school required completion of the sale and staffing of a program. Three elements complicated the sale. First, the Sisters of Mercy and the government began with



FATHER Joseph A. Stephan, director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions

very different estimates of the value of the property — \$30,000 and \$15,000, respectively. Not surprisingly, the government's estimate prevailed. The only potential customer was the OIA. At the urging of the BCIM, Mother Joseph finally accepted the government offer. A second complicating element was the confusion in titles to Mother Joseph's property because of outstanding mortgages. Her inclination "to make debts" meant that the proceeds of the sale at the government's price went almost entirely to her creditors. Finally, the state legislature had to authorize the sale of land within its boundaries to the federal government.<sup>25</sup>

Upon deciding to buy the school in mid-November, Daniel M. Browning, the recently appointed commissioner of Indian affairs, first met the staffing question by offering the superintendency to Mother Joseph. Pleased that his lobbying had discovered a way to continue a Roman Catholic presence in Indian education, Father E. H. Fitzgerald of the BCIM urged Mother Joseph to accept. Yet his satisfaction was shortlived. By mid-December, Commissioner Browning had instead offered the position to William H. Johnson, then superintendent of a reservation boarding school at the Quapaw Agency, Missouri. Apparently the OIA had intended to hire the Sisters of Mercy only as a transition faculty. In evaluating the school's potential as a federal school, Inspector William Moss had recommended against keeping the sisters as staff. "They have failed in judgment, business management, and are not educators, but nurses," he wrote.<sup>26</sup>

That evaluation might have reflected a bias against the sisters in particular and Catholics in general. Moss had earned the suspicion of the BCIM, but the terms in which he made his criticism were significant. They were

<sup>23</sup> Mother Joseph to Stephan, May 8, June 28, 1888, February 19, 1890, Stephan to Mother Joseph, March 29, 1890, to Edward Morrell, February 25, 1891, all in ABCIM: *Catholic Directory*, 1887, p. 355.

<sup>24</sup> Mother Joseph to Stephan, June 1, July 6, 1896, to Fitzgerald, July 11, 1896, all in ABCIM; ARCIA, 1895, serial 3382, p. 10-12, 1896, serial 3489, p. 14-16; 55 Congress, 2 session, 1897-98, *House Executive Documents*, vol. 13, p. 7 (serial 3641).

<sup>25</sup> Mother Joseph to Browning, June 1, 1896, MISR: Lusk to Archbishop John Ireland, September 18, 1896, Fitzgerald to Mother Joseph, July 11, October 18, November 12, 1896, Mother Joseph to Fitzgerald, October 21, 1896, and correspondence between Fitzgerald and Mother Joseph during the first six months of 1897 documenting the complications in the sales, all in ABCIM. Lusk of the BCIM was finally able to announce the completion of the sale in a letter to Mother Joseph, June 15, 1897, ABCIM.

<sup>26</sup> Mother Joseph to Stephan, July 6, 1896, to Fitzgerald, August 4, November 21, December 1, 1896, Fitzgerald to Mother Joseph, November 21, 1896, assistant director, BCIM, to Browning, CIA, December 8, 1896, all in ABCIM; Mother Joseph to Browning, June 1, 1896, Browning to William H. Johnson, December 17, 1896, William Moss to CIA, August 15, 1896, all in MISR.



not “educators.” Where Congress was concerned about the separation of church and state, the Indian Office wanted a professional staff. Operating essentially in the tradition of Morgan, Superintendent of Indian Schools William N. Hailmann believed that a professional education, preferably normal school training, was a prerequisite for a school superintendent. This observation is not to deny that nativism was at work in this time of transition but rather to point out the harmony between the movement toward a trained staff and the removal of the “foreign” sectarian influence. Despite 50 years of experience, Mother Joseph was not an educator!<sup>27</sup>

Mother Joseph and seven of the sisters remained in Morris during that bleak winter. Their discovery, first made in the columns of a St. Paul newspaper, that someone else had been hired to superintend the federal school set the tone for the season. The absence of income or any local credit left them close to starvation. Finally Superintendent Johnson’s arrival at the end of January brought lease payments for the school. Over the next month he negotiated the purchase from the sisters of the supplies and equipment useful for the school. In the spring the sisters left for Oregon to assume new missions of mercy. Philanthropy gave way to professionalism at Morris.<sup>28</sup>

JOHNSON BEGAN his new duties with enthusiasm. Although the transition involved some unpleasant surprises — no students were present, buildings and grounds had deteriorated, and he had to phase out the nearby St. Paul’s Indian School at Clontarf — he had good reasons for optimism. It was a new era. The acting commissioner of Indian affairs endorsed Johnson’s plans to improve the industrial education component at Morris and promised an appropriation for remodeling and the construction of new buildings.<sup>29</sup>

The Morris civic leaders followed the transition with enthusiasm and gave support where they could. Perhaps because of her “inclination to make debts,” but also because of the opposition of the parish priest, Mother Joseph had found little encouragement in the local community. In contrast, the local newspaper interviewed Johnson upon his arrival and continued with optimistic reports about the progress of the new school. Morris was coming out of the economic depression, and Main Street boosterism was on the rise. The community looked to the federal government’s purchase of the school as a further guarantee for economic recovery. By the end of the summer Morris boosters had persuaded Senator Knute Nelson and Congressman Frank Eddy to visit the school, to meet with Johnson and local leaders, and, most important, to advocate appropriations for building renovation. Not only did the community receive Johnson and his plans well, but, he reported, they made the students generally welcome.<sup>30</sup>

By the beginning of 1898 the new era seemed well under way. Johnson’s concern about finding students was realistic, but 95 Chippewa from White Earth Agency were enrolled. The pending absorption of the Clontarf school into the Morris campus would increase the number of students while eliminating a nearby competitor. Johnson’s argument that the merger would save \$3,020 per annum without consideration of remodeling costs at Clontarf had persuaded the Indian Office to abandon that site. Meanwhile, remodeling of the buildings had begun and a full staff was assembling.<sup>31</sup>

The most obvious changes that occurred with the emergence of the federal stage of Indian education reflected increased resources. The physical plant developed rapidly. Soon after his arrival Johnson recommended the major renovation of two buildings, the construction of a new dormitory, a classroom building, a bathhouse, an independent water system, and the installation of steam heat and electricity. By 1905 these recommendations had been met. The brick buildings were augmented by a superintendent’s residence, a separate laundry, and a barn. Early on the school purchased 160 acres of arable land close to the campus to allow the scope of agriculture that had been intended in the original purchase. Inspector John Charles described a modern and prosperous school in 1904.<sup>32</sup>

The increase in average size of staff from 13 to 16 was a less significant change than dramatic differences in personnel background, tenure, and definition of duties. The 14 individuals recruited for the first year of opera-

---

<sup>27</sup> Lusk to Stephan, July 31, 1896, ABCIM, reveals the suspicion of Moss. Hailmann had fought for the inclusion of the Indian education staff under the civil service rules. For this and his concern for formal training as a requirement for teachers and superintendents, see his monograph, ARCIA, 1896, serial 3489, p. 347, and his *Education of the Indian*, 6–8, 14–16 (Albany, N.Y., 1900). The continuation of federal subsidies for Hampton and Lincoln institutes, both founded by Protestant denominations, fueled the conviction that antisectarianism was actually anti-Catholicism. Prucha, *Churches and the Indian Schools*, 33, 43.

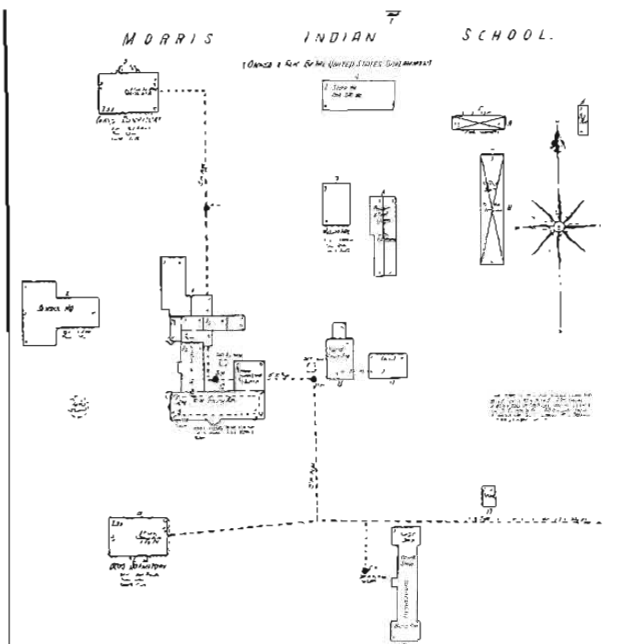
<sup>28</sup> Mother Joseph to Fitzgerald, January 15, 30, March 14, and n.d., 1897, all in ABCIM.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson to CIA, February 9, 16, March 4, October 15, 1897, to Hailmann, September 7, 1897, Thomas P. Smith, acting CIA, to Johnson, February 16, 1897, all in MISR.

<sup>30</sup> *Morris Tribune*, February 8, 17, April 7, May 12, July 7, August 4, September 22, 1897; editor J. A. Campbell to Knute Nelson, December 6, 1897, attached to Nelson to CIA, December 10, 1897, MISR; ARCIA, 55 Congress, 3 session, 1898–99, *Executive Documents*, 15:373 (serial 3757).

<sup>31</sup> Johnson to Hailmann, September 7, November 29, 1897, to CIA, June 18, 1898, supervisor Thomas P. Smith to CIA, May 5, 1898, all in MISR; *Morris Tribune*, October 13, 1897.

<sup>32</sup> ARCIA, 1899–1905, serials 3915, 4101, 4290, 4458, 4645, 4798, and 4959, respectively, report improvements in the sections devoted to the Morris school; Charles to CIA, February 25, 1904, MISR.



A 1902 PLAN of the Morris Indian School shows buildings added under the federal administration.

tion were all members of the federal Indian service. That common characteristic assured much less homogeneity than had membership in a religious order. The staff of seven men and seven women included two couples, a married woman, four single women, and five single men. For the first time the staff included Indians. Indeed, half of the staff were Indians — four women and three men, of whom none were teachers. Titles and salaries suggested a clear hierarchy that corresponded to training and also to race: superintendent, teachers, matron, seamstress, and laundress, of whom only the latter was Indian; then assistants for the last three titles, an assistant cook, two Indian assistants, and a watchman, all of whom were Indians. In subsequent years, more titles appeared — principal teacher, industrial teacher, kindergartner, clerk, carpenter, and engineer — and some were held by Indian staff. During these years the staff experienced constant turnover.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> ARCIA, 1898, serial 3757, p. 652. Each annual report, 1898–1905, includes a listing by name of the staff of the school, including title, sex, race, and salary.

<sup>34</sup> On the general curricular trends see Hailmann, *Education of the Indian*, 12, 16–18, and David W. Adams, "The Federal Indian Boarding School: A Study of Environment and Response, 1879–1918," chapter 4, Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1975. Specific trends in the Morris school can be followed in the annual reports of the CIA, 1898–1906. For information on graduates see the reports and *Morris Sun*, July 15, 1909. Shortcomings in but also goals of the curriculum are revealed in Charles D. Rakestraw to CIA, October 8, 1899. J. Franklin House to CIA, May 19, 1902, John B. Brown to CIA, June 2, 1902, all in MISR.

<sup>35</sup> Hailmann, *Education of the Indian*, 12; Adams, "Federal Indian Boarding School," 151–154.

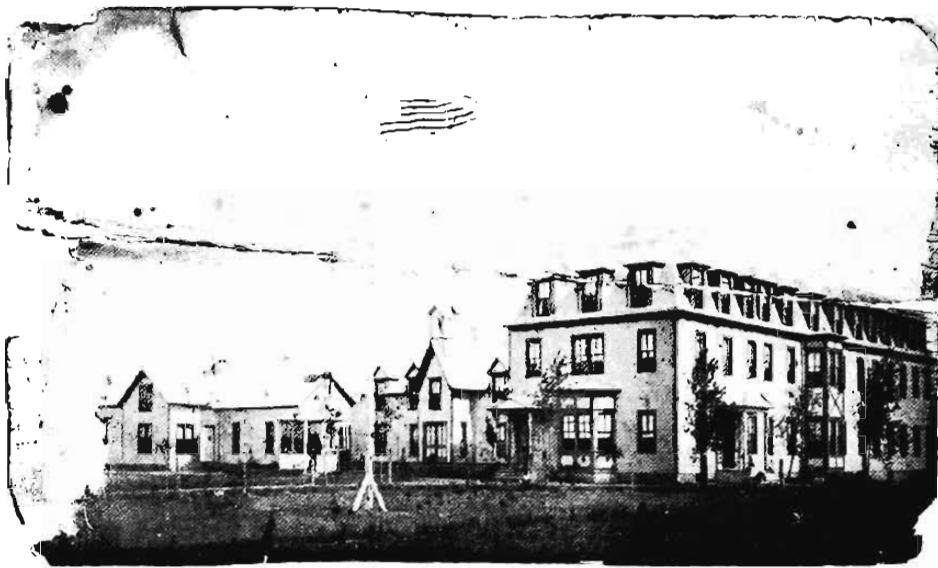
<sup>36</sup> ARCIA, 1899–1905; see especially 58 Congress, 2 session, 1903, *House Documents*, no. 5, p. 420 (serial 4645).

THE CURRICULUM continued to emphasize both the academic and the industrial, but, as the proliferation of titles suggests, the components of the curriculum became more defined and in parallel with the recommended course of study promulgated by Estelle Reel, the new federal superintendent of Indian schools. Called an industrial school, the Morris Indian School nevertheless began with a kindergarten program and offered academic instruction through the eighth grade. Whether or not the new teaching staff was better able than the sisters to meet the goal of linking classroom lessons and the world of the Indian students is impossible to determine. At least in the first years, the Morris superintendent agreed with the inspector that they were not fully meeting the more "progressive" model of education. Yet some new features were clearly present. The school regularly, if not annually, graduated students from the eighth grade and enabled them to pass the examination used in the Minnesota public schools. Music became an important feature of the school. By 1903 the staff included a bandmaster and full-time teacher of music. A William Morris Literary Society also was organized for the older students.<sup>34</sup>

While classwork occupied half of the student's day, "domestic or industrial work of a character suited to their age" filled out their program. As with the Sisters of Mercy this involved the girls in domestic and the boys in agricultural work. An emphasis on purely agricultural tasks for the boys had several advantages. It fit the mode of labor that dominated the region; it contributed an income that helped support the costs of the school; and it was in keeping with the OIA's prediction of the likely occupation of Indian students who returned to their home communities.<sup>35</sup>

The Morris school sought with mixed success to add training in other trades. Nonreservation boarding schools were intended to introduce vocations the students could pursue on the reservation or in non-Indian communities. Upon his arrival, Johnson concluded that the severity of the winters required some other industrial training to occupy the boys when weather made agricultural tasks impossible. Blacksmithing was inevitable, but he wished to add harness making as a compatible occupation much in demand in country or city. Before that program was instituted, the construction of new buildings opened up another possibility — carpentry. From 1899 to 1904, the faculty included a carpentry instructor, and the students worked on the campus buildings. When the campus was complete the staff re-introduced the idea of a harness-making shop.<sup>36</sup>

This pattern of limited diversification characterized most nonreservation boarding schools. A few students shared a rarer experience — outing — modeled after the eastern schools, Hampton and Carlisle. As a last step toward assimilating the Indian youth into white culture,



*THE SCHOOL as it looked in 1896, the year it became the property of the government*

those schools placed their students “out” on a farm or in an industry separate from the school during the summers. Seven boys at Morris had such an experience during the summer of 1898 — five with farmers, one with a blacksmith, and one as a chore boy with the school’s physician. The next record of such a program came in 1902. Now it was directed away from agricultural pursuits and no longer limited to the summer. One boy served as an apprentice in the blacksmith shop and another in the printing office.<sup>37</sup>

Industrial training for the girls reflected the assumption that they would be homemakers. Sewing, cooking, and laundry dominated. Emphasizing sewing, Mother Joseph had hoped to place at least some of her women students in a position to earn their own livelihood. Educators in the Indian service, however, increasingly stressed Indian women as forces for civilization. As Captain Richard Henry Pratt of Carlisle posed the question, “Of what avail is it that the man be hard-working and industrious, if the wife, unskilled in cookery, unused to the needle, with no habits of order or neatness, makes what might be a cheerful, happy home only a wretched abode of filth and squalor?” Thus the core of industrial education for girls became “lessons in housekeeping.”<sup>38</sup>

HOW DID this curriculum affect the students who attended the Morris Indian School? Little evidence exists to answer this question. No records of alumni are available. The student records that do survive, however, allow some inferences. A few students did graduate, but most came to the school without the prior education that was expected. Nonreservation schools were supposed to enroll students who knew English and had been to the earliest grades. In 1902, however, 60 of the students

at Morris were at the first-grade level. This breakdown in the system might explain part of the low rate of completion, but alienation was an important factor.<sup>39</sup>

Studies of Indian boarding schools in this era suggest that students both accommodated to and resisted their programs. Students who graduated reflected some level of accommodation. Despite the many assaults on their cultures, students did stay and learned the basic skills the school offered. Yet the records also suggest resistance. Discipline problems and running away from the school figured constantly in the annual reports.<sup>40</sup>

School was no longer the totally alien experience for the students that it had been for the previous generation; many of them had relatives or acquaintances who had gone to a federal Indian school. But, like other boarding schools, the Morris program alienated students not necessarily adverse to learning to read and write. Only English was to be spoken; the curriculum emphasized the value of the white man’s way and at least implicitly the evil of the child’s home.

Nevertheless, the student body grew and became more diverse. From 1901 through 1908, average attendance stood close to 160 students, about 10 greater than

<sup>37</sup> A. O. Wright to CIA, December 23, 1898. CIA to superintendent, Morris school, March 12, 1902, Brown to CIA, May 19, 1902, all in MISR.

<sup>38</sup> Mother Joseph to CIA, October 11, 1892, to Hailmann, June 19, 1895, Brown to CIA, June 2, 1902, all in MISR; Adams, “Federal Indian Boarding School,” 155, 156n.

<sup>39</sup> ARCIA, 57 Congress, 1 session, 1901, *House Documents*, no. 5, p. 2–4 (serial 4290); House to CIA, November 8, 1902, MISR.

<sup>40</sup> Adams, “Federal Indian Boarding School,” chapters 5, 6, provides a valuable discussion of patterns of acquiescence and resistance.

the nominal capacity. During 1901-1902 a total of 202 students enrolled. Some continued to come from the Turtle Mountain area, but the Ojibway reservations of northern Minnesota supplied most of the students. A further diversity came through connections of the school's Indian staff with other reservations. Thus, Hugh James, an Oneida assistant teacher, brought several students from his Wisconsin community. The average age of the students increased. Both the superintendents and the OIA inspectors agreed that more "full-blooded" students were coming — that is, students from traditional Indian homes.<sup>41</sup>

THE SHIFT to federal control, then, meant qualitative as well as quantitative change. More people moved in and out — students, staff, federal inspectors. More money came for construction and purchases. The school represented for the community the clearest presence of federal government and the advantages thereof. Indeed, the most striking change was the way it served the white population — the local community, the staff of the Indian service, and building contractors. To be sure, the students lived in better quarters, worked with more faculty, including Indians, and had a more advanced curriculum. Yet some problems continued, some new ones emerged, and it was the Indian students and staff members who bore the brunt of them. As the national system strengthened, the difficulties for Indian peoples increased.

In theory, the termination of nonreservation contract schools represented the increased rationality of a federal system of education. Morgan's plan for a hierarchically arranged system of schools had apparently come into being. The day schools and reservation boarding schools would prepare the students to enter the more advanced nonreservation boarding schools, which would complete the education for most students but send the talented and motivated on to advanced industrial schools, such as Carlisle, Hampton, or Haskell, or to normal schools or colleges. No longer would sectarian barriers stand between Morris and other Indian schools. Its staff could concentrate on educating its natural pool of recruits, not waste energies in seeking students.

---

<sup>41</sup> Johnson to CIA, December 6, 1898, House to CIA, May 19, 1902, Brown to CIA, February 16, 1903, March 16, 1904, all in MISR.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson to CIA, May 10, 1897, July 31, 1899, Chiefs of Mille Lacs Indians to CIA, June 20, 1899, all in MISR; Supervisor Hailmann's concern over the pattern of agent resistance is expressed in ARCIA, 1896, serial 3489, p. 351-354.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson to CIA, June 27, 1898, John H. Sutherland to CIA, August 16, 1898, both in MISR.

<sup>44</sup> Charles F. Pierce to CIA, November 19, 1898, Johnson to CIA, May 10, 1897, July 31, 1899, Brown to CIA, February 16, 1903, all in MISR.

Several factors, however, operated to obstruct the enrollment of students at Morris, and, more generally, to reveal continued contradictions within the system of Indian education. Indian parents continued to resist sending their children long distances to school if comparable institutions were available nearby. They especially balked at the tendency of the schools, and Morris in particular, to keep students over summer vacation. Continued parental resistance was less surprising than was the co-operation they received from agency officials.<sup>42</sup>

Some of this co-operation undoubtedly showed the influence of tribal members who served as the agents' intermediaries with their tribe. Their children most often fit the model of the students who had received some education and should now go to a more advanced school. Yet if they resisted, the agent was likely to support them. Charles Gardner was such a man on the White Earth reservation. An allottee and successful farmer, he agreed to enroll his children at the Morris school. When, to his surprise, they did not return for the summer vacation, he traveled to Morris to discover why. After an argument with Johnson, Gardner withdrew his children in the superintendent's absence and returned home with them. Johnson's inflamed attack on Gardner's action, including a call for his imprisonment, sparked effective opposition from Agent John H. Sutherland of White Earth. Not only did he commend Gardner's character, but he charged Johnson with dishonesty for implying that the children would be allowed to return for the vacation and then refusing to do so. The Gardner children did not return to the Morris school.<sup>43</sup>

School superintendents on the reservation also resisted sending advanced students to nonreservation schools. When Morris was in the first year of transition, men such as Charles F. Pierce, school superintendent at the Oneida Agency in Wisconsin, challenged the claim of the Morris school to advanced status. As the school developed, reservation educators continued to resist. Not only did they wish to ensure that their schools be full, but they wanted to fill them with the best students. In contradiction to the OIA's guidelines, reservation educators wished to keep the older, more successful students to help the younger ones. Johnson lamented that the Morris school could secure only the incorrigibles or children with no previous schooling.<sup>44</sup>

The Indian Office paid little attention to these tensions within the system. In only one instance on record in connection with the Morris school did the commissioner reprimand an agent: this was because he billed the Morris school recruiter for lodging, board, and transportation and failed to report this to the OIA. Moreover, the office allowed parents some freedom in choosing schools for their children. The compulsory ed-

ucation law required uncoerced parental consent to enroll a student in a nonreservation school. Not only might parents decide on a reservation school, but they could also choose between several nonreservation boarding schools.<sup>45</sup>

DESPITE THESE BARRIERS to enrollment, a superintendent was judged by his ability to keep his school full. Johnson felt the pressure immediately, but his response only aggravated the problem. Gardner was not the only parent he misled about the duration of the stay at school. He refused to release children for vacation, fearful of losing them either to the call of traditional ways or to another school. He also contrived to extend his students' terms from three to five years without their agreement. Tribal leaders at Mille Lacs as well as at White Earth petitioned against his behavior. His encouragement of his Indian staff to bring back students from distant communities without insuring that they would not interfere with other schools earned him the enmity of other educators. Finally, he resorted to the ties that Mother Joseph had established in North Dakota. Less careful than she about assuring that the students from Turtle Mountain were indeed Indians, he fulfilled the prophecy of Inspector Moss that the only students who would come from long distances to attend Morris would be whites trying to pass as Indians in order to secure a free education. For this, and for some other reasons that will be explored below, the commissioner of Indian affairs fired Johnson in the summer of 1901.<sup>46</sup>

Within a year the new superintendent, John B. Brown, managed to fill the school and keep it full. His style and the effectiveness of the school certainly had something to do with this success. But Brown was also frustrated in securing suitable students for a nonreservation school aspiring to offer advanced industrial training. Concerned about the future enrollment of the school, Brown expressed that concern in a way that revealed the preoccupation with authority that characterized Indian educators. The competition for students between elements of the school system, he observed, "creates the impression that the parents and children are conferring a great and personal favor on the representative and the school if the children are permitted to go." He wished to reduce the room to maneuver of these "dependent" people. Schools of the same type should have exclusive territories. Students would have some choice between types but would not be able to play off the schools against each other. The Indians must feel beholden to the educators, not vice versa.<sup>47</sup>

Federal superintendents, following Mother Joseph in the frantic quest for pupils, shared her fiscal anxieties. The Morris experience highlights the absence of a federal financial commitment to fulfill the dreams of



*SUPERINTENDENT John B. Brown*

Morgan and other advocates of education as the instrument for immediate assimilation. Beneath the surface prosperity of new buildings, austerity crippled the school's operation. When appropriations for Indian education dropped to a depression low in 1895, the individual school operated on a budget formula of \$167 per capita. Ten years later that same formula existed despite a one-third increase in the cost of supplies. These statistics explain the constant lamentations in the correspondence of Morris school superintendents. They also reveal a growing tendency to equate efficiency with economy.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Thomas P. Smith, acting CIA, to Robert M. Allen, White Earth agent, May 14, 1897, MISR. The limits to compulsory education as revised by Commissioner Browning (ARCIA, 1894, serial 3306, p. 6) still stood. The degree to which this law was enforced, however, needs study.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson to CIA, June 1, 1898, Gus H. Beaulieu to CIA, June 10, 1899. Only after Johnson's dismissal did his recruitment of "non-Indians" become apparent; see Brown to CIA, November 19, 1901, June 2, 1902, House to CIA, May 19, 1902. Moss's prediction came in a letter to CIA, August 15, 1896. All the above correspondence is in MISR.

<sup>47</sup> Brown to Commissioner Francis E. Leupp, January 24, 1906, see also the attached endorsement by J. A. Dortch, early February, 1906, MISR.

<sup>48</sup> The general trend of appropriations for Indian education, 1878-1912, is revealed in ARCIA, 1895, serial 3382, p. 12; 58 Congress, 3 session, 1904, *House Documents*, no. 5, p. 446, 571 (serial 4798); *Reports of the Department of the Interior for 1912*, 2:214 (serial 6409).

No matter who was in charge of the school, such federal parsimony had repercussions on the quality of its operation. Johnson's refusal to send children home for vacations, which only aggravated his difficulty in securing students, had been based in large part on his desire to use as little money on transportation as possible. Available food and clothing necessarily deteriorated in quality. Extraordinary expenses met delays. In the midst of a typhoid epidemic, after one child had died and 37 were ill, Brown apologized to his superiors for the deficit caused by hiring the four nurses he needed. Raw sewage continued to be deposited yards from the campus for years before dollars were appropriated to construct an adequate sewer.<sup>49</sup>

AT ITS BEST, industrial education contributed only haphazard subsistence to a school. Pedagogy took precedence over productivity. Hailmann and Reel, superintendents of Indian schools, recommended guidelines that involved formal instruction in industrialization. But the fiscal poverty contravened policy and reduced industrial education to menial chores. Reflecting his experience at another school, the Winnebago alumnus of Yale University, Henry Roe Cloud, attacked this form of miseducation: "The government should not use the labor of the students to reduce the running expenses of the different schools, but only where the aim is educational, to develop the Indian's efficiency and mastery of the trade. . . . I worked two years in turning a washing machine in a government school to reduce the running expenses of the institution. It did not take me long to learn how to run the machine and the rest of the two years I nursed a growing hatred for it. Such work is not

educative." It may be surmised that Morris subjected its students to similar experiences under the motto, "learning by doing." At least a few parents expressed concern about their children spending too little time in class and too much time doing chores.<sup>50</sup>

In this fiscal climate what quality of faculty could be secured? Morgan and, subsequently, Supervisor Hailmann had stressed the necessity of providing salaries competitive with the public schools. Indeed, the isolated location of even some of the nonreservation schools such as Morris might have required more than average salaries to attract competent staff. While many teachers in federal Indian schools exhibited a near missionary dedication, Morgan and like-minded policymakers felt that a truly public and professional system should not depend upon such zeal. Yet the turnover in staff and the scandals and turmoil that characterized the early years of the federal stage of the Morris Indian School demonstrated the inadequate implementation, if also the wisdom, of this vision.<sup>51</sup>

Johnson and several staff members shared neither the zeal nor the moral tenor of Mother Joseph and her colleagues. Scandals growing out of petty rivalries and sexual improprieties among the staff and between the staff and students plagued the school under Johnson's leadership. Johnson himself was accused of raping two Indian students and engaging in adulterous relations with at least one of the staff. Despite his pleas of innocence, these charges added to other complaints against him led to his dismissal.<sup>52</sup>

Indian staff members contributed to the over-all turmoil at the school. They filed some of the complaints against Johnson, attacking his integrity and morality. These Indians, who had adapted to white culture to the point of accepting the value of education and Christianity, found Johnson's behavior to be unchristian and intolerable. Their complaints illustrated the tensions between Indian and white staff and the discomfort of white staff working with Indian peers.<sup>53</sup>

At first, the federal school at Morris seemed to be continuing a trend of Indian policy closely tied to the optimistic assimilationist thrust of Morgan and the "Friends of the Indian." Anxious to demonstrate the value of education and to hasten assimilation through the influence of educated Indians, the Office of Indian Affairs emphasized the hiring of "returned Indians." Among the early Indian staff at Morris were alumni of Carlisle and Hampton. Their status and salaries significantly improved by 1903. At that time they held five supervisory positions and had an average salary close to that of the white staff.<sup>54</sup>

Yet sentiment locally and at headquarters was moving in the opposite direction. Some sign of this had come in 1900. Johnson had temporarily staved off an exposure of his misdeeds by blaming the Indian staff for the strife.

<sup>49</sup> Brown to CIA, October 23, 1904, MISR.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, "Federal Indian Boarding Schools," 157-159; Mrs. J. R. Brown to Brown, December(?), 1907, MISR.

<sup>51</sup> Morgan, "Supplemental Report on Indian Education," 224, and his "Supplemental Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," ARCA, 1890, 51 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, 12:CXXXV-CXLV (serial 2841), 1896, p. 347, 358 (serial 3489).

<sup>52</sup> Commissioner William A. Jones to Secretary of the Interior, July 30, 1901, MISR, summarized the charges against Johnson and recommended his dismissal. The original in letters received, Office of Indian Affairs, NARG 75, includes as an attachment the full brief of the charges against Johnson and his reply. The evidence of staff and student unrest appears as early as late winter 1899; Wright to CIA, April 14, 1899. Cornelius H. Wheelock, *et al.*, to CIA, December 31, 1900. Edwin L. Chalcraft to CIA, February 11, 1901. Eugene MacComas to CIA, June 26, 29, 1901, all in MISR.

<sup>53</sup> Wheelock, *et al.*, to CIA, December 31, 1900, MISR.

<sup>54</sup> ARCA, 1896, serial 3489, p. 351-354, 1903, serial 4645, p. 570. White salaries averaged \$586 a year in contrast to \$508 for Indians. In 1899 the contrast had been \$582 to \$227.50, reflecting the lower status positions then held by Indian staff.

Inspector Charles H. Dickson of the OIA endorsed Johnson's credibility: "It has not been my practice to say aught against Indian employes. The policy of the Government in giving preference to Indians in appointments when qualified, is right and proper. With the full-bloods there is but little trouble, but with the mixed-bloods, it is an exception when they do not give more or less disturbance." In November, 1900, Commissioner William A. Jones accepted the recommendation that five of the Morris school Indian staff be fired and replaced, if possible with local white workers.<sup>55</sup>

The return of Indian staff after Johnson's departure and the increased responsibility of the positions by 1903 suggests that Johnson had manufactured the hostility towards Indians. His correspondence reveals an anti-Indian prejudice. Yet the alacrity with which Office of Indian Affairs inspectors and Jones believed Johnson was instructive. During the winter of 1904-05 another purge occurred. Five more Indian staff were dismissed for "objectionable conduct." If this terse phrase from the *Annual Report* left much unexplained, the files contain such equally vague and unsubstantiated assessments as "lacking in discipline and candor." That such explanations sufficed revealed a trend of increased suspicion of Indian employees by the Indian Office.<sup>56</sup>

This attitude was a corollary of a broader and more significant shift in the administration of Indian policy. Lessened confidence in Indian employees corresponded with a greater sense of the resilience of differences between Indians and whites. Policymakers' confidence that assimilation would rapidly occur diminished. With this came the racialistic pattern of thought that held mixed-bloods especially suspect. With it as well came changes in the educational system. The nonreservation boarding school, the conduit for rapid assimilation into white society, lost its central role.<sup>57</sup>

In 1901, even as he quoted figures documenting the impact of education on Indian students, Jones expressed his first skepticism about the nonreservation school. Such schools were obstacles to, not cultivators of, civilization, he argued. They encouraged dependence, not independence, and accustomed the students to a style of living impossible to maintain when they returned to the reservation. The student was indiscriminately drawn out from reservation homes, placed in relatively luxurious surroundings, all with no effort of his own. Wrote Jones: "Here he remains until his education is finished, when he is returned to his home — which by contrast must seem squalid indeed — to the parents whom his education must make it difficult to honor, and left to make his way against the ignorance and bigotry of his tribe. Is it any wonder he fails?"<sup>58</sup>

Morgan and Hailmann had been impressed by the successes of the "returned" students and saw them as ideal candidates for the Indian service. Despite the

thrust of his statistics, Jones was less persuaded. He opposed hiring such students on the grounds that it furthered an unhealthy dependence on the government. He lacked confidence in the ability of Indian students to handle the demands of modern life.

The 1901 statement was only a harbinger of a shift in educational policy. Jones continued to downplay the nonreservation boarding school, calling it "an almshouse." The Morris school's difficulty with scarce resources and its treatment of Indian staff probably reflected the new influence. But on the surface these schools received continued support. In 1904 the 25 nonreservation schools comprised, in the commissioner's words, "the largest class of Indian schools in point of capacity and extensive equipment." Reformers at Lake Mohonk were not ready to abandon a comprehensive system of Indian education. Their influence remained compatible with congressmen's reluctance to abandon that component of Indian education which most directly benefited white communities in which they were placed.<sup>59</sup>

FRANCIS E. LEUPP, Theodore Roosevelt's appointee as commissioner of Indian affairs in 1905, accomplished the transformation of Indian educational policy. More than Jones, he had solid credentials as a "friend of the Indian," having served as the Washington lobbyist of the Indian Rights Association during the early 1890s. By 1907, however, he had little faith in the nonreservation school. He reiterated his immediate predecessor's concern that such boarding schools undercut self-reliance, also calling them "educational almshouses." At the same time, he offered an additional rationale. The issue of Indian education, he asserted, "pivots on the question whether we shall carry civilization to the Indian or carry the Indian to civilization, and the former seems to me infinitely the wiser plan. To plant our schools among the Indians means to bring the older members of the race within the sphere of influence of which every school is a centre."<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Dickson to CIA, November 15, 1900, Jones to Johnson, November 24, 1900, Johnson to Jones, December 4, 1900, all in MISR. For an earlier expression of hostility to mixed-bloods, see Wright to CIA, April 14, 1899, MISR.

<sup>56</sup> ARCIA, 59 Congress, 1 session, 1905. *House Documents*, 19:421 (serial 4959); Brown to CIA, February 28, 1906, MISR.

<sup>57</sup> Hoxie, "Beyond Savagery," chapter 11 especially, characterizes the shift in assumptions as one from viewing Indians as "an exceptional people" to a "backward race."

<sup>58</sup> Here and below, see ARCIA, 1901, serial 4290, p. 2-6, 39-41, 1896, serial 3489, p. 351-354; Hailmann, *Education of the Indian*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> ARCIA, 1904, serial 4798, p. 32, 39.

<sup>60</sup> Allan Nevins' sketch of Francis Leupp in Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 11:195 (New

Initially, Leupp accompanied his critique with piecemeal reforms. New regulations prohibited nonreservation school personnel from visiting reservations to recruit students. Rules against enrolling youth under 14 in out-of-state boarding schools soon followed.<sup>61</sup>

These changes made more difficult Superintendent Brown's recruitment of students. The opening of a reservation boarding school at Wahpeton, North Dakota, also boded ill for the future of the Morris school. The new school was within 50 miles of Morris and that much closer to the Indian population. Moreover, its curriculum was identical to that of Morris. Enough rumors circulated about the closing of the Morris school that in August, 1908, Brown sent a letter to superintendents and agents reminding them that the school was still open. While informing Leupp of his action he also agreed that the nonreservation school idea had been overdone. Yet he argued that Morris' size and proximity to Indian communities should make it an exception. The main problem, in Brown's estimation, was that the schools were getting too big.<sup>62</sup>

If Leupp wished to reduce the role for such schools as Morris, what would become of them? His answer, first suggested in 1907, both reaffirmed his commitment to education and took into account the interest of congressmen within whose districts such schools were located. As a step toward connecting Indian education to white, state educational systems, Leupp would transfer these schools to state governments, saying: "Here is a school plant of some value, in good order. It has industrial shops, a small farm, school-rooms, dormitories. We



THE MORRIS INDIAN School class of 1908

will make you a gift outright of the whole establishment if you will agree to continue it as an industrial school, and to put a proviso into its charter that for the next ensuing ninety-nine years any Indian who wishes an education there may have his tuition free."<sup>63</sup>

The Indian Appropriations Act of April 30, 1908, authorized Leupp to explore transfers with the governors of selected states. Morris was one of five schools to begin the experiment. Determined lobbying by Morris's state representative, Lewis C. Spooner, gained the support of United States Senator Moses E. Clapp, chairman of the committee on Indian affairs, who introduced a bill for the school's transfer from federal to state control on December 9, 1908. On March 3, 1909, Congress deeded the Morris school to the state of Minnesota on the condition "that Indian pupils shall at all times be admitted to such school free of charge for tuition and on terms of equality with white pupils."<sup>64</sup>

The Morris Indian School closed in early June, 1909. The townspeople who had welcomed the federal school now expressed no regrets about its demise. Rather, civic leaders were enthusiastic about a new school to serve the white citizens of the region. When it appeared that Governor John A. Johnson was balking at accepting the facility, Morris boosters, led by Spooner, entertained members of the legislature and administrators from the University of Minnesota to demonstrate the support for a regional school of agriculture as well as the potential of the campus and community.<sup>65</sup>

Their campaign was successful. The West Central School of Agriculture opened in the fall of 1910. For the next 50 years it offered a boarding school experience for white rural youth under the auspices of the University of Minnesota's Institute of Agriculture. Its staff also

York, 1933); ARCIA, *Reports of the Department of the Interior for 1907*, 2:17-26 (serial 5296); Francis E. Leupp, *The Indian and His Problem*, 135-140 (New York, 1910).

<sup>61</sup> ARCIA, *Reports of the Department of the Interior for 1908*, 2:17-22 (serial 5453); *Reports of the Department of the Interior for 1909*, 2:17 (serial 5747).

<sup>62</sup> 57 Congress, 1 session, *House Report*, no. 2664 (serial 4407); ARCIA, 1907, serial 5296, p. 32; Brown to Superintendents and Agents of the Indian Service, August 15, 1908, to CIA, August 15, 1908, MISR.

<sup>63</sup> Leupp to Brown, August 21, 1908, MISR; ARCIA, 1907, serial 5296, p. 17-26; Leupp, *Indian and His Problem*, 138-140.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis C. Spooner to Leupp, July 10, 1907, May 26, 1908, Moses E. Clapp to Leupp, July 10, 1907, Leupp to Clapp, November 24, 1908, Charles F. Larrabee, acting CIA, to Spooner, July 6, 1908, all in MISR; *Congressional Record*, 60 Congress, 2 session, 1909, 43:67, 571; ARCIA, 1909, serial 5747, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> The governor's reluctance to accept the school is evidenced in Johnson to Larrabee, October 10, 1908, and to Robert G. Valentine, acting CIA, May 26, 1909, MISR. Johnson's attitude, combined with the failure of the Minnesota legislature to appropriate funds to operate the school in 1909, meant that the new school could not open until the fall of 1910. See also *Morris Sun*, especially March 4, 11, 25, April 8, 15, June 3, 10, 24, July 15, August 26, September 16, 1909.



operated an agricultural experiment station that provided advice to farmers of the region on scientific agriculture.<sup>66</sup>

IN RETROSPECT, the closing of the school merits mixed reactions. An awareness of the ethnocentric assumptions behind Indian education at that time and the documentation of the problems that plagued the school suggest that its termination was timely. Even if one suggests that some students gained skills of value to them and to their communities, the argument of the Indian Office that these skills could be gained more effectively closer to the students' homes is compelling.

The transfer in the school's mission occurred, however, in the context of a retreat from meeting treaty obligations to Indian peoples. The move from nonreservation schools was not a step toward giving Indian communities more control over their children's education. When Leupp spoke of the strengths of Indian cultures, he was not, after all, making a pluralistic approach. That strength was a problem, one which he hoped to overcome to some extent by placing more schools in Indian communities as outposts of civilization. But he did not expect totally to solve the problem. He held a more pessimistic view of the character and destiny of Indian peoples than did many of the "Friends of the Indian." While some at the Lake Mohonk conferences were beginning to challenge the injustices of too precipitous a withdrawal of the federal obligations, Leupp appeared to accept them as inevitable. In the area of schooling, his call for a reduction in advanced training was couched in terms of realism, but it coincided with a reduction in federal spending for Indian education.<sup>67</sup>

In particular, the transfer of schools such as Morris to state control effectively closed them to Indian students. The proviso for attendance of Indian students on free and equal terms, which Leupp suggested would satisfy "the sentimental needs," also reflected the fact that the school plant which had been built by funds appropriated on behalf of Indians was given free to the states. In fact, the proviso did appear to be more sentimental than real. During the 50 years of the West Cen-

tral School of Agriculture, only two Indian youths attended.<sup>68</sup>

The brief history of the Morris Indian School, then, does disclose a rapid shift in white assumptions about and policies toward racial minorities and Indians in particular. In the early 1890s the fight to control Indian education was a part of the engrossing sectarian struggle within American society. By 1910, rather than fighting over providing such services, white Americans were eager to transfer even the educational resources from Indians to themselves. Yet this diminution of services to Indian peoples suggested as well a feature of the emerging liberal state. The bureaucratization of American society showed the increased power of those groups who looked to the national arena to meet their needs. Governmental agencies, despite their growing efficiency and rationality, would ill-serve locally oriented individuals. As the most place-oriented of American peoples, Indians experienced that neglect more rapidly and completely than other localists.

---

<sup>66</sup> Theodore H. Fenske, ed., "A History of the West Central School of Agriculture," in *The Moccasin*, vol. 50 (1963). This publication celebrated the school's 50th year with a history of the school and the West Central Experimental Station and also recognized the transformation of the campus from the WCSA to the University of Minnesota-Morris, a residential four-year liberal arts college.

<sup>67</sup> Leupp, *Indian and His Problem*, 45, 110, 115-150. Earlier evidence of his racialism and yet commitment that policy should continue to indoctrinate the "American way of life" included his "Failure of the Educated American Indian," in *Appleton's Magazine*, 7:594-602 (May, 1906).

<sup>68</sup> Fenske to Rodney Briggs, July 24, 1962, Records of the Office of the Provost, University of Minnesota-Morris Archives, Rodney Briggs Library.

THE PICTURES on p. 82 and 84 are from the archives of the Sisters of Mercy Provincialate, Omaha; the one on p. 89 is from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Records, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee; on p. 92, from the National Archives, Record Group 75. The portrait on p. 86 is from James M. King, *Facing the Twentieth Century*, opposite p. 261 (New York, 1899). All others are in the MHS audio-visual library and map collections.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).