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"I Like the School So I Want to Come Back": The Enrollment of American Indian Students at the Rapid City Indian School

SCOTT RINEY

Charlie Twiss, a mixed-blood Lakota from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, enrolled in the Rapid City Indian School in 1909. Founded in 1898, the government boarding school existed to detribalize Indian children and prepare them for assimilation by teaching them English and basic vocational skills. When Twiss enrolled, Rapid City housed students from six to twenty years of age, including relative Dora Twiss, who entered Rapid City in 1903 at age six. His enrollment was against Indian Bureau regulations, for Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp (1905-1909) had ruled earlier that year that Indian children were to go to day schools through the primary grades, and from the day schools graduate to reservation boarding schools. Only the most advanced students, ages fourteen and older, were to be enrolled in off-reservation boarding schools like Rapid City. Charlie Twiss nevertheless attended Rapid City until 1911, when overcrowding at the school led Superintendent Jesse F. House (1904-1922) to cut enrollment by

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sending home underage students. Twiss, eleven years old and in the first grade, was returned to Pine Ridge and enrolled in a reservation day school.¹

The system of day, reservation boarding, and off-reservation boarding schools that enrolled Twiss and thousands of other Indian children had its origins in the work of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Jefferson Morgan (1889-1893). Morgan personally embodied the paternalistic public face of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, while doing more than any previous commissioner to build the BIA's system of schools. A professional educator with a gift for florid, sometimes inflammatory oratory, Morgan spoke widely on Indian education. In his address, "A Plea for the Papoose," Morgan imagined that he could divine the desires and goals of Indian infants and put in their mouths a plea for the gift of civilization, without which he believed they would be lost. "Our only hope is in your civilization, which we cannot adopt unless you give us your Bible, your spelling book, your plow and your ax," Morgan said, on behalf of the infants. "Grant us these and teach us how to use them, and then we shall be like you."²

Lest Indian parents spurn the benefits of Morgan's offered civilization and raise another generation of "barbarians," the commissioner instituted what became widespread practices of coercion, authorizing reservation superintendents to withhold rations from Indian families that refused to send children away to school, and to use Indian police to seize children. By 1900, continuing Morgan's program of school construction, the BIA operated 147 reservation day schools, enrolling 5,000 students; 81 reservation boarding schools, enrolling 9,600 students; and 25 off-reservation boarding schools, enrolling 7,430 students. There were as well 32 contract schools, run by independent organizations under contracts providing BIA funding, enrolling 2,800 students; and 22 mission schools unconnected to the BIA, enrolling 1,275 students.³

Indian responses to the BIA's aggressive promotion of its schools remain the subject of historical inquiry. In *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*, David Wallace Adams writes that "[t]he opposition of Indian parents to white schooling was both deeply felt and widespread." Parents were especially reluctant to send their children to boarding schools. Adams details some of the strategies of resistance Indian parents employed: the refusal of individual families or entire communities to enroll children in

school, the practice of sending away orphans to fill far-off schools, and the support and shelter given to children who ran away from school. In response, reservation agents withheld rations from resisting families or ordered agency police to round up school-age children.⁴

Case studies of off-reservation boarding schools reveal additional factors. Brenda Child emphasizes economic hardship as a determining factor in the schooling choices of Chippewa families from the Red Lake Reservation in Minnesota. In her dissertation, "A Bitter Lesson: Native Americans and the Government Boarding School Experience, 1890-1940," Child discusses the ways in which family crises, reservation poverty, and the catastrophic effects of the Depression forced Chippewa families to turn to boarding schools for child care. The devastating effects of poverty played a role equal to the coercion of Indian agents and reservation police in forcing Red Lake children into boarding schools.⁵

In *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School*, K. Tsianina Lomawaima notes the effects of the Depression on schooling choices. When hard times made it difficult to provide for large families, Indian parents turned to the Chilocco Indian School, in north-central Oklahoma. But Chilocco represented more than simply a child care provider of last resort; Indian parents also valued its educational resources. "Involuntary recruitment by coercion or starvation was not necessary at Chilocco in the twentieth century," Lomawaima concludes. "In the Indian Territory, education was by and large a desired commodity." Chilocco offered an alternative to public schools, when public schools would not enroll Indian students. As family members went to Chilocco, attendance at the school sometimes became family tradition.⁶

Adams, Child, and Lomawaima all describe essential elements of the boarding school experience. Some students attended unwillingly, taken from their homes by reservation police. Poverty forced others from their families. Yet Lomawaima's work in particular raises the possibility that Indian students and parents may have played a more active role in making educational decisions. Such was the case with Charlie Twiss. "I like the [boarding] school so I want to come back to Rapid City SD," he wrote Superintendent House. "I don't want to go to the day school. I could learn nothing so I want to come back." That Twiss and others may have sought out boarding schools, and used them in familial or personal

survival strategies, challenges both the BIA's scripting of Indian roles, and interpretations of BIA boarding schools that stress Indian victimization by minimizing Indian agency. Study of the issue of recruitment at the Rapid City Indian School, an off-reservation boarding school operated by the BIA in Rapid City, South Dakota, from 1898 to 1933, supports Lomawaima's interpretations, while illustrating a broad range of Indian responses to BIA boarding schools.⁷

The Rapid City Indian School was one of several institutions with which Indians in southwestern South Dakota interacted. The school was easily accessible from the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River reservations. The BIA's education program was very much a part of reservation life in South Dakota: A visitor to the Rosebud Reservation in 1904 described Indian education as "compulsory in a way that compels." If a child missed a day of school at a reservation day school, the teacher reported the child's absence to the Indian police, who escorted the child to school the following day. Indian police played a similar role at the Cheyenne River Reservation. There, the combined capacities of a reservation boarding school near the agency, a mission school at Oahe, five reservation day schools, and the nearby Pierre and Rapid City off-reservation boarding schools were sufficient to accommodate the entire school-age population of approximately 650 children. "By the early 1900s," Frederick E. Hoxie declares, "it was almost impossible for a family to avoid sending its children away for an education, the principal goal of which was to separate the children from their traditions and their past."⁸

The Rapid City Indian School was thus part of a larger effort by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to compel the attendance of Indian children at BIA or mission schools.⁹ By the time the Rapid City Indian School opened in 1898, it had become increasingly difficult for Indian children to avoid white schooling altogether. For Indian children and their families, choices became more complex, even as compulsory education dramatically decreased the range of possibilities. Reservation day schools had only the primary grades, often the first four, and lacked the facilities to offer advanced instruction. Boarding schools offered instruction in the higher grades, but sometimes discouraged the enrollment of children in the fourth grade or lower, or children with limited knowledge of English. Would children go to a reservation day school and stay at home, or would they go away for their schooling? Would they start at a

day school and then transfer elsewhere? If children chose to go away for their education, would they stay on the reservation, if not always near their home communities, or would they leave for an off-reservation boarding school? If they stayed on the reservation, would they go to a mission, usually Catholic school, or to a government school? If they left the reservation, would they go to Rapid City or Pierre? Haskell or Carlisle?

Commissioner Morgan envisioned an integrated, rational system of government Indian schools where children would receive primary education at reservation day schools, go to reservation boarding schools only after they had learned English, and graduate to off-reservation boarding schools for advanced vocational training. Rarely did Indian children make such an orderly progression through school, for no single bureaucratic entity within the BIA coordinated all levels of education. Instead, important elements of Morgan's system fell within the control of separate, often competing jurisdictions within the BIA. Reservation day and boarding schools were within the jurisdiction of reservation superintendents. The off-reservation boarding schools had their own superintendents, each reporting directly to the Indian Office in Washington. In 1891, school superintendents became part of the civil service, and civil service reform reached the Indian agencies during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. As career civil servants, the superintendents knew their tenure and advancement in the Indian Service depended on the success—as gauged by enrollments, graduation rates, and other measures of achievement—of their respective institutions.¹⁰

Rapid City's first two students, Nora and Oscar Ammiott, arrived at the school September 20, 1898, brought by their father, "a Frenchman," from the Pine Ridge agency in South Dakota. Superintendent Ralph P. Collins (1898-1900) did not greet the Ammiotts, for he was at Pine Ridge recruiting more students. Collins recruited twenty-two students from Pine Ridge, whom he shipped to the school by wagon. A month-long trip to the Shoshone agency in Wyoming netted only four students, but the agent at the Cheyenne River agency in South Dakota delivered twenty-two more children to Collins. He took them to the school in wagons driven cross country in cold weather that was hard on children and the superintendent alike. Such recruiting trips quickly brought the school into conflict with reservation officials. Superintendent Sam B. Davis (1900-1904) reported an enrollment of one hundred students in

1901 and claimed to have turned away applicants for lack of room. Parental acceptance of the Rapid City Indian School may be at least partially explained by Davis' practice of paying generous travel allowances to parents who brought their children to school. An enlarged school could easily enroll three hundred students, Davis determined, if not for the intransigence of reservation officials, who preferred to keep their own schools filled.¹¹

Such bureaucratic jealousies aroused the ire of Commissioners of Indian Affairs William A. Jones (1897-1904) and Francis Ellington Leupp (1905-1909), neither of whom was favorably disposed to off-reservation boarding schools. Jones believed that the number of off-reservation boarding schools was already sufficient to the needs of the Indian Service, if not excessive. He did not sympathize with their superintendents' efforts to fill the schools to capacity. Jones described a "scramble for pupils among nonreservation schools" that was sometimes "so undignified as to call for drastic measures from this office." To limit competition between off-reservation schools, Jones assigned a recruiting territory to each school.¹²

Leupp likened the activities of recruiting agents to the African slave trade. Since Congress based appropriations for off-reservation boarding schools on yearly enrollment, at 167 dollars per child, Leupp believed the school superintendents were inclined to fill their schools with little or no regard for the health and welfare of the children. Decrying the "regular system of traffic in these helpless little red people," Leupp forbade outright the practice of sending recruiters to the reservations in 1908. If Indian parents wished to send their children to a non-reservation school, they could apply through their reservation superintendents, who were to respect the parents' wishes. Superintendents of off-reservation schools could send advertising material to reservation families. The school superintendents could neither send recruiting agents into the field nor pay the transportation expenses of Indian children enrolling in their schools, however, and it was their responsibility to see to it that no child entered an off-reservation school without proper application, including signed forms of parental consent. Leupp supported compulsory education, but he enjoined reservation superintendents from withholding rations or benefits to coerce parents into sending their children to off-reservation schools. The commissioner believed that under these restrictions, the system of off-reservation schools would disintegrate by degrees.¹³

Leupp's criticisms of off-reservation boarding schools remained persuasive, for they lent support to a powerful critique of federal Indian policy. Off-reservation boarding schools emerged as places where Indian children, removed forcibly from their families, endured attacks on their persons and cultures at the hands of assimilationist white educators. They stood as stark symbols of the wrongs of racist policies toward Indians. But Leupp's criticisms rested on assumptions about the roles of Indian parents and the nature of the choices before them that deserved closer examination. Leupp assumed that Indian parents, if left alone, would have little reason to send children to off-reservation boarding schools. Indian parents sent their children to off-reservation schools only when coerced or tricked into doing so by unscrupulous agents, in whose hands parents, angry as they were, were only so much clay, to be molded to the demands of the dominant society. Whether modified through emphasis on parental resistance, or on poverty as a motivating factor in parental decisions, elements of Leupp's view persisted in studies of off-reservation boarding schools. The perceptions that Indian parents were reactive, if not wholly passive, and that the off-reservation boarding schools were singularly lacking in appeal, guided the discourse on Indian schooling.

Leupp's subsequent experiences as commissioner of Indian Affairs suggest flaws in his basic assumptions. Leupp tried to set forth a rational plan of Indian schooling in Education-Administration Circular No. 295, issued May 18, 1909. Indian parents were to be allowed to choose the schools to which they sent their children, "the only requirement being that they place them in some good school and keep them there in regular attendance." In no way did this amount to freedom of choice for Indian parents, for it did not allow them the option of educating their children traditionally, in their own cultures. Leupp believed, however, that allowing Indian parents a modicum of control over their children's schooling prompted an increased interest in education among Indians.¹⁴

To Leupp's chagrin, Indian parents tended to "overstep the privilege" allowed them, in his opinion, and "disregard the legitimate authority of the Reservation Superintendent by sending to non-reservation schools children of any age and stage of advancement." Leupp believed in a structured system not unlike that proposed by Morgan. He wanted children to go to reservation schools first, and preferably to day schools,

unless other circumstances such as distance from a school forced parents to send their children to reservation boarding schools. The off-reservation schools, expensive to equip and maintain, were for children fourteen years of age or older, who had the maturity and prior schooling necessary to take advantage of the advanced instruction an off-reservation boarding school offered. No children under fourteen years of age were to be transferred to or otherwise enrolled in an off-reservation boarding school without special authority from the Office of the Commissioner. Leupp ordered Circular No. 295 posted conspicuously at school and agency offices, so parents could acquaint themselves with it.¹⁵

Because Indian parents preferred to keep the children in a family together when at school, the Rapid City Indian School never entirely succeeded in eliminating the lower grades. When the Chamberlain, South Dakota, boarding school closed in 1909, Rapid City Superintendent House arranged the transfers of former Chamberlain students from the Crow Creek and Lower Brule reservations to Rapid City. House asked permission from the commissioner of Indian Affairs to enroll children under the age of fourteen, for Chamberlain had enrolled whole families of children. To take only the older children would divide the families, to which the parents would not consent. Acting Commissioner F. H. Abbott responded by waiving the age limit for transfers from Chamberlain and allowed House to enroll any child who had an older sibling at Rapid City. The issue came up again in 1910, as House began enrollment processes for fiscal year 1911. House asked Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert G. Valentine (1909-1912) to lower the age limit for enrollment at Rapid City to twelve years, and also asked that the limit be removed entirely when necessary to enroll an entire family. "The parents living on these nearby reservations prefer to have all their children in one school," House wrote, "and would not care to send the older children here, and the younger ones to the reservation schools."¹⁶

As late as 1932, the school worked to accommodate the wishes of parents who preferred to keep families together. Reorganizing the off-reservation boarding schools in the early 1930s under Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, the BIA finally removed the last underage pupils from the Chilocco and Phoenix Indian schools, which became high schools. Finding no similar role for the Rapid City Indian School, the BIA scheduled its closure to make way for a tuberculosis sana-

torium (Sioux Sanatorium, or "Sioux San"). As part of the consolidation process that preceded the school's closure, the BIA transferred the last of Rapid City's younger pupils below the fourth grade to the Pierre, South Dakota, off-reservation boarding school. C. M. Schwandt, the school social worker, asked Rapid City Principal Kirk K. Newport if two of the four children of Moses B. Eagle could be advanced to the fourth grade so they could remain at Rapid City with their two older brothers. The children wanted to stay at Rapid City, and Eagle was "very satisfied with what the school has done for his children. He is confident that they will be safe and for that reason wishes them to remain together." Newport did not think it in the interests of the two younger boys for them to advance to the fourth grade, and so he released the two older boys to the Pierre Indian School so the family could remain together.¹⁷

The desire of Indian parents to keep families together thus challenged Leupp's assumptions about off-reservation boarding schools. Yet Leupp's assumptions were not wholly unfounded, for the Rapid City Indian School indeed took in children under a wide range of circumstances. Particularly before Leupp's reforms, Rapid City enrolled children under duress. In September 1907, for example, John R. Brennan, agent of the Pine Ridge agency, authorized the Rapid City Indian School to round up and enroll thirteen children whom Brennan believed were "loafing around the town and should be in school." In October 1907, Pine Ridge Day School Inspector J. J. Duncan asked Rapid City to capture three young women, one of whom was to be enrolled at the school.¹⁸

The resort to coercion was particularly reprehensible in light of Indian concerns about the safety of off-reservation boarding schools. As Adams and Child have noted, parents sometimes refused to send their children to off-reservation boarding schools out of fear for the children's health or their very lives. Tuberculosis, measles, and other diseases took a heavy toll, especially in the early years of the off-reservation schools. Between 1881 and 1894, eleven of fifteen children sent to the Carlisle Indian School from the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming either died at school or returned home sick and died soon after. Of fifty-four children sent from Wind River to the Genoa Indian School, in Genoa, Nebraska, twenty-three died at school or came home to die, and another twelve returned home invalids. Three of the four Wind River children sent to the Santee, Nebraska, school returned home sick and

died. Parents had good reason to fear boarding schools, where once-healthy children might be crowded into dormitories and classrooms with students with active, contagious tuberculosis, and where medical care was either primitive or wholly absent.¹⁹

Aware of the risks through bitter experience, parents tried to see that their children went to schools where health was good and kept them out of schools where too many deaths occurred. In 1911, for example, parents of students from the Tongue River agency in Montana refused to return their children to the Rapid City Indian School at the end of summer vacations. Two Tongue River boys had died the previous year, and the parents feared that more would die over the winter. They were willing to send their children to other off-reservation boarding schools, but not to Rapid City.²⁰

Yet parents and children alike sometimes preferred off-reservation boarding schools in general, or the Rapid City Indian School in particular, to other schools. Felix Eagle Feather, a Lakota from the Rosebud Reservation and parent of a Rapid City student, told Superintendent House in 1910 that he wished the government would close all the day schools because the non-reservation schools did more good for the children than day schools. Charlie Twiss would have agreed.²¹

Parents sometimes complained about the quality of education available at reservation boarding schools or mission schools. In 1910, Nicholas Ruleau applied for his three daughters to enter the Rapid City Indian School. Two of his daughters, Zona and Isabel, had been attending the Holy Rosary Mission at Pine Ridge for three years, and Ruleau complained that "they don't seem to make any progress in their studies." Ruleau also wanted to keep all his children at one school. A. Hankaas pulled his two children, a nine-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy, out of the Rosebud boarding school and sought their placement at Rapid City, though both were underage. Hankaas vowed never to send his children to the Rosebud school again, even if it meant holding them out of school entirely. "I put them there to learn white man way in stead of that they learn how to talk Indian," Hankaas complained. He was also concerned because the Rosebud superintendent turned his children out for the summer before Hankaas got to the school to pick them up.²²

The preference of some Indian parents for the Rapid City Indian School helps explain the school's persistence in the face

of official hostility toward off-reservation boarding schools. Despite Leupp's hope that the off-reservation boarding schools would disintegrate by degrees, the Rapid City Indian School, like the much larger Phoenix and Chilocco Indian schools, adapted well to the competitive recruiting environment Leupp created. The yearly routine of recruiting and enrolling students underwent only minor modifications during Leupp's tenure and lasted with few changes at Rapid City until the school's closure in 1933. Recruiting trips to the reservations of Wyoming, Montana, and western South Dakota remained essential to securing students for the school.

Indian parents sometimes played an active role in the competition between schools, and could be quite adept at manipulating the different jurisdictions of the BIA. In December 1918, James H. McGregor, superintendent of the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota, accused House of undermining his authority on the reservation by allowing parents from the Cherry Creek district to enroll underage children at Rapid City. "I am frank to say that I think you are at fault in accepting pupils below the third grade when they go there without any authority from me when I had already informed you that I expected to retain pupils below the 4th grade for the reservation school," McGregor charged. "For you to disregard my policy only makes it harder for me to maintain the discipline that I desire."²³

Superintendent House tried to placate McGregor, while defending his own actions and those of the Cherry Creek parents. House had no intention of undermining McGregor's authority. He had enrolled pupils from the lower grades, but the children had been brought there by their parents, who invariably said that the enrollment had been approved by the district farmer or other reservation authority. House could not refuse the children, particularly when there were no arrangements made for the children's return to the reservation.²⁴

House attributed McGregor's problems with the Cherry Creek people to reservation politics that predated McGregor's administration. For as long as House had known the Indians of the Cherry Creek country, they had "shown a feeling that the agency authorities were not in sympathy with them." House attributed the tensions in part to the distance of the Cherry Creek district, in the southwestern corner of the vast Cheyenne River Reservation, from the agency and the superintendent's offices. Rapid City was no farther away than the agency, and there were jobs available in Rapid City. Some of the Cherry

Creek people could get jobs at what House considered to be very good salaries at any time. Living in Rapid City, Cherry Creek Indians could meet their friends and relatives from other reservations and enjoy contact with a wider world than that available to them at the agency.²⁵

As the controversy over enrollment from the Cherry Creek district of the Cheyenne River Reservation demonstrates, reservation boundaries were not absolute barriers. Indians could, and did, travel off the reservations. Nor were reservations always the centers of community for reservation residents. And contrary to the stereotypes surrounding off-reservation boarding schools, the off-reservation schools were not necessarily farther from children's homes than the reservation boarding schools. Cherry Creek yields a case in point. For Cherry Creek parents and children, the Rapid City school was more accessible than the reservation boarding school. Whether acting out of frustration with innumerable delays inflicted on them by agency employees, as House implied, or out of a desire to embarrass their reservation superintendent, as McGregor charged, the people of the Cherry Creek district exploited divisions within the BIA to make their own educational choices.²⁶

In the 1920s, competition between the off-reservation boarding schools and transfers from reservation to off-reservation boarding schools became somewhat more regularized. C. D. Munro, superintendent of the Cheyenne River agency in 1922, demonstrated changing attitudes among reservation superintendents toward off-reservation schools when he sent Rapid City Superintendent S.A.M. Young (1922-1925, 1930-1932) the names and addresses of students eligible for enrollment in an off-reservation school. Reservation boarding schools facilitated the enrollment of older students in off-reservation boarding schools by hosting the superintendents on their recruiting trips and inviting students to listen to the superintendents and weigh the merits of their schools. Elizabeth Whitehat received such an invitation in August 1924 from the principal of the Rosebud Boarding School. Superintendent House, then in charge of the Flandreau Indian School, Superintendent Young of Rapid City, and Superintendent Whitlock of the Pierre Indian School planned to visit the Rosebud boarding school on August 19, 20, and 21. The principal of the Rosebud school told Whitehat that the visits of the three superintendents would be a good opportunity for her to select her school for the year, if she had not already decided.²⁷

Students enrolled at the Rapid City Indian School for a variety of reasons. Susie Battle, a Lakota from the Pine Ridge Reservation, had been impressed by the school catalogue. Although the catalogues changed over the years, they remained a mainstay of the mailings the school sent to prospective students. Under Superintendent House, the catalogues constituted lengthy and elaborate documents. A "Catalog and Synopsis of Courses" from the 1916-1917 school year carried in the inside cover a very formal portrait of House, accompanied by a letter "To Patrons and Those Interested," which drew attention to the opportunities and advantages offered by the school. A list of officers and instructors followed, along with a calendar of the school year. Information on the school and its location and history, expenses, and detailed descriptions of classes filled the bulk of the thirty-page document. A picture of the last graduating class and lists of graduates from previous years rounded out the catalogue. Photographs of the school liberally illustrated the publication. This feature of the catalogue attracted Susie Battle. She obtained the catalogue for the 1917-1918 year, "saw the pictures of the school and was very much surprised to see it," and decided to go to Rapid City. Later catalogues followed a similar format, with the addition of lists of the previous year's enrollment. Superintendent Young toned down the formality of the document and included more direct advertising pitches. The 1923 catalogue noted, among other features, "Better class rooms for boys' industrial work," "A larger school than ever before," and "A better band and orchestra." As an inducement to prompt arrival, the catalogue promised "A Good Time the First Week," with a good picture show, and a social with refreshments.²⁸

Other students enrolled because their parents or relatives had gained employment at the school. Indian employees of the Rapid City Indian School with children of their own commonly enrolled their children in the institution. Frank and Lizzie Bullard accepted employment as night watchman and assistant seamstress, respectively, only when assured that Rapid City would enroll their children. Chippewa employee Sophie E. Picard, assistant matron in charge of large boys and herself a graduate of the Mt. Pleasant Indian School and the Haskell Institute, enrolled a cousin at Rapid City. The boy was to learn a trade, and his mother wanted Picard to look after him while he was in school. If Picard, a career employee of the BIA, moved to another school, the mother wanted Picard to take the boy with her. Superintendent House did not

know whether or not the boy's transportation could be paid by the BIA, but he readily agreed to enroll the boy under the conditions suggested by the boy's mother.²⁹

Personal acquaintance with school personnel sometimes played a role in decisions about enrollment. The Reverend Sam Rouillard led a Presbyterian congregation on the Pine Ridge Reservation when S.A.M. Young taught school at the nearby No. 5 Day School. When Rouillard sought to enroll his son, Isaac, and four other boys in an off-reservation boarding school in 1922, he wrote to Young, who was by then superintendent at Rapid City, and reminded Young of their acquaintance. Young, who remembered Rouillard quite well, was happy to send him applications for his son and the four other boys.³⁰

Acquaintances and friendships between children also brought students to the Rapid City Indian School. Lucy Cottier, a former student, asked to be allowed to return to Rapid City in 1910 to enroll in its domestic science program, though she could not see well enough to participate in academic work. Cottier's friends were going back to Rapid City, and she wanted to go with them. Cottier also asked for applications for two of her friends, Julia Allen and Laura Stevens, who wanted to enroll. House made arrangements for Cottier to enroll in the domestic science program as she wished, and sent catalogues to Allen and Stevens. House urged Cottier to speak to Allen and Stevens about enrollment, and hoped that she would bring them with her when she returned to school.³¹

In times of family crisis, the Rapid City Indian School became a child care provider of last resort for Indian parents. In "A Bitter Lesson," Child argues that Chippewa parents turned to boarding schools in times of family crisis. Poor reservation health conditions resulted in many deaths, and the death of a spouse often left the survivor without adequate resources to care for children. Reservation poverty made it difficult for relatives to take in needy children, and the Chippewa tradition of adopting and providing for orphans within the tribe became in some cases impossible to maintain. Enrolling children in boarding schools meant their separation from family and reservation communities, but ensured that the children would be fed, clothed, housed, and hopefully provided with an education that would benefit them later in life. Lomawaima demonstrates a similar role for the Chilocco Indian School, where in the 1920s the lower grades were filled primarily with orphans and children from broken homes.³²

The Rapid City Indian School met corresponding needs for families and children from the reservations of Wyoming, Montana, the Dakotas, and surrounding communities. A Potawatomi widower named Tesson living in Gordon, Nebraska, had three children to enroll in school: Mary and Rachel, ages eleven and six, and Peter, age nine. Enrolling the children meant giving them up for long periods of time, but their separation from their father was not permanent. Enrolled for three-year terms in 1911, all three Tesson children reenrolled in 1914, leaving the school December 31, 1917. Enrolling all the children, even at young ages, kept them together, as Tesson wished. They were among other Indian children, too, though they were the only Potawatomis at Rapid.³³

Mrs. Nick Ruleau enrolled three boys, William, age eleven; Edward, age nine; and Blaine, age seven; in Rapid City in 1922. Recently divorced, Ruleau could not earn a living while caring for her children. The three boys attended the Catholic mission school at Pine Ridge, but Ruleau wanted them enrolled for a period of four to five years in a school where they would be cared for the entire year and not sent home for the summers. Even with little room at Rapid City, Superintendent Young sought to find space for the boys. School closed June 2, and Young did not expect the boys to arrive until other children were going home for the summer.³⁴

While Tesson and Ruleau initiated the enrollments of their children in the Rapid City Indian School, reservation officials applied varying degrees of suggestion and coercion to get children from financially strapped homes enrolled at Rapid City. Superintendent C. H. Gensler of the Lower Brule agency, South Dakota, sent two children of Mrs. Driving Hawk to Rapid City after the death of the father. Gensler knew Rapid City was filled to capacity, yet he asked Superintendent Young to take the children because there was no other way of caring for them. After the death of the children's father, Driving Hawk was left with "quite a large family." The nearest public school was some distance from the Driving Hawk home, and Driving Hawk could not, in Gensler's estimation, support the family and keep the children in school. Young found Henry and Alvena Driving Hawk to be bright children, and apparently pleased to be enrolled at Rapid City. Despite the crowding at the school, Young promised to find "some nail on which to hang them," and was glad he could be of service to the children and their

mother. Whether Gensler forced the children's enrollment at Rapid City or merely facilitated it is unclear.³⁵

No such uncertainty surrounded the enrollment of the Matt children. In April, 1920, Theodore Sharp, superintendent of the Flathead agency in western Montana, received permission from Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. B. Meritt to place the nine children of Jule and Peter Matt in the Rapid City Indian School, if Superintendent House could find room for them. Jule Matt, a mixed-blood resident of the Flathead Reservation, had seven children between the ages of five and twelve. After the death of his wife, Matt's children had been without care and often without food, fuel, or clothing. W. G. Brown, the day school inspector, recommended that the children be removed from their home after two of the girls were found at night in the streets of Ronan, a reservation town 3.5 miles from the Matt home, cold, hungry, and crying. The family's relatives were too poor to take care of the children, and there was a waiting list for admission to the state Orphan's Home. Sharp turned to the Rapid City Indian School for their care. Sharp also wanted the two children of Peter Matt seized and taken to Rapid City. Their father had died in the Montana State Penitentiary at Deer Lodge, and Sharp described their mother as "a vicious woman with a notorious reputation who gives the children no proper care." The children circulated between the mother and their relatives, whom Sharp judged to be too poor to care for them. The Rapid City Indian School enrolled the children on July 1, 1920, ten weeks before regular enrollments began.³⁶

Such enrollments were not exceptional, for boarding schools were common destinations for Indian children removed from their homes. In 1924, Superintendent Henry J. McQuigg of the Turtle Mountain Indian agency, North Dakota, asked Young to enroll three orphans, who had been staying with a married sister after the deaths of their parents. The sister lacked the resources to care for and educate the children properly, and a meeting of the Indian judges at Turtle Mountain agreed that McQuigg, acting for the government, should without delay seek the children's placement in a government school. Young, though noting that he "really should not take them, since we are more than full and there are children nearby without school facilities," agreed to again make room and squeeze the children in.³⁷

Superintendent McQuigg again asked the Rapid City Indian School to accept Turtle Mountain children in 1926. Eliza

Hayes, eleven, an orphan, did not have a home. Indian judges ordered Mary C. and Mary Ann Houle, ages seventeen and fifteen, taken from their home because of the unfitness of their parents to care for them. The judges recommended that all three be placed in an Indian school. Matron Theresa C. Kaufman said she would be glad to take them in, but Superintendent Sharon R. Mote (1925-1929) refused to admit the girls, since the school was already over capacity. When Young returned to Rapid City in 1930, he too turned away welfare placements. The school had more than enough students.³⁸

The evolution of student enrollment at the Rapid City Indian School points the way to a new understanding of Indian responses to BIA boarding schools. The first Indians to enroll in the Carlisle Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, left what was to become the Rosebud Reservation in 1879. By the time Rapid City opened in 1898, Indians in the Northern Plains had become quite knowledgeable about BIA schools. From experience with Carlisle and other off-reservation boarding schools, Indian parents knew the advantages and disadvantages of a boarding school education. Rapid City was also in country that the people of the reservations of Wyoming, Montana, and western South Dakota knew well. If they had not actually traveled near the Black Hills (Rapid City was within the historic lands of the Crows, Lakotas, and Cheyennes), the climate, altitude, and vegetation were still familiar. For some, Rapid City, a town of 1,342 people in 1900 and 5,777 in 1920, was closer than reservation headquarters and reservation schools. As the BIA's campaign for the compulsory education of Indian children made it increasingly difficult to avoid white schooling altogether, Indians responded by making the most of the choices the BIA offered.³⁹

Taking advantage of the competition between reservation and off-reservation boarding schools, Indian parents forced the Rapid City Indian School to meet their needs to a greater degree than the BIA had anticipated. Ignoring the BIA's plans for a structured system where only the oldest, most advanced students would study at off-reservation boarding schools, Indian parents forced Rapid City to take children of all ages so families could stay together. If reservation schools did not provide the education Indian parents wanted for their children, they sent them to Rapid City. In an environment in which education was compulsory but the choice of school left largely open, children enrolled at Rapid City to be with friends, to stay

close to relatives, or because its superintendent or catalogue made a good impression.

The experiences of the Tesson and Matt children reveal a different side of enrollment at the Rapid City Indian School. The deaths of spouses, poverty, and social dislocation sometimes left Indian parents and their children with few, if any choices. Enrollment at Rapid City might bring relief from poverty and instability at home, as students received food, clothing, housing, and warmth in the cold Northern Plains winters. While the availability of Rapid City made it possible for reservation superintendents to separate children from their parents, the school enrolled entire families, regardless of age restrictions, which at least made it possible for children in a family to stay together. The enrollment of children from Turtle Mountain at the request of the Indian judges suggests that the Rapid City Indian School may have become a part of community survival strategies as well, as reservation communities sought to cope with the debilitating effects of poverty. The Rapid City Indian School emerges not as a wholly alien institution, forced on Indian communities, but rather as an element of a larger network of BIA institutions, one that Indian families and communities understood to have distinct costs and benefits, and were capable of manipulating to their own advantage.

NOTES

1. "Quarterly School Report for Rapid City, S.D.," General Correspondence File (hereafter cited as GCF) Box 27, Decimal Classification (hereafter cited as DC) 820.0 Quarterly Report Ending 30 June 1906 file; "Quarterly School Report for Rapid City, S.D.," GCF Box 27, DC 820.0 Quarterly Report Ending 31 December 1910 file; "Education-Administration Circular No. 295," Francis E. Leupp, Commissioner of Indian Affairs (hereafter cited as CIA), 18 May 1909, GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1909 file; Jesse F. House, Superintendent, Rapid City Indian School, to Robert G. Valentine, CIA, 25 October 1910, GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1911 file; Valentine to House, 4 November 1910, GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1911 file; all Rapid City Indian School, Record Group (hereafter cited as RG) 75, Federal Archives and Records Center-Kansas City (hereafter cited as FARC-KC).

2. Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indian: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian," 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 222-223, 244; Francis Paul Prucha, "Thomas Jefferson Morgan," in Robert

M. Kvasnicka and Herman J. Viola, eds., *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 193-203.

3. Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 700-707, 815-817.

4. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 210-211.

5. Brenda Joyce Child, "A Bitter Lesson: Native Americans and the Government Boarding School Experience, 1890-1940," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Iowa, 1993), 45-46.

6. K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 32-36.

7. Charlie Twiss to House, 12 February 1911, Superintendents Subject Correspondence File (hereafter cited as SSCF) Box 6, Education Administration 1911 Students Eligible for transfer to non-reservation schools file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

8. Prucha, *The Great Father*, 815-817; "The Rosebud," *Rapid City Daily Journal*, 25 June 1904; Frederick E. Hoxie, "From Prison To Homeland: The Cheyenne River Indian Reservation Before World War I," *The Plains Indians of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Iverson, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 59.

9. Though Congress discontinued spending for sectarian contract schools (all Catholic after the withdrawal of the few Protestant schools from the contract system in 1892) in 1900, the BIA allowed Indian children to attend mission schools as alternatives to BIA schools. Prucha, *The Great Father*, 707-711.

10. Prucha, *The Great Father*, 731-736.

11. "Indian School Pupils," *Rapid City Daily Journal*, 21 September 1898; "Indian School Arrivals," *Rapid City Daily Journal*, 27 September 1898; Ralph P. Collins, Superintendent, "Report of School at Rapid City, S. Dak.," in *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1899* (hereafter cited as CIA Report) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), 430-431; Sam B. Davis, Superintendent, "Report of School at Rapid City, S. Dak.," CIA Report 1901, 570-571; David B. Miller, *Gateway to the Hills, An Illustrated History of Rapid City* (Northridge, California: Windsor Publications, 1985), 33.

12. W. A. Jones, CIA Report 1903, 26-27; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 816-819.

13. Francis E. Leupp, CIA Report 1908, 16-17; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 819-820.

14. Francis E. Leupp, Education-Administration Circular No. 295, "Transfer of pupils under 14," 18 May 1909, GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1909 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Jesse F. House, Superintendent, Rapid City Indian School, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 21 July 1909, SSCF Box 2, Buildings and Equipment-Equipment file, School Lands sub-file; F. H. Abbott, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to House, 5 August 1909, SSCF Box 6, Education and Administration file; House, "Enrollment of Pupils," to the

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 3 June 1910, GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1910 file; all Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

17. C. M. Schwandt, School Social Worker, to Kirk K. Newport, Principal, Rapid City Indian School, 9 August 1932; Newport to Schwandt, 12 August 1932; both GCF Box 30, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1932 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC; Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light*, 39; Robert A. Trennert, Jr., *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 199.

18. John R. Brennan, Agent, Pine Ridge Agency, to House, 30 September 1907; J. J. Duncan, Day School Inspector, Pine Ridge Agency, to Lawson Odle, in charge of Rapid City, 22 October 1907; both GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1907 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

19. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 214; Child, "A Bitter Lesson," 183-186; Congress, Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs, *Conduct and Management of Indian Schools, Etc.*, 57th Congress, 1st session, Senate document 201.

20. John A. Buntin, Superintendent, Tongue River Agency, to House, 11 October 1911, GCF Box 90, DC 842 Tongue River Agency file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

21. Felix Eagle Feather to House, 22 February 1910, GCF Box 28, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1910 file; Charlie B. Twiss to House, 12 February 1911, SSCF Box 6 Education Administration, 1911-Students Eligible file; both Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

22. Nicholas Ruleau to House, 12 September 1910, SSCF Box 7 Education, a-2-10 Nicholas Ruleau 1910 file; A. Hankaas to Superintendent, undated, SSCF Box 7 Education, a-2-68 Hankaas (sic) 1910 file; both Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

23. James H. McGregor, Superintendent, Cheyenne River Agency, to House, 3 December 1918, GCF Box 29, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1918 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

24. House to McGregor, 10 December 1918, GCF Box 29, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1918 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. C.D. Munro, Superintendent, Cheyenne River agency, to S.A.M. Young, Superintendent, Rapid City Indian School, 24 July 1922, GCF Box 29, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1922 file; Principal (no name given), Rosebud Boarding School, to Elizabeth Whitehat, 14 August 1924, GCF Box 30, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1924 file; both Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

28. Susie Battle to House, 22 August 1917, GCF Box 88, DC 842 Pine Ridge agency 1913-1916, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC; "Catalog and Synopsis of Courses, United States Indian School, Rapid City, South Dakota, 1916-17;" "The School of the Hills, U.S. Indian School, Rapid City, S.D., August, 1923;" both SSCF Box 9, School Annuals, Graduate Programs, School Paper file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC. Despite its title, this file contains

no school papers. There is no evidence that Rapid City produced a school paper.

29. Frank Bullard to Young, 1 June 1924; Young to Bullard, 4 June 1924; Young to E. W. Jermark, Superintendent, Pine Ridge Agency, 28 February 1925; all GCF Box 6, DC 161 (A-B) Frank B. Bullard file; Sophie E. Picard to House, 2 July 1916; House to Picard, 8 July 1916; "Record of Sophie E. Picard;" all GCF Box 12, GCF 161 (P-R) Picard, Sophie file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

30. Reverend Sam Rouillard to Young, 23 August 1922; Young to Rouillard, 25 August 1922; both GCF Box 13, DC 161 (R-S) Rouillard, Isaac file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

31. Lucy Cottier to House, 29 August 1910; House to Cottier, 5 September 1910; both SSCF Box 7 Education, a-2-54 John Cottier 1910 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

32. Child, "A Bitter Lesson," 45-50; Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light*, 38-39.

33. Nancy E. Ulargran to House, 17 May 1911, SSCF Box 6 Education Administration, 1911-Students Eligible file; "Report of Attendance, Quarter ending December 31st, 1912," GCF Box 27, DC 820.0 Quarterly Report ending December 31st, 1912 file; "Report of Attendance, Quarter ending December 31st, 1917," GCF Box 27, DC 820.0 Quarterly Report ending December 31st, 1917 file; all Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

34. W. H. Blish, Day School Inspector, Pine Ridge Agency, 14 April 1922; Young to Blish, 17 April 1922; both GCF Box 29, DC 840.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1922 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

35. C. H. Gensler, Superintendent, Lower Brule Agency, to Young, 2 November 1922; Young to Gensler, 16 January 1923; both GCF Box 88, DC 842 Lower Brule Agency file, Rapid City Indian School, FARC-KC.

36. Theodore Sharp, Superintendent, Flathead agency, to E. B. Meritt, Commissioner of Indian Affairs (hereafter cited as CIA), 26 March 1920; Meritt to Sharp, 10 April 1920; Sharp to House, 16 April 1920; all GCF Box 29, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1920 file; "Report of Attendance, Quarter Ending December 31, 1922," GCF Box 27, DC 820.0 Quarterly Report Ending December 31, 1922 file; all Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

37. Henry J. McQuigg, Superintendent, Turtle Mountain Indian Agency, to Young, 26 December 1924; Young to McQuigg, 29 December 1924; both GCF Box 30, DC 840.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1924 file, Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

38. McQuigg to Sharon R. Mote, Superintendent, Rapid City Indian School, 29 January 1926, with notes written on the letter by Mote and Theresa C. Kaufman, Matron, Rapid City Indian School, GCF Box 91, DC 842 Turtle Mountain agency file; Young to the Rice District, United Charities of St. Paul, 10 December 1930, GCF Box 24, DC 710 Sanitation file; Young to Laverne Bonser, 8 December 1931, GCF Box 30, DC 820.2 Enrollment and Attendance-1932 file; all Rapid City Indian School, RG 75, FARC-KC.

39. *Abstract of the Thirteenth Census of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 74; *Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 65. Census enumerators counted only eighty-one Indians in Pennington County, in which Rapid City was located, in 1900. By 1930, the total had risen to three hundred, a number which still was almost certainly low. Lakotas from the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne River reservations often camped outside Rapid City on a seasonal basis. *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Vol. III: Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 710; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Vol. III, Part 2: Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 844