

The Pawnee Mission Letters, 1834–1851. Edited by Richard E. Jensen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 716 pages. \$60.00 paper.

Studies of Christian missions to various indigenous groups in North America and beyond are numerous, and the multifaceted topics surrounding missions represent an ever-expanding field of inquiry. Scholars bend their thoughts to discern the meaning and efficacy of the missionary enterprise, as well as the relative degrees to which indigenous peoples accepted or rejected the spiritual and civilizing goals of the missionaries. As part of these studies, scholars have interrogated the vast bodies of missionary writings housed in scattered archives, most of them specializing in particular missionary organizations or religious denominations.

One of the most useful services in which scholars have recently engaged has been the transcription and editing of missionary records for broader public consumption. Perhaps the most outstanding recent example of this is Rowena McClinton's masterful two-volume edition/translation, *The Moravian Springplace Mission to the Cherokees* (2007). In his most recent book, Richard E. Jensen has added to this body of work by making available the letters of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM)–operated Pawnee mission, which existed in what is now the state of Nebraska during the 1830s and 1840s. Interspersed with these materials, which are drawn from the ABCFM manuscript collection housed at Harvard University, are numerous documents relevant to the Pawnees and the mission that have been culled from the extensive records of the federal Office of Indian Affairs and from some separate manuscript collections and journals. Using these combined resources, Jensen has delivered a rich archive of antebellum Protestant missionary materials.

Jensen, a retired senior research anthropologist with the Nebraska State Historical Society, is a veteran editor, and his expertise shows in this book. Jensen has chosen to allow the documents to speak largely for themselves, inserting very little of his own voice outside of the useful introduction and very brief (one-sentence to short-paragraph) summaries preceding each letter. The introduction provides sufficient historical background and explication about the ABCFM, Pawnee relations with the US government, and the most important religious figures involved with the Pawnee mission. More importantly, his judicious and much appreciated endnotes provide helpful information about the individuals, towns and villages, and historical context related in the letters. The notes effectively provide readers with the proper context to understand the primary sources more fully.

Initially conceived in 1833 as a missionary expedition to the “Flathead” Indians in the Oregon Territory, a combination of poor timing and a lack of

resources caused the initial missionaries, John Dunbar and Samuel Allis, to miss their opportunity to travel west before the onset of winter. Being effectively stranded near what is now Omaha, Nebraska, both men took an interest in the local indigenous population. In the process, they found what appeared to be a promising possibility for a mission among the Pawnee Indians, a Plains people concentrated in modern Nebraska and divided into four bands. The Pawnee had a reputation of close friendship with the local white population, making a mission particularly viable. The Pawnee leadership, for their part, seemed quite receptive to receiving missionary aid and instruction. Having just signed a treaty stipulating their settlement in more permanent villages, the Pawnees sought allies to provide adequate educational and agricultural resources in order to help ease their transition.

With most missionary documents, we learn much more about the missionaries and the mission structure than about indigenous people. The Pawnee mission records are no exception. The dominant story that unfolds is a story of the lives of the missionaries and of their initial interpretations of Pawnee behavior and morals. Not surprisingly, many instances of cultural misunderstanding, cultural chauvinism, and missionary mores of savagism and civilization emerge in these records. Readers familiar with the Protestant missions in this period will notice many standard recurring themes at the Pawnee mission. These ongoing topics include the inconvenience of western travel, rigors of frontier life, effort to master the Pawnee tongue, struggle to establish adequate housing for the missionaries and funding for the mission, and persistent lack of personnel to service the dispersed Pawnee people adequately.

Perhaps the most pressing issues in the letters, particularly after the Pawnees began to form more permanent settlements and the mission began in earnest in 1841, were disputes regarding the methods of conducting the mission (the ever-present dilemma of emphasizing conversion before civilization, civilization before conversion, or attempting to do both simultaneously) and interne-cine disputes among the missionaries and persons under government employ. Dunbar and Allis, the original missionaries and the most important sources of information in the letters, argued for a civilization-first approach to ensure that the Pawnees were sufficiently prepared for Christian instruction. This included exposing the Pawnees to Euro-American agricultural methods and (feeble) efforts to provide basic education for Pawnee children. Both missionaries, by nature of their isolation and lack of funds, also argued that supporting themselves and their growing families legitimately absorbed much of their time and labor, rather than ministering to or educating the Pawnee people.

Later missionaries criticized this apparent neglect of religious duties, particularly assistant missionary George Gaston, who accused Dunbar of failing to see to the spiritual needs of the Pawnee people by focusing on his own

well-being. Gaston, who left the mission and became a government farmer, also allied with other government employees who agreed that only harsh management and physical forms of punishment could “civilize” the Pawnees. The combined criticism of the mission and disagreement over how the Pawnees should be treated (Dunbar and Allis objected to the disciplinary practices used by Gaston and his allies) led Gaston and his faction to call for the dismissal of Dunbar and his associates. The latter third of the book largely concerns this controversy, which led to extensive investigation, testimonies, dismissals, and letter exchanges among the missionaries, government employees, the Office of Indian Affairs, and the ABCFM. Ultimately, the mission weathered the controversy (with the support of the Pawnee leadership) and appeared poised to move past these difficulties. However, the growing conflict between the Pawnees and Sioux during the mid-1840s caused the missionaries to flee to Missouri, prompting the ABCFM to abandon the mission.

Although the letters largely focus on missionary lives and concerns, some ethnographic information about the Pawnees does emerge. This is particularly true of the materials from the 1830s, when Dunbar and Allis traveled with the Pawnees on their winter hunts. Both men, particularly Dunbar, devoted significant attention to Pawnee hunting practices, spiritual beliefs, material goods, housing, and gender roles. Despite the sometimes-judgmental tone of the writing, careful reading allows substantial glimpses into the lives of the Pawnee people, and the humanity and reality of their everyday existence materializes in important ways. The other wealth of information about Native American people in these records centers on the political relationships between the Pawnees and their neighbors. The letters provide some insight into Pawnee alliances (especially with the Otoe and the Omaha) and conflicts (particularly with the Ponca and the Sioux) that manifested in Nebraska during this period. Additionally, readers will notice scattered references to many other indigenous people in the area, those from the region and those whom the United States had removed westward during the 1820s and 1830s from the Midwest.

The only major critique of the book is inherently unalterable and does not fall at the feet of the editor. Rather, it is a complaint about the letters. Though the aforementioned glimpses of Native life do find their way into the mission record, almost no Native voice emerges. Aside from isolated snippets of council speeches, there are almost no instances of the missionaries holding discussions, spiritual or otherwise, with individual Pawnees. Though transcriptions of Native American thought and speech are problematic and filtered in the process of translation and recording, they do give readers some access, however obfuscated, to Native American voices. Very little information exists regarding what life was like for the Pawnee children at the mission or about adult converts to Christianity. Unlike many contemporary missionaries,

Dunbar, Allis, and their associates seemingly did not file regular reports about the mission or letters suitable for printing in the religious presses. Such sources generally provide richer ethnographic materials for reconstructing the lives and spiritual beliefs of those involved with the missions than those letters found here. As such, those seeking information on specific Pawnee people, their beliefs and opinions, and the daily activities of their lives will likely be left unsatisfied.

Overall, *The Pawnee Mission Letters* stands as a very welcome addition to the growing body of edited missionary writings that have found their way into press in the past several years. Although not fully satisfying as a source of information about the Pawnees, this book certainly provides valuable insight into the missionary and his world at an early stage of Protestant missionary activity in the trans-Mississippi west.

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Perimeters of Democracy: Inverse Utopias and the Wartime Social Landscape in the American West. By Heather Fryer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 432 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

What is a reservation? It depends upon whom you ask and when you ask. Colonists claim they magnanimously set aside tracts of “their” land as homes for the surviving indigenes. From the other side of the transaction, the Indian landlords ceded land to buy peace but “reserved” some for their own use.

Some resemblance to the Jewish ghettos of Europe existed, with isolation standing in for physical walls, much like the red lines on a banker’s map that functioned as walls around African American neighborhoods in northern cities. Passing the reservation boundaries often required documents, and escape from the reservation meant exclusion from the constitutional category “Indians not taxed” but subjection to the vicissitudes of color prejudice common to the times by law and by custom.

Reservations continue to be established in contemporary times, but most date from the winding down of the shooting phase of the Indian wars. This history will come to mind for Indian readers when thinking about Heather Fryer’s decision to include the Klamath Reservation in her analysis of World War II–era “inverse utopias,” government-established communities containing people whose difference from the surrounding cultures were thought to make segregation a wise policy for the duration of hostilities.