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Assimilation's Agent: My Life as a Superintendent in the Indian Boarding School System.
Edwin L. Chalcraft

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ironworks astonished the conquistadors.” Yet the Aztecs had no knowledge of iron or iron working. They did develop the lost wax method of casting gold and had some beaten copper implements but did not know how to smelt iron.

So, what are we to make of this work? I believe that Ingstad wanted to focus attention on his own heroic efforts to contact the Sierra Madre Apaches. His lack of mention of Goodwin’s earlier parallel effort and his romanticized description of his own acceptance and intimacy with Apaches all point to a rather self-centered effort. From a historical perspective it is nice to have this work available in English, but it contributes little in terms of new information about the Sierra Madre Apaches or Apaches in general that other recent works have not covered.

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Assimilation’s Agent: My Life as a Superintendent in the Indian Boarding School System. Edwin L. Chalcraft. Edited by Cary C. Collins. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 302 pages. \$59.95 cloth.

When he retired in 1925, Edwin Chalcraft could look back upon thirty-seven years of service within the Office of Indian Affairs (later called the Bureau of Indian Affairs [BIA]) and, for the most part, find it satisfactory, often gratifying. There were ups and downs, of course, but overall Chalcraft’s experiences were more positive than negative. His memoir covers the years 1883 to 1925 and shares specifics of his role as the superintendent of schools on several reservations, among them Chehalis, Washington; Puyallup, Washington; Wind River, Wyoming; and Salem, Oregon.

The memoir consists mainly of anecdotes and reflections, highlighting successes as well as some failures in carrying out his duties. Chalcraft, an ardent supporter of assimilation, gave full effort to preparing Indians for interaction with and eventually membership in the dominant society. It is clear, as editor Cary C. Collins states in his introduction, “Chalcraft never questioned the propriety of American Indian policies and he remained unwavering in his commitment to assimilation” (xv). The BIA-sponsored schools were the major vehicle in the drive to assimilation, and Chalcraft devoted his considerable energies to setting and maintaining high—and rather rigid—standards in dealing with the Indians under his care.

Chalcraft’s devotion to his task comes through consistently in his writing as he describes the regimen he imposes or follows in his many years in the Indian Service. But politics frequently interfered with his goals and methods. We read, for instance, of pressure put on Chalcraft at times to fire an employee simply because he or she was of the wrong party and of cases when he had to rebut charges against himself by a disgruntled employee or superior whom Chalcraft had angered in some way.

While these clashes occur periodically, Chalcraft’s lengthy memoir is upbeat overall, carrying the reader on a long, interesting journey among

Indians—mostly students—during years when many Americans had predicted their demise. From 1883 to 1900, Chalcraft served at four agencies: Chehalis, Puyallup, Salem, and Wind River—places where he aggressively worked to transform Indians into an accepted American (white) mold. For example, he describes a struggle with the Indian Shaker Church at Chehalis, a Native religious group that practiced the “shakes” alongside prayers and chants to treat people for illness.

Chalcraft devotes twenty-two pages to this group and his elimination of their church. He succeeded by cooperating with the police court, which issued orders banning the practice. Like so many Americans within and outside the Indian Service, Chalcraft sought to impose Christianity on what was seen as pagan spirituality and viewed Indian culture, generally, as an obstacle to progress.

Chalcraft met many nationally known people in his career and gives his judgment of them quite succinctly. He had a warm relationship with Captain Richard Pratt, founder of the famous Carlisle Indian School, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In one major clash with superiors in the Indian Office, Chalcraft sought Pratt’s aid—which was given wholeheartedly. Both President Taft and ex-president Theodore Roosevelt (admired fellow Republicans) made brief stops at Chemawa when Chalcraft was in charge of that school near Salem. A long excerpt on Sherman Coolidge, a Shoshone who became an Episcopal priest, reveals that Chalcraft saw him as a major success story, an Indian who became “enlightened.”

His years as superintendent at Siletz agency in Oregon are particularly revealing. Chalcraft provides much detail about the first Indian fair held there (1915) and how the Indians themselves took control of the event, though Chalcraft initiated it. He describes the many exhibits, such as beadwork, needlework, livestock, farm products, and baskets. Two special prizes were a John Deere plow and a two-horse cultivator—fitting, in light of the assimilation goal.

Siletz Indians gave Chalcraft a nickname that seems quite appropriate: “Ca-nux-ie,” which translates to “He Who Moves Fast”—which Chalcraft chose to view as complimentary. Chalcraft contrasts this with the nickname given to a New York reservation trader: “Rail Fence”—an allusion to that man’s crookedness. Chalcraft was strict, but he was also seen as fair and honest and seems to have had good rapport with his Indian charges.

Chalcraft’s longest continuous service was at Siletz agency (1914–25), and during much of his first year he attacked the liquor problem. Liquor traffic, a growing problem across the nation following World War I, was flourishing at Siletz, but Chalcraft and allies, the US Attorney for Oregon and the Siletz police court, prosecuted cases in which liquor was a major catalyst in crimes on and off the reservation, often involving both Indians and neighboring white people. By 1916 Chalcraft felt on top of the situation, and in that year Oregon voted to become a dry state, helping his cause immensely.

One of his last acts as superintendent at Siletz was to support the closing of that agency. Chalcraft wrote to the commissioner of Indian Affairs in May 1925: “It appears to me that the work of this jurisdiction has reached the point

where it can be consolidated with another without detriment to the welfare of the Indians” (292). He was anticipating his retirement, but clearly Chalcraft was still considering what would be most efficient in terms of the Indian Service as a whole.

Assessing Chalcraft’s years in the Indian Service, one is struck by his length of service and ability to outlast contention at both the local and national levels, as well as by his steadfastness to the prevailing ideology of assimilation. He served under nine commissioners of Indian Affairs, usually harmoniously, though willing to oppose policies he thought injudicious. In one instance, Commissioner R. G. Valentine briefly suspended Chalcraft during his time at Chemawa, a move that clearly rankled Chalcraft, since he devotes several pages to it and reproduces a lengthy letter from Pratt in his defense.

Chalcraft’s career encompassed some major legislation such as the Dawes Act (1877) and the Voting Rights Act (1924), both of which he supported strongly. However, the famous Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890 receives no mention. One wonders whether Chalcraft was too caught up in his local affairs to give much, if any, thought to the event.

Chalcraft frequently describes elements of his family life, with comings and goings linked to weddings, funerals, and other such gatherings. He benefited greatly from his wife, Alice, who was a true partner with him and apparently willing to endure the many absences necessitated by his work. The memoir presents Chalcraft as a solid family man and the glimpses into his family life help relieve the long, detailed, and “heavy” passages that comprise the bulk of his writing.

Supplementary sources that would help flesh out Chalcraft’s memoir include *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the ‘Friends of the Indian’, 1880–1920* by Francis Paul Prucha (1973); *The Indian Office: Growth and Development of an American Institution, 1865–1900* by Paul Stuart (1979); and varied histories of boarding schools throughout the country such as *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* by K. Tsianina Lomawaima (1994) and *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900–1940* by Brenda Child (1998). Although not updated, a study of the thinking and careers of several commissioners of Indian Affairs remains useful: *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824–1977* by Henry Viola (1979).

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Coming to Shore: Northwest Coast Ethnology, Traditions, and Visions. Edited by Marie Mauzé, Michael E. Harkin, and Sergei Kan. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. 508 pages. \$70.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

This collaborative collection of essays on Northwest Coast ethnology grew out of a conference held in Paris in 2000. Unlike a similar conference held in Burnaby, British Columbia, in 1976 (the proceedings of which, unfortunately, have never been published), this session arguably failed to attract many of the