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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A PAST NOT PRESENT:  
MEMORY, CHRISTIANITY, AND INDIAN REMOVAL MISSION SITES  
IN THE GREAT LAKES AND THE SOUTH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

JOINT PROGRAM IN PUBLIC HISTORY AND AMERICAN HISTORY

BY

SEAN THOMAS JACOBSON

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2022

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So welcome each other with open arms in the same way the Chosen One has honored the Great Spirit by welcoming you. This is what I am saying: the Chosen One came as a servant to our Tribal People, to show that the Great Spirit has kept the promises he made to our ancestors. He also came to show his kindness and mercy to the Outside Nations so they would also give honor to the Great Spirit.

Small Man to the Sacred Family in Village of Iron 15:7-9  
(Paul's Epistle to the Romans)  
First Nations Version



## PREFACE: A NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE

Throughout this dissertation I will, in most cases, use the terms *American Indian*, *Native American*, *Native*, and *Indigenous* interchangeably. Each of these labels has its own complex history tied to the colonial experience, and some terms continue to fall in and out of favor by particular groups and individuals over time, Native and non-Native communities alike. Whenever possible, I refer to a specific tribe either by their preferred spelling (“Potawatomi”) or an endonym (“Neshnabek”). I capitalize the words “Native” and “Indigenous” in the same way I would capitalize “French,” “Spanish,” or “American.” Unless otherwise noted, I use the term “American” as a political designation for United States settlers and institutions, and I will specify “white American,” “Anglo-American,” “African American,” etc. when appropriate.

The French term “Métis” is used in reference to persons of mixed Indigenous and French-Canadian heritage, and it has limited usage for the Great Lakes region. While Métis is a designated racial category in Canada, it is admittedly anachronistic to call someone Métis in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries, as racial identity could be much more fluid. Persons like Magdalene LaFramboise, Charles Langlade, or Joseph Bourassa could as readily identify as Odawa or Potawatomi and were often labeled “Indian” by contemporaries, even though they were equally French in their ancestry. For the sake of simplicity, I still use the term Métis, with the knowledge that the term carries complex meaning. Outside the Great Lakes, I will identify individuals as mixed-race only when it bears significance to their contexts, but I will more often refer to them by their tribal affiliation and consider them Native American. The issue of “blood quantum” is a much later imposition upon American Indian communities that I do not concern myself with for the purpose

of this dissertation. If a person or source identifies as Indian, they are Indian regardless of their skin color or exact genetic makeup. As historian Christopher A. Oakley has suggested, Native identity is “a process, not a constant.”<sup>1</sup>

Many commonly used names of tribes or individuals are exonyms or Anglicized corruptions of original pronunciations (e.g., “Chippewa” vs. “Ojibwe”). In other cases, spelling conventions range considerably for a proper name (e.g., “Singoa,” “Singowa,” “Sinagaw,” “Chinega,” etc.). Except when quoting directly from a primary document or referencing an entity that uses a particular spelling (e.g., “Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians”), I have chosen to standardize spelling that is most preferred by the respective tribe, though I acknowledge multiple naming variations.

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion on American Indian identity formation and negotiation, see Christopher Arris Oakley, *Keeping the Circle: American Indian Identity in Eastern North Carolina, 1885-2004* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 3-12.

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CHAPTER I  
DISRUPTING THE NARRATIVE  
REMOVAL ERA INDIAN SCHOOLS AS A CHALLENGE TO THE HISTORICAL  
DETERMINISM OF INDIAN REMOVAL

As for our going to the Arkansas [Territory], it is not decided. Perhaps we shall know better, when you return. You know mother is always very anxious to remove to that country, but father is not. For my own part, I feel willing to do whatever is duty, and the will of our parents. I feel willing to go, or stay. The Lord will direct all things right, and in him may we put all our trust...<sup>1</sup>

So wrote in 1823 a young Cherokee woman living in northern Alabama to her brother in Andover, Massachusetts. Both siblings, Catharine and David Brown, were part of a generation who had experienced more rapid and seismic cultural and political changes than any prior generation of their Native American compatriots. Catharine and David, who were born Ka'ty and A'wish, had been raised in a traditionalist Cherokee home. They had several half-siblings, as their parents John (Yau-nu-gung-yah-ski) and Sarah (Tsa-luh) practiced polygamy – a common practice among Southeastern Native peoples. Amid the context of intertribal warfare and political upheavals, both siblings enrolled as teenagers in a missionary school established within Cherokee country. Within a couple years, both siblings mastered the English language. Moreover, they both converted to Christianity. As they grappled with the possibilities of their Cherokee community and kin being exiled from their homeland, both Catharine and David committed themselves to spreading the Christian gospel to

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<sup>1</sup> Catharine Brown to David Brown, January 18, 1823, in *Cherokee Sister: The Collected Writings of Catharine Brown, 1818-1823*, ed. Theresa Strouth Gaul (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 106-109.

their fellow Cherokee and translating the Bible into their native tongue. Catharine became the first female Cherokee educator for a girls' school, and David became one of the first Native American graduates of a major American seminary. However, both siblings were dead before the age of thirty. By the time of their deaths, Catharine and David's parents, half-siblings, and other relatives had already left under duress their homes to live in Arkansas. Soon after, they would join the fate of most of the Cherokee Nation in being expelled to Indian Territory (Oklahoma).<sup>2</sup>

What do we make of such a story? The lives of Catharine and David Brown are full of paradoxes. In the immediate aftermath of their premature deaths to tuberculosis, the Browns were hailed by white Protestant missionaries as the paragons of success in the enterprise to "civilize" the Cherokee Nation. Despite such enthusiastic acclaim, the Brown siblings were unusual among their peers for their education and wholesale zeal for the Christian faith. Many more Cherokees were content holding on to traditionalist cultures with an ambivalent attitude toward Christianity's exclusive claims (and by extension, Western standards of monogamy and patriarchy).<sup>3</sup> From a traditionalist standpoint, Catharine and David Brown might represent the betrayal of a former way of life or the ultimate futility of cultural change, given how both died in their youth. Consequentially, many subsequent scholars dismissed their Indigenous identities. The evangelistic efforts among Southern Indian nations failed to prevent removal. While scholarly appreciation of Natives who embraced non-Indigenous cultural tools has increased more recently, very few people outside of academic specialists know of the Brown siblings' existence. The passage of time has effaced not only

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<sup>2</sup> Theresa Strouth Brown, introduction to *Cherokee Sister*, 7-11, 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 169-171.

their memory but their actual burial sites, which were flooded by Tennessee Valley Authority damming in the 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

On the surface, Catharine and David Brown seem to stand in for a larger declension narrative that has plagued American Indian nations and tribes since the foundation of the United States. The narrative presumes that Native people and the United States are incompatible. Noble efforts to bridge the gaps between Indigenous societies and the settler cultures of the USA are misguided at best and harmful at worst. Indigenous attempts to culturally adapt or innovate result in the destruction of ethnic and tribal entities. Indians, deprived of their traditional homelands, ecological resources, and social structures, are incapable of living in Western “modernity,” and Native converts to Christianity are often questioned for their “authenticity.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Compare the relative obscurity of Catharine Brown with the seventeenth century Mohawk woman Catherine/“Kateri” Tekakwitha, the first Native American woman canonized as a Roman Catholic saint in 2012. For an anthology of sources documenting Native and Catholic engagement with her memory since the late seventeenth century, see Mark G. Thiel and Christopher Vecsey, eds., *Native Footsteps: Along the Path of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2012). For a thorough biography and argument for her significance in Native American Christianity, see Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> In Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville’s magisterial study of American peoples, institutions, and lifeways in *Democracy in America* (first published in 1835), he mused on the effect of interactions between European, African, and Native American races. During a sojourn in the Creek Nation in Alabama, Tocqueville witnessed familial interactions between three women: a Creek woman, her mixed-race white daughter, and (presumably) their enslaved Black servant. He remarked, “a bond of affection here united the oppressed to the oppressors, and nature, in striving to bring them together, rendered more striking still the immense space that prejudices and laws had put between them.” In other words, efforts at interracial intimacy accentuated rather than ameliorated racial prejudices, at least from his European vantagepoint. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 306-307.

Two generations later, Theodore Roosevelt’s *Winning of the West* encapsulated many of the Progressive-era reformers’ assumptions about contempt of the feminized missionary influence among Indians. In a depiction of the Moravian missions and the Gnadenuhnten massacre of 1781, Roosevelt remarked, “the wrong was peculiarly great when at such a time and in such a place the defenceless [*sic*] Indians were thrust between the anvil of their savage red brethren and the hammer of the lawless and brutal white borderers. The awful harvest which the poor converts reaped had in reality been sown for them by their own friends and would-be benefactors.” Theodore Roosevelt, *The Winning of the West, Volume I: From the Alleghenies to the Mississippi* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1889), 99-100.

Historical scholarship has offered insight into the settler colonial processes by which these fatalistic narratives were infused into American local, regional, and national identities. Jean O’Brien’s *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) used a literary studies methodology to deconstruct various texts produced by New England local historical societies, though she notably excludes missionary literature from her analysis. Adam Dahl in his book *Empire of the People: Settler Colonialism and the Foundations of Modern*

Such negative, fatalistic portrayals of American Indians can also be found in traditional Christian narratives of American history. Whether they be Spanish Franciscan clerics' *conquistador* spirit in the interior reaches of New Spain or the Puritan missionaries' "errand in the wilderness" in New England, there was for generations a tacit assumption that Christian settlers represented light against the forces of darkness embodied by nature and its Indigenous inhabitants. Traditional religious narratives likewise projected that Native people would either be absorbed into the larger fabric of American life, thereby ceasing to be "Native," or that they would be annihilated through force. Even the comparatively secular and post-Christian America of the twenty-first century inherits some of the same historical assumptions, though dressed in more generic and updated language: demands for being on the "right side of history" pits forces of light and progress against superstition, darkness, and backwardness.<sup>6</sup> Even as the twenty-first century crises of climate change, racial unrest, resurgent nationalisms, and global pandemics have made more people cynical towards "progress" narratives, the romantic appeal for Indigenous wisdom can inadvertently reinforce the assumption that Indians represent the antithesis of modernity, only useful for individualized spirituality or environmentalism.<sup>7</sup>

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*Democratic Thought* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2018) posits that political writings and the creation of state constitutions created the paradox of "popular sovereignty" being contingent on Native dispossession, and the violence involved in that dispossession was subsequently denied. As a result, the entirety of American democratic systems is predicated on Native disappearance. As concerns Indian encounters with missionaries, Dahl argues, "the practical effect of assimilationist policies was the extirpation of indigenous land claims." True as this might be, such a totalizing claim denies opportunities for Native people who effectively used Christianization as a tool against removal, especially in Michigan. Dahl, 13. For a discussion on historians being reticent over Native Christianity and Native "authenticity," see Rachel Wheeler, "Hendrick Aupaumut: Christian-Mahican Prophet," in *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, eds. Joel W. Martin and Mark Nicholas (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 226-227.

<sup>6</sup> For a popular argument that the secular West inherits the prejudices and assumptions of its Christian antecedents, see Tom Holland, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 521, 530-533.

<sup>7</sup> See for example romantic reviews of Robin Wall Kimmerer's (Citizen Nation Potawatomi) book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Edition, 2013). Kit

There has existed, however, scholarship for quite some time (some pushing forty years old) that has rejected the simplistic notion of Indians occupying separated or incompatible realities from settler societies. Since the 1980s and beyond, the so-called New Indian History recovered many Native voices that had heretofore been forgotten. Far from being tragic figures of a passing race, American Indians were agents in the development of complex relationships among their fellow Native kin, the US federal government, traders and missionaries, the yeomanry, and free and enslaved African Americans. Scholarship by Daniel Richter, Philip Deloria, Nicolas Rosenthal, and Colin Calloway have reaffirmed the inclusion of Native people as contributing to the life of modern and urban America, defying expectations of their settler counterparts.<sup>8</sup> In other words, historically Indians are not isolated on the fringes of civilization or off in some remote “Indian Country.”

Despite the wealth of research produced on Native lives, there are still interpretive challenges to overcome. For one, there is an overwhelming geographic bias on the trans-Mississippi West. While not to detract from the importance of Indigenous people in shaping the West, which still has the highest numbers of Native-identifying residents today, for the eastern United States, it is far easier to assume a non-existence for Native people.<sup>9</sup> This is in no small part due to the success of

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Crawford, “Forbes All-Star Book Club: Kit Crawford Reviews ‘Braiding Sweetgrass,’ *Forbes*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbes-books/2020/04/10/forbes-all-star-book-club-kit-crawford-reviews-braiding-sweetgrass/?sh=781515cb6e18> (accessed January 20, 2022); Linda Poppenheimer, “Braiding Sweetgrass -Book Review,” *Green Groundswell* (blog), March 9, 2020, <https://greengroundswell.com/braiding-sweetgrass-book-review/2020/03/09/> (accessed January 20, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> See Daniel Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004); Nicolas Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Colin Calloway, *The Chiefs Now In This City: Indians and the Urban Frontier in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> According to the 2020 US Census, the five highest states with people identifying as American Indian (in whole or part) are Alaska (21.86%), Oklahoma (16.1%), New Mexico (12.45%), South Dakota (11.45%), and Montana (9.28%). Adriana Rezal, “Where Most Native Americans Live,” *US News*, November 26, 2021

the federally sponsored Indian Removal Act of 1830, which initiated the grossly mismanaged displacement of some 123,000 people to make way for the rapacious settlement of the Ohio River Valley, Mississippi River Valley, the Deep South, and the Great Lakes regions.<sup>10</sup> Despite this attempt at ethnic cleansing, pocket remnants of tribal bands and communities evaded removal to publicly resurface in later generations, many of whom achieved federal recognition in the late twentieth century. By that point, however, settler institutions and material infrastructure had largely written Natives out of existence in the eastern United States. The proliferation of Native place names, whether in parks, streets, schools, public art, or sports mascots, drew upon Indians as legendary or mythic figures but largely denied them an ongoing presence. Historical scholarship has increasingly brought attention to these settler colonial processes, but transforming the broader public historical consciousness remains elusive by and large.<sup>11</sup>

How can Native history and Native perseverance be recovered in places that have rendered them invisible? This dissertation argues for a counterintuitive path to increase Native visibility in the eastern US and better integrate Native history into broader patterns of American history. Over the following chapters, I situate the identification and public interpretation of Removal Era missions and boarding schools as places to highlight Native American survivance. These spaces bring Native history into sharp conversation with American religious history. Outside of Southwestern US

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<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/the-states-where-the-most-native-americans-live> (accessed January 12, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 247. These estimate numbers greatly vary, and it does not account for the uncertain numbers of those who made the return journey after their expulsion to the trans-Mississippi West.

<sup>11</sup> On the ways historians themselves participating in narrative erasure, see Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting. As it concerns the Great Lakes region, see James Buss, *Winning the West with Words: Language and Conquest in the Lower Great Lakes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).*

Catholic studies, Indigenous people occupy at best a marginal part in the overwhelmingly European-dominated narratives of American Christianity. As such, addressing the complex histories of missions serves two functions. In addition to restoring Indigenous lives to the material landscape, this work also decolonizes American religious history by highlighting Indigenous participation, resistance, and manipulation in the processes of institutional growth. Such work also holds accountable American churches in the twenty-first century to acknowledge their own histories of settler colonialism and repair relationships where possible.

Public history – more specifically, historical interpretation of the built environment – will be the chief vehicle for exploring this topic. There are several advantages to a public history approach. First, it encourages a more expansive methodology not limited to archival documentation, which admittedly can be sparse on issues of memory. For example, the arrangement of a historic site, the construction techniques, the state of preservation, and economies that sprout up around such sites tell stories of how the present interacts with the past.<sup>12</sup> Archaeology excavated from historic sites can provide wealth of material knowledge used for both study and public exhibition. However, unlike the discipline of archaeology, public history also takes seriously the public's interactions and beliefs about historical places. Furthermore, public history acknowledges the *affective* nature of historic sites on people. Historic structures and landscapes, even as miniscule as a gravestone, a building foundation, or a natural feature, form tangible links for people to connect with their ancestors or an affinity group. The affective nature is especially resonant for many Native American cultures, who

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Mary Heidemann's and Ted Ligibel's discussion about historical interpretation at the Peter Dougherty mission house to the Odawa at Grand Traverse Bay, Michigan. The mission house's construction techniques as a frame-structure versus a log cabin is used to articulate beliefs about the status of Anishinaabeg communities in Michigan following the 1850 state constitution, which granted provisional citizenship to Native men. Mary Heidemann and Ted Ligibel, "Preserving and Interpreting a Shared Mission: Peter Dougherty, Chief Ahgosa, and Northern Michigan's Old Mission," *Michigan Historical Review* 43, no. 1 (2017): 29-56.

have continually sought to protect traditional cultural properties (TCPs) from destruction at the hands of property developers. Although the missions and boarding school sites explored in this study are not TCPs, *per se*, they likewise provide affective resources for religious groups and Indigenous persons alike to connect with someone's past experiences, reflect, or perhaps mourn.<sup>13</sup> Finally, public activity within the built environment usually indicates public attitudes and values about the past. To use a different example, the taking down of Confederate monuments only in recent years highlights that public consciousness about systemic symbols of oppression lags decades behind conversations that progressive academic historians have taken for granted at conference presentations and in articles and monographs. The degree of curation versus neglect of historical sites demonstrates how communities and institutions imagine a "usable past." If outmoded narratives of US history have lost their luster, or worse, are deemed harmful to certain demographics, there must be new creative energies poured into existing historic sites and resources if future generations of Americans hope to learn from the past.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A formative influence in place-based methodology is Christine DeLucia, *Memory Lands: King Philip's War and the Place of Violence in the Northeast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 8-11, 17-18. DeLucia asserts the importance of acknowledging physical space as an active element in the construction of historical meaning. Her notion of the "witnessing trace" links together physical markers of the past with both private and community rituals of remembrance. In a settler colonial context, many of these traces have been used to promote narratives of Native disappearance. Additionally, Michelle McClellan, who is the director of University of Michigan-Ann Arbor's public history program and author of a forthcoming book about heritage tourism of Laura Ingalls Wilder, has used the term "place-based epistemology" as a way to understand the cognitive processes that occur in the association of place with history and identity. McClellan, "Place-based epistemology: This is your brain on historic sites," May 25, 2015, *History@Work*, National Council on Public History, <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/place-based-epistemology/> (accessed February 15, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> An informative article by Amy Lonetree, author of *Decolonizing Museums: Representing Native America in National and Tribal Museums* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), bridges the conversation of Confederate monument toppling with the removal of California Catholic mission monuments, especially those to Junipero Serra, a Franciscan missionary who was canonized by Pope Francis in 2015. Lonetree argues very positively to the removal of monuments deemed to celebrate cultural genocide and recommends that former mission lands should be ceded to California Indigenous communities. Lonetree, "Decolonizing Museums, Memorials, and Monuments," *The Public Historian* 41, no. 4 (November 2021): 21-27. However, Lonetree fails to acknowledge or extrapolate the religious vs. secular dimensions of the decolonizing process. To Catholic critics, the removal of Serra monuments represented a failure to understand the contextual role of Spanish priests or of the role of Christianity among contemporary Indigenous communities. "California Catholic Conference Issues Statement on Removal of St. Serra Statues in the



## Establishing Historical Context of the Removal Era

These issues of memory and the built environment will be extrapolated over the next several chapters through case studies of individual Indian mission or boarding school sites in the eastern United States. Before I introduce the case studies, it is necessary to establish the historical conditions faced by Indigenous people living within the borders of the newly independent United States. This overview will also consider how Indigenous struggles against removal intersected with the expansion of Christianity into the North American interior.

The historical era in question is an admittedly broad one. This period of rapid state formation between the late eighteenth century and mid-nineteenth century has been variously dubbed by historians the Early Republic, the Age of Jackson, the Antebellum Era, the Second Great Awakening, and the Market Revolution, among other periodizations. From an Indigenous perspective, particularly for tribes east of the Mississippi, this period may also be termed the Removal Era. This label does not suggest a one-directional path of Indigenous disappearance, but it reflects the reality that Native American concerns and decision-making were defined by an emergent settler colonial policy of dispossession and forced migration.

For purposes here, I define the Removal Era between the years 1795 and 1842. Granted, land dispossessions exceed this arbitrary timeline, and the bookend years could be adjusted depending on the lens of focus. The 1795 start date refers to the Treaty of Greenville. Technically,

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State,” June 22, 2020, California Catholic Conference, <https://cacatholic.org/article/california-catholic-conference-issues-statement-removal-st-serra-statues-state> (accessed February 10, 2022). On the other hand, scholars of California Native-colonizer interactions, particularly in the context of the Spanish Franciscan missions, are making increasing demands to acknowledge Indigenous strategies of persistence to debunk the harmful narrative trope that views missions through a “carceral lens.” See Tsim Schneider, Kahl Schneider, and Lee M. Panich, “Scaling Invisible Walls: Reasserting Indigenous Persistence in Mission-Era California,” *The Public Historian* 42, no. 4 (November 2020): 97-110. I argue for a parallel (though not identical) historiographic revisionism to take place in the former mission landscapes of the Southeast and the Great Lakes.

this treaty had its most acute impact for the defeat of the Western Indian Confederacy and the cession of lands in Northwest Territory. Nevertheless, Greenville carried greater symbolic impact with the abandonment of Indian hopes for British protection against Americans and the inauguration of federal annuities for tribes who ceded land. The annuity system guaranteed a way for the federal government to gain leverage in tribal politics.<sup>15</sup> The 1842 end date refers to the end of the second US-Seminole War, which historian Claudio Saunt has described as “the grim culmination of the U.S. policy to expel Native peoples” east of the Mississippi.<sup>16</sup> That year not only marked the final military enforcement of the 1830 Indian Removal Act, but it also coincided with turning points for two of my case sites, including the decline of the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky and the creation of the University of Notre Dame on Potawatomi mission grounds.

### **Westward Expansion in the Early Republic**

If facing east from Indian Country, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were characterized as a period of intense cultural flux and political realignments for Indigenous peoples. With the recognition of the United States’ independence after 1783, American Indian nations west of the Appalachians had lost much of their negotiating power as intermediaries between rival factions of imperial officials and settler colonial populations. Their homelands, formerly honored by British Crown protection under the Proclamation of 1763, now fell under the purview of an independent settler republic which sought to parcel out lands into new territories and states. Sensing a turning of the tide, Indigenous peoples had a range of responses. Some Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)

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<sup>15</sup> John P. Bowes, *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 25, 30-31; Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 113-114.

<sup>16</sup> Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020), 301.

bands in New York decided to relocate further away from settler populations and conglomerate in multi-ethnic communities along the Great Lakes. These enclaves attracted scores of other small groups escaping conflict with white American settlers, including formerly enslaved African Americans who did not want to live in fear of racial persecution or re-enslavement.

Many of these communities included those who had initially sought protection through cultural and religious adaptation but who had nevertheless suffered colonial violence. The so-called Moravian Indians, mostly descended from the Lenni Lenape (Delaware) people in Pennsylvania, had converted to Christianity earlier in the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, this effort to mollify Euro-Americans did not protect 96 unarmed men, women, and children from being butchered by Pennsylvania militiamen at Gnadenhutzen in 1782, who saw their enemies in racial rather than cultural or religious terms. Survivors of the Moravian missions, together with the descendants of the Stockbridge and Munsee “praying town” Indians of southern New England, would find refuge in western New York among Haudenosaunee, though they would eventually be forced further to Wisconsin or Canada to maintain their survival as Indigenous communities.<sup>17</sup>

Given the apparent futility of religious conversion to protect their own from violence and dispossession, some Indigenous leaders sought to lead separatist spiritual movements. Handsome Lake (Seneca) led a traditionalist revival as a means of social uplift and autonomy. His movement was not without controversy: he boldly asserted that whites had killed Jesus Christ, thereby making white claims to possess truth invalid. Nevertheless, Handsome Lake’s followers would eventually

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<sup>17</sup> Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*, 83-84. Charles Cleland, “Factionalism and Removal: The Stockbridge and Munsee, 1830-1856,” in *Faith in Paper: The Ethnohistory and Litigation of Upper Great Lakes Indian Treaties*, Charles Cleland et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 230-234.

compile his teachings into *Gaiwiyjo*, or “the Good Message” of Handsome Lake.<sup>18</sup> One of his Seneca rivals, Red Jacket, also gave a famous testimonial arguing that the Christian religion offered no benefit for Indians because it did not make the white settlers kinder neighbors. Red Jacket put forth a proposition to a white missionary:

Brother. We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians; we will then consider again what you have said.<sup>19</sup>

These above-mentioned revivals appeared to have been limited within Haudenosaunee networks, but other prophetic voices like Tenskwatawa, known by white persons as the Shawnee Prophet, sought a grander vision of pan-Indian spiritual renewal to the point of breaking away from traditional political allegiances to lead his own movement. Internal tribal divisions and geographic separations prevented the prophetic dreams of a pan-Indian alliance from realizing its full potential. These mitigating factors were exacerbated by the already sizable settler populations in Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Consequentially, the prophetic movements often ended in embarrassment or disaster, such as the destruction of Prophetstown on the Tippecanoe River or the infamous massacre of Red Stick Creeks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.<sup>20</sup>

Still other Native peoples sought more secular means of cultural change as it became apparent that the United States was not just another passing European empire to deal with over a “middle ground.” Among southeastern tribes, African slavery became a rapid device of accruing

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Tooker, “On the Development of the Handsome Lake Religion,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133, no. 1 (March 1989), 36; Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 141-142.

<sup>19</sup> “Indian Speech, delivered before a gentleman missionary, from Massachusetts, by a chief, commonly called by the white people Red Jacket,” Boston, 1805, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.04702500/?st=text> (accessed April 14, 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 142-144, 170-171, 187.

wealth and pedigree. The Cherokees, for instance, appropriated large numbers of slaves by raiding white settlements in southeastern Tennessee during the Chickamauga Wars of the 1790s. While Cherokee slaveholders were only a minority, they quickly accrued the greatest political power – one of the wealthiest being James Vann, whose slaves built a plantation manor in northern Georgia that still stands today. Missionaries and federal agents alike would try to exploit the growing class distinctions among tribes in the southeast.<sup>21</sup>

Amid the unstable period of calibrations and recalibrations for Native nations west of the Appalachians, one of the largest settler migrations was well under way. Notwithstanding those speculators and squatters who had already made extralegal claims before the end of the War for Independence, new generations of Americans were eager to establish themselves as independent property owners. The trans-Appalachian population increased ten-fold from over one hundred thousand in 1790 to a half million by 1800.<sup>22</sup> Despite well-laid plans for an orderly allotment of lands in which the federal government would adjudicate interests between Indian nations and western settlers, the reality was far more chaotic. Government policy could hardly keep up with the many settlers who simply ignored speculative land claims or Indian treaty boundaries.<sup>23</sup>

The social imagination of the Early American Republic imbued the promise of westward expansion with a spiritual dimension. National figures like Thomas Jefferson believed that migrations would preserve American freedom, promote property ownership, and limit the numbers of those dependent on peonage to social superiors (women and slaves notwithstanding). Prior to the

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<sup>21</sup> Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 159-161; William McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 69-72, 124-125.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2016), 408.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 358-359.

establishment of the federal constitution, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had specified the process of creating new states that would guarantee the full liberties enjoyed by the original thirteen states. The third article of this ordinance specifically called for establishment of schools in the west, with “Religion, Morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind.” Article Three matched promotion for civilization with a more humane Indian policy, which claimed, “The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians, their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent.”<sup>24</sup> Although this stated Indian policy bore little resemblance to the lived reality, this article is nevertheless significant because it reveals the federal government’s optimal outlook toward American expansion. By linking Indian policy with the spread of religious instruction and education, the authors of the Northwest Ordinance believed that they could create a new standard for expansion characterized by republican virtue and reason.

The genteel backgrounds and formal education of many of the early American legislators allowed them to imagine a course of history defined by tempered Enlightenment values. The western frontier, however, tended to invite those who repelled the paternal structures of eastern federalists. The issue of religion was certainly no exception to this trend. Westward migration facilitated the proliferation of religious revivals and the splintering of denominations in a period known as the “Second Great Awakening.” The dispersed population patterns proved fertile ground for the growth of newly Americanized forms of Christianity, such as distrust of hierarchical establishments, greater emphasis on free will, “common sense” theology, emotional experiences of conversion, and inner sanctification. Older Protestant denominations like the Anglican church, redubbed “Episcopal” church but still associated with Old World pageantry and monarchy,

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<sup>24</sup> *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875*, Vol. 32 Journals of the Continental Congress (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1936), 334-342.

struggled in comparison to more egalitarian Baptist and Methodist movements, which had looser qualifications for preaching and teaching. Likewise, the Calvinist stress on mankind's total depravity found less popularity on the frontier than did Arminian theology, which emphasized free will to choose the gift of Christian salvation and experience moral transformation in the present life.<sup>25</sup> It was this generation, argues historian Jon Butler, that ascribed religious significance to the American Revolution in retrospect as a breaking away from the strictures of the past and an embrace of new possibilities. Although many Protestant denominations like the Baptists and Methodists would create their own hierarchies by the 1840s, the early years of the nineteenth century witnessed much more fluidity of movement, both spiritual and geographical. Catholics too would have their own versions of revival culture through parish missions and the arrival of "regular" clergy (i.e., those belonging to a religious order) from Europe. These Catholic missionary arrivals stemmed in part from religious persecution during the French Revolution (the most famous case being Stephen Badin, who fled France in 1791 and became the first priest ordained in the United States). The character and intensity of Catholic revivalism differed from Protestant counterparts, namely in that revivalism was more prolonged and saw an increase in centralizing institutions, but Catholics likewise shared with Protestant revivalists their participation in market competition and creation of voluntary societies.<sup>26</sup>

This period of American Christianity was also transformative in seeing the spread of the faith among those on the margins of society, particularly enslaved African Americans. The increase of Christianity among the enslaved was a double-edged sword for slaveholders. As the religiously

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<sup>25</sup> Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 206-207, 211-216; Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 9-13; Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 171-178.

<sup>26</sup> Jay Dolan, *Catholic Revivalism: The American Experience, 1830-1900* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 12-13, 154-155; J. Herman Schauinger, *Stephen T. Badin: Priest in the Wilderness* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956).

inspired revolts like Denmark Vesey's in 1822 attested, Blacks could interpret the Christian gospel as a counteractive tool against the efforts of religious conservatives to further buttress slavery. For a handful of whites, particularly those in Quaker or Methodist communities, religious revival inspired slave manumissions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, at least until state legislatures restricted those practices.<sup>27</sup> Very seldom did Christian revivalism in the early nineteenth century create anything appearing like racial equality, but Christianity's universalism (i.e., not tied to any ethnic identity) and power to overcome personal crisis and oppressive circumstances led many of its most devout to envision a wider, imagined community that could transcend racial and political boundaries.

The aspirations of Christian evangelists to see a church of "every tribe, tongue, and nation" also fueled expansive voluntary efforts and increased numbers of young people becoming missionaries in the early nineteenth century. In some ways, this was merely a continuation of eighteenth-century evangelistic efforts. During the height of British colonial power in North America, Anglo-Protestant Christianity bolstered imperial identity, with organizations like the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) linking the hinterlands of empire into a network of shared values and trade. The independence of the United States did not halt the efforts of transnational faith communities to pool resources, and the patterns of American missionaries tended to reflect places where the British already held imperial influence, such as India, Burma, West Africa, or the Sandwich Islands (Hawai'i).<sup>28</sup> The founding of the United States on the

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<sup>27</sup> On Denmark Vesey's interpretation of the Bible to inspire slave revolt, see Jeremy Schipper, "'On Such Texts Comment is Unnecessary': Biblical Interpretation in the Trial of Denmark Vesey," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 4 (December 2017), 1032-1049; On Christian abolitionism, see Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 12-24.

<sup>28</sup> On the relationship between Protestant identity and British colonial expansion, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). For



“free exercise of religion” inspired some Christian leaders, including one-time Continental Congress president and later US Representative Elias Boudinot, to believe that the United States was going to help usher the kingdom of Christ, not least by converting Indians, whom he believed to have descended from lost tribes of ancient Israel.<sup>29</sup> Although not many shared Boudinot’s specific interpretation of the “end times,” most American Christians in the early republic had a positive outlook on the future, as evinced by the global ambitions of mission organizations established in this time, notably the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).<sup>30</sup>

Missions to American Indians also fell under the label of “foreign missions,” which reveals that missionaries acknowledged Indigenous nations as sovereign entities rather than “domestic dependents” as they would later be legally categorized. Perhaps more so because missionaries viewed Indians as foreign “heathens,” they sought to convert them not only to the Christian religion but also to what they deemed “civilization” from a Euro-centric perspective. Both Protestant and Catholic missionaries alike desired to transform Indians both spiritually and culturally; where they differed was which type of transformation to prioritize. The French Jesuits of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were chiefly concerned about bringing Indians into the Catholic Church’s fold through baptism and receiving of the sacraments, which made them both effective and controversial in their leniency to contextualize Indigenous religious concepts and rites into Catholic practices.

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Anglo-American collaboration on the mission field in the Early Republic period, see Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1-5.

<sup>29</sup> Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West, or, A Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Tribes of Israel, Preparatory to Their Return to Their Beloved City, Jerusalem* (Trenton, NJ: D Fenton, S Hutchinson, and J Dunham, 1816); Elizabeth Fenton, *Old Canaan in a New World: Native Americans and the Lost Tribes of Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 88-91.

<sup>30</sup> The ABCFM was initially conceived to be an inter-denominational organization, though in practice it was mainly Presbyterian and Congregationalist. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 186-187.

Other Catholic orders, as well as most Protestant missionaries, believed that adoption of European culture, including total renunciation of Indigenous rituals, was a necessary precursor to their receiving the Christian gospel. Nevertheless, Catholics and Protestants alike shared with one another their desire to create controlled environments to do effective ministry: namely, model settlement communities with permanent buildings, a mission church and school, and most importantly, tilled farmlands and domestic animals. Missionaries and Indians alike also understood the issue of using each other to broker alliances with their respective factions. While not to dismiss the very personal nature of religious experiences and conversion, religion could not be separated from culture and politics such as when Indigenous nations throughout the French, British, and eventually American colonizing periods used adaptive resistance to keep their group identities intact and remain on their homelands.<sup>31</sup>

The leverages of power in the trans-Appalachian west shifted around the start of the nineteenth century. As mentioned above, the Treaty of Greenville (1795) inaugurated the process of federal annuities in exchange for Indian land cessions in the Northwest Territory, thereby tightening the grip of United States power. Besides treaties with Indigenous leaders, Jay's Treaty (1794) and the Treaty of San Lorenzo (1795) further solidified US claims to the Old Northwest and Old Southwest against the interests of Britain and Spain respectively. Apart from a brief British interregnum in places like Detroit and Michilimackinac during the War of 1812, the US asserted unequivocal claims to western lands south of the Great Lakes by the 1820s. From a cartographical perspective, a clear line of distinction began to form between the US and British Canada, eroding sense of the Native or

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<sup>31</sup> James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 280-285, 332.

Anishinaabe “middle ground” that had characterized the region for two centuries prior.<sup>32</sup> The federal government further asserted colonial control over American Indians with the landmark Supreme Court case *Johnson v. M'Intosh* (1823), in which the justices unanimously ruled that Indians could only sell land to the federal government, not to any private entity or individual. Chief Justice John Marshall also famously declared that Indians only had “right of occupancy” but no claim to property titles.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, continuities from the middle ground persisted well into the nineteenth century, particularly through the French and Métis traders and their families, whose networks extended even far west of the Mississippi, where federal government oversight was a relative non-issue in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, French Catholicism retained a cultural presence in the Great Lakes and the Upper Mississippi several decades after the French lost its North American empire in 1763. While many of the missions suffered a hiatus during the late eighteenth century during the suppression of the Jesuits, a wave of Catholic revivalism in the nineteenth century inspired a new generation of missionaries, particularly those from France and Belgium, to increase their reach into North America and in other parts of the world. Indeed, for the North American

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<sup>32</sup> Phil Bellfy, *Three Fires Unity: The Anishinaabe of the Lake Huron Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 83. The extent to which both the US and Britain struggled in asserting control over the US-Canadian border proves historian Michale Witgen's notion that Anishinaabewaki was really a native ground, as they held the cultural and economic cohesion of the upper Great Lakes. Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 325-331.

<sup>33</sup> Section 38 of the court ruling reads, “It has never been doubted, that either the United States, or the several States, had a clear title to all the lands within the boundary lines described in the treaty [of Paris 1783], subject only to the Indian right of occupancy, and that the exclusive power to extinguish that right, was vested in that government which might constitutionally exercise it.” *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 US 543 (1823), Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/21/543#fnl\\_ref](https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/21/543#fnl_ref).

<sup>34</sup> Anne Hyde, *Empires, Nations, and Families: A New History of the North American West, 1800-1860* (New York: Ecco Press, 2012), 29-30, 219.

mission field, Catholics fiercely competed with Protestant denominations over Indian souls.<sup>35</sup> As US expansionism became increasingly aggressive, many Catholic missionaries identified themselves with Indians, as they felt mutually oppressed by the greater government financial support for Protestant evangelization. The ultramontane and centralizing tendencies of Catholic missionary orders like the Jesuits (re-established in 1814) and the Congregation of Holy Cross (founded in 1837) also gave Catholics more leverage in not being seen as mere agents of Indigenous dispossession.

Evangelical Protestants, contrarily, would occupy a prominent place in the emerging American political and cultural landscape of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> The “voluntary” nature of evangelical culture meant that much of this activism could exist from grassroots sources. This activism proved particularly effective for women who lacked political power to vote or hold government office. Church communities provided the structural basis out of which emerged many of the reform movements of that century, such as temperance, women’s suffrage, and abolition; these reform movements could (and often did) transcend orthodox evangelical boundaries to include Unitarians, universalists, and “free-thinkers.” Evangelical rhetoric provided a language for

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<sup>35</sup> John McGreevy suggests that Catholic missionaries in the nineteenth century, especially the reconstituted Jesuit order, were keener on reclaiming nominal or lapsed Catholic populations, including Native Americans with historic Catholic presence, than they were on trying to convert Protestants to Catholics. John McGreevy, *American Jesuits and the World: How an Embattled Religious Order Made Modern Catholicism Global* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 30-31, 34-36.

<sup>36</sup> Finding a definition for the term “evangelical” has occupied untold shelf space over the last few decades among historians and theologians. For historians of American religion, the most widely used definition (though admittedly imperfect) is the so-called Bebbington Quadrilateral, first proposed by David Bebbington in his book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989). Bebbington’s Quadrilateral is defined by the following: 1) Biblicism (emphasis on the authority and often literal interpretation of the Bible), 2) Crucicentrism (emphasis on Christ’s death as a work of atonement), 3) Conversionism (one must have a “born again” experience to receive salvation), and 4) Activism (the Christian faith should be applied throughout one’s life and the gospel message spread). While the usage of the term has evolved over time, the “evangelical” label would have been broad in its nineteenth century context, with evangelicalism being the mainstream of Protestantism. The label would shift by the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the further splitting of Protestantism into liberal, conservative, and charismatic sects. For a scholarly discussion over evangelicalism in a more contemporary context, see Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George Marsden, eds. *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019).

many, especially persons of color, to speak critically and with biblical authority into a culture who deemed them as outsiders. Nevertheless, evangelicalism was simultaneously an insider faith.<sup>37</sup> Evangelicals enjoyed the benefits of official government support through their mission boards, for missionaries served multiple roles as ambassadors for their denominations and as government agents. From a governmental standpoint, missionaries promoted the advance of civilization by ensuring that westward migration would be characterized by a morally upright citizenry. This goal certainly fit well within the latitudinarian views of the Founders, regardless of any particular religious creed, even if some were chagrined by the necessity of permitting Catholic missionaries to work in the country.<sup>38</sup> Even though the American republic had been founded on religious disestablishment to protect freedom of conscience, church and state hardly had a clear “wall of separation” that twentieth-century jurists would later defend.<sup>39</sup> Missionaries would provide, in theory, the best kind of settlers in a given community; their presence would sanctify whites and Indians alike. Contrarily, missionaries could just as readily serve as thorns in the side of frontiersmen who balked at the idea of someone calling out licentiousness, fornication, cock-fighting, dueling, injustice, and even the institution of slavery. Many Protestant missionaries, especially Presbyterians and Congregationalists from New England, tended to be the most highly educated class of Americans; their erudition and austerity could come across as coastal elitism in the eyes of the backcountry yeomen who preferred

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<sup>37</sup> Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the re-establishment of the Jesuit order, John Adams said to Thomas Jefferson in a letter dated May 6, 1816, “If ever any Congregation of Men could merit, eternal Perdition on Earth and in Hell... it is this Company of Loiola [*sic*]. Our System however of Religious Liberty must afford them an Assylum [*sic*].” *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 474

<sup>39</sup> John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 163-167.

to make their own living unburdened by moral and ethical scruples. The “moralizing” force of missionaries would court the favor of Federalist (and later Whig) politicians, in contrast to Democrats, who were suspicious of any government attempt to control public morality (unless protecting slavery).<sup>40</sup>

The revivalist culture of the Second Great Awakening had a peculiar relationship with the development of American Indian policy. An assimilation policy toward American Indians was first formally vocalized through Henry Knox, Washington’s Secretary of War, as a matter of prudence to reduce bloodshed. American possession of Indigenous lands was already assumed as an inevitability – what mattered to government officials was how to do so “humanely.” Knox’s advocacy for assimilation characterized a paternalist model of American republicanism, in which Indians and other non-white persons, though in a lower social position, could nevertheless integrate and participate in white American society if they received the proper tutelage to become “civilized.” In most cases, Native leaders paid for mission schools from their annuities for land cessions. More often than not, these elders were not as much interested in sending their children to missionaries to receive Christian conversion as they sought to gain reading and writing skills necessary to interact with white persons on a level of parity.<sup>41</sup> A generation after Knox, this same paternalist mindset would be echoed by Thomas McKenney, a Quaker from Maryland who oversaw Indian trading “factories” (promoting consumerism among Native peoples). McKenny was later appointed as the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs under President James Monroe. In 1819, McKenney had led

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<sup>40</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 17-18, 125-127; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 192-193, 573.

<sup>41</sup> Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 28, 33.

efforts in Congress to pass the Civilization Fund to provide direct financial support for missionaries to establish religious schools on Indian lands. McKenney and others assumed that education and adoption of Christianity among Natives would somehow lead them to be more agreeable to rescinding their tribal identities and purchasing private plots of land to farm. If that was not possible, the assumption was that Natives would voluntarily migrate west of the Mississippi to be further removed from the antagonisms of white settlers. Thus the swelling of assimilation programs coaligned with increased efforts to pass an Indian Removal Act by 1830. Persons like McKenney, as well as Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy, apparently saw no contradiction with continuing support of mission schools while advocating for removal, for they naively assumed that removal would be done in a humane and cooperative manner.<sup>42</sup>

McKenney grossly underestimated the resolve of most Indigenous people to remain put on their homelands. He also failed to see from his limited vantage point the wider scale cultural change occurring in American politics during the ascendancy of Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party. Whereas the moribund Federalists had supported class paternalism and restraint of the masses, the nascent Democrats, represented by Jackson, embodied the liberated spirit of the frontier. The Democrats created an interclass base of political support through white racial solidarity at the expense of non-whites. Indeed, McKenney lost his job as Superintendent of Indian Affairs by criticizing Jackson's dismissive attitude toward Indian intellectual capabilities. This ironic turn of fate for McKenney came only three months after he had supported passage of the Indian Removal Act.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*, abridged ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 71-72; Saunt, *Unworthy Republic*, 23, 48, 63.

<sup>43</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 353-354; Saunt, *Unworthy Republic*, 84-85.

As the crisis over Indian Removal came to a head in the 1830s, missionaries could find themselves at odds with whites who saw their ministry efforts as subversive to the goal of removal. In northern Indiana, one government agent complained about the influence of Catholic missionaries among the Potawatomi to Senator John Tipton in 1836, “I wish old Baddin [*sic*] and his Catholicism had been some where else than operating among the Indians for it has no other effect on them than to make them troublesome to the Government.”<sup>44</sup> The most infamous case of missionaries challenging state policy was the imprisonment of Samuel A. Worcester and Elizur Butler, who in 1830 defied a Georgia state mandate for whites living on Cherokee land to obtain a license and swear loyalty to the state. This resulted in their imprisonment, which later prompted the Supreme Court case *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) that declared that states could not impose their jurisdiction over Indian territory – that was solely a matter between Indian nations and the federal government.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Mission Landscapes**

Because these missions operated in a period of great flux and crisis for Indigenous peoples, it is difficult to provide a nuanced historical treatment that resists a wholesale judgment by the political standards of the twenty-first century. The whole issue of Native American transculturation was, even two hundred years ago, considered controversial. Over time, and especially since the reassertion of Indigenous sovereignty movements post-1970s, missionization has only become more fraught with scrutiny. One end of the spectrum might view any and all “civilization” projects as cultural genocide, with missionaries using coercive methods to manipulate psychology and tear down social and cultural bonds among various Indigenous nations, including separating children

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<sup>44</sup> Anthony L. Davis to John Tipton, March 2, 1836, quoted in Herman Schauinger, *Stephen T. Badin: Priest in the Wilderness* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956), 245.

<sup>45</sup> Theda Perdue and Michael Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 87-88.



from the influence of their parents.<sup>46</sup> Another view would see missionaries as valuable allies who provided linguistic, cultural, and spiritual tools for Natives to use to adapt and resist removal and tribal erasure.<sup>47</sup> Evidence points to both processes occurring in tension with each other. According to historian Michael McNally, “Missionary encounters could eradicate traditions; they could also provide material for new articulations of those traditions.”<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the degrees of negative and/or positive effects of mission projects depended on both local geographical contexts and the individual personalities involved. It is unfair, therefore, to make broad, sweeping judgments about the entire effect of missionaries on Native Americans. To do so is more a practice of political activism than historical investigation. As such, this dissertation refrains from making generalized claims about all mission work, and when judgments are made, they are necessarily limited to particular localities and historical contexts.

There is also the issue of evaluating missions from short-term versus long-term effects. Although an individual’s or group’s decision to explore a new spiritual path or reorient an economy may have failed to prevent removal or secure cultural autonomy in the longer run, that does not mean that those decisions were ineffectual in the shorter term. In trying to balance Indigenous agency versus their systemic oppression under settler colonialism, it is important to acknowledge that the persistency of settler colonial forces was not limited to a particular moment in time. Just

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<sup>46</sup> For a classic work from this perspective see George Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>47</sup> These claims are best done when focused on specific tribal and historical contexts. See for instance Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918*, who makes a particular claim for the ironic effect of missionaries creating the social spaces for cultural cohesion for the remnant Choctaw families in Mississippi that allowed them to persist to receive federal recognition in the twentieth century.

<sup>48</sup> Michael McNally, “Naming the Legacy of Native Christian Missionary Encounters,” in *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, 289.

because a particular nation or band successfully fought off land seizures in the 1830s does not mean that they did not face the latent threat of removal in the 1850s or the effacement of their ancestors' graves or other sacred sites by white settlement in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As such, selective cultural adaptation may have been the best available path for an Indian nation to take given acute circumstances.<sup>49</sup>

The Removal Era mission sites themselves have with few exceptions been completely erased by the passage of time and movement of populations. Some, as in the cases of the Carey Mission to the Potawatomi or the Brainerd Mission to the Cherokee, were on lands already desirable for settler development, being engulfed in what became Niles, Michigan or Chattanooga, Tennessee. Others fell victim to topographical destruction, such as the Creek Path Mission (near present-day Guntersville, Alabama), where Catharine Brown, the Cherokee convert introduced at this chapter's beginning, taught in a girls' mission school. The former school and stone memorial to Catharine Brown was inundated through damming by the Tennessee Valley Authority in the 1930s.<sup>50</sup> Archaeological excavations at select sites have made it possible to reconstruct certain features of daily life, including the extent to which Indigenous ways coexisted with Western-introduced material culture. However, archaeological evidence is fragmentary at best and does little to show

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<sup>49</sup> The story of multiple migrations of the Brotherton and Stockbridge Indian communities is a case in point. See David J. Silverman, "To Become a Chosen People: The Missionary Work and Missionary Spirit of the Brotherton and Stockbridge Indians, 1775-1835," in *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, 250-275. For an example of land threats dating from the Biden administration, see the lawsuit in eastern Arizona regarding a proposed transfer of federal land to a copper mining company that provoked numerous Apaches, other Indigenous organizations and their allies to protest for the protection of sacred oak groves at Oak Flat. Although the demonstrations and petitions succeeded in halting the process in March 2021, the attorney for the Apache Stronghold group believes that the sacred site is still under threat. Felicia Fonseca, "USDA puts breaks on land transfer for Arizona copper mine," *AP News*, <https://apnews.com/article/usda-apache-land-arizona-copper-mine-1da6e5c9713fc85b824c80c6dac5b834> (accessed February 11, 2022).

<sup>50</sup> See Laurie Brockman, Larry Smith, and Larry Benefield, *New England Missions and Schools to the Cherokees in Northeast Alabama: 1820-1838* (Independently Published, 2018). Larry Smith, email correspondence with author, January 1, 2021.

psychological motives and cultural expectations of Indians or their missionary counterparts as they interacted with each other.

The mission journals provide some means to reconstruct the day-to-day activities at these historic sites and the role they played in tribal politics and the larger debates on Indian Removal. These sources must be interpreted critically for various reasons. One of their most conspicuous qualities to twenty-first century readers is how blatantly biased they are toward the superiority of Christianity and Western culture over the “heathen” practices of Indians, who are often portrayed with infantile or primitive qualities. While these missionaries may be criticized in hindsight for their problematic vocabulary or paternalist mindset, to dismiss these accounts entirely as “ethnocentric” does not do justice to the complexity of cultural interactions. One does not have to be evangelistic to be ethnocentric. Contrariwise, many Indigenous people had no interest in adopting foreign religions or cultural practices because they thought their own ways superior to other cultures and found European culture to be uncouth, or worse, degenerate.<sup>51</sup>

Another consideration in missionary-based sources is the genre and audience. While some diaries or correspondence were private, such as the letters Amanda Ferry wrote to her parents while living on Mackinac Island, many journals were written specifically for the missionary boards to publish in annual reports or religious periodicals, such as the ABCFM’s *Missionary Herald* or the Catholic Church’s *Annales de la propagation de la foi*. Records about conversion stories or the material growth of a mission might be portrayed in overly positive terms in order to maintain church donations needed to financially sustain the mission work, even if missionaries privately conceded

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<sup>51</sup> Even so, the most ardent “nativists,” such as the Red Stick Creeks in the 1810s, could still be selective in their denunciations of outsider influence, having no problem with Western technology or material but rejecting political or religious influences. Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 169-170. For earlier ethnocentrism in the Iroquois Confederacy, see Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 281.

despair or doubt to the success of their evangelization efforts. Historian Julius Rubin termed this genre “religious intelligence,” in which narratives of conversion experiences were written in such a manner to evoke emotional responses. For example, the *Memoir of Catharine Brown* (1825), edited by Rufus Anderson of the ABCFM’s Prudential Committee, was a posthumous retelling of the young Cherokee woman’s journey from pagan ignorance into Christian piety. It contains all the major tropes of evangelical rhetoric, from life in the “wilderness” of the unconverted soul to a “born again” experience to growing and maturing in the faith through persecution and ailment, and finally an appeal to continue propagating the gospel to others. The fact that Catharine died of tuberculosis at such a young age certainly added a level of romanticism that made her story particularly appealing for Protestant New England audiences. For long stretches of time after her death, people either fell into the camp of using her as Protestant hagiography or dismissing her story as colonized Protestant propaganda. It took scholars like Theda Perdue and Joel Martin to uncover additional evidence, such as a copy of an account of Catharine’s visionary quest toward conversion that contained clear evidence of Cherokee traditions transposed to Christian faith, and recover a fuller picture of her life as one that could genuinely occupy both Christian and Cherokee worlds.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the broader missionary literature must be combed through to identify points of possible manipulation or distortion of facts, but one should not be so preoccupied with a modern secular bias so as to condemn sources as nothing more than colonial entrapments. While not representative of Indigenous perspectives that never made it into writing, missionary sources are invaluable to

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<sup>52</sup> For instance, Catharine’s vision of a small person helping her up the precipice of a mountain matches similar stories of spiritual quests and protectors in a traditional Cherokee worldview. Julius Rubin, *Perishing Heathens: Stories of Protestant Missionaries and Christian Indians in Antebellum America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 128-130; Theresa Strouth Gaul, ed. *The Collected Writings of Catharine Brown, 1818-1823*, 16-17.

understanding the joys and sorrows of communities seeking to make ends meet in an unpredictable and often hostile world.<sup>53</sup>

Another source into the life of these missions is from the Native students themselves. Here, again, the nature of the written medium favors those individuals who had greater success in acquiring Western cultural tools. For example, at the mission house on Mackinac Island, a fourteen-year-old French/Ojibwe girl given the name “Mary Hollyday” wrote the following to one of her white sponsors in New England:

Last year I came from the wilderness, and entered the mission school, and family on the 10th of July, and my mother and two sisters. Oh how I love to stay with the missionaries, and will be very glad to tell you what God has done for my soul. . . . O, Madame I can't express my feelings very well, but I hope I feel thankful that God has sent his people to come and teach the poor Indians. They are so ignorant they dont know that they have a precious soul to save, but I hope there is a day coming when all the nations shall hear the gospel, sound in their ears. I hope you wont think boldly of me for writing to you, and I hope you will accept of it. I remain, your affectionate friend.

Appended to the bottom of the letter is a postscript by missionary Amanda Ferry certifying that Mary “wrote this letter unassisted and uncorrected.”<sup>54</sup> On one hand, the supervision of missionaries over student writings limits our ability to discern if less flattering letters had opportunities to be shared to outside communities. Beyond the evangelical linguistic trappings, however, this letter also reveals that mission communities did in some cases include multigenerational environments. In this scenario, the Mackinac mission house provided a safe haven for Native women and their mixed-race children whose husbands were largely absent because of the fur trading business. Thus, while

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<sup>53</sup> For another valuable primary source, see Rowena McClinton’s comprehensive translation and transcription of the German-speaking Moravian mission journals at Springplace Mission on the plantation of Cherokee James Vann. Rowena McClinton, ed., *The Moravian Springplace Mission to the Cherokees, Abridged Edition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Mary Hallyday, letter to Hannah White, September 12, 1825, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts from selected letters written from Mackinac Island, 1823-1834,” 67-68, Box 1, Ferry Family Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

mission schools disrupted or deteriorated traditional Indigenous lifeways, they also provided spaces of female bonding and surrogate families for women seeking to escape neglect or abuse.<sup>55</sup>

Mission schools had a wide range of student ages and backgrounds. Those who entered younger and/or had at least one Euro-American parent were more likely to have success at their studies than those who had little to no exposure to white culture or the English language prior to adolescence. Historians have far better access to those students who succeeded in writing and acquiring skills in white cultural practices. Missionary societies were also more likely to reprint the success stories of student conversions than highlight those who either struggled or resisted adaptation. For those students who struggled and/or resisted, historians have to rely on second- or third-hand testimony, such as accounts of students who ran away from the school.<sup>56</sup>

Contemporary literature from outside these missions could also reveal less than positive reactions. In the case of Isaac McCoy's Carey Mission to the Potawatomi, which shut down in 1830,

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<sup>55</sup> There is a historiographical tradition going back at least to Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), that emphasizes Native women's roles as cultural mediators, and the role of French Catholicism in creating kinship networks and positions of influence, but there is less study on the possible continuities of this culture as Native women from fur-trading families were introduced to Protestantism in the nineteenth century. By comparison, Theda Perdue in *Cherokee Women*, 164-171, did more extensive study of Cherokee women's identity development through exposure to Protestant missionaries in *Cherokee Women*, and one might propose that Perdue's conclusions might inform study of Great Lakes Indian women. A contrary view of Native women interactions with missionaries is presented by Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Devens presents a feminist argument for Native female spirituality pitted against male opportunism, but this view overlooks the reality that there were more female converts to Christianity than male converts, or that some Native and Métis women successfully used Christianity as a way to increase their social influence. See also Susan Sleeper-Smith, "Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade," in *Native Women's History in Eastern North America before 1900: A Guide to Research and Writing*, eds. Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 234-236. For a Canadian case study of contested historical interpretations of a Chipewyan woman, Thanadelthur, as peacemaker and cultural broker, see Patricia A. McCormack, "The Many Faces of Thanadelthur: Documents, Stories, and Images," in *Reading Beyond Words: Context for Native History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003), 329-364.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, the account of Joseph Clymer (Kuknahquah), a Potawatomi student at the Choctaw Academy who ran away in 1846. He had been disowned by his white father who abandoned him and his mother, and the Potawatomi elders at Council Bluffs sent him away to the Choctaw Academy, presumably against the teen's wishes. Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 263-264.

one embittered South Bend resident, Timothy Smith, felt strongly enough to publish a tract in 1833 titled, *Missionary abominations unmasked: or, A view of Carey Mission*. Three of Smith's sons had worked for Rev. McCoy at the mission station store, which sold to Indians food items, liquor, and various manufactured materials from the eastern seaboard. Much of the store's inventory came through donations from Christian churches to aid the efforts of Indian evangelization and provide material comforts to those living a frugal existence in the "frontier." As such, these stores ostensibly served a ministry purpose for Indians via their annuity arrangements, but in practice, white settlers took advantage of buying goods they elsewhere could not acquire. The missionary overseers likewise could cut a profit by selling goods at higher prices to white settlers at the expense of Indians. Smith accused McCoy of avariciousness: "In the first place we see that notwithstanding the ostensible object of Mr. McCoy's was to teach the Indians a knowledge of Christianity, the secret motive and the one which appears to have governed his whole course of conduct was to gather together 'money'."<sup>57</sup>

Smith may have had an axe to grind with McCoy, but his excoriating circular against the Baptist missionary nevertheless reveals anxieties about the possibility of miscegenation through the influence of Christianized Indian communities. McCoy himself had officiated mixed marriages between white traders and Indian or mixed-race female students, though according to Smith, McCoy denied such as "against the missionary creed" since McCoy believed that Indians would be better off removed from the white population.<sup>58</sup> The diatribe also accused Carey Mission of introducing

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<sup>57</sup> Timothy Smith, *Missionary abominations unmasked: or, A view of Carey Mission containing an unmasking of the missionary abominations practiced among the Indians of St. Joseph Country at the celebrated missionary establishment known as Carey Mission under the superintendence of the Rev. Isaac McCoy* (South Bend, IN: Beacon Office, 1833; South Bend, IN: Windle Printing Company, 1946), 16. Page numbers refer to the reprinted 1946 edition. Only one copy of the 1833 original is known to exist.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Missionary abominations unmasked*, 3.

alcoholism and fornication among students, although the spurious claims of a possible abortion and subsequent coverup from a love affair between a “missionary girl” and an Odawa student is yet to be corroborated.<sup>59</sup> Whatever actually happened, the issue of sexual scandal was not unheard of in the missionary enterprise and had devastating effects even in the most benign incidents. At the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut – an “elite” ABCFM training school for promising Indigenous graduates from the missions in Indian Country or the Hawaiian Islands – fury broke out when two Cherokee students, Elias Boudinot (Galegina Watie) and his cousin John Ridge (Skahtelohskee) fell in love with two local white women. Their widely condemned marriages led to the missionary board closing the school.<sup>60</sup> In a far more nefarious incident, the repeated rape and impregnation of Choctaw student Susannah Lyles by missionary Stephen Macomber wrought devastation on the ABCFM’s credibility in the Choctaw Nation. Elsewhere, the presence of male Indian students from slaveholder families posed risks of sexual misconduct against enslaved Black women who labored at or near the mission schools. An incident of rape occurred against one enslaved woman, Rose, by an anonymous Creek student at the Choctaw Academy, an intertribal boarding school in Kentucky.<sup>61</sup> One must be cautious about generalizing the character of all mission or residential schools based on these few examples; nevertheless, the fact that these stories of sexual transgression were recorded reflects a nation in conflict over the efficacy of amalgamating non-

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>60</sup> John Demos, *The Heathen School: A Story of Hope and Betrayal in the Age of the Early Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 152-153, 176-178, 220-221.

<sup>61</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 72, 117.



whites into the American Republic. These mission schools were transient and liminal communities that variably characterize social fluidity or racial stratification.<sup>62</sup>

### **Changes to the Land: Addressing Historical Silences in the Aftermath of Removal**

The process of Indian Removal was destructive first and foremost to the lives of Indigenous nations and families. Moreover, Removal wrought long-term devastation in the forms of topographical effacement and cultural amnesia. One of the most enduring myths in the United States east of the Mississippi River is that Indian Removal denoted a clean break from the frontier and “wilderness” past to make way for the arrival of settler immigrants who brought with them American political systems, industrialization, urbanization – indeed, foundational alterations to the ecosystem.<sup>63</sup> Euro-Americans tended to ignore and/or forget Indigenous people, assuming that they were long departed from the scene, when in fact sizable pockets of Native American communities remained present and lived materially in ways similar or even indistinguishable from their white counterparts. Rather than attribute success to Indians’ ability to accommodate to settler economic practices, many whites assumed that Indians could not become “civilized.” Thus, census records and other historical record-keeping often wrote Indians out of existence, denying those who had evaded removal or returned from a “trail of tears” a legitimate “Indian” identity. To be fair, however, many Indians who could blend into white society chose to suppress their cultural or linguistic distinctiveness to prevent becoming targets of racial prejudice or objects of pity.

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the racial liminality of missions, especially in the South, see Otis W. Pickett, “T.C. Stuart and the Monroe Mission Among the Chickasaw, 1819-1834,” *The Native South* 8, no. 1 (2015), 63-88.

<sup>63</sup> On environmental impacts of settler population growth on Indian Country, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003).

The landscapes themselves also underwent transformation if not the erasure of what came before. In the worst cases, racist characters would remove and dispose headstones over Indian graves or dig up remains for valuables as conscious efforts to deny Indians any ancestral claim to land settlers now appropriated for themselves.<sup>64</sup> More commonly, whites would simply move into former Indian homes or recycle old building materials for new structures, not knowing who the former occupants were. Likewise, mission churches and schools originally established to reach Indigenous communities and quickly transitioned to serve the swelling settler populations, whether migrants from the east or immigrants from Europe. These newcomers naturally had little history with the land, and many would not even set roots in the newly claimed lands before moving even further westward.<sup>65</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that within a generation, local and regional histories, whether sacred or secular, set down foundation narratives with all but passing mentions of Native peoples, who receded into the background just as soon as they made their entrance.

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<sup>64</sup> Such occurred at the Springplace Moravian mission near present-day Chatsworth, Georgia. It was only in the twenty-first century that the graves were rediscovered. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources erected a monument and interpretive plaques at the site.

<sup>65</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Republics: A Continental History, 1783-1850* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2021), 210-212.



Figure 1. "God's Acre" Cemetery at the Springplace Moravian Mission site near Chatsworth, Georgia. The original headstones were removed during Cherokee Removal. The historic site has only since been reclaimed with a memorial and interpretive plaques in 2002 by the State of Georgia. Photo by the author.

The following four chapters examine in depth the processes of memory and erasure at individual historic sites. Four case studies spanning from northern Michigan to southeastern Tennessee will represent a diversity of local contexts that inform how knowledge about Indigenous people and Christian missionaries have been manipulated, forgotten, or preserved over time. A caveat must be prefaced: these featured locations do not tell a comprehensive story about the trauma of Indian Removal or Native experiences with Christianity. On the contrary, these four settings, when juxtaposed with each other, will bring into sharp relief contingent factors that shape the type and extent of memorialization, the visibility of Native people, and the impact of that history on local and regional identities. When pooled together, these case studies demonstrate great variances in the community value (or lack thereof) placed at historic mission sites. Additionally, the public history practices at these sites reveal an ongoing struggle for how to best position American Indians and the important role of Christianity in the American Indian past and present.

The case studies will span four historical locales spread along a north-to-south geographic line from the upper Great Lakes to the South. These sites include an evangelical Protestant mission station in the historic Cherokee country in southeastern Tennessee, both Catholic and Protestant missions to the Anishinaabeg in the Mackinac Straits of Northern Michigan, a Catholic mission to the Potawatomi of the St. Joseph River Valley at what later became the University of Notre Dame, and a one-time Baptist-turned-secular boarding academy on a plantation in the Kentucky Bluegrass. All four locations were active scenes of cross-cultural interaction during the Removal Era, and they are representative of broader changes in the United States between the 1820s and 1840s. While covering common historical trends, each chapter will also address memory issues and landscape alterations that are particular to each locale. Each chapter will open with a brief description of the contemporary landscape that introduces the major themes and issues associated with the site. I will then provide historical context to the Native nations or tribes associated with the location and explore the uses of the site over time.

By studying the production of narratives and histories, I heavily rely upon anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot's methodology for understanding the creation of historical silences. In his book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot identifies the creation of historical silences in four stages of production, namely: 1) the raw materials (sources), 2) the assembly of those materials (archives), 3) the retrieval of sources (narratives) and 4) ascribing retroactive meaning and significance to narratives (history).<sup>66</sup> Discussion around Trouillot's schema has traditionally focused

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<sup>66</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 26.

on archival texts and materials, which have sometimes been portrayed as products of colonialism.<sup>67</sup> I would, however, expand the utility of Trouillot to the built environment as well. Historic landscapes (or what historic preservationist Ned Kaufman prefers to call “storyscapes”) exhibit many of the same processes of creation, destruction, and transformation that are seen with archives and written narratives. Landscapes, especially ones that have been marked as “historical” or interpreted in some fashion, may convey a feeling of permanence or being “frozen in time,” but actually, they are continually shifting products of human interactions. The elements of a landscape that are preserved versus those that are altered or erased reveals a story about who controls the land or what a community values.<sup>68</sup> Because the meaning of these sites of Native and settler interaction extend beyond the extant material remnants (which may be sparse), I will occasionally employ Kaufman’s term “storyscape” when describing the various settings.

Envisioning the land itself as a “storyscape” may also serve as a means to reclaim, if only in a small way, an Indigenous view of history. Vine Deloria was one of the first twentieth-century Native writers to challenge Western assumptions of history as a primarily temporal and linear destiny. While I do not go as far as Deloria to claim that “history is negated by geography,” I do find it worthwhile to acknowledge how, for many Indigenous people, the idea of “place” evokes a reciprocal relationship between people and the land. Even if the topographies have changed, or if the settler communities are ignorant of their surrounding context, an attention to “place” reaffirms Indigenous

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<sup>67</sup> For such a view, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>68</sup> Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1-3, 22.

experiences and associations with these sites.<sup>69</sup> A place-based approach to history reveals unsettling truths that upend the notions that Indian history is “distant” and no longer “present.” Native storyscapes forces the present to reckon with a past that will not be “removed” – something historian James Taylor Carson has called “postcolonial ghost stories.” Historical literature has increasingly begun to reclaim Indigenous assertions of sovereignty in the landscape in the two centuries since Indian Removal. By moving from the text to the built environment, I hope that this project signals a call to reify Indigenous storyscapes as important not just for the past but for the present and future as well.<sup>70</sup>

Each of the following chapters will stand on its own as a case study, and the final chapter, featuring ongoing efforts to rehabilitate the Choctaw Academy into a museum, will synthesize themes gathered from the preceding case examples to provide an overarching assessment for how these historic sites can be preserved and interpreted in a way that involves Native cooperation, moves beyond narratives of disappearance, and inculcates greater public understanding of Native rights to sovereignty and cultural self-determination.

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<sup>69</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishers, 2003), 61-67.

<sup>70</sup> Carson’s example of a “postcolonial ghost story” is the issue of Cherokee graves being discovered during the attempted expansion of an airstrip in Franklin, North Carolina, which served as an uncomfortable reminder that the occupied ancient capital of Nikwasi, which was (and remains) a sacred site for the Cherokee. James Taylor Carson, “Cherokee Ghostings and the Haunted South,” in *The Native South: New Histories and Enduring Legacies*, ed. Tim Alan Garrison and Greg O’Brien (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 245. For more discussion on how recent scholarship is taking cues from Indigenous ways of knowledge and applying them to understandings of local, regional, and national “belonging,” see Gina Caison, *Red States: Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Southern Studies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 4-16. For an anthology of Native American voices writing about their homeland in the post-Removal period, see Geary Hobson, Janet MacAdams, and Kathryn Walkiewicz, eds., *The People Who Stayed: Southeastern Indian Writing after Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

## CHAPTER II

### “A MEMORIAL TO PEACE”

#### SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN USES OF CHEROKEE MISSION LANDSCAPES

Anne Bachman Hyde (1868-1959) once recalled childhood memories of fishing with her father at Bird’s Mill, an idyllic spot on the banks of the Chickamauga Creek outside Chattanooga, Tennessee. What Anne remembered most were the stories her father, the Rev. Jonathan Waverly Bachman, would share with her and her siblings. Rev. Bachman, a former Confederate captain and later chaplain, might have chosen to recount war stories within living memory of the 1863 Battle of Chattanooga, where the rebel forces of General Bragg were routed by the Union army’s charge up Missionary Ridge. Bird’s Mill evidentially survived the war unscathed. But if the bucolic stone mill east of Missionary Ridge masked any former setting of conflict, it also masked an earlier history as a cultural and religious crossroad in the heart of Cherokee Country. Rev. Bachman, who was minister at the First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga, deeply impressed upon his children the story behind a forlorn cemetery located about a quarter mile from Bird’s Mill. Here, as Anne would later recall, Rev. Bachman narrated the story of the Cherokees and evangelical missionaries who called the place Brainerd Mission – the hub of Protestant missionary activity in the Cherokee homeland from 1819 until its forced closure in 1838 at the start of the Trail of Tears.

“Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set,” Rev. Bachman at times quoted to his children about the cemetery, which was one of the last material vestiges of the old

Presbyterian-dominated mission station.<sup>1</sup> A few derelict headstones, and several more unmarked graves, contained the remains of Cherokee students, white missionaries and their families, and possibly enslaved Blacks. Bachman's commitment to remember these forgotten graves left an indelible influence on his daughter Anne, who would see it as both her Christian and patriotic duty to preserve these memorials and create a movement to claim Cherokee mission history as a foundational part of the region's heritage. Anne Bachman Hyde went on to become a prominent leader in the heritage activism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For several years, she simultaneously served as the Historian-General for the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) as well as the Tennessee State Chairman for the Daughters of the American Revolution's (DAR) Committee for Preservation of Historic Spots. Following in the wake of her father's influence, Hyde served as a chief advocate and interlocuter for heritage causes, with the aimed restoration of the Cherokee mission lands being a life-long *cause célèbre*.

For all of Hyde's enthusiasm in these pursuits, not to mention the widespread support she received from like-minded Chattanoogaans, there are some stark ironies. For one, why did white Southerners take up the cause to memorialize an oppressed non-white people group? Additionally, how did these white Southerners, the same evangelists for the "Cult of the Lost Cause," come to claim "Yankee" missionaries, once seen as outside agitators, as part of their own cherished heritage? Finally, why did these heritage enthusiasts (as will be revealed later) advocate for the historic preservation of a "frontier" and "Indian" past while simultaneously participating in the suburban development that would erase that historical landscape by the latter twentieth century?

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Bachman Hyde, letter to Penelope Johnson Allen, October 1, 1933 (Penelope Johnson Allen Papers, University of Tennessee Chattanooga Special Collections, hereafter cited as UTC). The biblical quote is from Proverbs 22:28 (KJV).



The answer to the first question has been addressed in other scholarship. Tiya Miles and Andrew Denson alike have pointed out how the Trail of Tears tragedy aligned with white Southern narratives of loss and redemption. Ex-Confederates identified with the Cherokees as a fellow “conquered” nation victimized by the federal government. The nostalgic romance of the Cherokee as the most “civilized” Indigenous people, not to mention prominent Cherokees’ mixed ancestry with white settlers and construction of plantation homes, made them readily claimable within a white Southern mythology.<sup>2</sup> As Denson notes, these narratives “provided a story of Indian disappearance that established white settlers as the logical possessors of Native American land.”<sup>3</sup>

The second and third paradoxes, by contrast, require more fleshing out. During the emergence of modern America in the early twentieth century, white heritage enthusiasts used the commemoration of Cherokee graves and mission sites – in particular, the Brainerd Mission cemetery – to create a national unification narrative. In doing so, they also asserted white Protestants as the founders of American civilization and the saviors of vulnerable racial groups. The religious and racial dimensions to these unification narratives cannot be overstressed. The story of New England missionaries, Cherokee hosts, and enslaved Blacks all living as part of a frontier religious community neatly encapsulated the Christian values that these heritage groups saw themselves promoting – self-sacrifice, righteous living, enlightenment, and a spirit of industriousness. Subliminally, this narrative also promoted a conservative racial hierarchy where Indigenous people and African Americans were childlike wards of heroic white missionaries.

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<sup>2</sup> Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 10-15.

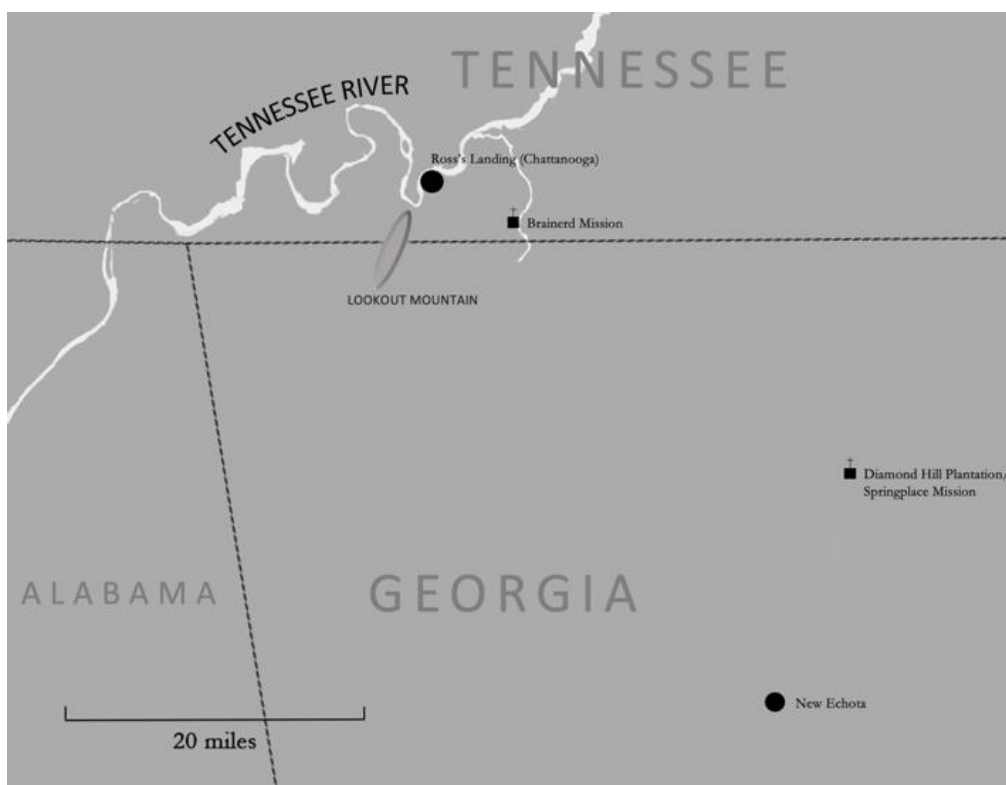
<sup>3</sup> Andrew Denson, *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest Over Southern Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 6.



Figure 2. Brainerd Mission Cemetery is the only remnant of the largest ABCFM mission to the Cherokee Nation. Today it is surrounded by parking lots in the middle of a shopping center, but the landscape used to be more park-like when the DAR restored the historic site in the 1930s. Photo by the author.

From the preservationists' viewpoint, the tragic end to these idealized communities with the Cherokees' forced removal to Indian Territory corresponded to Christian narratives of righteous suffering and martyrdom. By incorporating the graves of Cherokee converts and missionaries into their own origin stories, Southern heritage groups inscribed their own Christian gospel of redemption onto the landscape: the death of the righteous sows the seed that grants new life. As will be shown, the Chattanooga DAR chapters successfully preserved the cemetery and established its historical significance for posterity, but the grander scheme of recreating the Brainerd Mission into a center for religious tourism ultimately failed. The name "Brainerd," with its Indian and pioneer associations, instead became a marketing device for white suburbanization during the post-World War II period. Once the landscape became dominated by residential and commercial development,

the frontier narrative for Brainerd had served its purpose, and the historic site became marginalized in a sea of asphalt. In recent years, the cemetery may have lost its salience to interpret the history of Christian missions and Cherokee cultural change. Nevertheless, the story of the public history practiced at this site gives insight into how local memory is cultivated and later forgotten. In particular, the appropriation of Brainerd's memory as a model for suburban development tells a lot about how white Protestants envisioned themselves as redeemers of the past.



Map 1. Regional Vicinity of Brainerd Mission. Map created by the author.

### Laying Claim to “Brainerd”

Brainerd Mission was founded in 1817 as “Chickamauga Mission,” on lands missionary Cyrus Kingsbury purchased from John McDonald, a Scottish trader who had married a Cherokee woman and whose grandson was John Ross, future Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. Kingsbury headed the Congregationalist and Presbyterian-run American Board of Commissioners

for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts. After receiving federal government support through the Civilization Act of 1819, the mission was christened “Brainerd” after a well-known eighteenth-century missionary to the Mohican and Lenni Lenape. The mission complex itself consisted of several New England-based missionary families, resident Cherokee students, and African Americans enslaved by Cherokee elite. At its height in the early 1820s, the mission was a veritable village based off a New England model, complete with a blacksmith shop, gristmill, library, schoolhouse, and general store. Brainerd served as a “model town” that the missionaries hoped the Cherokee to emulate, and the early successes of the mission gave rise to several other ABCFM satellites in the Southeast. Several Brainerd students went on to become involved in Cherokee Nation education and politics during the Removal crisis, including Catharine Brown, John Arch, Elias Boudinot, and John Ridge. The “experimental” community finally shut down in 1838 at the onset of the Trail of Tears. However, much of the educational work begun at Brainerd resumed in the Cherokee Nation in Indian Territory (Oklahoma).<sup>4</sup>

Since Brainerd’s closure, much mystery had surrounded the once thriving community. A prominent white Georgia family had erected Bird’s Mill on the foundations of the original mission mill. According to an 1874 article in *Scribner’s Monthly*, one of the old mission houses also remained about another quarter mile from the old mission cemetery – “a decaying ruin, inhabited by a horde of negroes.”<sup>5</sup> Beyond these fragments, the article remarked upon erasure of the mission with a note of sad nostalgia: “Cherokees and missionaries have gone their ways together; there is not one to be

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<sup>4</sup> Joyce B. Phillips and Paul Gary Phillips, eds., *The Brainerd Journal: A Mission to the Cherokees, 1817-1823* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 4, 14-16, 398-400.

<sup>5</sup> Edward King, “Southern Mountain Rambles: In Tennessee, Georgia and South Carolina,” *Scribner’s Monthly* VIII, no. 1 (May 1874), 5.

encountered in any nook of the forest; the current of Fate has swept the Indian to the West, and the priests who labored for him into almost forgotten graves.”<sup>6</sup>

This romantic assessment was not entirely accurate. Although the mission lands had been vacated and allotted after the Trail of Tears, Brainerd cemetery had received subsequent burials over the years. John Vail, one of the former New England missionaries, remained in the vicinity after Cherokee removal, owing to multiple children and a wife being buried there. Vail himself chose to be buried next to them in 1871. To make matters more complicated, the most prominent monument in the cemetery did not even hold the original occupant’s remains anymore. The founding secretary of the ABCFM, Rev. Dr. Samuel Worcester (not to be confused with his missionary nephew Samuel A. Worcester, the subject of the *Worcester v. Georgia* Supreme Court ruling) had unexpectedly died while visiting Brainerd in 1821. Just before dying, Worcester had chosen to be buried at the mission. In 1845, however, Worcester’s New England relatives came down to exhume Dr. Worcester’s remains and rebury him in the family plot in Salem, Massachusetts. John Vail’s wife Penelope Conners was subsequently buried in Dr. Worcester’s former resting place out of convenience, with the original Worcester monument left in place.<sup>7</sup>

Worcester’s headstone remained the most identifiable marker to the mission’s historical significance. In the 1890s, friends of the Worcester family in Massachusetts made overtures to remove the monument from its obscure location to a more prominent and symbolic location at the crest of Lookout Mountain in the Civil War battlefield park. This “Yankee” initiative met the ire of Mary A. A. Fry, who protested in *The Chattanooga Times* that no “visitor from Massachusetts has a

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<sup>6</sup> King, “Southern Mountain Rambles,” 5.

<sup>7</sup> Sallie M. Conner, letter to Penelope J. Allen, October 27, 1933, Allen papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

right to come here and remove a landmark or a gravestone from any graveyard; especially in this instance, where it [the Worcester monument] marks the most ancient historic spot near Chattanooga.”<sup>8</sup> Fry had authored a State Centennial Poem in 1896 that framed the achievements of the Brainerd Mission as part of the founding of Chattanooga. Of Worcester she included the following:

Rev. Samuel Worcester, corresponding secretary  
 Of the foreign board, was also a missionary  
 To Brainerd; he came in Eighteen hundred and Twenty-one.  
 Arrived in feeble health, his life’s work already done.  
 He died in two weeks, his grave is in the mission ground,  
 Not far from the old mill, where to-day it may be found.  
 A stone from New Haven, Connecticut, marks the place;  
 It may crumble, but his influence time will ne’er efface.<sup>9</sup>

Rev. Bachman had also opposed the proposed monument removal.<sup>10</sup> Together, the protests of these local voices thwarted the attempts to relocate Worcester’s monument.

For all the vigor of the participants, these activities had very little to do with actual Cherokee people or history, although that was about to change. Between the late nineteenth century and the immediate post-World War II period, Southerners’ interest in remembering a Cherokee past rose dramatically. Southern whites’ fascination with Cherokee lore mirrored national intrigues with Native American cultures during this time. The Wounded Knee Massacre – seen as the last gasp of the so-called Indian or Frontier Wars – represented a symbolic turning point in US-Indian relations.

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<sup>8</sup> “Worcester Monument,” *The Chattanooga Times*, January, 189--. Exact year and date is unknown, as this story came from a string of newspaper clips collected by Anne Bachman Hyde. Anne Bachman Hyde papers, UTC Special Collections.

<sup>9</sup> Mary A. A. Fry, *Tennessee Centennial Poem: A Synopsis of the History of Tennessee, From Its Earliest Settlement on Watauga to the present time, with short Biographies of her Most Prominent Men* (Chattanooga: The Author, 1896), 87.

<sup>10</sup> “Worcester Monument,” *The Chattanooga Times*, January, 189--. Exact year and date is unknown, as this story came from a string of newspaper clips collected by Anne Bachman Hyde (Anne Bachman Hyde Papers, UTC). Anne Bachman Hyde, letter to Penelope Johnson Allen, October 1, 1933, Allen papers.

The 1890 defeat amplified the myth of the “vanishing Indian” that white Americans had already been using for the last century to justify Indian land dispossession and assimilation. This assumption was not unwarranted: between the breakup of tribal reservation holdings, the creation of the state of Oklahoma, and forced assimilatory education for Indian children, the US national government’s policies intended to solve the “Indian problem” by fully “Americanizing” them into the majority white culture. Now was the time, so believed many white Americans, to celebrate and record traditional Indian cultures and practices before they went extinct.



Figure 3. The Worcester monument as it appears today. An urn originally adorned the top of the monument but is now missing. Photo by the author.

This belief in preserving the past could take multiple forms. At the scholarly level, anthropological work, such as James Mooney’s extensive studies of the Eastern Band Cherokee,

made traditional Cherokee culture more widely accessible to white audiences.<sup>11</sup> At the more plebeian level, Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows, the dime-novel, or later media of comic books and cinema reinforced stereotypical displays of Native people as "noble savages" who existed outside modernity.<sup>12</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, painter George Catlin worked extensively to capture portraits and scenes of "traditional" Indian life before it presumably passed away. Later generations of American artists, most notably Edward Curtis, renewed these artistic efforts with new photographic technology. In particular, Curtis' staged photography of Pacific Northwest Native peoples served as a means to manufacture Indian "heritage" in Western boosterism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Popular images of a mythological Indian past gave meaning and context to America's maturation into a global imperial power in the twentieth century. As Walter Hixson has argued, the subjugation of Indigenous people in North America provided templates for US military interventions in the Philippines and in Latin America.<sup>14</sup>

Much of the literature on white uses of an Indian past has typically centered around cultural notions of masculinity. Classic historical works by Richard Slotkin and Philip Deloria, for example, show how portrayals of Native people went hand-in-hand with ideas about race and imperialism

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<sup>11</sup> See for example James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902). See also Christopher A. Oakley, *New South Indians: Tribal Economies and the Eastern Band of Cherokee in the Twentieth Century* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018), 34-35.

<sup>12</sup> Chad Barbour, *From Daniel Boone to Captain America: Playing Indian in American Popular Culture* (Oxford, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2016); Joy Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). Contrast the financial and cultural success of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago with the pitifully underfunded exhibit put up by the Office of Indian Affairs of a mock boarding school, complete with 30 Native students taken from off-reservation schools, in attempt to show the "civilization" of the American Indian. Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 324-326.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Olson, "Heritage Schemes: The Curtis Brothers and the Indian Moment of Northwest Boosterism," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 166-167.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 167-169.



during the emergence of modern America.<sup>15</sup> However, the focus on masculinity has overlooked the place of religion in the Indian past. If the fierce images of Tecumseh, Dragging Canoe, or the fictional Uncas provided inspiration for young men's fascination with the "savage" frontier, then the Christian and erudite personas of John Arch, Elias Boudinot, or Catharine Brown equally reinforced pride in religious heritage, especially in the case of white Southern Protestant women.

The "end of the frontier" in 1890 coincided with the creation of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) that same year. While not an expressly religious organization, DAR members came mostly from Protestant upper- and middle-class stock and saw Protestant Christian virtues as core and true Americanism. As the country around them entered the brave new world of modernity, the DAR saw themselves as the guardians of traditional morality and patriotism. They embraced the old ideal of Republican Motherhood and sought to unify America through commemoration of the past. When it came to the Native American past, the DAR provided a contrast to the violent, savage imagery often marketed toward men. They chose instead to sanitize the past by highlighting Indigenous people who had embraced Christianity and civilization and become enthusiastic participants in settler nation building.<sup>16</sup>

Andrew Denson concisely identified DAR commemorative practices of Native Americans as both a "gesture of respect and act of possession."<sup>17</sup> Commemoration could take various forms, whether through the erection of monuments, restoration of historic sites, or pageantry. As Philip

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 51-62; Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Simon Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020), 4-5, 96-100.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Denson, "Reframing the Indian Dead: Removal-Era Cherokee Graves and the Changing Landscape of Southern Memory," in *Death and the American South*, ed. Craig T. Friend and Lorri Glover (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 251.

Deloria has pointed out, white uses of Indian heritage and iconography served their efforts to claim a distinctly American identity. In an age of anxiety over modernization and the import of peoples and ideas that threatened to corrode the old Anglo-Protestant settler establishment, Indian narratives allowed whites to reinforce their own social position as “real” Americans and the most fitting successors to First Peoples.<sup>18</sup>

An example of this duplicitous “respect” and “possession” may be found with Robert Sparks Walker, who was a chief ally to the DAR in the Brainerd restoration efforts. Walker was a Chattanooga author, columnist, and naturalist whose family connection to the Indian past boosted his own authority claims. Walker lived in the log house of his childhood on the Chickamauga Creek upstream from the Brainerd Mission site. His home had originally belonged to prominent Cherokee elder Spring Frog (Tooan Tuh). Spring Frog was a late-eighteenth century Cherokee naturalist who had allied with the United States against the Red Stick Creek faction in the War of 1812. Along with his contemporary Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee syllabary, Spring Frog was among an early group of Cherokees to migrate west to Arkansas before forced removal. Walker prided in this connection with Spring Frog and considered the long-dead Cherokee as his muse in some of his nature poems. Later in his life, Walker enshrined his legacy as the natural possessor of Spring Frog’s estate when he converted one hundred acres of his farmlands into a nature preserve to provide a haven from the troubles of modern city living (which still exists in the twenty-first century).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 7, 100.

<sup>19</sup> Walker’s perspective is telling in the title for his memoir on the creation of his wildlife preserve. Robert Sparks Walker, *As the Indians Left It: The Story of the Chattanooga Audubon Society and Its Elise Chapin Wildlife Sanctuary* (Chattanooga: G.C. Hudson, 1955). For more information on Walker, see Haley McCullough, “Voice of a Naturalist: Life Lessons from the Writings of Robert Sparks Walker,” University of Tennessee Chattanooga Library Special Collections, <https://www.utc.edu/library/special-collections/exhibits/robert-sparks-walker.php> (last updated May 2018).

In alliance with both heritage organizations and local churches, Robert Sparks Walker played a role in resurrecting the memory of the Cherokee past for Christian ends. As early as 1920, Walker wrote regular columns for *The Chattanooga Times* that celebrated the accomplishments of the mission and the piety of the persecuted missionaries (of whom white Georgians, never Tennesseans, were the villainous persecutors). In one article, he compared “the cruelties to which the missionaries were subjected” as “approaching those [cruelties] endured by the early apostles chosen by Christ.” Cherokee removal was unjust, of course, but the post-removal successes of the Cherokee Nation cast their suffering with redemptive qualities. Walker went as far to say that Brainerd allowed the Cherokee population to be double in 1920 what it was a century before, since more than any other Indian nation, they were willing “to mix and mingle with their white brethren.”<sup>20</sup>

Walker wrote his newspaper columns based on his primary research attained through multiple visits to Harvard University’s library. His historical enthusiasm, however, went beyond the seclusion of the archive or his writing desk. Walker also contributed to the earliest public commemorations of the forgotten Brainerd site. Each year, Walker’s church, the Pilgrim Congregational Church, held a special Missions Sunday service to promote giving for global missionaries through the ABCFM (the same organization that established Brainerd among the Cherokee a century prior). In 1920, Walker himself had suggested to his pastor Rev. Marston S. Freeman at a men’s group to inaugurate a memorial service at the Brainerd site as a tangible link

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<sup>20</sup> Robert Sparks Walker, “The Story of the Brainerd Mission,” *The Chattanooga Times*, June 6, 1920. Walker’s assessment for Cherokee amalgamation being the secret to their population success echoes a very similar argument made by Thomas Jefferson more than a century prior. In a December 21, 1808 letter to the Captain Hendrick Aupaumut, leader among the Christianized Stockbridge-Munsee people, Jefferson wrote, “. . .you will unite yourselves with us, join in our great Councils & form one people with us and we shall all be Americans, you will mix with us by marriage, your blood will run in our veins, & will spread with us over this great Island.” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-9358> (accessed April 2, 2022).

between past and present. Anne Bachman Hyde was a frequently featured guest at these annual church events, and she used the knowledge of the landscape her father had given her to make the past come alive to her audiences. As church members picnicked under two oak trees ostensibly planted by the mission, Hyde toured people around the vicinity and recounted the mission's history. She would identify the stories behind the names of the few remaining cemetery headstones and also point out geographic remnants of the mill trace and the boat landing that travelers came through before the days of modern roads. These material traces of their denominational heritage meant a great deal to Pilgrim Congregational Church, which took one of the millstones from the site to use as the cornerstone for a new church building erected in 1921.<sup>21</sup>

Material culture from the Brainerd Mission served to cement belonging for these Christian communities and reinforce a redemptive narrative to the Cherokees' dispossession. At the third of these annual exercises in 1922, Hyde brought out at the end of her moving address a pewter communion pitcher, chalice, and serving plate used at Brainerd. Present to prove these relics' authenticity was Eliza "Lilly" Blunt Kirby, the daughter of Brainerd missionary Ainsworth Blunt. When the mission church closed down in 1838, the communion set had stayed in the Blunt family's possession after they relocated to Dalton, Georgia. Hyde's exhibition of the artifacts provided the perfect prop to frame the story of Brainerd as the first station on a Cherokee "via dolorosa" of sorts. At almost every recounting of the Brainerd story, Hyde emphasized the last communion service in August 1838 as the start of the Trail of Tears, as if it were the analogous to Christ and his disciples taking the Last Supper the night before the crucifixion. "[T]he Cherokees doubtless suffered much

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<sup>21</sup> "Honor Memory of Worcester," *The Daily Times*, Chattanooga, Tennessee, June 6, 1921; "The Brainerd Mission," church bulletin, Pilgrim Congregational Church, October 16, 1931, ABH Papers. The church building containing the mission mill cornerstone has since been demolished, and the whereabouts of the material artifact are lost to time.

injustice” because “the white man took from them the most precious thing on earth... the land of their birth.” A Christian redemptive spin, however, always followed Hyde’s narrative, thanks to missionaries like Samuel A. Worcester. Much after the manner of Christ, who preceded his disciples in suffering for the sake of the gospel, Worcester, after suffering persecution at the hands of Georgia, had gone ahead of the Cherokee to prepare a place for them in Oklahoma.<sup>22</sup>

These largely religious services in the early 1920s occurred in conjunction with the beginnings of broader civic interest in the Brainerd area. In earlier times, Missionary Ridge had prevented most development east of Chattanooga, but with the construction of a highway tunnel in 1913, both tourism and residential development grew.<sup>23</sup> The two-lane road extending east of the tunnel was first named Bird’s Mill Road, and by the 1920s plans for new suburban neighborhoods were well underway. Anne B. Hyde, using her influence both as the daughter of a prominent Presbyterian minister and an officer in the UDC and DAR, seized upon the growing interest in the Brainerd Mission history to advocate a name change to the road that ran through the former mission. Together with her friend Robert Sparks Walker, Hyde attended meetings of various community leagues and the Hamilton County Chamber of Commerce to press the case for restoring the historical significance of the mission name. Despite initial pushback to remove Bird Mill’s association with a pioneer family, Hyde and Walker convinced neighborhood developers that the

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<sup>22</sup> “Impressive Memorial Services at Brainerd,” *The Chattanooga News*, June 12, 1922; “Mrs. C.R. Hyde Gives History of Old Mission,” *The Daily Times*, Chattanooga, Tennessee, June 12, 1922. The use of the Brainerd communion set at these commemorative events highlights the ability for religious objects to “activate” both piety and collective spiritual power. The study of the religious uses of material objects demonstrates their power to transcend denominational boundaries. See Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 39-43.

<sup>23</sup> Harmon Jolley, “Remembering the Construction of the Bachman Tubes,” *The Chattanooga*, August 17, 2003, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2003/8/17/39834/Remembering-The-Construction-Of-The.aspx> (accessed January 25, 2021).

name “Brainerd” was one that carried national significance because of the mission’s far reach in bringing Christianity and civilization to the region and the approbation it received by President James Monroe. “Here were educated hundreds of Indian children and the negro slaves of the Cherokees were taught in Sabbath school.” The speeches presented at multiple meetings and court sessions won over developers. A local judge gave credit to the DAR Chickamauga Chapter when he approved the rebranding of Bird’s Mill to “Brainerd Road” in 1922. The name has stuck to the present-day.<sup>24</sup>

Following the official name change, developers sought to capitalize on the rising historical interest of the area. On the former mission lands, DAR chapters erected two monuments on either side of Brainerd Road in 1924. The north side commemorated the Revolutionary War-era destruction of the hostile Chickamauga Cherokee villages by Evan Shelby in 1779, and the south side commemorated the Cherokees’ subsequent civilization by Protestant missionaries.<sup>25</sup> As a way to honor the rich history of the land, one of the residential community leagues decided to christen the suburb Brainerd. Between 1925 and 1930, the Brainerd community advanced rapidly and became known as “a thriving, highly restricted residential section” of a modern Chattanooga. A local magazine kept in Hyde’s personal records gives details on the nature of this community and its close association with a pioneer and Indian heritage. The Brainerd Community League prided on the affluence and exclusivity of the new residential area, requiring a minimum price tag of \$10,000 for new home constructions. “There is a freedom from the obnoxious smoke of the city. No factories

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<sup>24</sup> “Short Session County Court,” *The Daily Times*, Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 4, 1921; Anne Bachman Hyde, “The History of Brainerd Mission; One of Chattanooga’s Progenitors,” *The Chattanooga News*, April 16, 1921; “Brainerd Road Gets Approval,” *The Daily Times*, June 30, 1922.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Bachman Hyde, “Outstanding Work Accomplished by Brainerd Mission,” *The Chattanooga Times*, July 16, 1944.

are allowed east of Missionary Ridge. Brainerd, in fact, affords an ideal location for the development of a beautiful home.”<sup>26</sup> The neighborhood was intended to preserve an open and natural feeling, complete with golf courses and parks connecting parts of subdivisions.

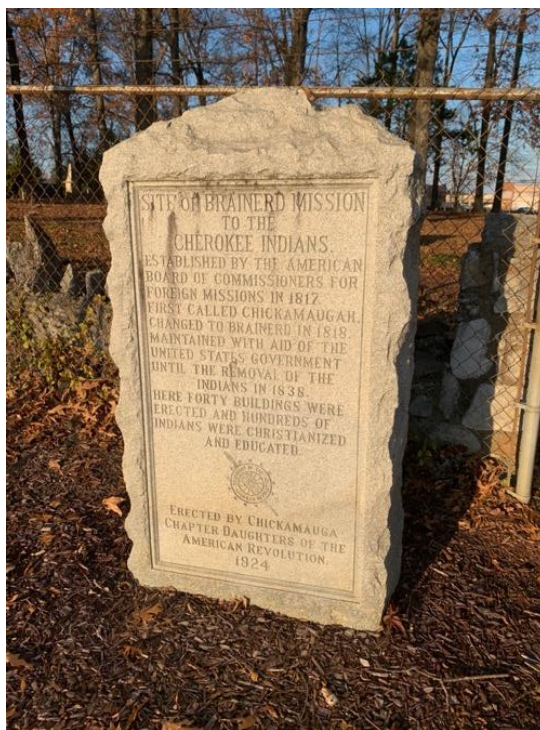


Figure 4. This 1924 monument originally stood on Brainerd Road before suburban development. Photo by the author.

The associations with an Indian past manifested in advertisements for the Brainerd suburb. The role of Indians could be contradictory. One pamphlet cover depicted an idyllic neighborhood of pristine houses located in a valley, and in the foreground, a silhouetted Native American man, wearing little more than a skirt and a feather headpiece, gazes from the forest.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, written advertisements showcasing Brainerd’s historical allure romanticized the accomplishments of the

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<sup>26</sup> “A Five Year Miracle,” excerpted article from an unknown magazine, likely cut out by Anne B. Hyde, Chattanooga, Tennessee, c. 1930, ABH Papers.

<sup>27</sup> “Brainerd: East of Missionary Ridge,” undated pamphlet, Chattanooga, Tennessee, c. 1930, ABH Papers.

Cherokee students. “The few standing monuments, the fallen stones, the sunken graves over which weeds and vines riot and tangle, fill us with romantic curiosity, historic pride and spiritual reverence.... The stories of the Little Osage captives, of Catherine [*sic*] and David Brown, John Arch, Sequoyah, the first Indian printer and editor, and the visits of President Monroe, Chief John Ross and the old King Path Killer are romantic historical facts.”<sup>28</sup>

Both the suburb’s creation and the erection of dual monuments on either side of Brainerd Road were acts of sanitizing history. Tennesseans had already done this with the founding figure of John Sevier, who was transformed from a treasonous and unruly killer of Cherokees and Creeks into a respectable leader and statesman who embodied American democratic values. The nineteenth-century efforts at historical revisionism reached an apotheosis in 1889 when the former governor’s remains received a “homecoming” in Knoxville to be reinterred after having lain in “exile” in Alabama. Sevier’s bloody past was thereby curtailed to accommodate a narrative of righteous patriotism who was misunderstood by outsiders.<sup>29</sup> The reclamation of Brainerd on the eastern outskirts of Chattanooga in the early twentieth century extended this sanitization further by masking the memory of the violent Chickamauga Wars with the arrival of Protestant religion in the state.

### **Restoration of the Cemetery**

With the christening of Brainerd Road and the creation of an upper-class Brainerd subdivision, enough momentum grew for the DAR to renew their efforts to restore the Brainerd Mission lands into something more prominent. In 1930, DAR historian and former *Chattanooga News*

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<sup>28</sup> Nancy Pearson, “The Story of Old Brainerd,” unknown magazine, Chattanooga, Tennessee, c. 1930, ABH Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Kevin Barksdale and Kristofer Ray, “Searching for John Sevier: Myth, Memory, and the History of Early Tennessee History,” in *Before the Volunteer State: New Thoughts on Early Tennessee, 1540-1800* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 208-212.



writer Penelope Johnson Allen recorded the establishment of a Cherokee Historical Society. The society's purpose was to document Cherokee history and preserve graves and historic sites associated with the early history of the region. Besides Allen, this group included among its leadership Anne B. Hyde, Robert S. Walker, businessman and former US Senator Newell Sanders, and Robert Bruce Ross, the grandson of Cherokee Chief John Ross.<sup>30</sup> This group's first activity involved taking inventory of the historic resources in the area designated worthy of preservation, including the John Ross house in Rossville, the Red Clay council grounds, the graves of Chief Pathkiller and Harriet Gold Boudinot at the site of New Echota, the grave of Nancy Ward, and of course, Brainerd Mission cemetery.

The involvement and agency of Cherokees themselves in these largely white heritage efforts is rather ambiguous. Beyond the occasional inclusion of the descendant of prominent Cherokees (most often those with mixed European ancestry), these preservation attempts were the exclusive domain of upper-class whites. Outside of the formal efforts to erect memorials, Cherokees were often the subject of the tourist gaze. In some cases, Cherokees participated in the romanticizing of their own history before white audiences. For example, the emerging activities of the DAR and the Cherokee Historical Society in Chattanooga mirrored a time of cultural and economic transition for the Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina. Headquartered just beyond the Great Smokey Mountains, the Eastern Band had begun a process of reorienting their local economy away from the declining lumber industry toward a tourist-based economy. This transition consequentially meant a greater degree of integration with white culture, which brought paradoxical results. On one hand,

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<sup>30</sup> Cherokee Historical Society Meeting Minutes, March 23, 1930, PJA Papers. Robert B. Ross actually died of a heart attack shortly following the first meeting, but I did not find any documentation on a possible replacement, or if there were ever subsequent efforts to include a Cherokee member on the society's board after Ross's death.

greater contact meant greater pressure to assimilate to white culture (such as dress or land allotment), but on the other hand, these Eastern Band Cherokees also faced demands by white tourists to perform traditional “Indian” rituals and be an exotic “other.”<sup>31</sup> Members of the Cherokee Historical Society were certainly attentive to the regional “Indian Fairs” occurring in Tellico Plains, Tennessee (the site of the former Cherokee city Great Tellico) and saw the popularity of these events as indicators of the support they would receive from the general public.<sup>32</sup>

Interest in the history of Brainerd and the restoration of the cemetery swelled between 1931-1933. One thing that ushered greater public awareness was Robert S. Walker’s publication of *Torchlights to the Cherokee*, based on years of research notes both he, Anne B. Hyde, and Penelope J. Allen had compiled from the original ABCFM manuscripts at Harvard University Library. The genesis for Walker’s book project came a decade prior, around the 1920 tricentennial of the Pilgrims’ landing at Plymouth Rock. Walker had been commissioned to locate the “Pilgrims of the South” and thereby craft a narrative case for Chattanooga’s lineal descent from the New England Pilgrims and Puritans. Conveniently, Brainerd Mission provided the perfect origin story, as it was founded by a Congregationalist and Presbyterian mission board who had descended (both genealogically and theologically) from the seventeenth-century Puritans.<sup>33</sup> *Torchlights*, which came out in 1931, was notable in its extensive quoting from missionary journals and other archival materials from the

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<sup>31</sup> John B. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokee in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 53-56; Christina Taylor Beard-Moose, *Public Indians, Private Cherokees: Tourism and Tradition on Tribal Ground* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 18-19; Katrina Phillips, *Staging Indigeneity: Salvage Tourism and the Performance of Native American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 20-24.

<sup>32</sup> Cherokee Historical Society Meeting Minutes, July 19, 1930, PJA Papers; brochure for Tellico Plains Indian Fair, September 1931, PJA Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Walker explains the story behind writing in the preface to his book. Robert S. Walker, *Torchlights to the Cherokee: The Brainerd Mission* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), viii-ix.

ABCFM. As Macmillan publishers claimed, “In this compact recountal of its history lies a story of uncalculated courage and kindness, of pious Puritanism blended with good sense, of heroism and humour.”<sup>34</sup> Based on this and the multiple endorsements given to *Torchlights* by denominationally affiliated reviewers, Walker intended for his book to not only be informative for the general public but stirring for the religious faithful as well.

The actual timeline of restoration took place rather quickly and points to the zeal with which both local Protestant churches and the DAR carved their own significance into the landscape. In the summer of 1933, the DAR Chickamauga Chapter finally received the cemetery property rights through a land donation by Dr. Henry H. Hampton and his nephews, who had used the surrounding land for cattle grazing. After evicting trespassing farm animals and removing metal scraps and other debris from the site, four DAR chapters collaborated to raise funds to restore the cemetery into a more permanent religious and patriotic “shrine.” Over the fall of 1933, churches of multiple denominations and local businesses pledged financial and labor support in supplying the necessary materials and flora to restore the old mission burial ground. Only four of the original headstones remained by the time the DAR gained ownership. However, thanks to earlier documentation by Anne B. Hyde and her father the Rev. Jonathan Bachman, the DAR identified twenty-one names of persons buried at the cemetery. Rather than try to recreate the cemetery as it might have looked in the early nineteenth century, the DAR decided to design a garden-like memorial park after a Colonial Revival fashion, including the erection of a crenellated stone wall and a wrought-iron gate.<sup>35</sup> New headstones were placed on top of known graves such as Cherokee John Arch (Atsi), and a

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<sup>34</sup> Macmillan Publishing Company, promotional pamphlet for *Torchlights to the Cherokee*, 1931, PJA Papers.

<sup>35</sup> “Money Being Given For Brainerd Wall,” *The Chattanooga Times*, October 17, 1933.

local business man, H.P. Colvard, donated multiple dozens of blank headstones to denote the many unknown burials and to provide a more pleasing aesthetic for the cemetery. These graves would have contained the remains of other Cherokee students (John Arch's resting place being the only known spot) and Black slaves who would have resided at the mission.<sup>36</sup> The restoration work was completed in less than a month, in time for a dedication ceremony held by the DAR's State Convention held in Chattanooga that November.<sup>37</sup>

The act of preservation intended to promote more engagement of local churches with their own religious history (such as rituals already being performed by the Pilgrim Congregational Church), and it would also create another tourist destination for visitors to witness an intersection between the Indian past and the birth of "civilization" to the region. As one unpublished document by Penelope J. Allen argued, this "sacred spot" proved that Christian missionaries gave light to all people indiscriminate of color: "not only was its influence for good among the Indians incalculable, but the religious and cultural impress [Brainerd] made upon the first ~~white~~ pioneers of this locality was deep and far-reaching" (cross-out in original).<sup>38</sup> In other words, the Brainerd narrative gave Chattanooga a distinctly Christian origin while preserving a conservative racial hierarchy.

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<sup>36</sup> It was known and acknowledged by DAR leadership that Brainerd Mission also educated enslaved African Americans (most likely those owned by Cherokee, though some of the missionaries themselves became small-scale slave owners) and that the cemetery would have undoubtedly contained the remains of Black persons associated with the mission. Penelope J. Allen also acknowledged in a newspaper article, "For many years the property where the old mission site is located belonged to Philemon Bird, and it is said that a number of his slaves are buried on one end of the plot." Allen, "Fading Words on Falling Tombs Show History of Old Graveyard," *The Chattanooga Times*, October 15, 1933. This issue was conspicuously omitted in official commemoration proceedings and plaques.

<sup>37</sup> Jessie E. Turner, "Cemetery Project Credit to Citizens," *The Chattanooga Times*, November 5, 1933; Sarah Martin and Carroll Van West, National Register of Historic Places Supplemental Record Listing: Brainerd Mission Cemetery, November 3, 2006, National Park Service, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/45830ea6-3402-4dcf-8320-16e58d5425d1> (accessed May 5, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Penelope Johnson Allen, untitled typed notes, October 1933, PJA Papers.

The dedication of the cemetery and the subsequent commemorative efforts during the 1930s emphasized this recurring narrative of national reconciliation baptized in Christian nationalist language. The November 1, 1933 dedication service, attended by more than 700 people, featured as its distinguished guests a daughter of one of the missionaries (Eliza Blunt Kirby), the President-General of the DAR (Edith Scott Magna), the mayor of Chattanooga (E.D. Bass), and a Tennessee jurist and state historian (Judge Samuel Cole Williams). Judge Williams' plenary address gave mention to the hopes for this newly restored "memorial to peace" as a way to redeem Chattanooga's historical narrative from its association with conflict. Missionary Ridge, as Williams claimed, was originally named so "in recognition of their [the missionaries'] work of mercy, tending strongly for peace. But as if to deride and mock the name, white brothers, during the Civil War, fought a desperate battle on its slope and crest. So now the name of Missionary Ridge stands for both peace and war." In essence, reclaiming the heritage of Brainerd Mission served as an antidote to the memory of sectional conflict between white brethren.<sup>39</sup>

This narrative worked for creating an imagined community of a white Christian nation, yet it also served to silence the obvious fact that Brainerd was a tangible reminder that Chattanooga was on occupied Cherokee land. Historically, the existence of Brainerd would have been at odds with the first white settlers to southeastern Tennessee and northern Georgia, who would have seen the New England missionaries as impediments to white economic development. Under the DAR's revisionist narrative, however, these missionaries became the vanguards of nation building. For the DAR and their heritage allies, the missionaries redeemed the land from two savage pasts – one distant and another more recent. In the early nineteenth century, the missionaries arrived with a gospel of peace

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<sup>39</sup> "Brainerd Dedication Is Highlight of D.A.R. Program," *The Chattanooga News*, November 1, 1933.

on lands that had once been the scene of violent savagery during the so-called Chickamauga Wars. They then transformed once-“savage” Indians whose forefathers had fought against the United States into “civilized” individuals who saved their people from oblivion. In the same dedication speech, Williams went as far even to say that, following the Trail of Tears, the civilized Cherokee and missionaries worked “to make Oklahoma a great state of the Union” – a grossly misrepresentative claim that completely overlooked the existence of a designated Indian Territory or an independent Cherokee Nation tribal government that the incorporation of Oklahoma effectively vitiated. The second redemption served the present social context of white Tennesseans who sought a way to move past the shadow of the Civil War. Northern missionaries, specifically John Vail or Ainsworth Blunt, put aside any sectional preferences by seeking the welfare of the city they resided in even after the exile of the Cherokees. Vail and Blunt became some of Chattanooga’s founding citizens with their role in establishing the First Presbyterian Church, and Blunt went on to become the founding mayor of Dalton, Georgia.

By keeping these missionaries as the protagonists of the narrative, the Tennessee DAR chapters also sought to propel Brainerd’s significance on the national level. In 1934, Penelope Johnson Allen led a committee to apply for a commemorative souvenir stamp collection that the United States Postal Service was promoting during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first term. The USPS initially declined the application for a Brainerd Mission stamp, but Allen persisted, given she had powerful connections in Washington, including Anne B. Hyde’s brother US Senator Nathan Bachman as well as the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull, a native Tennessean. Both Bachman and Hull pledged to intercede with the Postal Department on her behalf.<sup>40</sup> Allen, believing that perhaps

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<sup>40</sup> Nathan L. Bachman, letter to Penelope Johnson Allen, January 9, 1935, PJA Papers; Cordell Hull, letter to Penelope Johnson Allen, Jan 10, 1935, PJA Papers.

the Postmaster General did not accept the application out of historical ignorance, wrote a follow up letter through her senators' offices to emphasize Brainerd's significance in her eyes. "A stamp commemorating the unselfish labor of these Christian missionaries among this receptive and progressive Indian tribe would be a beautiful and well-earned tribute, and would do honor to the only phase of our national history in dealing with the Indians, from which the white man can claim any credit." Throughout the letter, Allen repeatedly highlighted themes of "unselfishness" and "brotherly love" that she claimed should be "brought to the attention of this present generation." It was the Christian and patriotic spirit of these forty-odd missionaries who enabled the spread of culture, literacy, and agricultural and mechanical arts to the South, making the Cherokees "the most progressive and highly civilized of all the Indian tribes of North America... before 1830." While Cherokee accomplishments were truly applauded through Allen's petition, the actual meaning behind this proposed stamp commemoration was dubious. In the same letter, Allen justified the timing of this stamp as a centennial commemoration of the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, which made secure Brainerd Mission's dissolution once that treaty came into effect in 1838. In a way, this proposed stamp counteractively commemorated the Cherokees' acculturation in association with their removal.<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, the renewed efforts for a Brainerd commemorative stamp came to naught, given the mass numbers of applications the Postal Department received. All the same, this episode sheds further light on how these heritage activists wanted to frame the history of Cherokee missions.

Further commemorative activities at the cemetery itself and other related sites expanded historical interpretation of Cherokee history to suit the DAR's narratives of nation-building and

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<sup>41</sup> Penelope Johnson Allen, letter to Kenneth McKellar, January 29, 1935, PJA Papers.

Christian redemption (and subliminally, white supremacy). The first interpretive marker inside the cemetery listed only the missionary men and women who served at Brainerd during its twenty-one-year history, including their states of origin (the vast majority coming from New England states). It was not until 1938 during the Chickamauga National Celebration, which happened to coincide with the Trail of Tears centenary, that the DAR first acknowledged in any official capacity the names of several Cherokee affiliated with the ABCFM missions. These included Charles Hicks, siblings David and Catharine Brown, John Arch, Elias Boudinot, Stephen Foreman, Lydia Lowery, and other prominent students, some of whom later became employed through the ABCFM. This unveiling ceremony was notable for being the first time that Cherokee representatives received a formal invitation by the DAR to revisit their occupied homelands and take part in the commemorations. Among the select invitees from Oklahoma included Arminta Foreman, the daughter of Stephen Foreman, a Cherokee student at Brainerd who went on to become a Presbyterian minister and the first superintendent of education for the Cherokee Nation.<sup>42</sup> It is not fully known how these Cherokee representatives, who arrived in fully Westernized apparel, would have interpreted white heritage uses of their own history. Publicly, Arminta Foreman was grateful for the acknowledgement of past wrong against her ancestors, saying “we believe they are sincere.” Nevertheless, Cherokee attendance at such ceremonies reinforced white narratives about the triumph of the civilization program. Being spectators and visitors to white-occupied lands, Cherokees had little opportunity to offer counter-narratives to this overt presentation of white benevolence and paternalism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Denson, *Monuments to Absence*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.



The commemorations of the 1930s also marked a pivotal turning point in the production of memory. The erection of permanent monuments ushered a transition from “communicative memory” to “cultural memory.”<sup>44</sup> Figures like Eliza Blunt Kirby or Arminta Foreman were the last of the generation who had first-hand encounters with the historical figures of Brainerd Mission and the Trail of Tears. Their presence at commemorative ceremonies gave additional authority to the DAR as the trustees of historical memory after the last eyewitnesses had passed away. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot reminds, the production of historical *narratives* equally involves the production of historical *silences*.<sup>45</sup> Prior to the erection of historical markers and other acts of preservation, heritage enthusiasts and government sponsors had already spent time in archives and private document collections to assemble a narrative about the Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears that suited the needs of their largely white and Protestant constituents. Material sites like Brainerd Mission cemetery facilitated the retelling of narratives published by Chattanooga’s own residents (e.g., Robert Sparks Walker, Zella Armstrong, and Penelope Johnson Allen), and by the time that Cherokee outsiders like Arminta Foreman arrived to the scene, the narrative boundaries – both physical and metaphorical – had already been established. For white Chattanoogans, Cherokees were model Indians because they became Christian and adopted white cultural practices, and they were significant inasmuch as they featured in their own history of progress. No fluidity could exist between the civilized “white”

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<sup>44</sup> These terms are original to Jan Assmann, an Egyptologist, but they are also used by historian Simon Wendt to elaborate and refine concepts more common to American memory studies, such as “official” vs. “vernacular” memory – first used by John Bodnar in his book *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Wendt prefers the terms “communicative” and “cultural” memory as a better way to describe the linear development of memory as it moves away from living memory (“communicative memory”) to a more formalized process of narrative setting (“cultural memory”) that intends to reinforce a collective identity. Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 26-27.

Indian of the twentieth century and the romanticized “savage” Indian of the past (cf. the Eastern Band’s Indian Fairs). These contrasting images for Native Americans remained segregated for white commemorators in a manner similar to their strict segregation of white and Black societies.

Cherokees could indeed be honorary members of white society, but they could do so only as they lent support to American causes, including assimilation to white behaviors and attitudes. Black contributions to Brainerd Mission and other nearby sites would not be acknowledged until many decades later, and to this day there has yet to be a memorial to the graves of enslaved Black people in the cemetery.

### **Pioneer Heritage and Brainerd’s Absorption into Suburbia**

During and immediately following the Second World War, local Chattanooga continued to capitalize on Brainerd Cemetery’s associations with religious and pioneer heritages in an effort to promote economic growth to an increasingly modern city. In the midst of US attention to the war effort, local governments and private businesses alike anticipated postwar demands for recreation and tourism. The old mission site surrounding the DAR-restored cemetery looked to be prime for development given the proximity of the affluent Brainerd residential community. At present, the land was used as a drive-in movie theater, but historically minded locals saw a great opportunity to expand the DAR shrine into a fully-fledged tourist attraction. One local newspaper editorial from 1944 argued, “The city must be prepared to jump right into the tourist trade promotion when the war ends, and the old mission could be restored as a high spot on the new program.”<sup>46</sup>

Chattanooga already had a draw from Lookout Mountain and the Chickamauga National Battlefield, but certain individuals wanted to expand Chattanooga’s historical aura beyond the Civil

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<sup>46</sup> “Go ‘Back’ For History,” unknown newspaper, Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1944, clip located in PJA Papers.

War. George M. Clark, a Chattanooga banker and later president of the Consumer Bankers Association, was a particular advocate for the recreation of the Brainerd Mission as an outdoor museum and religious heritage center. Clark was the founding CEO of the Pioneer Bank of Chattanooga, and if the name suggests anything, Clark fused together his career with his passion for local heritage. At a June 1944 meeting before the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Clark argued, “The many well-planned Civil War plaques and monuments and the almost unpardonable and complete absence of marking and memorials of pre-Civil War historical incidents have left a more or less and thoughtless impression that Chattanooga’s history began in the Civil War period.”<sup>47</sup>

Clark teamed up with Penelope Johnson Allen, Robert Sparks Walker, publisher Zella Armstrong, and First Presbyterian Church pastor James Luther Fowle to form a Brainerd Mission Foundation for the purpose of raising funds to purchase the land between the cemetery and Chickamauga Creek and recreate the mission, complete with a chapel and a museum. Tennessee governor Prentice Cooper agreed to sign an appropriation bill of \$10,000 for the purchase of the land, provided the foundation matched state funds through private subscriptions.<sup>48</sup> The proposed project received enthusiastic community responses, if muted due to the world war. That August, word of the planned mission reconstruction reached the ears of James Moffitt, the secretary for the Oklahoma Historical Society and Chattanooga native. Moffitt related the significance of the project to what he had already observed with heritage tourism among Catholics in the Southwest: “I have been impressed by the manner in which the Catholics have taken care of their shrines... In New Mexico thousands of tourists are attracted by the old missions, and Brainerd would certainly have a

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<sup>47</sup> “Brainerd Mill, Mission to be Restored Here,” *Chattanooga News*, June 28, 1944.

<sup>48</sup> “Brainerd Mission Charter Received,” *Chattanooga News*, June 30, 1944.

strong appeal. There are so few religious shrines maintained other than by Catholics.”<sup>49</sup> For Moffitt, it was high time that the Protestants had a shrine of their own and reap potential economic benefits.

Donations trickled in over the fall, with the largest of \$500 coming from Southern hotel chain owner J.B. Pound, who predicted that Brainerd Mission could become “one of the greatest attractions of Chattanooga.”<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, Governor Cooper’s term for office was set to expire in January 1945, which put a time crunch on the fundraising. As of November, the foundation had only raised \$4,000 of the \$10,000 needed to secure state funding to purchase the extra land.<sup>51</sup> For reasons not entirely known, the foundation failed to acquire the land through the state. Several years in retrospect, George M. Clark attributed the blame to the Hampton family who had owned the land around the cemetery. “Dr. Hampton was so languored [i.e., languished] in preparing the deeds for the ten acres along Brainerd Road,” stated Clark in a 1977 letter, “and [he] decided to accept a ten thousand dollar cash offer from a railroad company who converted the property into a driving range.”<sup>52</sup> The efforts to recreate Brainerd Mission appeared to have collapsed following the end of World War II.

Despite this major setback, the core drivers for the Brainerd Mission Foundation committed themselves to keeping alive intrigue in the pioneer heritage during the early Cold War years. Indian pageants made for one popular expression of “pioneer spirit,” and the Brainerd enthusiasts were no exception. Already during the Chickamauga National Celebration of 1938, white Chattanoogaans had

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<sup>49</sup> Sue Mills Loop, “Moffitt Thinks Brainerd Mission Would Draw Tourists From West,” *The Chattanooga Times*, August 20, 1944.

<sup>50</sup> J.B. Pound, letter to Robert Sparks Walker, November 23, 1944, PJA Papers.

<sup>51</sup> George M. Clark, letter to Zella Armstrong, Robert Sparks Walker, and James L. Fowle, November 24, 1944, PJA Papers.

<sup>52</sup> George M. Clark, letter to Mrs. Griffin Martin, May 20, 1977, PJA Papers.

donned Indian costumes to perform scenes of Cherokee history in a “Drums of Dixie” pageant, which situated famous Cherokees from Nancy Ward to Sequoyah as part of Chattanooga’s history.<sup>53</sup> In 1949, the Chattanooga Writers’ Club wrote a stage play based on Walker’s *Torchlights to the Cherokee* that was performed at J.B. Pound’s Hotel Patten in downtown Chattanooga. The five-act pageant was highly elaborate with several dozens of cast members (ranging from older adults to school children – all white) portraying the story of Cherokee Christianization and forced removal that coincided with the birth of the modern Chattanooga. In addition to the actual performance, the hotel also exhibited artifacts from the mission period, including the Brainerd communion set, school textbooks that would have been used in the mission school curriculum, report cards from an early pioneer female academy, and various “Indian relics.” The money raised from tickets to the pageant was for the copy of microfilm reels of the ABCFM missionary journals at Harvard to be purchased for the Chattanooga Public Library.<sup>54</sup>

Efforts to raise Brainerd’s visibility and its connections to a pioneer spirit continued into the 1950s, even as the area around the former mission lands fell increasingly under pressure for commercial development. Subdued hopes remained for the possibility of restoring the mission entirely as a Christian shrine, and one 1953 news article gave reasons why remembering the Cherokee mission had value for whites: “the mission cast a light across the Cherokee nation that is comparable in many ways to the early efforts to Christianize our British ancestors... and the equation is hard work and sound doctrine.”<sup>55</sup> It seemed that for certain white Chattanoogaans, the

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<sup>53</sup> Denson, *Monuments to Absence*, 98-100.

<sup>54</sup> Chattanooga Writers’ Club, Brainerd Mission Pageant program, March 21, 1949, PJA Papers; “Performances, Costumes Excellent in Pageant About Brainerd Mission,” *The Chattanooga Times*, March 22, 1949.

<sup>55</sup> Kinchen Exum, “Interest in Historic Brainerd Cemetery Increasing,” *Chattanooga News*, August 20, 1953.

memory of the pioneer missionaries provided the moral recipe for sustaining Protestant American values as the country headed further into modernity. George M. Clark was sensitive to this very issue when he decided to open a new branch of his Pioneer Bank in the growing Brainerd community. Although the building was fashioned in a mid-century modern style, Clark made sure that his clients appreciated his business's historic sensibilities by placing a Davy Crockett sculpture in the front and distributing historical pamphlets that juxtaposed images of the modern bank with sketches of Brainerd Mission and various scenes from a pre-industrial Chattanooga. For the new branch's opening, Clark prominently exhibited the Brainerd pewter communion set that had periodically appeared as relics at previous commemorations.<sup>56</sup> Clark's opening of a Brainerd bank branch in 1954 coincided with the last gasp of hope for a reconstructed Brainerd outdoor museum and "Protestant shrine." The former mission lands went up again for sale around 1955, only to have the foundation's aspirations crushed again once an Atlanta real estate developer, Thomas Northcutt, purchased the property in 1957 with plans to convert Brainerd into a fully-fledged suburban retail center.<sup>57</sup>

Within a short span of time the cemetery that had served as an outpost for religious heritage and reminder of a "wilderness" past became engulfed by "civilization" – or more precisely, supermarkets, hardware stores, restaurants, retail businesses, and parking lots. To be fair, developers understood, if only superficially, the significance of the land they were constructing upon. In 1960, a 32-store strip mall was christened Brainerd Village Shopping Center on the pastureland that would have been the reconstructed historic mission park. The six-million-dollar development boasted of having 1400 parking spots, and for its grand opening, the developers decided to bring "an Indian

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<sup>56</sup> Brainerd Pioneer Bank, "Brainerd and Environs: Today and Yesterday," June 1954, PJA Papers; "Old Altar Pieces Exhibited in Bank," *The Chattanooga Times*, June 21, 1954.

<sup>57</sup> Martin and West, National Register Supplemental Record Listing.

flavor” in honor of the “historical background of the land.” A large teepee information booth was erected in the parking lot, children received Native headdresses, and an “Indian Chief,” Loafing Hound of the Choctaw Nation, provided entertainment to shoppers. Additionally, a local Boy Scouts troop built and erected a totem pole for the shopping center’s entrance.<sup>58</sup> Only two years afterward, the drive-in theater on the opposite side of the cemetery was developed into Eastgate Shopping Mall, which completely enclosed the mission cemetery by parking lots and cut off its immediate access from Brainerd Road.<sup>59</sup>

It is unknown how the DAR might have reacted to the final erasure of the original mission landscape. The creation of a suburban shopping center and its appropriation of Native American iconography was full of ironies. In one sense, the representation of Native culture for suburban consumerism was completely ahistorical and went against the DAR’s efforts to portray the Cherokee as modern and assimilated. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of a generic pre-modern Indian culture with white “civilization” and “progress” fit precisely within the paradigm that the historic preservationists already operated within. Chattanooga DAR chapters continued dressing up as Indians well into the 1960s at events like a 1965 Silver Tea pageant at the Chattanooga Golf and Country Club, where participants remembered Brainerd Mission “through tableaux, exhibits and costumes” as they celebrated “the combined efforts of the churches and the United States Government.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Gaines Hobbs, “Big Brainerd Village Shopping Center Opening Tomorrow,” *Chattanooga News*, August 17, 1960.

<sup>59</sup> “History,” Eastgate Town Center, <https://www.eastgatecenter.net/history> (accessed February 9, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Betty Patten, “DAR Silver Tea To Commemorate Brainerd Mission,” *Chattanooga News*, February 12, 1965; “Chattanooga Golf and Country Club Is Scene of Colorful DAR,” *Chattanooga News*, February 18, 1965.

To add even further complexity, some Indigenous persons themselves participated in this white consumer culture. This was the case with the Eastern Band's pageantry at the Indian fairs in Tellico Plains, the site of an eighteenth-century Cherokee capital, and within the Qualla Boundary in western North Carolina in the 1930s. During the 1930s and following, the Eastern Band benefitted from these fairs due to the increased tourist traffic after the opening of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the federal rollout of the "Indian New Deal" that supported, if only temporarily, tribal sovereignties. These Indian fairs and other offshoot events portrayed stylized versions of "traditional" culture – more accurately, a mixture of actual Cherokee practices, like the ball game Anetso, and those imported from other cultures, like Pueblo pottery from the Southwest or buffalo-hide teepees from the Northern Plains. Tribal governments were involved, but many of the interpretive decisions were determined by non-Native "experts" and professionals.<sup>61</sup> Anthropologist Christina Beard-Moose has argued that the Eastern Band exploited aspects of the white tourist trade for their own economic survival, including catering to the Plains Indians stereotypical tropes (e.g., teepees, feather headdresses, etc.) and engaging in the profession of "chiefing." This "chiefing" developed as a form of gendered performative practice during the mid-twentieth century that promoted Native visibility, even if stereotyped, in order that white tourists might have the opportunity to be educated on "real" Native cultures if they managed to talk with the performer.<sup>62</sup> The identity and motivation for the Choctaw "Chief Loafing Hound," whether that was his real name or a stage name, is not known, but his performance at the Brained Village Shopping Center would certainly fit the wider phenomena of Native people performing to maintain their visibility.

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<sup>61</sup> Oakley, *New South Indians*, 63-73.

<sup>62</sup> Beard-Moose, *Public Indians, Private Cherokees*, 69, 80-83.



Despite Brainerd's absorption into suburban sprawl by the mid-1960s, five local DAR chapters continued to maintain the walled cemetery, erect further memorial benches for their own members, and hold ongoing commemorations. However, with the historical setting of the mission having disappeared, the efficacy of commemoration may be called into question. The further installment of memorial benches every few years tended only to honor individual members of the DAR or their male counterpart Sons of the American Revolution (SAR). These commemorations were devoid of any context of the site's historical significance or concern to living Cherokee communities. In 1963, local DAR chapters unveiled another monument in the cemetery – this time to an individual member, Lena Barton Kain, who notably volunteered her time to garden and maintain the cemetery while serving as an informal guide to the occasional passers-by (who by this time were most likely to be wandering shoppers curious about a cemetery in the middle of a parking lot). One news article described Kain's service as a “one-woman battle to preserve this historical site,” which was alternatively referred to as a “shrine” or as an “oasis of memories in an asphalt desert.”<sup>63</sup> Between the 1960s through the 1990s, the cemetery primarily became a place for annual Flag Day ceremonies that honored past and present members of the DAR, and interpretation at the site remained more or less untouched from its original 1930s form.<sup>64</sup> In an age of civil rights advances and major social and demographic changes, one cannot help but wonder if the DAR was turning more inward by repeating the same narratives of their self-importance as the conservative guardians of a nostalgic past when white Anglo-Saxon Protestants were (in their minds) the unchallenged harbingers of everything good in America.

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<sup>63</sup> Steve Corn, “Oasis of Memories in Asphalt Desert,” *Chattanooga News*, May 7, 1967.

<sup>64</sup> See for example the program for a Flag Raising Ceremony hosted by the Tennessee Society Daughters of the American Revolution, June 13, 1990, PJA Papers.

Alarming, there seems to have been no public record of lament toward the re-marginalization of the Brainerd mission as it was absorbed into suburbia. Throughout the latter twentieth century, the DAR chapters dutifully tended their gardens, held annual events, and congratulated each other's patriotic services. The only physical manifestation of any response to the commercial encroachment was the erection of a chain link fence around 1980 to protect the cemetery from vandalism. Additionally, the Daughters began locking the main wrought-iron gate entrance except for public events.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 5. The original cemetery entrance, once with direct access to Brainerd Road, is now blocked by the back of a retail store. It is kept locked for most of the year. Photo by the author.

The DAR's relative lack of response to both landscape changes and historiographical developments begs the question: Had the original preservation of Brainerd Mission Cemetery served

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<sup>65</sup> Martin and West, National Register Supplemental Record Listing.

its purpose? If one travels back to the original nineteenth century context, Brainerd Mission intended to serve as a model settler community not only for Cherokees but for future “good colonists” as well. Brainerd’s church and mission school certainly emphasized Protestant Christianity as the foundation for civilization, but the ABCFM’s recruitment of Christian farmers, mechanics, and other skilled professionals indicated a desire to develop a permanent settlement community to replace the wilderness associated with traditional Cherokee culture.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, in the twentieth century, Chattanooga suburban developers and historic preservationists alike hoped to capitalize on Brainerd’s namesake to create an attractive and model (i.e., white) residential community. White evangelical Christian communities were more than happy to revive Brainerd Mission’s memory for the sake of establishing their own connections to the “founders” of Chattanooga, see the city progress toward modernity, and distance themselves from the shadow of the Civil War. In this vein, the narrative of Brainerd as a model settler community *promoted* rather than challenged the erasure of the wilderness landscape in the twentieth century. Granted, the ringleaders behind the cemetery’s preservation had great admiration for the Cherokee Nation and their accomplishments, even going as far to acknowledge the many injustices they had received at the hands of whites. When push came to shove, however, Cherokees always took a back seat to the real protagonists of their story – the missionary families who became the area’s leading Christian settlers during the “founding” era (which just so happened to correspond with Cherokee removal).

The specter of the generic “Indian,” whether through writing, exhibition, or performance, mainly served as a marketing device for white suburbanization. The wild Indian-inhabited frontier served as the counterpoint to civilization. Once the landscape around the former mission site

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<sup>66</sup> This is the argument laid out by Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 102-104, 129.

became overtaken by residential and commercial development, the frontier narrative had run its course.

### **Conclusion: Race and the Use of History**

The marginalization, rediscovery, preservation, and re-marginalization of Brainerd Mission as a historic site of Indigenous and settler interaction was by no means an inevitable narrative. As history is full of contingencies, so is the process of preservation and memory. In its present state isolated within two twentieth century shopping centers, the DAR-preserved cemetery lacks the resources or land space to do much interpretive expansion. However, had the Brainerd Mission Foundation been able to acquire the additional ten acres of land in 1944, a much different history of the site might have ensued. A partially reconstructed Brainerd Mission would certainly have provided more context to tell narratives about the nuanced relationships between white missionaries and Cherokees during a critical period in US expansion. It is difficult to say whether or not the tourist attraction would have provided an eastern counterpart to the Spanish Catholic missions of the Southwest, as the proposal enthusiasts predicted it would be. More than likely, the hypothetical “Protestant shrine” would have reinforced white evangelical narratives about themselves as the exemplar nation-builders and defenders of the helpless (i.e., non-whites). It is not unimaginable that the outdoor museum might have developed into a pilgrimage site for conservative religious groups during the political emergence of the Christian Right in the late-twentieth century. Then again, it is also possible that a reconstructed Brainerd Mission would have increased the visibility of Cherokee history in the landscape, eventually opening the door for Cherokees themselves to challenge the DAR’s settler-centric framework. If the Foundation lacked the resources necessary to sustain the multi-acre site, the state of Tennessee might have later stepped in to convert the property into a historic state park, analogous to what the Georgia Historical Commission did with the New Echota

historic site near Calhoun. Brainerd would then have occupied a more pronounced place along the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail.

As with any historical monument or memorial, Brainerd Cemetery, as a commemorative site, better reflects the values of the preservationists than it does the actual historical experiences of Cherokees and missionaries. For the Tennessee Society DAR in the early twentieth century, Brainerd provided an appropriate “founding” narrative that tapped into the myths of the heroic pioneer spirit as well as Christian altruism and self-abnegation that they considered cornerstone values for Americans to emulate in their own historical context. Undergirding all of this, however, was the assumption of white paternalism and superiority. Cherokees were the receivers of white culture from the New England missionaries, and the DAR helped invent the narrative that Brainerd Mission formed the core spiritual progenitor of Chattanooga. Ironically, the actual Brainerd Mission would have violated the racial sensibilities of white Chattanoogaans in a segregationist society. The ABCFM mission stations throughout Cherokee Country routinely taught Cherokee, Black, and white persons alike in integrated mission schools. The missionaries still upheld racial and social hierarchies, but their evangelical theology would have demanded equal educational access to receive the spiritual enlightenment of the Christian gospel.

The expansive resources devoted to Cherokee Removal history at other historic sites in southeastern Tennessee and northern Georgia open the question if the Brainerd cemetery site still has relevancy as a place of memory. Is the cemetery now a dead monument to outdated narratives of white paternalism, Indian absence, or Christian nationalism? Or does it have new narratives to offer? Are new narratives even feasible for this site? In 2001, a local Boy Scout completed for his Eagle Scout project a wooden and glass bulletin board that contextualized local Cherokee history from the Chickamauga wars up through the Trail of Tears. The interpretive bulletin also included information

about archeological excavations near the site over the years in addition to ongoing commemorative activities (as of 2001). When the author visited the site in late 2020, the bulletin appeared to have been left untouched for several years. Long-term exposure to sunlight had faded multiple pages of laminated text so that they were no longer legible. In contrast to that sign's neglect, six combined chapters of the Tennessee Society DAR and SAR continue to maintain the grounds of the cemetery at least thrice annually. Continuing with a tradition dating back to the 1930s, the chapters also host annual Flag Day ceremonies each June, which the 2020 coronavirus pandemic did not stop from happening, albeit at more limited numbers. According to a recent news report, "the design of 1933 remains largely intact today." That statement was in reference to the physical condition, though it could just as readily apply to the interpretive scheme of the DAR and SAR. "The one-acre cemetery stands as a reminder not only of the important roles individuals can have in effecting good in our society, [but] as well as a symbol of the sacrifices that many men and women made on behalf of the community, the state and the United States."<sup>67</sup>

Next to the American and Tennessee state flags are the tribal flags for the Eastern Band Cherokee and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Both of these flagpoles were erected in the early 2000s once the site became a designated spot along the National Historic Trail of Tears by the National Park Service. According to a 2006 supplementary listing for the National Register of Historic Places, the DAR began including Cherokee representatives in their commemoration services in 2002, but their participation has not been consistently reported.<sup>68</sup> So long as the DAR

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<sup>67</sup> "Annual Flag Day Ceremony Held At Brainerd Mission Cemetery," *The Chattanooga*, June 11, 2020, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2020/6/11/410370/Annual-Flag-Raising-Ceremony-Held-At.aspx> (accessed February 19, 2021).

<sup>68</sup> For instance, a news story of the 2016 commemoration service mentioned Alva Crowe (Eastern Band Cherokee) as giving "a musical tribute." The notice for the 2018 ceremony, in contrast, gave no mention of any Cherokee involvement. "Brainerd Cemetery To Hold Annual Flag Raising Ceremony June 8," *The Chattanooga*, May 25,

and SAR chapters maintain their control over the site, the interpretation is likely not to change much. Even when nearby chapters have better acknowledged Indigenous cultures at other memorial sites (e.g., Nancy Ward's grave in Benton, TN), these modest interpretive revisions do not disrupt the existing foundation of settler triumphalism manifested at these sites.<sup>69</sup>

It is unrealistic and overly idealistic to expect heritage organizations like the DAR or SAR to displace settler bias with Indigenous-centered narratives at their sites of memory, for doing so would violate their *raison d'être*. Rather, the tenable forward path is to acknowledge the existence of polyvocal interpretations held in tension. However, this is not any excuse to tolerate narratives of blatant white supremacy. On the contrary, historians may draw lessons from the shortcomings of earlier interpretations to elevate previously marginalized voices.

The history of Brainerd Cemetery as a public history site showcases the intricate relationship between memory (or forgetting) and the built environment. The goal of the historian is not necessarily to eradicate or reverse changes already wrought to the landscape (in this case, the destruction of Cherokee memoryscapes in Chattanooga through suburban sprawl). Rather, it is more constructive to turn toward other memory sites and apply lessons from Brainerd to do responsible practice.

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2016, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2016/5/25/324980/Brainerd-Mission-Cemetery-To-Hold-Flag.aspx> (accessed February 19, 2021); "The DAR and SAR Host Flag Day At Brainerd Missions Cemetery," *The Chattanooga*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2018/5/21/369158/The-DAR-And-SAR-Host-Flag-Day-At.aspx> (accessed February 19, 2021).

<sup>69</sup> In the case of the Nancy Ward memorial, the Cherokee district chapters of the TSDAR erected a new marker in 2018 that acknowledge Ward's "contributions to her culture" and noted her Cherokee name and the clan she came from. The dedication service involved members of The Association of the Descendants of Nancy Ward (some of whom came from Oklahoma, though their tribal membership in the Cherokee Nation is unknown. Pauline Moore, "New Markers Dedicated At Nancy Ward Grave Site State Park," *The Chattanooga*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.chattanooga.com/2018/3/28/365854/New-Markers-Dedicated-At-Nancy-Ward.aspx>.

To better understand the nuanced place of missions in Cherokee cultural change and survivance, the public may be better directed to go across the Tennessee border into Georgia and visit the Chief Vann Home State Historic Site near the town of Chatsworth. Unlike Brainerd, which has become entrapped in suburban sprawl, the former plantation of Cherokee elite James Vann retains more of its historical setting and lends more possibility for interpretive expansion. The flagship resource of this site is the Vann manor itself, built by African slaves. As one docent remarked to me during a house tour, Vann was “the Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos of the Cherokee Nation.” Few visitors to the Vann Home realize that the state historic park also maintains the grounds of the Springplace Moravian Mission that Vann hosted on his plantation; the Moravians actually predated Brainerd and the ABCFM missions to the Cherokee. In the early nineteenth century, Springplace Mission was contiguous with the plantation grounds and slave quarters, but today, it is a non-contiguous section of the park located across the street from the manor, museum, and springhouse. Like Brainerd, the main point of interest is the mission cemetery, called “God’s Acre” in the Moravians’ parlance. Unlike Brainerd Cemetery, however, whose preservation was guaranteed by Aimsworth Blunt’s purchasing it through allotment, Springplace did not have such a benefactor, and the gravestones of mostly Black and Cherokee persons were effaced following Cherokee Removal. The cemetery’s exact location was not rediscovered until 2000 on someone’s private property. The owners of the plot donated the site to the state of Georgia in 2002, after which the state park administration created interpretive markers surrounding the confirmed burial site and dedicated the entrance with two commemorative headstones (see Figure 1).<sup>70</sup> The museum itself contains a few material relics from Springplace, including a foundation stone and the church bell.

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<sup>70</sup> Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill*, 205. This information was also available on the interpretive markers present on site, which provides information on the archeological work performed.



Additionally, visitors can hear an audio loop recording of contemporary Cherokee Nation members singing a Cherokee translation of “Amazing Grace,” which hints at the role of Christianity in the preservation of Cherokee language. The gift shop sells copies of the transcribed Moravian mission journals that provide intimate glimpses into day-to-day life at the Vann plantation, particularly the experiences of women and slaves.

Apart from these subtle references to the connection between the Vann estate and Cherokee missions, the state historic site is still somewhat reticent to talk about religion. During the docent-led house tour, the name of James Vann’s second wife, Margaret Ann “Peggy” Scott, did not appear once. Peggy Scott, a survivor of domestic abuse, became an influential Cherokee woman following her Christian conversion with the Moravians and subsequent organizing of Cherokee women’s councils to fight against removal, making her an ideal candidate for the interpretation of prominent Cherokee women. When I asked probing questions about Peggy Scott from my tour guide, who was a public history master’s student at a Georgia university, she did not know much about the subject and usually redirected the conversation. When I asked follow-up questions about the relationship between the Vann family and the Moravian mission, she replied with short, dismissive comments, such as “Oh, the Moravians were very racist,” and “We can’t trust their sources because they were very patronizing to enslaved people.” I might have had varied responses with other docents on the subjects of Peggy Scott or the Springplace mission, but my experience indicated that the interpretation of religion and cultural change during a crisis period for the Cherokee Nation has yet to be fully developed. In theory, the Chief Vann House State Historic Site has opportunity to expand interpretation and even physical infrastructure to address the complexity of a Christian mission on a Cherokee plantation, much in the way that slave experiences are now highlighted at the

house museum where they had previously been ignored. For historic interpreters, however, these issues demand better efforts at a nuanced interpretation, free from lazy modern moral judgments.

In addition to the public history labor needed on the part of interpreters, the stakeholder situation should also be taken into consideration. What audiences would an expansion in historic interpretation serve? At many Cherokee historic sites in Tennessee and Georgia, visitors tend to be largely white, especially in the case of local visitors. Certainly, white Georgians and Tennesseans would benefit from greater exposure to the ways their landscape has been shaped by Native and Black experiences. It would likewise behoove African American communities to have greater visibility at these sites, given how enslaved Blacks were vital contributors to the Cherokee mission operations, even receiving education that in other places would have been prohibited. The question of Native stakeholders at mission sites, Cherokee or otherwise, is otherwise more complicated. For one, white claims to Cherokee ancestry are widespread phenomena throughout the South. Most who make these claims do not have any formal relations with contemporary Cherokee culture and lack tribal membership. For enrolled tribal members of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma or the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, whether in Oklahoma or North Carolina, the efficacy of historic sites to provide any direct benefit for their people is questionable. So long as geographic distance separates living Cherokee communities from these historic sites, and as long as these sites are operated by state or national government entities rather than tribal governments, the history work performed at historic sites will only have intangible educational benefits at best.

The religious dimensions for these sites are equally confounding when it comes to stakeholder responsibilities. White American Christians – in particular, white evangelical Protestants – are largely ignorant of their own histories and could benefit from greater education on American Christianity's role in settler colonialism. However, the historical distance from Cherokee Removal

makes nebulous an appropriate response. Do contemporary churches owe anything to the Cherokee people in the way that certain Black voices demand action from white Christians for their tolerance of racism?<sup>71</sup> If so, should responsibility be collective or individual to particular churches or denominations? The ABCFM was an interdenominational mission organization that no longer exists, though its chief leaders were Congregationalists and Presbyterians. In terms of lineage, the most direct descendants of the Puritan Congregationalists are the United Churches of Christ (UCC). The UCC is arguably one of the most progressive branches of mainline Protestantism today, but it lacks a strong cultural presence in the South, and its theological affinities are almost unrecognizable from its largely Puritan antecedents.<sup>72</sup> Presbyterianism, on the other hand, has a much stronger cultural foothold in the region, though it is split among conservative and liberal branches. The conservative Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) or Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) would have the most in common theologically to the nineteenth century evangelical missionaries, especially those who remained in the South following Cherokee Removal. (The First Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga is a PCA congregation and was founded by two former Brainerd missionaries.)

The diffusion of Protestant denominations into countless sects and splinters complicates efforts to connect past with present, especially when it comes to identifying responsible agents. Likewise, Native involvement at the historic site remains tenuous given the cemetery's alienation from its historical setting. In the twenty-first century, Brainerd Cemetery is as much a memorial site

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<sup>71</sup> For black demands for racial justice aimed at white Christians, see Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019).

<sup>72</sup> For a scholarly treatise on the present UCC's relationship to its Puritan historical roots, see Margaret Bendroth, *The Last Puritans: Mainline Protestants and the Power of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

for the DAR as it is to Cherokee history. For instance, there are now more memorial benches dedicated to outstanding service to the organization than there are headstones for the original mission community of whites, Cherokees, and Blacks. For all intents and purposes, the DAR has long abandoned any loftier goal of using the Brainerd site as a place for public engagement on issues of religion, colonialism, and Native American experiences.

As will be seen in the following chapter, dialogue on memorial uses of the landscape becomes more attainable when different sites complement each other to create a larger context for meaning. The public history work at Brainerd may have failed in its larger effort to reclaim the landscape for religious purposes, but a different story emerges in other locales. In the Upper Great Lakes, where Native people had much greater success in weathering the storm of land dispossession and forced removal, multiple environments of memory play off one another to tell a much more complicated story of Christianity, American “civilization,” and Native resilience than the declension story often told in the Southeast.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CROSS AT THE STRAITS

#### NATIVE AND RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATION IN NORTHERN MICHIGAN TOURISM

For many Americans, the name “Mackinac Island” evokes a scenic spot for summer getaway – quaint shops, fudge, majestic views from the porch of the Grand Hotel, horse drawn carriages, and a proper balance of nature with the manufactured feeling of “old time” America. Located between the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of Michigan and within view of two Great Lakes, Mackinac forms a historic crossway between the United States and Canada. All the while, Mackinac also provides the feeling of remoteness. It is several hours’ drive from any major city; there are no highways connecting the island to the mainland (and no motorized vehicles allowed on the island); the small resort town consciously preserves a historical flair that is both elegant and rustic. For most except hardy local inhabitants, the Island is inaccessible during the long and harsh winters.

Local Mackinac tourism authorities lean into dual identities as historic commercial hub and romantic natural preserve. The Grand Hotel’s website claims that Mackinac offers the best of “old-world hospitality and charm,” while the Mackinac Island State Park boasts in lush forests and stunning geologic formations from the Ice Age. Indeed, Mackinac Island’s brief stint as a national park (the second in the USA) attested to the place’s allure for its “restorative qualities” as well as its

connection to Native American history. An early twentieth century travelogue claimed, “the charm of the locality is due, in no small degree, to the halo of antiquity which hangs over it.”<sup>1</sup>

Mackinac’s very name speaks to its Indigenous past. The full name for the straits between Lake Michigan and Lake Huron is “Michilimackinac,” a French transliteration of an Anishinaabe word *Michinaamakiinaago*, which could translate as “people of large underground places.”<sup>2</sup> The immediate region plays an important role in the origin story of the Anishinaabeg, who are sometimes known as the Three Fires Confederacy and comprise the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa), and Potawatomi. According to Anishinaabe tradition, in the beginning, the Creator flooded the world to flush out the corrupted ways of men and begin anew. The generosity of a large turtle, *Mishimikinaak*, who allowed soil to be placed on its back, saved life on earth, and so the land of North America came to be known as “Turtle Island.” The tale has several variations and is not unique to the Anishinaabeg. In fact, nineteenth-century Ojibwe ethnographers William Warren and Peter Jones both claimed that the stories bore many resemblances to stories from the Hebrew Bible, notably Noah and the Flood, making it difficult to know how the oral traditions may have been altered after contact with Europeans.<sup>3</sup> One Ojibwe tradition held that the island was the center of this great turtle and thus the center of the world. Peter Jones claimed that the natural formation called Sugar Loaf Rock resembled a turtle’s head, and he noted other practices on the islands around Lake Huron of Indians leaving offerings in front of similar turtle-shaped rock formations to pray for

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<sup>1</sup> Meade C. Williams, *Early Mackinac: A Sketch Historical and Descriptive*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Duffield and Company, 1912), vii.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Mike Zimmermann, a language expert in Anishinaabemowin and Ojibwe language and cultural instructor at the Indian Community School in Milwaukee County, WI, for assistance with etymology and spellings.

<sup>3</sup> William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibway People, Based Upon Traditions and Oral Statements* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1885), 63, 70-71; Peter Jones, *History of the Ojebway Indians: with Especial Reference to their Conversion to Christianity* (London: A. W. Bennett, 1861), 35.

traveling protection.<sup>4</sup> In this vein, it is possible that the “people of underground places” references the spirits (*manitos*) dwelling in the breccia rock formations commonly found in the area. Odawa historian Andrew Blackbird, on the other hand, firmly rejected the “Great Turtle” etymology and favored a theory that the island was named after a refugee group called *Michinemackinawgo* who fled from the Iroquois.<sup>5</sup> This narrative would seem to correspond to the fact that a band of Catholic Wyandot (Huron) refugees briefly sought shelter on the island in 1670, around the time when the French Jesuits began activity on the island. According to French accounts, these Wyandot were exploited by the Odawas and later relocated around Detroit.<sup>6</sup> It seems dubious that the Anishinaabeg etymology for Michilimackinac would date from the contact period, and even Blackbird claimed that this original group of *Michinemackinawgo* refugees came five or six hundred years prior to when he was writing in the 1880s.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of the true origin of the name, Michilimackinac was central to Anishinaabe history as the place where the Three Fires Confederacy peaceably diverged into three tribes: the Ojibwe (Keepers of the Faith) went north and west to Lake Superior, the Odawa (Keepers of the Trade) largely stayed put in the Straits area and along the Lake Huron shoreline, and the Potawatomi (Keepers of the Fire) went south along Lake Michigan.<sup>8</sup> As the Odawas’ association with trade suggested, the Mackinac Straits was indeed a central gathering place for Anishinaabe trade with other

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, *History of the Ojibwey Indians*, 45, 255.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan* (Ypsilanti, MI: The Ypsilantian Job Printing House, 1887), 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Blackbird, *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians*, 23. Mike Zimmermann believes Blackbird was referencing the Mascouten tribe. Email correspondence with author, August 1, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Warren, *History of the Ojibway People*, 81-82.

Native nations as well as European empires. Historian Michael McDowell has argued that Michilimackinac was less of a “middle ground” but rather “Indian country” through and through, as French and British trade in the region played to the tune of Odawa politics, not the other way around.<sup>9</sup>

What then happened between the late eighteenth century and the present for this Native ground to be eclipsed by the tourist gaze and a majority-white resort community? The area’s historical memory is most often encapsulated by the alliterative “faith, fur, and fish.”<sup>10</sup> Apart from the freshly caught whitefish served daily at most restaurants, that rustic French and Indian heritage sharply contrasts with the pristine gardens, Victorian cottages, and recreational amusements expected by contemporary tourists. As far as the Native population is concerned, the Anishinaabeg never left the area and have even celebrated cultural revitalization in recent decades. Nevertheless, they are still forced to contend with the entrapments of modern consumerism, as most tourists are not coming to Mackinac to learn about Indigenous history. Likewise, as prominently featured as Christianity is in the local landscape, the concerns of the economy are almost entirely secular, with religion, like Indians, providing an aesthetical backdrop more than anything else. As this chapter will reveal, the Mackinac Straits’ heritage landscape is a dialectic between sacred and secular forces vying for influence over each other.

Why Mackinac? Admittedly the island and its environs are of more regional tourism interest than national shrine in the way that Washington, D.C. or Mount Vernon might be. Moreover, any claim to Mackinac as a site of “Americana” is dubious: the area’s geography and history make it just

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<sup>9</sup> McDowell, *Masters of Empire*, 13-15, 23.

<sup>10</sup> To this Mackinac State Historic Parks former director Phil Porter has added three more associations for Mackinac, “forts, fun, and fudge.”



as much a shared site for Canadian heritage (only an arbitrary treaty placed Mackinac permanently within US borders by 1815). Nevertheless, it is precisely Mackinac's location as part of the North American borderlands that gives it a flair set apart from other centers for heritage tourism. The Straits' remoteness to imperial population centers like Quebec, New York, or London, not to mention its harsh winters and low agricultural prospects, spared it from intense settler migration and industrial development characteristic in other places of the Old Northwest like Chicago or Detroit. These same geographic factors allowed Indigenous communities to retain a greater share of cultural influence compared to other parts of eastern North America. The most obvious example of Native influence is the fur trade. Even after the trade's decline in the nineteenth century, Native Americans still used Mackinac Island as a significant place for social reunions, religious feasts, and gift exchange. Their presence and folklore traditions about the Island gained the attention of white tourists who developed Mackinac's romantic mystique. These characterizations of Mackinac as a spiritual or therapeutic respite from the industrial cityscape would lead to the conscious preservation of its pre-industrial landscape. These efforts had ironic consequences. Despite the overt absence of certain modern features (e.g., no automobiles), Mackinac's historical mystique is thoroughly manufactured. The past is present all around, but visitors can choose at any time to indulge in the past only as an aesthetic fantasy rather than as a process of change and continuity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In this chapter I will delineate two types of tourism co-existing at the Straits of Mackinac. The one described in this paragraph is an "aesthetic tourism" in the sense of being driven by therapeutic or pleasure-seeking interests. (It is the kind of tourism that drives the local economy and is chiefly concerned about creating a visitor experience, with educational goals being secondary or "add-on.") It thrives off the notion that the "tangible past" is vanishing and inaccessible as well as the notion that things that are "ancient" (or removed from the "present") provide a means of escape from the unromantic "modern" world. Examples for Mackinac Island include local businesses, restaurants, bed and breakfasts, hotels, and official and unofficial tourism marketing agencies concerned with selling a for-profit service. Another kind of tourism, "educational tourism," here being represented by the Mackinac State Historic Parks and the staff of cultural museums and institutions, are more concerned with education. They tend to employ persons with training in history or related fields. They are also interested in providing public services but tend to be more non-profit and reliant on state support and grants. The lines between these modes of tourism are often blurred and can co-exist within the same organization. For example, a marketing department may chiefly cater to "aesthetic tourism" to generate

Michilimackinac makes for a good, if not exceptional, case study to explore the effects of settler colonialism in the built environment. Settler colonialism's history in this location is one of paradoxes. As the island and its surrounding environs transformed from Native country into a summer resort destination, it has maintained historical patterns of seasonal migration. Unlike comparatively urban or industrialized spaces, Mackinac's community consciously seeks to preserve its historical setting while exploiting its resources for outsiders to consume. The local economy thrives off being an *escape* from mundane modernity through its living history presentations while safeguarding tourists' expectations of modern consumer comfort. Nuanced historical interpretation of the area's Indigenous history coexists with assumptions that visitors must enter a romanticized past to have an "authentic" encounter with Native Americans. Moreover, Anishinaabeg continue to participate in the region's economy and have historically performed roles expectant for the tourist gaze.<sup>12</sup>

Mackinac Island is also remarkable from the prominence given to religious heritage. The longevity of historical religious structures, particularly the Presbyterian "Mission Church" and Ste. Anne's Catholic Church, at first glance may be surprising given the transient nature of the area's demographics and apparently secular interests of the tourist economy. Upon deeper inspection, however, these same buildings and the communities they represent may be the unacknowledged bedrocks of continuity precisely *because* of the area's transience. For Natives and settler groups alike,

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revenue while a programming department may be more dedicated to "educational tourism" with a stated moral agenda in mind. Likewise, "educational tourism" can and often does make use of aesthetic elements, but the primary goal is to instruct and inform rather than merely titillate the senses. For a foundational discussion on the relationship between landscapes and nostalgia, see David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory" *Geographical Review* 65, no. 1 (January 1975), 1-36.

<sup>12</sup> For an example of Anishinaabeg pageants performed for a white tourist gaze, see Katy Young Evans, "The People's Pageant: The Stage as Native Space in Anishinaabe Dramatic Interpretations of 'Hiawatha'," *Melus* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2016), 124-146.

religion provided both tangible and intangible bonds of fellowship and kinship networks that had seemingly counteracting effects. For Anishinaabeg, the incorporation of Christian missions into their social networks enabled many to persist in their home territory long after American incursion. For white settlers and later migrants, church communities helped maintain ties to larger communities back East or in the mother country, or in some cases, offered the ability for self-transcendence from an otherwise “savage” or wilderness landscape. For all alike, Mackinac’s religious communities provided stepping stones to larger engagements in culture and business that shaped the Great Lakes region. In this vein, Michilimackinac makes for a good place to locate Christianity’s complex roles in transforming the built environment, eroding the middle ground, and creating a vehicle for Indigenous survivance all in one locality.



Map 2. Straits of Mackinac. Map created by the author.

The area's prominence in tourism adds an additional layer to the mix. How does the "tourist gaze" affect the development of the landscape, the visibility of Native peoples, the auras of religious iconography, and the narratives told about the Straits? Mackinac's tourist gaze enforces perhaps a demarcation of the "heritage" past with the present, implying that Indians, missionaries, fur traders, and soldiers are somehow cut off from contemporary reality. Through the themes of commercialization and secularization, this chapter will explore the creation and preservation of Mackinac's heritage landscape. It will also detail more recent efforts by Anishinaabeg and public historians alike to navigate the heritage tourism scene and highlight continuities of Native communities rather than disruption.

### **Historical Overview: From Contact to the Decline of the Fur Trade**

This following section will provide a brief sketch of the Straits of Mackinac from early contact up through the emergence of the area's economic transition to tourism in the mid-nineteenth century. As mentioned already, the area played a centerpiece in the division of the Three Fires Confederacy into the modern tribal entities of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi. Over time, each tribe developed its own linguistic and ethnic identity, but they all retained common culture and religion as Anishinaabeg (as most commonly spelled in Ojibwe and Odawa dialects; alternatively pronounced "Neshnabek" in Potawatomi), which means "principal people" or "spontaneous people." A primary way of maintaining those kinship ties was by seasonal summer travels to Michilimackinac to trade, celebrate religious festivals, and arrange marriages between the various clans to broker alliances. While the Straits hold significance for all Anishinaabeg, the Odawa and Ojibwe will feature most prominently in this chapter given their closer proximity to Northern Michigan.

Jesuit missionaries and French fur traders would have been the first Europeans in the western Great Lakes during the early to mid-seventeenth century, and they entered Anishinaabewaki (the traditional name for Anishinaabe territory) at a time of great intertribal conflict on two fronts: to the east, they were in conflict with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and to their west they were fighting with the Dakota. The frequent raiding parties and enslavements prompted many smaller bands to migrate to safer shores, one of which were Iroquoian-speaking Wyandots. The Wyandot (also called “Huron” by outsiders) had one of the earliest alliances with Jesuit “black robes” when they were more powerful on the northern shores of Lake Ontario. After devastation wrought by European diseases and wars with the Iroquois Confederacy, the Wyandot dispersed southward and westward. Jesuits accompanied one such refugee band to the western Great Lakes.

Being in such a vulnerable position outside their homeland, these Wyandots likely sought spiritual protection in their Jesuit alliance and began to incorporate Catholicism into their lifeways. Following the Wyandot band to the western shores of Lake Superior, the Jesuits established a remote outpost called Mission Saint-Esprit (Holy Spirit). By the 1660s, however, the Dakota wars further threatened the survival of the Catholic Wyandot, and Fr. Claude Dablon journeyed back eastward to scout out a safer location to spread Catholicism. Dablon found Michilimackinac highly suitable given its central location within Anishinaabewaki and as a gathering place for tribes from across the Great Lakes. The Odawa were the most prominent group there and were also curious about Catholicism. Dablon instructed his young disciple Fr. Jacques Marquette to relocate Mission Saint-Esprit and come to Mackinac Island in 1670. Marquette’s mission to the Huron is generally considered the origin point of Catholicism in Northern Michigan, even though Marquette was not the first missionary to arrive (one already existed at Sault Ste. Marie some 50 miles north). Despite the visually attractive location of the island, Marquette and Dablon had not planned for the soil to

be poor for agriculture. As the Wyandot were an agricultural people, they relocated in winter 1671 to the northern mainland. Marquette named the new mission St. Ignace after the founder of his Jesuit order, Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>13</sup>

As has already been hinted at, the mission community at Michilimackinac followed Native patterns of population shifts and was hardly a static entity. French military garrisons and fur-trading *voyageurs* tended to follow the footsteps of the Jesuits and their Indian host communities. The Jesuit presence at St. Ignace stabilized during the 1680s-1690s and gained members to their baptismal records (primarily women and children), but the mission also attracted more French settlers who stymied religious efforts by introducing alcohol among the Indians. In response, the Jesuits appealed to King Louis XIV, who in 1686 issued restrictions on selling alcohol to Native people, but these royal decrees were hardly enforced by Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, the Jesuits' *bête noire* and the military commander at Fort Buade in St. Ignace between 1694-1701 before he left to establish the town of Detroit. The abyssal state of the mission, given that the remaining Catholic Huron had left for Detroit as well, was such that in 1706 the Jesuits burned down St. Ignace and retreated to Québec.<sup>14</sup>

Several Odawa, however, were still open to Catholicism, and the Jesuit mission would be rebirthed in 1714 on the southern shore of the Straits at Fort Michilimackinac (present-day Mackinaw City), where the French garrison relocated following the Odawa who had moved their summer villages. Although the Jesuits initially established their mission to convert Natives, they

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<sup>13</sup> David Andrew Nichols, *Peoples of the Inland Sea: Native Americans and Newcomers in the Great Lakes Region, 1600-1870* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018), 30-35.

<sup>14</sup> James Boynton, *Fishers of Men: The Jesuit Mission at Mackinac, 1670-1765* (Mackinac Island, MI: Ste. Anne's Catholic Church, 1996), 26-29.

quickly found that the French settlers themselves needed much moral reform and so broadened their reach to bolster the growing French-Canadian population, which grew not by large numbers of settlers but through intermarriage with Anishinaabeg families. At Fort Michilimackinac, the fledgling Catholic congregation first began to take on the name Ste. Anne's Church after a larger chapel was constructed in 1743 (a replica of which now exists at the Colonial Michilimackinac living history museum). The creation of a more stable center of Catholic faith correlated with the gradual rise of a few influential Métis families who exercised the greatest control over both the fur trade and the newly incorporated faith. The most prominent of these racially mixed families were the Langlades. Domitilde (Odawa), who married the French trader Augustin Langlade, was particularly noteworthy in her advocacy for Catholicism. Through being godmother to several Anishinaabeg children, she both solidified the community's affiliation with the Church and created extensive "fictive relations" across clans that ensured Anishinaabeg power in the Straits for the ensuing generations.<sup>15</sup>

The local Odawa further expanded their association with the French Jesuits when several families and a Jesuit "black robe" left Fort Michilimackinac to establish L'Arbre Croche (Waganakising), meaning "crooked tree," during the 1740s and established a relatively successful mission and farm (this Odawa settlement exists today as Cross Village). Unfortunately, both local and global events during the 1750s-1760s negatively impacted the Odawa and their allies. A smallpox epidemic caused devastating loss of life among Odawa communities. Furthermore, French losses during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) and the subsequent suppression of the Jesuit order by colonial empires caused the Odawa to lose their strongest European allies. Fr. Pierre DuJaunay was the last resident Jesuit priest among the Odawa mission community until being recalled to

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<sup>15</sup> Boynton, *Fishers of Men*, 41; McDowell, *Masters of Empire*, 112-114.

Québec following the disastrous fallout of the British takeover of Canada and Pontiac's Rebellion, when Ojibwe and Sac warriors attacked Fort Michilimackinac in protest of the British not respecting standing trade policies.<sup>16</sup>

Anishinaabeg communities persisted despite the British takeover of the Straits and the decline of Jesuit missions. In fact, one of Domitilde Langlade's sons, Charles Langlade, served as second in command of Fort Michilimackinac during the transition period between French and British colonial rule. The British garrison at the fort largely chose not to incorporate themselves into the Indigenous lifeways, allowing the culturally amalgamated French-Canadians and Indians to retain demographic advantage in the Straits area. Through the decades of transition from French to British and later from British to American control, a small but growing Métis population had secured a position of cultural and economic prominence, as the Euro-American trade companies were dependent on them for the fur trade for carrying kinship ties to Anishinaabeg communities deeper inland. So long as the new imperial powers honored their customs and provided annual gift receipts to their Native relatives, Métis cooperated with the influx of Anglo-American settlers and businessmen and could weave their way in and out of both worlds. In the longer run of American growth and expansion, those with Indian ancestry were forced to cede local political power, but they were mostly concerned about maintaining a way of life by being tied to the fur trade.<sup>17</sup>

Michilimackinac's French and Indian population were initially hostile to British occupation. During the 1763 capture of Fort Michilimackinac, Ojibwe killed at least sixteen British soldiers and

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<sup>16</sup> Boynton, *Fishers of Men*, 42-32; McDowell, *Masters of Empire*, 213-217; Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 196-198.

<sup>17</sup> Keith R. Widder, *Battle for the Soul: Métis Children Encounter Evangelical Protestants at Mackinac Mission, 1823-1837* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 61-65.



imprisoned the rest of the Anglos, but no French-Canadians were harmed.<sup>18</sup> British authorities learned their lesson following this episode and came around to respect the trade arrangements held by the Anishinaabeg during French rule. Having regained a status quo, most Anishinaabeg in the Great Lakes came around to support the British during the American War for Independence, with several Anishinaabeg war parties being sent out from the Mackinac Straits. However, Fort Michilimackinac's superintendent Patrick Sinclair realized the fort's precarious location on the southern mainland. In 1780, Sinclair authorized the relocation of both the fort and the town to Mackinac Island. Whereas the British soldiers and French-Canadian fur traders had lived side-by-side on the southern mainland, on the island these communities would be separated, with the British at Fort Mackinac atop the island's bluffs and the French-Canadian town below (this was likely a security measure given that France was then at war with Britain during the American Revolution). The town moved to the island first (along with Ste. Anne's Church, deconstructed and reassembled) followed by the Sinclair's garrison, who burned down the mainland fort in 1781.

The 1783 Treaty of Paris awarded Mackinac Island to the newly independent United States, yet the British garrison did not leave for another 12 years. This fact suggests the fragility of the US, but more importantly, it also suggests the strength of the Anishinaabeg to retain their influence over the region to the point of dismissing land claims made thousands of miles away. Even after Americans took military control of Mackinac in 1795, the Anishinaabeg would continue their gift arrangements with the British, ignoring any arbitrary border made between British Canada and the US Northwest Territory. It might be argued that American control over Mackinac was only ever

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<sup>18</sup> McDonnell, *Masters of Empire*, 218.

nominal, given the ease in which a joint force of British and Indians were able to recapture the island during the War of 1812, only to lose it back to the Americans at the Treaty of Ghent.

Since the French loss in 1761, the Straits of Mackinac had been claimed by a Protestant power – first the British and later the Americans. Neither the British nor the Americans made any concerted effort to convert the area’s Native inhabitants until the early nineteenth century. So long as the Odawa still *de facto* controlled the fur trade, the British traders and Anglo-American merchants were largely content with prioritizing economic interests and over any attempt to transform the culture or habits of the largely French- and Odawa-speaking residents. Without a resident Catholic priest between 1765-1830, many lapsed in their formal practices of religion, though many retained beliefs and knowledge of certain prayers. As with earlier times, formal attachment to any religious group or community was sparse, as most men spent only parts of the year in the Straits to do trading business while leaving their families in Native villages further west in what is now Wisconsin, Minnesota, southern Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. Nevertheless, the fact that the building housing Ste. Anne’s Church survived the move of the fur trading community from the mainland to the island reveals that Catholicism still carried influence on the community’s sense of identity. In 1802, David Bacon was the first Protestant missionary sent to evangelize on Mackinac Island, but his mission failed when he retreated back to New England in 1804 with no converts.<sup>19</sup>

It was only after the War of 1812, after the failure by western Indian confederacies to revert the region back to the British, that religious revivalism began to play a more active role in culture and politics. In 1823, the Odawa community at L’Arbre Croche sent a detailed letter in English to US President James Monroe asking for a Catholic priest to be sent among them:

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<sup>19</sup> Julius Rubin, *Perishing Heathens: Stories of Protestant Missionaries and Christian Indians in Antebellum America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 35-40.

We return our best thanks to our father and to Congress for his & their exertions to bring us, your very affectionate children, to civilisation [sic] and to the knowledge of Jesus the Redeemer of the red skins as well as of the white people. Trusting on your paternal affection, we come forward, and claiming the Liberty of conscience, we most earnestly pray, that you may be pleased to let us have a teacher or a minister of the Gospel belonging to the same Denomination of Christians to which did belong the members of the Catholic missionary society of St. Ignatius established at Michilimakinac, or at the Arbre Croche by F. Marquet[te] & others of the order of the Jesuits. During a great many years they have resided amongst us, occupied and cultivated a field on our own Ground, and instructed our fathers in the first principles of Christianity & Agriculture.<sup>20</sup>

L'Arbre Croche did receive a visit in 1825 from Fr. Francis Vincent Badin (brother of Fr. Stephen Badin, see Chapter Four), followed by Fr. Jean DeJean between 1827-1830, but it was not until the 1830s that they would receive a Catholic school through the aid of a young Dominican priest from Italy, Samuel Mazzuchelli, whose effective ministry would challenge the government-supported agenda for “civilization” and effective “Americanization” of the fur trade.<sup>21</sup>

Around the same time that the Odawa of L'Arbre Croche requested for Catholic instruction, the United States government supported the imminent arrival of Presbyterian missionaries at Mackinac Island, under the auspices of the United Foreign Missionary Society (which in 1826 merged with the ABCFM). These missionaries came almost exclusively from New England stock, and they predominantly consisted of newly-wed couples in their twenties (only two persons were over 30 years of age at the start of ministry). Most of these couples knew each other through extended family connections or through attending seminaries at Andover, Princeton, or Auburn. These Presbyterians were largely influenced by an internal movement within New England Calvinism known as the “New Divinity School,” which emphasized conversion experiences typical

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<sup>20</sup> Photostat of L'Arbre Croche Odawa Indians, letter to James Monroe, August 12, 1823, Box 10, Folder 4, Edward V. Cardinal Papers (CRD), UNDA.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie Tentler, *American Catholics: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 69-72.

for the Second Great Awakening and promoted the notion of “disinterested benevolence.”<sup>22</sup> In the spirit of evangelical piety, most of the young missionaries did not hold ordination or a seminary degree, although their titular leader, Rev. William Ferry, had a formal education.<sup>23</sup>

Protestant missions in the Old Northwest followed antecedent enterprises among Southern Indians, most notably among the Cherokee and Choctaw nations. The slower start may be attributed to the fact that the Great Lakes were still considered contested during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, namely due to British claims in Upper Canada and the Indigenous people who took advantage of the porous imperial borders and still received gifts from the British after the War of 1812. The American government and their evangelical allies both agreed that a cultural revolution, as opposed to violence or outright land theft, would ensure US stability to the region. Early American geographer Jedediah Morse (father of the inventor of the telegraph) was a major catalyzer for missions in the upper Great Lakes, especially Mackinac Island, as a way to “Americanize” the Indians and Métis who had for too long been under the influence of the Catholic French. Converting the native population into industrious Protestants, so believed persons like Morse, was key to bringing the fur trade economy fully into the United States.<sup>24</sup>

The American Fur Company (AFC), founded by John Jacob Astor in 1808, would play a major role during this era of Mackinac’s history, and many of the company’s leaders would provide critical support of the Protestant missionaries’ endeavors. Astor’s AFC rode on the success of precursor companies operated by French-Canadian and Métis persons. Although some were

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<sup>22</sup> Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 185-187, 233.

<sup>23</sup> Widder, *Battle for the Soul*, 30-32, 36-39.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

suspicious of missionary attempts to impose strict New England Calvinist morality onto incorrigible Indians and *voyageurs*, others found them to be allies in the cause of “taming” the wilderness and providing education to all. In 1824, AFC resident manager Robert Stuart enrolled his own children, David and Katherine, in the Protestant mission school at Mackinac, where they studied alongside Métis and Indian students.

Whereas the New England missionaries showed little interest in accommodating to Michilimackinac’s French, Indian, and Roman Catholic cultures, surprisingly, many racially mixed families within the island’s leading class, such as the Biddles or the LaFramboises, were congenial to the arrival of Protestants. Magdalene LaFramboise fulfilled a role similar to Domitilde Langlade a couple generations prior by serving as a matron figure for the fur trading community in both spiritual and familial matters. The daughter of a French *voyageur* and Odawa mother from the Grand River, “Madame” LaFramboise managed her own fur company after her husband’s murder in 1806. For a decade she competed with Astor’s AFC until the companies merged when she retired. Using her retirement wealth, LaFramboise built for herself a spacious home on the island, which still stands today as the Harbour View Inn bed and breakfast. Known as a socialite, she used her home and surrounding grounds to host various functions, and as a devout Roman Catholic, LaFramboise also used her influence to maintain the Catholic community in the absence of a resident priest, such as being godmother to several individuals and organizing prayer meetings. She deeded lands adjacent to her home for Ste. Anne’s Church on the condition that she be buried under the church’s altar. Her Catholic piety notwithstanding, LaFramboise did not discriminate educational enterprises when

she offered part of her home as classroom space for the new Presbyterian missionaries until they were able to construct a mission house in 1825.<sup>25</sup>

During its more than a decade tenure, the ABCFM mission school enjoyed moderate success in attracting 175 Native and mixed-race students whose fathers had summer business on the island and desired for their children to gain literary and trade skills to progress in life. Many of these students stayed for only a year or two, but some of the more successful used their time at the mission school to launch further educational and career paths, including William Whipple Warren, William Blackbird, and Augustin Hamlin. The mission also provided a safe haven for persons ostracized from their home communities. Such was the case of Eliza (Ojibwe), a former medicine woman who fell out of favor in her home community because of an alcohol addiction. Having lost three of her four children, Eliza came to the missionaries and enrolled her remaining child, whose mission name was “Joseph,” into the school since she could no longer provide for him. In many of these cases, language barriers created severe limitations, as most of the missionaries had no knowledge in Indigenous languages. They had to rely on persons like Elizabeth Campbell, who was fluent in French and Odawa, to provide interpretation both in school and at church.<sup>26</sup> Divisions over mission philosophy could occur over the issue of language. William Ferry, as the superintendent, believed that all students needed to learn English to fully attain Americanized culture as well as theological particulars, and he thus discouraged the use of French or Native languages at the school. On the other hand, another ABCFM missionary, Elisha Loomis, who had

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<sup>25</sup> Phil Porter, Introduction to Boynton, *Fishers of Men*, v-vi. The basement museum of Ste. Anne’s Catholic Church also acknowledges Madame LaFramboise’s generosity with the Protestant missionaries. David Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness* (New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), 264-265.

<sup>26</sup> Widder, *Battle for the Soul*, 78, 109-110.

served in Hawai'i before coming to Mackinac, recognized the need to learn the Ojibwe language. Despite Ferry's protestations, Loomis produced an early Ojibwe orthography.<sup>27</sup> Such linguistic projects would catalyze the creation of an Anishinaabe written literature, such as when former student Henry Blatchford would translate the entire New Testament into Ojibwemowin in 1856.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 6. The Mission House at Mackinac Island as it appears today. Since the 1980s, it houses summer interns for the Mackinac State Historic Parks. Photo by the author.

The missionaries collectively referred to each other and their students as one “family,” and this claim had much truth to it. Meals and supplies were shared; a single doctor served the healthcare needs of missionaries and students alike; and most shared the same regimented schedule. Upon arriving, Indian students were given English “mission names,” in some cases being given the names

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 117-118; Nichols, *Peoples of the Inland Sea*, 159-161.

<sup>28</sup> Widder, *Battle for the Soul*, 130, 138.

of various sponsors back on the eastern seaboard, who were encouraged to “adopt” an Indian child. In the hindsight of the later boarding schools of the assimilation era (late-19<sup>th</sup> through mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries), this renaming might be construed as an attempt at cultural erasure. However, this was not necessarily the case with these earlier mission schools like the one on Mackinac Island (as well as at the secular Choctaw Academy, see Chapter Five), for in most cases students retained ties to their Anishinaabe or French-Canadian kinfolk. It was also not unusual in many Indigenous cultures (as is the case today) for children to receive multiple names, usually as a rite of passage into adulthood. Especially for Métis persons, multiple names allowed them to go between various identities depending on their context and serve as cultural interlocutors.<sup>29</sup>

The students themselves faced the greatest challenge in being asked to conform to the cultural norms of New England evangelical Protestants. Nevertheless, the missionaries themselves faced challenges to their own worldview. Amanda W. Ferry recorded copious private writings describing her own emotions as she encountered cultures foreign to her own upbringing. As she and her husband had originally hoped for an assignment in Palestine, Amanda was unenthused about the request to go to the Northwest frontier and “could not be persuaded that the people were not all savages, on a comfortless barren spot.”<sup>30</sup> Her initial impressions of Mackinac’s Indian inhabitants were not pleasant either. On occasion of the Natives celebrating the New Year in 1824, Amanda wrote:

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<sup>29</sup> William Whipple Warren is one such student success story whose time at the Mackinac Mission would propel him to take on the role of interpreter at another ABCFM mission at La Pointe, Madeline Island. Warren would later be best known as an early Ojibwe ethnographer. Theresa Schenck, *William W. Warren: The Life, Letters, and Times of an Ojibwe Leader* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 8-10.

<sup>30</sup> Amanda Ferry, letter to Hannah White, November 13, 1827, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts from selected letters written from Mackinac Island, 1823-1834,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Unless otherwise noted, all letters found in his collection are copied typescripts originally compiled by William and Amanda’s granddaughter, who eventually donated the copy to the University of Michigan.



Next came Squaws without number, some sober, some not. Among them a blind woman, who insisted in moving her hand all over my face, when six kisses did I receive from her black lips before she released me. Next an Indian and his squaw, both so drunk they could not stand straight. But I kept at a distance from these filthy creatures, politely supplying them with cakes.<sup>31</sup>

As the summer visiting season rolled around, Amanda would be horrified by the apparent ignorance of Indians and the immorality promoted among them by the fur trade:

The Indians are pouring in from all directions: supposed to be about 1600 in all, now on the Island. Saturday last they left for Drummonds Island to receive their presents from the British govt.... Not a day passes but many of them, drunk, are strolling the streets, entering every house, noisy, and calling for whiskey. It is impossible to give an adequate idea of their wretchedness. Could you have it in your power to contrast the appearance of children on the streets with those in our family, you would never withhold your influence, sustenance and prayers for the civilization and Christianization of these wretched beings. From our door I have frequently counted fifty wigwams upon the shore near by.<sup>32</sup>

Amanda would eventually warm up to working with Indians, particularly among those who showed interest in the work of the mission and Christian teaching. In 1829 she reported positively of Assiginack (“Blackbird”), an Odawa elder from L’Arbre Croche visiting her Sunday school, who encouraged other Indian attendees, “You may listen to her. She teaches you the good way.” Despite Assiginack’s adherence to Roman Catholicism, Amanda Ferry admired his dedication to temperance and education among his people.<sup>33</sup> Amanda nevertheless was frequently anguished by the difficulty of changing Indian cultures and the pull that Roman Catholicism still had on the town’s mixed population. She welcomed the visitation of many during the busy summer season yet also dreaded

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<sup>31</sup> Amanda Ferry, letter to unknown recipient, January 1, 1824, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Amanda Ferry, letter to unknown recipient, June 29, 1824, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Amanda Ferry, letter to unknown recipient, May 10, 1829, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers. It is not clear whether Amanda was aware that Assiginack also fostered literacy among his L’Arbre Croche community by bringing Catholic hymnals and catechisms from Montreal that were published in Anishinaabemowin. Theodore Karamanski, *Blackbird’s Song: Andrew J. Blackbird and the Odawa People* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 44-45.

their corrosive influence on the work she toiled over during the isolated winter months. “It is a universal feeling that winters are harvest seasons for our souls,” she remarked in another letter, whereas the summer brought worldly-minded traders, whom she deemed “vile besotted men, who strive to make the children uneasy, to poison their minds: and to draw from the material which they change into a bad report to the [students’] parents.”<sup>34</sup> To add to that, the Fort Mackinac soldiers who attended services at the Presbyterian Mission added an additional layer of distraction, since according to her son’s recollections decades later, many of the soldiers were only interested in coming to church “to see the parson’s pretty wife and hear her sing.”<sup>35</sup>



Figure 7. The interior of the Mission Church retains the original box pews that were more common with eighteenth-century New England churches. Photo by the author.

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<sup>34</sup> Amanda Ferry, letter to unknown recipient, Dec 29, 1829, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>35</sup> William M. Ferry, Jr., speech at Old Settlers’ Association Banquet, 1897, “Biographical and Historical Information,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.



Figure 8. The front entrance to the Mission Church is on the main road circumnavigating the island. It is no longer an active religious house but occasionally hosts weddings. Photo by the author.

The ABCFM mission reached its peak in 1829-1830 during a wave of religious revivals, among whom were converted the AFC manager Robert Stuart, the merchant and sawmill owner Michael Dousman, William Mitchell and his Métis wife Elizabeth, and several others. These spiritual successes moved several on the island to donate funds for the erection of a permanent church building in 1830, which opened up for services in 1831 and presided over by Rev. Ferry. Incidentally, the revivalism also coincided with a renewed Catholic vigor. A bishop arrived on Mackinac in 1830 to make plans for the arrival of a permanent priest. Though this news came to the dismay of the Protestant missionaries, some Anishinaabeg welcomed the promise of more “black robes.” A year prior, Fr. Pierre DeJean had arrived at L’Arbre Croche, spurring a Catholic revival among the Odawa that also split the community. In response, the Catholic faction led by Assiginack

and his brother Mackadepenessy founded a “new L’Arbre Croche” community further south along the Little Traverse Bay (the future town of Harbor Springs, Michigan) in 1829.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to the transient mission community on Mackinac Island, the more permanent Anishinaabe community in Little Traverse Bay proved a more stable environment for both Catholic missionaries and Anishinaabe, specifically Odawa, families. Between 1830-1855, Anishinaabe elders (*ogimaag*), in collaboration with their missionary allies, purchased several tracts of private property that formed the land nucleus of the present-day Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (LTBB).<sup>37</sup> Concurrent with Anishinaabeg desires to stay on their land and prove themselves as “civilized,” the Catholics priests launched a new parish and their own mission school. This log cabin mission school, part of the Holy Childhood of Jesus parish, would close in 1839, but it reopened in the 1880s as part of a more aggressive national agenda to turn Native peoples into individual, assimilated citizens. The new Holy Childhood of Jesus School would gain a controversial reputation for its draconian discipline and effort to suppress Native languages and cultures, particularly among its largely Anishinaabeg student population (a subject revisited later in this chapter). Few people back in 1830 could have foreseen this future. Nonetheless, the school had its origins in the Catholic revivalism especially prevalent in the Great Lakes, which attracted both the historical French-Indian cultural base as well as new Catholic immigrants from Europe.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Karamanski, *Blackbird's Song*, 52-55.

<sup>37</sup> *Our Land and Culture: A 200 Year History of Our Land Use* (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, 2005), 30-33. E-book available from LTBB's tribal government website, <https://ltbbodawa-nsn.gov/> (accessed December 15, 2021). See also Theodore Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence: A Case Study of the Anishinaabeg of Michigan,” *Michigan Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 123-124. The land purchase strategy also proved useful for Odawa bands in the Grand River, but they allied themselves with Protestant missionaries to secure their land bases. See Susan Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 73-74.

<sup>38</sup> On the character of frontier Catholicism in the 1820-1840s and the gradual shift to separate institutionalism, see Tentler, *American Catholics*, 73-94.

These rapid developments threatened the future of the ABCFM mission on Mackinac Island. Despite the growth of the Presbyterian congregation, a new church building, and a handful of Indian converts, the Ferrys were mortified by the arrival of Frs. James Mullon and Samuel Mazzuchelli to the island, as they represented many things that the Protestants had worked so hard to root out among their mission. Moreover, Fr. Mullon accused William Ferry of being more concerned with financial exploitation, given his dabbling in shipping and lumber on the side with support from friends working for the AFC.<sup>39</sup> Ferry launched a series of lectures at the Mission Church denouncing the theological superstitions of the Catholic Church. Ferry did not expect to meet his match when Fr. Mazzuchelli, a twenty-four-year-old Italian Dominican friar, rebutted each of Ferry's address in his own series of sermons at Ste. Anne's Church down the street in 1831. The sparring match never went beyond their respective pulpits, but this episode prompted several lapsed Catholics, including some Indians and fur traders who had heretofore attended the Presbyterian mission, to renew their ties to the Roman Church.

So long as Ferry had the support of fur company leaders like Robert Stuart, or government Indian agents like Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, an evangelical Christian and teetotaler who moved to the island in 1833 with his British-Ojibwe wife Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Bamewawagezhikaquay), the mission school maintained itself. Schoolcraft would be an ardent defender of Ferry's character against political enemies and disgruntled Mackinac Islanders. He tried putting to death a scandal caused by mission students who spied on Ferry's private quarters through a keyhole and saw him with an assistant female missionary and rumored that he had an affair.<sup>40</sup> Outside of those issues,

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<sup>39</sup> Widder, *Battle for the Soul*, 92-93. John Odin Jensen, *Stories from the Wreckage: A Great Lakes Maritime History Inspired by Shipwrecks* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2019), 98-101.

<sup>40</sup> Schoolcraft had his own religious conversion prior to his arrival at Mackinac, following the sudden death of an infant son from croup. See Richard Bremer, "Henry Rowe Schoolcraft: Explorer in the Mississippi Valley, 1818-1832,

Ferry became increasingly conflicted by his secular business ventures, tending to his growing family (he and Amanda had four children born on Mackinac Island), and juggling all his responsibilities both as church pastor and school superintendent. He had experienced a couple bouts of severe illness that caused him to consider a change of direction. In 1833, Ferry took with him two Indian guides to travel around Lake Michigan to scout out a new location for the purpose of “doing something for the comfort of my family,” taking advantage of recently ceded Native lands in the Michigan territory.<sup>41</sup> Ferry eventually came to the mouth of the Grand River and met the Baptist missionary Leonard Slater (a former associate of Isaac McCoy) in whom he found a kindred spirit who shared enthusiasm for the moral uplift of Indians.<sup>42</sup> By 1834 Ferry sent a notice of resignation to the ABCFM’s general secretary, who only reluctantly allowed him to step down.<sup>43</sup> By the winter of that year, the Ferry family moved south, where they participated in the establishment of Grand Haven, Michigan, with William and his sons gradually taking on secular work in the growing timber industry.<sup>44</sup> Years after Ferry’s death, his daughter Amanda H. F. Hall defended her father’s piety against any accusations of materialism: “never, from first to last, was his chosen profession or his

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*Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66, no. 1 (August 1982), 54-55. Schoolcraft recorded the scandal involving an assistant missionary in his *Personal Memoirs*, dated March 28, 1833. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs of a Residence of Thirty Years with the Indian Tribes on the American Frontiers, with Brief Notices of Passing Events, Facts, and Opinions, A.D. 1812 to A.D. 1842* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1851), 470-471.

<sup>41</sup> William Ferry, speech given at Old Settlers’ Association Banquet, March 5, 1858, “Biographical and Historical Information,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>42</sup> William M. Ferry, Jr., speech at Old Settlers’ Association Banquet, 1897, “Biographical and Historical Information,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>43</sup> William Ferry, letter to David Green, August 15, 1834, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Widder, *Battle for the Soul*, 133.

personal consecration disregarded. Through everything, he was not only in bearing, and in the cut of his clothing, the ordained minister.”<sup>45</sup>

Ferry’s departure from the Indian mission on Mackinac anticipated other winds of change. By the mid-1830s, changes in fashion modes caused a decline in fur demand. The AFC’s founder John Jacob Astor retired in 1834, and a year later, the AFC decided to relocate their Mackinac headquarters further west to La Pointe, Wisconsin. This decision meant that many of the fur traders who had children enrolled at the mission school no longer had business on the island, causing a decline in enrollment. In an 1835 letter addressed to Henry R. Schoolcraft, ABCFM Secretary of Indian Affairs David Greene cited the lack of Native pastors and the dearth of younger men interested in Indian missions as internal reasons for decline.<sup>46</sup> The mission school on Mackinac officially closed in 1837. The departure of the ABCFM spelled the end of the Mission Church as an active Protestant congregation, whereas Ste. Anne’s Catholic Church maintained a steady presence on the island. Schoolcraft became Michigan’s Commissioner for Indian Affairs in 1836. Despite Schoolcraft’s enthusiasm for Indian missions and having a mixed-race wife, he allied himself with Andrew Jackson’s Democratic political program of Indian Removal and became a chief adversary in Michigan Native people’s efforts to stay on their lands. Schoolcraft had a large role in the cession of most remaining Michigan Anishinaabe lands at the 1836 Treaty of Washington, and he continued threats at removal until he lost his position after Democratic losses in the presidential election of 1840.<sup>47</sup> Upwards of thousands of Anishinaabeg still came to Mackinac during the summer to receive

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<sup>45</sup> Amanda Harwood Ferry Hall, personal memoranda, p. 29, c. 1870s, “William and Amanda Ferry: Typed excerpts,” Box 1, Ferry Family Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Schoolcraft, *Personal Memoirs*, 507-508.

<sup>47</sup> Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence,” 124. Schoolcraft was replaced by Robert Stuart as Michigan’s Indian Affairs Superintendent in 1841. In sharp contrast to Schoolcraft, Stuart adamantly opposed Indian Removal due to his experience and connections with the fur trader community, who relied on Native people for

annuity payments with Schoolcraft, but the influence they once held as masters of the fur trade had eroded by the end of the decade. A financial depression in 1837 further debilitated the fur trade, and the AFC eventually filed bankruptcy in 1842.<sup>48</sup> The Fort Mackinac garrison also left the same year that the Mission House and Church closed their doors. Many of these soldiers had also participated at Ferry's church and would have interacted with persons of Indian ancestry – it was sadly ironic that these same soldiers were immediately sent to fight a bloody guerrilla war against the Seminole in an effort to violently root out Indians from Florida. The fort would eventually be reoccupied in 1840, but these soldiers would experience a very different cultural environment from the one that preceded them.<sup>49</sup>

### **Converting Mackinac Island into a Restive Preserve**

The immediate decades following the departure of the American Fur Company and the ABCFM mission witnessed a gradual shift in the population from being one primarily associated with trade and conversion of Indian souls into one of commercial fishing, romance, and pleasure. Less than ten years after the closure of the mission, Mackinac Island already attracted several travelers and soul-searchers, among whom American transcendentalist and feminist Margaret Fuller wrote extensively about her visit to the island in 1843 as part of her travelogue *Summer on the Lakes*.

Fuller's nine-day sojourn on Mackinac Island produced a striking commentary on its people and environs at the end of the fur trade hey-day. It also revealed the apparent failure of the evangelical missionaries to transform the local culture. Fuller was far removed from the religious

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the regional economy. It is ironic that both men were leading members of Ferry's Presbyterian Mission Church on Mackinac Island.

<sup>48</sup> Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, 418-419; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 502-505.

<sup>49</sup> Porter, *An Island Famous in These Regions*, 32.



orthodoxy of her New England Puritan forebearers, yet she carried a similarly baffled estimation of the island's inhabitants. "The people in its streets, Indian, French, half-breeds, and others, walked with a leisure step, as of those who live a life of taste and inclination, rather than of the hard press of business, as in American towns elsewhere."<sup>50</sup> Fuller was perplexed by the issue of whether Indians had any possibility for improvement within an ascendant white nation. Unlike the missionaries from the early part of the century, Fuller embraced a newer paradigm of romanticism – a belief in which a person's moral and intellectual capabilities were not defined by individual reason but by the collective stock of their racial makeup. From Fuller's perspective, any attempt to teach Indians theological concepts like the doctrines of the Trinity or atonement was like trying to jam a square peg into a round hole:

The missionary vainly attempts, by once or twice holding up the cross, to turn deer and tigers into lambs; vainly attempts to convince the red man that a heavenly mandate takes from him his broad lands. He bows his head, but does not at heart acquiesce. He cannot.

Fuller apparently interviewed a former female missionary (name redacted from manuscript) who begrudgingly acknowledged that "after ten years' experience among them... the results of the missionary efforts had produced nothing calculated to encourage."<sup>51</sup>

Fuller gave an unabashedly damning portrayal of missionary labors on Mackinac. While she conceded that the French Catholics had gained the Indians' favor, this contrasted with "the stern Presbyterian with his dogmas and his task-work." She condemned the missionaries and fur-traders as strange bedfellows with the result of corrupting the Indian. Despite missionaries' proclamations about being a moralizing influence, they tolerated the vain worship of the fur trader "who all the

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<sup>50</sup> Margaret Fuller, *The Portable Margaret Fuller*, ed. Mary Kelley (New York: Penguin, 1994), 175.

<sup>51</sup> Fuller, *The Portable Margaret Fuller*, 189.

week, has been besotting and degrading the Indian with rum mixed with red pepper.” After visiting Ste. Anne’s Church on the island, Fuller remarked, “Oh, my heart swelled when I saw them [Indians] in a Christian church. Better their own dog-feasts and bloody rites than such mockery of that other faith.”<sup>52</sup> Fuller believed there was no possibility for redemption for Indians on account of the white man’s sins, and like many of her American contemporaries, she believed that Indigenous peoples were quickly on the road to extinction. Fuller likewise dismissed the practicality of Michigan’s Indians being admitted as US citizens, even though efforts were already underway for men “of Indian descent” to be admitted the vote in Michigan.<sup>53</sup> Rather, Fuller believed that the onus for moral reform lay not with the Indian but rather on the increasing white population. “Let the missionary, instead of preaching to the Indian, preach to the trader who ruins him,” Fuller finally suggested in conclusion. After a litany of philosophizing on the Indian’s character, she deduced that all efforts at his reform were unprofitable.<sup>54</sup>

Fuller’s cultural assessments in *Summer on the Lakes* is noteworthy during a time national transition. She surveyed the upper Great Lakes on the heels of an intense period for Indian evangelization (and conversely, intense pressure for removal and dispossession). However, her judgments of European and Indigenous cultures ought to be taken with a grain of salt, as Fuller’s antagonism to missionaries may have stemmed from her preexisting grievances with her New England Calvinist background. Nevertheless, that she spent so much time on the effect (or rather, inefficacy) of religion on Mackinac perhaps hints at a broader cultural rejection of the quixotic

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 190. On Anishinaabe efforts at citizenship in Michigan and the provision made in the 1850 Michigan constitution, see Karamanski, “State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence,” 119-138.

<sup>54</sup> Fuller, 214.

reform efforts of an earlier generation, as well as the growing influences of romanticism and scientific racism.<sup>55</sup>

The old mission landscape changed to reflect the shifting priorities of the local culture. By 1845, merchant Edward A. Franks purchased the vacant mission house from the ABCFM and repurposed it into a hotel, adding an additional floor to accommodate the increasing numbers of summer vacationers to the island. The Old Mission House, as it became known, remained in the Franks family through the late 1930s. As for the Mission Church, the pulpit was removed to the building's basement, an organ was later added in the balcony, and the building became a mixed event space, hosting anything from academic lectures to theater performances. While sporadic religious services might have happened whenever there was a visiting Protestant minister, the building more-or-less served secular purposes. The dominant religious community belonged to the parish of Ste. Anne's Catholic Church. One of the former ABCFM missionaries, Martin Heydenburk, a carpenter who had personally taken part in constructing both the school and the church, visited the island again in 1876 to find to his dismay the undoing of all the work he and his co-laborers had done decades prior. The church had not been maintained, and its white coat of paint had faded to brown. "[T]he pulpit, from which salvation was proclaimed to lost sinners, has been changed for a stage where theatrical entertainments are now offered them in place of the Gospel," Heydenburk reported. He went on to describe his revelations at the Old Mission House:

I found the proprietor of the Mission House [Edward A. Franks], with some of his guests, sitting around the card-table, and when I asked him something about the moral and religious

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<sup>55</sup> Although "scientific racism" did not become more systematized until the later nineteenth century, its ideological origins were already promulgated during the 1830s and 1840s, notably through Dr. Charles Caldwell, a professor at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, whose 1830 book *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* posited the idea that different human "races" were in fact different species and thereby shared no common ancestor. Caldwell was popularly cited among Southern defenders of slavery. See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 116-120.

condition of the community, he told me that the spiritual interests of the people are committed to him. There was also a great change in the population. I found but five or six who were there when I left, and the boys were old men.

The old missionary deduced the change to two causes: government removal of the Indians and the departure of the fur trade, which had “frustrated all the plans laid for their [Indians’] elevation and improvement.” His evaluation is also worth quoting in his own words:

And while the mission had been rich in its results in individual conversions, its work was abruptly terminated. The Christian Indians in the mission school were scattered and the mission family broken up, and the place again left to the blighting influences of Catholicism. This accounts for the moral change; but the change of population is from another cause. Mackinaw was the seat and center of the American fur trade[...] This [departure of the fur trade] changed the place from a commercial to a pleasure-seeking community, and an entire change of inhabitants resulted.<sup>56</sup>

If Heydenburk gave a dismal declension of the moral situation on Mackinac, another observer gave a rosier picture of the area’s compatibility for Catholic flourishing. A *New York Tribune* reporter in 1859 dressed Mackinac in nostalgic terms. “The history of this portion of the New World is strikingly *Roman-tic* [italics in the original].... The region of the Lakes was the stronghold of the gorgeous fabric, the Church of Rome, and for more than a century it was the ranging ground of that polished and learned order of the church, the Jesuits.”<sup>57</sup>

As early as the 1850s and 1860s, it would seem, the island proved more attractive for its distant past French colonial past, which had been recently revigorated by the surge of Catholicism among the local population, especially its Anishinaabeg inhabitants. Despite the land and power

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<sup>56</sup> Martin Heydenburk, “Mackinaw Revisited – How It Looked Forty Years Ago,” *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan*, vol. VII (Lansing: Thorp & Godrey, 1886), 196-197.

<sup>57</sup> Anonymous, *New York Tribune*, 1859, reprinted in “Mackinac,” *Report of the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan*, vol. VII (Lansing: Thorp & Godrey, 1886), 198.

losses, Catholic parishes like Ste. Anne's formed the most tangible and continuous link to a past where the Anishinaabeg could enjoy a thriving identity as masters of the Great Lakes.

Although Martin Heydenburk's visit to Mackinac provoked a sense of loss for him, his perspective was very much a minority one. Heydenburk was at least correct on the account that Mackinac was transitioning to a "pleasure-seeking community" for affluent Midwesterners in the mid-nineteenth century. The introduction of railway services to Mackinaw City sped up that transition following the Civil War, but at least two other local developments in the 1870s led to an increase in Mackinac's national significance and historical allure. The first of these was Mackinac Island's designation as America's second national park in 1875. The second was the rediscovery of Fr. Marquette's grave at the old mission site in St. Ignace on the upper peninsula side of the Straits. On both accounts, the Ferry family continued to form a bridge between Mackinac's twilight years as an Anishinaabe-dominated trading and military outpost and its evolution to a sanctuary for American tourists.

Thomas White Ferry was born on the island to William and Amanda in 1827, where he formed his earliest memories. Although still a child by the time his family relocated to Grand Haven, Thomas grew up with conversational knowledge in both French and Odawamowin given that most of his childhood playmates were students at the mission school. As he grew into adulthood, Thomas used his family's entrepreneurial success in the timber business to launch a prominent political career in Michigan state politics, eventually working his way to become a US senator during the Reconstruction era. Senator Ferry served two terms as the Republican US Senator from Michigan between 1871-1883, where he was particularly known to represent the interests of the business classes and the improvement of national infrastructure. He also served as president *pro tempore* of the Senate and acting Vice President for Rutherford B. Hayes between 1875-1879.

The legislation on Mackinac Island was not the most politically significant of Ferry's political career, but it was undoubtedly a "labor of love" for which Ferry labored meticulously to bring to fruition. In 1873, Ferry introduced a bill to the senate floor proposing that Mackinac Island be recognized as a national park. Without referencing his personal connection to the island's history, Ferry provided several rationales for why the place of his birth should be deemed significant for American heritage.

The significance and controversy of Ferry's claims should be weighed with respect to the time period. The precedent for federal government involvement in the preservation of historic and natural resources would not be established for another several decades (the first major milestone being the 1906 Antiquities Act, and the next being the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916). At the time of Thomas Ferry's proposal, Yellowstone was the only previous place dubbed "National Park" for its exceptional nature. Yellowstone might have been considered more of an *ad hoc* arrangement than the launch of a systematic program of federal ownership of lands to restrict private property, which was a hotly debated issue in Reconstruction politics.<sup>58</sup> If Yellowstone was considered so spectacular a natural treasure to limit human settlement (to the point of driving out Indigenous inhabitants within park boundaries), how could Mackinac – a borderlands military and trading outpost that had outlived its strategic relevance – stack up?<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Kathy Mason, *Natural Museums: US National Parks, 1872-1916* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 19-22. On the connection between the buildup of government administration, especially military occupation, and land conservation in the first national parks, see Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves and the Hidden History of American Conservation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 83, 87, 97-98. On the Reconstruction context for federal appropriations to survey the Yellowstone basin and its political reverberations as a signal for greater government involvement in conservation, see Megan Kate Nelson, *Saving Yellowstone: Exploration and Preservation in Reconstruction America* (New York: Scribner, 2022).

<sup>59</sup> On the subject of national parks being created on the precedent of Indian removal, see Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Thomas Ferry was armed with several reasons to promote Mackinac's recognition as a site of national significance. Most of these reasons were tied to the assumption that as America became more modern, it was necessary to preserve not only a pre-"civilization" landscape but also mark places "which serve to illustrate the march of the nation" lest posterity forget their own history. Ferry argued that Michilimackinac was a historic *entrepôt* for the military and commercial development of the Great Lakes. Though he did not emphasize the location as one of religious significance (ironic given he was the son of Mackinac missionaries), he brought in the memory of Father Marquette (who at that time was still not well known outside Michigan and Wisconsin) as the West's counterpoint to the East's 1620 Mayflower landing.

Given Ferry's desire to showcase Mackinac as part of "the march of the nation," it is surprising how little he talked up those forces of modernity (to which his own family contributed) compared to its romantic, pre-modern associations of the island's mystery and "the salubrity of its climate." The fact that the island was still an operational if not moribund military post was more of an incidental convenience for Ferry's case than an argument for significance, as Ferry proposed that the War Department maintain the national park with little to no additional expenditures needed. Ferry spent more words arguing for the island's romantic qualities – interestingly enough, drawing upon Native American legends and folklore surrounding the area. "In the estimation of the natives... the island was not only of singular beauty, but made sacred to them by legends and traditions from immemorial tribes and races." He continued this theme:

[I]t was not strange that the superstitious Indian, beholding in the distance an island of much natural beauty and grotesque crest, three hundred feet above the watery surface, naturally clothed its striking features with the supernatural, naming it 'the island of giant fairies.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Senator Thomas Ferry, speaking, March 11, 1873, 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress, special sess., *Congressional Record* 1, pt. 1:38-40.

Ferry's odd composition of arguments for Mackinac's value confused some of his hearers, and his critics (primarily Southern senators) were sharply opposed to any notion of wasteful government spending. Senator Morgan C. Hamilton of Texas noted Ferry's eloquence on the island's significance for Natives and turned the argument on its head:

The Senator from Michigan has made a pathetic appeal for the island of Mackinac; but if it carries conviction to the mind of any one for any purpose in the world, it should be to restore it back to the natives of the country, for they seem to deplore the fact that they have been robbed of that spot. I do not know anything about its surface, but possibly it would make a good reservation for Indians. If so, it had better be devoted to that purpose, or any other purpose than a national park, which would be but a sink-hole to waste money in.

Hamilton was not arguing in defense of Indian land rights but rather used a rhetorical ploy to chide what he deemed a nonsensical use of government resources. Just preceding this statement, Hamilton had roused laughter from the senate chamber when he suggested that with Ferry's logic, the impenetrable swamps of Louisiana ought to be protected using government money "to make magnificent parks of them."<sup>61</sup> (Little could anyone in 1873 have predicted the growth of government park systems to protect just such environs a century later!)

Despite opposition, Ferry's appeal for Mackinac's natural resources to be transferred to the War Department carried through on the basis of its conservative cost. In 1875, Mackinac National Park was established with the existing garrison at the fort being now responsible for maintaining the park lands. The War Department worked to preserve the island's natural beauties while making it accessible to tourists, but Congress provided no additional allocation for the national park.<sup>62</sup> The garrison seemed to have had an ambivalent relationship as caretakers of this newly dubbed national

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<sup>61</sup> Senator Morgan Hamilton, speaking, March 11, 1873, 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress, special sess., *Congressional Record* 1, pt. 1:38-40.

<sup>62</sup> Mason, *Natural Parks*, 35-38.



park. On one hand, some enlisted men did not particularly enjoy being tasked to pave paths, collect debris, create public latrines, or perform other landscaping work for the benefit of middle-to-upper class tourists. This kind of labor made Mackinac's military irrelevance all the more evident. While an active military garrison, these men's primary role was to consistently revive a romantic past for the consumption of the public, who sought little more than physical and spiritual rejuvenation. On the other hand, soldiers had little to complain about with posh living accommodations, highly pleasant weather, and stunning vistas for good portions of the year. The fort even boasted some of the latest benefits of modern technology and sanitation – having some of the earliest systems of hot baths, toilets, and running water in the 1880s.<sup>63</sup> The island garrison continued operation of the national park but struggled to make the practice sustainable. By 1895, as part of nationwide consolidation of the armed forces, the army departed Mackinac to join another garrison at Fort Brady on the US-Canadian border in Sault Ste. Marie. The parklands were transferred to the state to become Michigan's first state park, and a Mackinac Island State Park Commission was established, with Thomas Ferry acting as its first president.<sup>64</sup>

The other major development that boosted Mackinac's profile concerned the rediscovery of Marquette's grave and his subsequent elevation as the progenitor of civilization in the upper Great Lakes. The town of St. Ignace, it will be remembered, had been the original French Jesuit outpost to the Huron and Odawa from 1671. A small community of both Anishinaabe and white inhabitants continued to reside near the site of the old mission, though its importance gradually diminished with

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<sup>63</sup> This information is highlighted in the restored buildings and interpretive panels at Fort Mackinac, as visited by the author in August 2021. See also Phil Porter, *The Soldiers at Fort Mackinac: An Illustrated History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2018), xxiii-xxv.

<sup>64</sup> Mason, *Natural Parks*, 39.

the fur trade's decline. In 1877, a local property owner uncovered bones in a birch bark coffin which were later ascertained to be the remains of Jacques Marquette, who had been buried by Odawa at the mission in 1677 after he had died during a missionary expedition to the Illinois people.<sup>65</sup> Four years after the discovery, Fr. Edward Jacker, S.J., purchased Marquette's gravesite and deeded the land parcel to the Jesuit-operated Detroit College (modern-day University of Detroit).<sup>66</sup> A gravesite monument was erected in St. Ignace in 1882, and the Jesuit college later erected limestone markers for a park around the old mission site in 1901.

The reclamation of Fr. Marquette's grave was significant not just for St. Ignace but for the entire Straits area. On Mackinac Island, a committee chaired by none other than Thomas Ferry himself was established to raise funds for the creation of an even grander memorial to Fr. Marquette on the island, possibly atop a high rock outcropping called Robinson's Folly. The plans stagnated for a time until the committee was resurrected after Mackinac's transfer to the state. Thomas Ferry died in 1896, but a prominent businessman, Peter White, took over the presidency of the Mackinac Island State Park Commission the following year and helped to revive the Marquette Memorial Association. White had established a career in the iron industry of Michigan's Upper Peninsula and was intimately involved in raising the profile of the French Jesuit in his own adopted city (christened as Marquette, Michigan). He was responsible for a statue erected in that town by the same Italian sculptor, Gaetano Trentanove, who had created a Marquette statue for the state of Wisconsin to be placed in the US Capitol Building's Statuary Hall. Now a third Marquette statue by Trentanove was

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<sup>65</sup> Marquette had initially been buried at some unknown site near southern Lake Michigan when he died in 1675, and Odawa Christians came two years later to collect the priest's remains to be reburied at the mission site in St. Ignace. Boynton, *Fishers of Men*, 17-18.

<sup>66</sup> Fr. Jacker's account of the grave's rediscovery can be found in "Father Marquette, S.J.: Discovery of His Remains," *Woodstock Letters* VI, no. 3 (January 1878): 159-172. Jesuit Online Library <https://jesuitonlinelibrary.bc.edu/> (accessed August 20, 2021).

to be erected on Mackinac Island to solidify that location's centrality to a historical "founding." Despite frequent delays, "Marquette Park," located on the former fort garden grounds within prominent view of the harbor, opened to the public in 1909. The featured guest at the statue's unveiling was US Supreme Court Justice William Day, whose keynote address encapsulated the monument's purpose for the present generation of visitors:

The thousands who come from 'towered cities and the busy marts of trade' to find health and recreation on this island, shall learn as they look upon this statue new lessons of duty, of self-reliance and that faith in high ideals which characterized every act of James Marquette from early manhood to the grave.<sup>67</sup>



Figure 9. Trentanove's sculpture of Fr. Marquette remains a popular spot for family photographs and lies only a short distance from the downtown shops. An identical sculpture is in the US Capitol Building. Photo by the author.

By the turn of the twentieth century, public memory surrounding Mackinac's religious heritage appeared to be transcending the old divide between Protestants and Catholics. Although the inclusion of a Jesuit priest in Washington, D.C.'s Statuary Hall raised no little controversy in the

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Steven C. Brisson, "A Noble Figure: The Story of the Marquette Statues," *Mackinac History* III, no. 4 (2000), 13-15.

1890s, local memorialists saw no issue in uniting all religious sects as co-laborers in the common pursuit of civilization and collective duty to fellow man, white and Indian alike. It is interesting to note that the old values of collective duty were now reinterpreted for individualistic notions of the self-made man and the entrepreneur spirit. While the historical Marquette was chiefly concerned with the organization of Native American Christian communities, the Marquette of popular memory was reinvented as an intrepid explorer and mapmaker. Trentanove's original model for Marquette had the priest holding up a crucifix, but this was rejected by the commission. The specific reasons for the rejection are not known, though it is likely that a secularized version of the statue was more likely to mitigate sectarian differences and be palatable for secular business and tourist interests.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time of Marquette's revival as a larger-than-life figure, the memory of Protestant contributions also received renewed attention. A major restoration of the ABCFM Mission Church took place in 1895, led by a Presbyterian minister who had a summer residence on the island, Rev. Meade C. Williams. Williams and a few devotees on the island purchased the church as an attempt to restore it to proper use as a house of worship. Instead of remodeling the building according to the tastes of the late-Victorian era (by comparison, Ste. Anne's Catholic Church demolished their colonial-era structure in 1874 and replaced it with a larger Gothic edifice), the restorers consciously chose to retain as much of the original features as possible. This included restoring the old pulpit (which had previously been put in the basement) and retaining the colonial-style box pews. Its architectural fidelity aside, the Mission Church would now play an ecumenical Protestant role as a space for any denomination to use for sacred worship. According to a plaque these restorers placed in the church's foyer at its re-dedication, "The motive has been to preserve the old sanctuary as an

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<sup>68</sup> Brisson, "A Noble Figure," 7-12.

historic relic, and also to hold it as a summer chapel for religious services when strangers crowd the island.” In his address at the re-dedication service on July 28, 1895, Rev. Williams provided a detailed historical account of the mission, recounting that twenty-five Indians and twenty-seven whites had experienced Christian conversion during the 1829 revival.<sup>69</sup>

Not much has been recorded regarding the frequency of use of the restored Mission Church. Given that two other Protestant churches were erected on the island between the late 1870s and 1904, the old Presbyterian church likely only serviced special functions like an anniversary or memorial service. In 1911, a member of the Ferry family visited the old church and donated to its governing board a painting done by Hannah White, the sister of Amanda Ferry, during a visit to the island in 1830. The oil painting provided an unusual yet surprisingly accurate perspective of the island and town during the fur trading hey-day. Hannah White’s painting hung in the church foyer until 1955, when the church and its assets were transferred to the Mackinac Island State Parks Commission, who have since displayed the painting in the Island’s art museum.

Yet another material edifice created around the same time hints at the use of memory for Mackinac’s Protestant communities. In 1904, the Union Congregational Church erected a building on the west side of the island, better accessible to the affluent guests of the new Grand Hotel, which became affectionately known as the “Little Stone Church.” It similarly reflected a mainline Protestant trend toward ecumenism, as despite its formal denomination being Congregational, it staffed ministers anywhere from Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, or Lutheran backgrounds, with

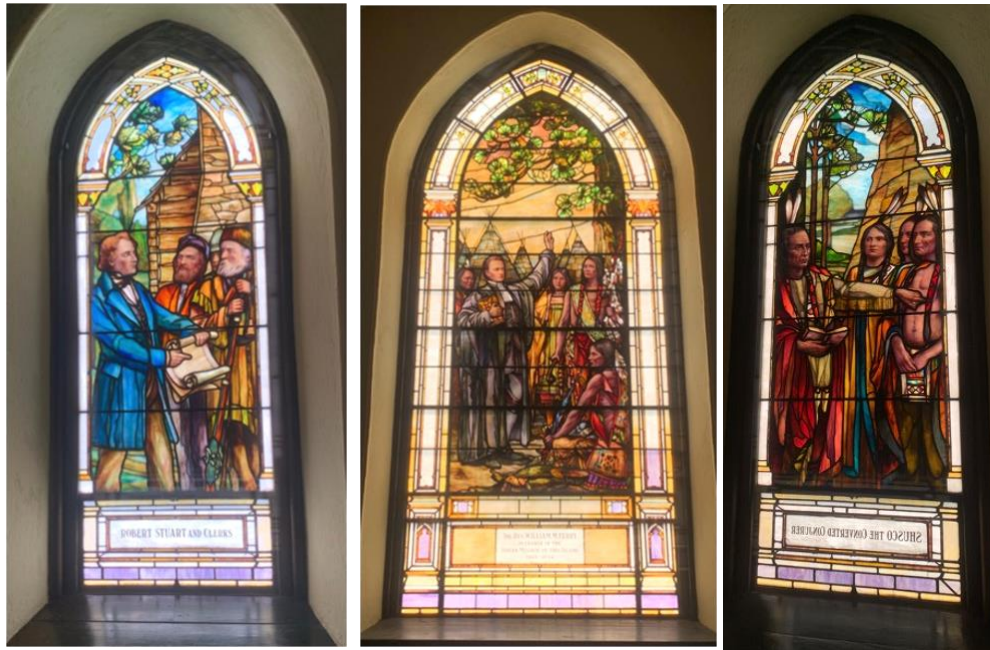
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<sup>69</sup> Handwritten plaque in Mission Church foyer, c. 1895, Mackinac Island. Meade C. Williams, *The Old Mission Church at Mackinac Island: A Historical Discourse* (Detroit: Wilton-Smith Co., 1895), 10-11. Williams’ account provided a good snapshot of how the mission’s legacy was seen when the last “living memory” was passing away. He acknowledged both the practical difficulties of sustaining the mission school during a time of economic transformation on the Island linked with the decline of the fur trade, and he also acknowledged the ecumenical roles of the church, such as Catholics using the sanctuary during the construction of the present Ste. Anne’s Church.

the congregants being equally if not more diverse. As it were, memory of the Ferry mission was invoked for a generally Protestant American consensus by the installation of stained-glass windows in 1914. These windows were commissioned and installed by the daughter of Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard, a one-time employee for Robert Stuart at the American Fur Company who later became a prominent Chicago businessman. The three windows in the sanctuary each depict a scene from the ABCFM mission. At center is a dramatic image of William Ferry in full clerical garb proclaiming the Christian gospel to the Indians with *nasaogans* (temporary bark summer shelters) in the background. On either side, viewers see the effects of Ferry's mission: to the left, AFC resident manager Robert Stuart gives instructions to his clerks, and to the right, the Odawa medicine-man Chusco, described as "the converted conjurer," reads the Bible to fellow Indians and points his finger on another man's heart. As prominent converts, Stuart and Chusco serve as archetypes for the sanctification of both white and Indian through the blessing of the intrepid missionary. It is also worth noting that these depictions emphasize the role of men while obscuring the work of women. Women, both in terms of the missionaries and the female converts, arguably played a more integral role in the life of the mission school, so it is telling that early twentieth century local memory preferred to highlight masculine virtues as indicative of the pioneer spirit and the story of American progress. The figure of Ferry becomes a Protestant counterpoint to the feminized patron saint figures both in St. Anne and Magdalene LaFramboise for Mackinac's Catholic community.



Figure 10. The Little Stone Church lies a convenient short walk from the Grand Hotel and serves as a seasonal ecumenical mainline Protestant congregation. Photo by the author.



Figures 11-13. The stained-glass windows on the west wall of the Little Stone Church form a triptych depicting the Ferry mission. At left is AFC manager Robert Stuart, who had an evangelical conversion on Mackinac Island. At center is Ferry preaching outdoors to the Natives, and at right is Chusco (spelled “Shusco”) who was a notable Christian convert. Notice the centrality of male figures in the Protestant Christianization of the Mackinac Straits and the conspicuous absence of women and children in this visual memory. Photos by the author.

## **Seek and Ye Shall Find: Mackinac Public History and Tourism the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries**

As Mackinac Island's seasonal tourism thrived and expanded during the twentieth century and beyond, visitors and residents alike have taken for granted the aesthetic powers of a nineteenth-century landscape to enchant. How then, do these romantic feelings of family-friendly pleasure line up with the active interpretation occurring at the many historic sites? What kinds of images and associations do visitors have when touring spaces that, while aesthetically pleasing in their simplicity, reveal complex layers of interaction between cultures? Relatedly, how do local historic sites share (or hide) the complex dynamics between Christianity and Native Americans?

The best method for traversing these issues is by taking a "grand tour" of the Island and the Straits area from the visitor's perspective. This tour, while not comprehensive, will survey the different localities in which the public encounters Indigenous history and the history of Christian missions. We first begin on the Lower Peninsula side of the mainland, Mackinaw City. The majority of tourists arrive here if they are coming from the south. Apart from the kitschy souvenir shops near the ferry docks, the thrust of foot traffic extends west of the downtown area toward the foot of the picturesque Mackinac Bridge, a five-mile suspension bridge first opened in 1957 connecting the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of Michigan. Directly below the bridge's south anchorage is the ticket office leading to Colonial Michilimackinac, an outdoor living history museum and active archaeological site for Fort Michilimackinac (1715-1781). Less frequented compared to the attractions on the Island, Colonial Michilimackinac provides some of the richest and most nuanced interpretations of the interactions among French and British soldiers, Catholic priests, Indians, Métis, and even a few Black Africans.

The living museum is interpreted for the 1770s, or during the height of the British period. While reconstructed townhouses simulate the ways in which British garrisons tried to emulate the



gardens of their mother country, many other features and buildings highlight the layers of cultural interactions. The largest and most prominent building is the reconstructed Ste. Anne's Church, the predecessor to the existing parish on the Island. While no longer an active sacred site (apart from wedding reservations), this reconstructed mission provides significant information on Catholic life at Michilimackinac during the eighteenth century.<sup>70</sup> The archaeological focus of the site also lends to material culture being emphasized, such as the abundance of rosaries, crucifixes, and rings with Jesuit-inscribed symbols. These were often traded with Indians, yet these material relics provide little information on how the introduction of Catholicism shaped the values or belief systems of individuals. For instance, did Natives understand Christian objects in the categories that Europeans used them? Was a ring a marker of someone's Christian identity, or was it merely a talisman or some decorative trinket?<sup>71</sup>

Additionally, the fort's recreation unintentionally enforces an artificial separation between the lives of Europeans and Natives. The museum text panels acknowledge the existence of a mixed community beyond the fort walls, but as a physical site with limited space, only portions of the fort's interior have been rebuilt and interpreted. The history of Anishinaabe trade is clearly discussed on exhibit panels, including more sensitive topics such as the presence of Indian slaves (*panis*) at Michilimackinac. However, should someone not take the time to read or watch audiovisual displays, he or she might get the impression that only Europeans occupied the fort site, as any overtly

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<sup>70</sup> According to one of the on-site plaques, the original chapel's site was confirmed in 1960 when the skeleton of an infant was exhumed, and documentary evidence corroborated that the child of Joseph Ainsse, the church's chief carpenter, had been buried beneath the baptistry during the church's construction in 1743.

<sup>71</sup> An archaeological discussion on this topic was presented at Mackinac Island in 1991. For the published article based on the presentation see Charles J. Rinehart, "Crucifixes and Medallions from Michilimackinac," in *The Fur Trade Revisited: Selected Papers of the Sixth North American Fur Trade Conference, Mackinac Island, Michigan*, 1991, ed. W.J. Eccles and Donald P. Heldman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 331-348. Rinehart believed that the crucifixes and other material Christian iconography equally served religious and trade uses.

“Indian” artifacts are outside, whether the birch-bark canoes along the lakefront, or the small collection of *nasaogans* (which the casual layperson may mistake for Plains Indian teepees) south of the fort walls which describe the seasonal migration patterns of not only Anishinaabe but several other Algonquian nations from around the Great Lakes.

Many casual tourists might bypass the mainland historical attractions altogether and take a ferry straight to Mackinac Island. As they enter the harbor, the most prominent structure in view is Fort Mackinac at the top of the bluffs just behind the downtown area. Down to the right, the white steeple of Ste. Anne’s Catholic Church is the tallest building on the main road, the M-185, which can be walked or biked around the Island’s perimeter. Beyond that, the other impressionable features are the multicolor Victorian cottages lining the downtown area. Below the fort bluffs, the open expanse of Marquette Park, with the statue of the French priest and explorer, is also visible from the ferry boat. Although several other historical buildings, including the Ferry Mission House and Mission Church, are also visible from the boats, they do not have as strong of a profile compared to the other landmarks.

Getting off the boats, visitors during peak season are inundated by a torrent of souvenir stores, fudge shops, and restaurants in a highly condensed downtown area. The late Victorian building aesthetics, horse-drawn carriages, and high volume of foot traffic is somewhat reminiscent of Walt Disney’s idealized “Main Street, USA” at his eponymous theme parks (minus animated film characters). Once navigating through this disembarking area (and avoiding occasional piles of horse manure, which enhance historic street authenticity), most visitors will drift due east of the downtown area to find their first opening from the congested Main Street. They begin their ascent toward the fort at Marquette Park, with the 1909 bronze sculpture at its center. Some visitors will walk across the park green for a photo-op in front of the statue, but closer to Fort Street many will

be attracted to a small birch bark structure labeled “Missionary Bark Chapel.” Many tourists on their way to the fort, especially families with small children, will step inside the novel recreation of the 1670 mission that Fr. Marquette led on the Island prior to relocating the Huron mission to St. Ignace. The interior diorama contains mannequins of an unspecified Native man holding a rosary and conversing with Marquette in his Jesuit habit. The Mackinac Historic State Parks, as with most of the Island’s historical interpretation, authored the informational plaques. However, the Knights of Columbus sponsored the creation of these memorial spaces, and they also sponsored other Catholic heritage sites like the Marquette statue and Ste. Anne’s Catholic Church. Marquette’s island ministry is clearly claimed as the birth of the Roman Catholic community, though it is not clear where Native Americans fit into this story of Catholic triumphalism.



Figure 14. The Missionary Bark Chapel is a small educational attraction on the uphill climb to Fort Mackinac's entrance. Children are usually the most curious to enter the structure. Photo by the author.



Figure 15. The inside of the bark chapel shows a Jesuit "black robe" interacting with Native man. The Marquette mission was only on Mackinac Island a brief time and is better associated with St. Ignace on the northern mainland. Photo by the author.

Once visitors purchase fort tickets and ascend the steep road up the bluff, they are immersed into a much later (and less diverse) era of the island's history. Unlike its earlier counterpart on the southern mainland, Fort Mackinac contains mostly original structures dating across the nineteenth-century, and it is interpreted for the 1880s, when the garrison managed then-Mackinac National Park. Costumed interpreters, largely college interns, portray daily life at the fort. The fort's impressive size, well-manicured layout, and cannons that fire regularly from the height of the bluffs evoke a symbol of American power and security, even though this image belies the reality that American control of the island was tenuous during the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, by the time that Anglo-Americans had secured a hold over the former French-Canadian milieu, the military importance of Mackinac Island was more or less a moot point, with the military

providing not much beside pomp and ceremony. In ironic contrast to the larger history of Mackinac, the fort's history is almost exclusively a white one. In fact, the museum in the old barracks goes so far to say unequivocally, "No African American soldiers were stationed at Fort Mackinac."

Many casual tourists who otherwise are not invested in exploring the Island's history will likely visit the fort given its attractive vistas and prominent location. The Mackinac Historic State Parks (MHSP) recognizes this fact, as they also recognize that the fort is only one chapter of the island's history rather than its centerpiece. Nevertheless, these public historians are forced to work within the constraints of tourist demand, which makes the fort the most marketed and profitable attraction. The fort also includes a museum more generally about Mackinac's history, which covers an impressive amount of ground, including much acknowledgment of Native American history and even some artifacts relating to the ABCFM mission, such as student writings excavated from the Mission House. For those travelling as families with children, or others simply strapped for time, the fort's interpretive elements do a good job at providing a catch-all space to tell the Island's story, but it is up to the visitors to make the effort to read that information. Otherwise, persons without any prior knowledge could be content watching soldiers' parades and cannon demonstrations and leave at the end of day completely unaware of the other layers of history or the presence of Native people.

To encourage further exploration, MHSP includes with the price of a fort ticket admission to other historic buildings, including the Biddle House (recently interpreted as a Native American history museum), the American Fur Company Store/Beaumont House, Robert Stuart's house, the Indian Dormitory (formerly a museum about Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, now housing an art museum), and the Mission Church. Except for the Mission Church, which is further east, all these attractions are interspersed within the highly trafficked downtown area. Collectively, the sites provide a broad representation of the varieties of cultures and periods of the Straits' history,

particularly with respect to the lives of Indigenous and French-Canadian peoples. The Biddle House, named for its residents Edward Biddle and his French-Odawa wife Agatha Biddle, is an example of a house museum that has revamped its interpretation over time. The house was initially restored in the 1960s and interpreted for the next half century as a house museum depicting the lives of a racially mixed merchant family who operated an independent fur company. During the late 2010s, as part of an effort to do more collaboration with area tribes, MSHP cooperated with the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa (LTBB). The state park staff worked closely with Eric Hemenway, the LTBB's Director of Repatriation, Archives, and Records, to re-interpret the Biddle House as Mackinac's Native American Museum. The new museum, which launched its first full season in 2021, used Agatha Biddle's life as a prism to understand the transition period of the 1830s for American Indians in the Great Lakes, particularly the experiences of Anishinaabeg as they had to readjust in the decline of the fur trade and the fear of forced removal. While small in square footage, the Biddle House offers a comprehensive and nuanced history of the Anishinaabeg that emphasizes both their ability to culturally adapt as well as maintain Native identity into the twenty-first century. Agatha Biddle herself is put into conversation with other Métis contemporaries who lived parts of their lives on Mackinac, including Elizabeth Mitchell, Magdalene LaFramboise, and Jane Johnston Schoolcraft. Interestingly, the exhibit creators chose not to highlight the religious lives of these people straddling both Anishinaabe and Euro-American worlds. For example, the average visitor would never realize that Edward and Agatha Biddle were members of Ferry's Presbyterian congregation and that Magdalene LaFramboise was the most influential member of Mackinac's Catholic community for her time. Passing references are made to the French Jesuit missionaries, contrasted with the horrors of Catholic boarding schools of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. On the other hand, the museum does not shy away from the role of Mackinac tourism in

promoting Indian stereotypes well into the twentieth century, and the ways that resident Indians had to cater certain tourist industries as a means of survival. One panel highlighted Native American protests in the early 1970s to the staged reenactments of the 1763 raid on Fort Michilimackinac, where Indians were portrayed as savage without the opportunity for Anishinaabeg to provide their own perspective.



Figure 16. One of six interpretive plaques along the M-185 that provide a survey of Anishinaabe history for passersby. Photo by the author.

Another place where the MSHP partnered with the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa can be seen with six interpretive panels surrounding the M-185 road forming a circumference around the island. This avenue is highly trafficked by walkers, joggers, horse riders, and cyclists. Unlike the fort, the M-185 is free, flat, and paved, making the road accessible to great proportions of tourists. Installed in 2017, six interpretive stations invite visitors to

rest from their traverse as they learn about the history and contemporary culture of Anishinaabeg in the Straits.<sup>72</sup>

The Mackinac State Historic Parks, which operates some 85% of the Island's land mass, are justifiably proud of their growth in recognizing Native peoples. In close partnership with area tribal governments, they have expanded Mackinac's narrative to highlight the centrality of Native people and their experiences for visitors around the world. Even with these successes in creating more museum displays and print materials available to tourists, public historians are nevertheless constrained by physical infrastructure as well as the expectation of tourists to preserve auras associated with Mackinac tourism. For example, it is unlikely that the Island could recreate the scenes depicted in writing (Margaret Fuller) or captured in drawings (Richard Dillon or Sarah Clarke) of Indians gathering in the thousands along the Mackinac shoreline to celebrate festivals or trade with the Europeans. The concentrated development on the Island's southern end maintains such modern trappings that make it more difficult for the layperson to imagine the layers of civilizations that preceded the current façade. In their interpretive schema, the park historians must necessarily decide what stories are included and which ones are marginalized.

A case in point lies with the site of Ferry's Mission Church and Mission House, both of which are operated by MSHP yet are somewhat further afield from the main traffic routes between the fort and the downtown area. Walking east from downtown along the M-185, tourists will pass by the 1830 Presbyterian church on their left. On paper, the church is supposed to be a ticketed entry with the other historic downtown buildings, included with the price of a fort admission. However, no MSHP staff member occupies the site, making the structure one of the lower priorities for

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<sup>72</sup> "Native American Cultural Trail Deepens Historical Perspective on Mackinac Island," February 23, 2017, *Michigan.gov*, <https://www.michigan.gov/som/0,4669,7-192-45414-405705--,00.html> (accessed September 5, 2021).



interpretation. A historic marker outside the steps and a couple plaques inside the foyer provide a brief history of the church's historical significance and the Ferry mission school, but the level of interpretation at arguably one of the best-preserved buildings on the Island is minimal in contrast to the recreated Ste. Anne's in Colonial Michilimackinac. According to chief curator Craig Wilson, part of the reason for MSHP's spartan treatment of the Mission Church is that 1) it receives far less visitor traffic than the other downtown sites and 2) the building is touted more as a wedding venue than as a museum or a historic house of worship.<sup>73</sup> When MSHP performed their last major restoration of the church in 1984, there was a limited attempt to use the basement as a museum interpreting the ABCFM mission, since that was the actual space used by William and Amanda for Sunday schools, with separate rooms for boys' and girls' instruction. In the mid-1980s, the basement rooms were fully furnished with reconstructed desks appropriate to the antebellum period, and a costumed interpreter answered visitor questions. According to Phil Porter, who worked intimately with the church's restoration and interpretation, this initiative was ultimately unfruitful due to low visitor turnout. To better manage their resources and create another revenue source, MSHP minimized the interpretation of the building and began promoting it for summer weddings. The former Sunday school rooms were cleared of most furniture and converted into a bridal prep space.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Personal conversation with Craig Wilson in front of the Mission Church, Mackinac Island, MI, August 4, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Phil Porter, phone interview with the author, August 27, 2021.



Figure 17. The basement of the mission church was originally a Sunday School classroom for mission students, taught by Amanda Ferry. After the 1980s restoration, the space was briefly interpreted as an ABCFM mission classroom, but this was abandoned in favor of using the space for bridal preparations. Photo by the author.



Figure 18. Since the 1950s, the unassuming Mission House has been dwarfed by the Mission Point Resort complex, which was originally built by Moral Re-Armament and later used as an evangelical college. Photo by the author.

Keeping east on the M-185, visitors will pass the Mission Church to enter the aptly named Mission Point Resort, which occupies the same space of the Old Mission House operated by the

Franks family. The original 1825 building still stands up a hill to the left of the road; however, its profile is so low that most passersby will not even notice the structure's existence. There is no signage pointing visitors to the former boarding school, and this has largely to do with the fact that it is one of the few MSHP-owned historic buildings that is not open to any public visitors. Although a historical marker exists outside to building to educate passers-by on the site's historical significance to Christian and Native American history, the Mission House serves no interpretive function but rather acts as a dormitory for some forty summer interns, mostly college students who work as interpreters for the various sites on the island.

Given the original Mission House's low-profile, one may wonder how Mission Point expanded into such a large resort complex, other than the obvious reason of prime real estate. Following the Mission House's demise as a boarding school, subsequent property owners had very different uses of the premises. Even so, Mission Point's historical associations as a place of interracial encounter and evangelical fervor reappeared in implicit or explicit ways. As mentioned previously, the Mission House passed into the hands of Edward A. Franks and his descendants, who expanded and renovated the space as one of the first summer resort hotels on the Island. During the 1860s, the Mission House Hotel hired at least a dozen African Americans, many of whom escaped from slavery, and it temporarily housed three Confederate political prisoners until they were transferred to Fort Mackinac.<sup>75</sup> One of the hotel's more notable visitors during the Civil War was American author Edward Everett Hale, who wrote the short story "The Man Without a Country" while staying at the hotel. In writing this moralistic tale, Hale melded patriotism with religious zeal, where the protagonist, a devout Presbyterian, prays daily for his exiled country. Generations later, a

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<sup>75</sup> Porter, *An Island Famous in These Regions*, 48.

1925 feature in a Detroit newspaper highlighted the Mission House's centennial, which by that time was run by Franks' granddaughters Katherine and Sara Franks. The Franks sisters held an open house for visitors to enjoy the historic place. Their tour highlighted the supposed room where Hale penned his famous magazine story, and it also highlighted the building's association with Indian missions. One photo caption read, "Fireplace and bake oven where the Indian girls were taught to bake bread. This room is now part of the lobby of the inn."<sup>76</sup>

The Mission House Hotel closed its doors to the public during the Great Depression, in which several other businesses on Mackinac experienced a similar fate when fewer Americans could afford leisure and travel. The subsequent life of Mission Point took an unprecedented turn. During the onset of the Cold War, the governor of Michigan invited Lutheran minister Rev. Dr. Frank Buchman to initiate activities for his growing spiritual organization, Moral Re-Armament (MRA). Buchman was a charismatic leader who had founded MRA in 1938 as an attempt to galvanize leaders from around the world to stand up against totalitarianism and atheism. The organization, while not tied to a particular religious sect, supported the necessity of worldwide evangelism in the "four absolutes" – honesty, unselfishness, purity, and love – to fight against the forces of Communism.<sup>77</sup> Beginning in 1942, Buchman hosted MRA training sessions in the Mission House, but by the early 1950s he envisioned plans to construct a large complex on Mackinac Island that would provide an international retreat center. The result was the present Mission Point complex adjacent to the Mission House, making MRA for a time the largest single landowner on the Island. It

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<sup>76</sup> Rotogravure Supplement, *The Detroit Free Press*, August 16, 1925. Hale's "The Man Without a Country" was originally published in the December 1863 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine.

<sup>77</sup> Daniel Sack, *Moral Re-Armament: The Reinventions of an American Religious Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-3.

is not clear if MRA found any specific appeal or connection between their anti-Communism agenda and the goals of the early nineteenth century evangelicals among Native Americans who occupied the same location.<sup>78</sup>



Figure 19. The main lobby at the Mission Point Hotel was designed by MRA to invoke a Native American council gathering. Photo by the author.

The Great Hall, currently serving as the main lobby of the Mission Point Resort, was constructed with white pine from nearby Bois Blanc Island. According to Mission Point’s own telling of their history, the architecture of the Great Hall was intended to invoke Native American spiritual blessing. The building resembled a 16-sided teepee, and “this structure fulfills the Native American prophecy that states: ‘Someday on the east end of the island a great teepee will be erected; All nations will come there and learn about peace.’”<sup>79</sup> The source material for this prophecy is

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<sup>78</sup> According to Daniel Sack’s history of the MRA, Henry Ford had suggested Mackinac Island to Frank Buchman when he toured his Willow Run airplane factory in Detroit. Like Ford, Sack was invested in the notion of mitigating the labor conditions that produced Marxist ways of thinking. Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, 130-131.

<sup>79</sup> “History of Mission Point Resort,” informational flyer given to author at concierge desk, Mission Point Resort, Mackinac Island, MI, August 2021.

unknown, though the reference to a Plains Indian teepee casts doubt for any genuine source in Anishinaabe oral tradition.

When contemporary visitors walk into the resort's main lobby and adjacent corridors, prominent photographs and captions adorn the walls and detail the massive construction of the MRA complex between 1954-1960. As MRA expanded its operations in the late 1950s, they constructed a sound stage for their growing film industry, claiming to be the second largest studio in the world. From Mackinac, MRA produced dozens of anti-Communist propaganda films, the most successful being a musical *The Crowning Experience* (1960), starring African American singer Muriel Smith. The archival photographs on display in the present lobby highlights the racial and national diversity of MRA adherents. One caption reads, "The 145 volunteers on the construction crew for the Film Studio came from 23 countries – black and white from South Africa, white and Maori from New Zealand, Japanese and Scandinavians...." The images of interracial amity, as well as the prominence of persons of color in their films and stage productions, would seem to suggest MRA was racially progressive for its time. Ideologically, however, their memory is mired with controversy. Both then and now, detractors viewed MRA as a religious cult.<sup>80</sup> During the late 1950s through early 1960s, MRA's headquarters at Mission Point held conferences that could last multiple weeks and courting international visitors in the thousands. These meetings were not unlike evangelical revival meetings of the nineteenth century, with an emphasis on personal testimony-sharing and emotionally powerful performances meant to swell attendees to action. MRA meetings differed from

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<sup>80</sup> Such was the opinion of MSHP chief curator Craig Wilson in casual conversation with the author on the premises of Mission Point Resort. Hollywood actress Glenn Close, whose parents were part of MRA, has also derided the organization in hindsight as a repressive cult. She most recently testified about a "traumatic" childhood in an Oprah Winfrey docuseries. Disha Kandpal, "What is Moral Re-Armament? Glenn Close Discusses Life in the Cult in Oprah Winfrey's Documentary," HITC, <https://www.hitc.com/en-gb/2021/05/22/glen-close-moral-re-armament/> (accessed March 17, 2022).

their evangelical forebearers in being more ideologically driven with the concerns of the Cold War and preserving democracy, being willing to cross interfaith boundaries while remaining firmly rooted in a theistic and millenarian worldview.<sup>81</sup> The Mission Point Resort today makes no effort to interpret MRA's complex historical context and legacy.

By the mid-1960s, MRA gradually shifted their main operations to a retreat center in Caux, Switzerland. After founder Frank Buchman died in 1961, his successor, Peter Howard, envisioned an afterlife of the Mission Point complex that would serve their growing youth outreach. In a parallel to Ferry's mission to Indian and Métis children in the 1820s-1830s on the same spot, Howard brought thousands of American youth each summer to create moral shock-troops who could fight against the incursions of sexual liberation, godlessness, Marxism, and general disdain for religious values. Young people would be encouraged to carry out MRA's goals through music and performing arts that would broadcast their message of reform to their fellow Baby Boomers, redeeming them from the corruptions of 1960s counterculture. Howard noticed, however, that the Mackinac retreat center was not being taken full advantage of during the off-season months, and so he envisioned a much broader vision of incorporating a full liberal-arts educational institution that would open as Mackinac College in 1966. Mackinac College, technically established as an independent institution, nevertheless received MRA's blessing and inherited its ideological framework, with substantial administration, faculty, and students coming directly from MRA's ranks. Mackinac College served as a moralistic and religious counterpoint to the largely secular New Left

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<sup>81</sup> Sack, *Moral Re-Armament*, 146-147.

taking ahold at many other American universities, but like the New Left, it was equally interested in transforming the role of higher education, though with a vastly different agenda.<sup>82</sup>

The experiment in a revivalist higher education was noble but short lived. Although its students formed a tightly knit community, Mackinac College was not financially sustainable due to its isolated location and controversies over its MRA connections, and the campus was sold to televangelist Rex Humbard in 1971, who kept the name Mackinac College to form his own evangelical Christian college. Humbard's project also failed after only a year of classes, and Humbard switched the use of the property from a spiritual education center into a source of tourist revenue, called "The Inn at Mackinac." Finally, in 1977, Humbard's evangelical organization sold the property to another management company, where the complex became today's Mission Point Resort.<sup>83</sup>

When I visited the site, I could not help but wonder if Buchman, Howard, or Humbard saw the work they were performing as part of the longer history of evangelical experiments on Mackinac Island. Although the Ferry mission, MRA, and Mackinac College occupied vastly different historical contexts, they were alike in their evangelical zeal to transform the cultures around them, their idealism to unite different peoples under one moral banner, and their value for Mackinac Island as a strategic location to accomplish spiritual renewal. Apart from the name "Mission Point," however, there is no explicit appeal to the memory of the nineteenth century Protestant mission or the boarding school and church that housed its operations. Rather, the condition of the 1825 Mission House vastly deteriorated during the MRA and Humbard years, as it was only used for storage. In 1977, the building was deeded to the Mackinac State Historic Parks, who went to task on a massive

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 170-171; 183-184.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 188-189; "History of Mission Point Resort."



restoration project to save the building. In the late 1970s, much attention was raised for the possibility of this site to be at least partially restored into an interpretive center for the Ferry mission.<sup>84</sup> However, as with the Mission Church, these plans did not quite follow through. According to former parks director Phil Porter, the acquisition and restoration of the Mission House prompted a response to a more immediate need for the parks – increasing the lodging accommodations for summer island workers.<sup>85</sup>

Although the Mission House has never been open to public tours for well over half a century, I was able to secure a private visit via chief curator Craig Wilson, who directly supervises many of the interns who live in the Mission House. Wilson himself lived there when he first began his MSHP career in the early 2000s. Having read much about the uses of the building over time and its architectural fidelity to Martin Heydenburk's original construction in 1825, I was curious to note the present condition of the structure, and whether any vestiges were left from before its current use as an intern dormitory. To my shock, I discovered the building in ramshackle condition. Although Wilson claimed that the Mission House received a paint job every couple years, much of the exterior was severely chipped and dirty. I entered the lower level of the west wing, which originally housed the Ferry family living quarters. Apart from brick fireplaces, nothing else original has survived. This in itself is not all that surprising given the multiple re-uses of the building over its near-200-year history, but I was a bit surprised to see how poorly the rest of the space had been treated. The central section of the building, which would have originally been the dining hall for the mission

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<sup>84</sup> Phil Porter, "Restoring the Mission House," *The Historical Society of Michigan Newsletter* 5, no. 1 (1979), 2-4. Original manuscript located in folder "Mission Church Restoration," Petersen Center, Mackinac State Historic Parks, Mackinaw City, MI.

<sup>85</sup> Phil Porter, phone interview with the author, August 27, 2021.

school, is now a common area lounge. The basement is more-or-less unchanged from what it might have originally looked like with dirt floors and wooden beam foundations, though some of these looked in dire need of restoration. My overall impression of the space was that it serves a very utilitarian function. Given the heavy rotation of summer workers each season, little care goes into the building's upkeep either as a historic structure or as a living accommodation.

Elsewhere during my time on Mackinac Island, I had interacted with two college interns who both worked as costumed interpreters for the Biddle House and the American Fur Company Store respectively. Both lived in the Mission House, and they were both aware of its connection to a Protestant mission school to the children of fur trade workers. They did not express any knowledge or perspective beyond that simple fact. Neither remarked on the condition of their living accommodations, but they did exhibit a fondness for the camaraderie of living under one roof with other summer workers. In my conversation with Craig Wilson at the Mission House thereafter, I asked him out of curiosity if summer workers were explained the history of the building they were living in, given the weight of Native American boarding schools in contemporary public memory. He said that most interns receive general information about the Mission House along with other reading materials about general Mackinac history, but he conceded that the Ferry mission chapter of that history was never a high priority. He justified this by saying that the ABCFM mission was so short-lived and “largely a failure.”

I did not respond or attempt to challenge Wilson's assessment, but the conversation prompted further reflection on the real value of physical buildings as conduits for public memory and engagement with the past. Given Mackinac's rich resources and incredible levels of historic preservation, I was confounded at the lack of desire to take advantage of those resources to tell a richer story – one that would highlight Native peoples and the complexities of their relationship to

Christian missions. By contrast, many other similar sites of Native cultural change have been erased – most prominently, Holy Childhood School in Harbor Springs, which raised some controversy (discussed below). In most other cases, the processes of settler colonialism displaced Native communities and replaced them with their own narratives and infrastructure, as explored in the previous chapter on Brainerd Cemetery in Chattanooga. In the case of Mackinac, both Wilson and Phil Porter attested that the primary interpretive thrust for the ABCFM mission was done through historian Keith Widder’s independent monograph project from 1999, *Battle for the Soul: Métis Children Encounter Evangelical Protestants at Mackinaw Mission, 1823-1837*. The book provides a detailed and carefully balanced history of the Ferry mission and its effect on both the Island’s fur trade and area Native peoples during a time of rapid changes. Widder’s research methodology was almost entirely based on printed materials and archives, and his book refrains from making any larger claims about memory or the continuity of the sites into later generations. In fact, Widder could likely have written the same book had all archeological and material traces on Mackinac Island been entirely eviscerated. This again calls into question the independent role of physical spaces to share history in a way that the printed book cannot.<sup>86</sup>

Ironically, public visitors will encounter more interpretation about the Protestant mission by going to the private museum underneath Ste. Anne’s Catholic Church than they will at the actual Mission House or Mission Church. Ste. Anne’s, located on the M-185 only a couple blocks west of the Mission Church, expresses by far the richest awareness to the religious history of Mackinac. Of all the churches on Mackinac Island, Ste. Anne’s claims the largest house of worship, the oldest

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<sup>86</sup> For the record, *Battle for the Soul* was not being sold in any of the six bookstores and gift shops that I frequented during my summer 2021 visit to the Straits, though that is *not* to say that Widder’s book was not on shelves back when it was a recent publication.

continual religious community, and the most robust and accessible outreach to visitors and year-round residents. The church's fellowship hall beneath the sanctuary also contains a museum and the grave of its most famous parishioner, Magdalene LaFramboise. The museum had closed to the public through the COVID-19 pandemic, but I arranged private access through the parish office to view the exhibit. The church's head of maintenance and decades-long Island resident Jim Morse provided me a tour of the museum, which tells through artifacts a 350-year story of Catholic ascendancy from the arrival of Fr. Marquette to the present day. The museum was originally conceived by Br. James Boynton, S.J., in the early 2000s. Boynton is a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, and his decision to become a Jesuit priest stands as a legacy to his Anishinaabeg forebearers' relationship with Christianity. Although Boynton had since been reassigned to a Jesuit high school in Detroit by the time of my visit, Jim Morse remembered "Br. Jim" fondly and considered him one of the most active friars in Mackinac's Catholic community.

Boynton's care and attention to history was evident at the small church museum. The most prized possession under lock and key is a baptismal record dating back to 1695. The museum contained much that I would have expected as far as historical artifacts, including rosaries, chalices, clerical vestments, and other ritual objects dating from between the eighteen through early twentieth centuries. I was particularly intrigued, however, to see an entire panel discussing the Ferry's Presbyterian mission and boarding school. The actual text was sparse, though the juxtaposition of artifacts and images made it clear that the 1820s-1830s represented a crucible of faith for the region's Catholic population, especially the Métis students at the ABCFM mission. It is implied that the Presbyterians unwittingly laid the groundwork for Catholic revivalism brought by Fr. Mazzuchelli. The panel includes a geography textbook used at Ferry's school, a Protestant hymnal, and a copy of one of Fr. Mazzuchelli's written sermons against Rev. Ferry in defense of the Catholic

doctrine of the Eucharist. The panel does not vilify the Ferrys but rather portrays them as an opportunity for the refinement of Catholicism on the island. The adjacent panel goes on to highlight the growth of Catholicism among the Anishinaabeg during the mid-nineteenth century. The most prominently featured items include Christian texts in Anishinaabemowin languages, including an 1858 Ojibwe prayerbook created by Bishop Frederic Baraga, a Slovenian missionary most notable for his promotion of translating holy scriptures and liturgy into Native languages.



Figure 20. Ste. Anne's Catholic Church is the longest continual religious congregation in Mackinac Island's history. It is located adjacent to Harbour View Inn, the original home of Magdalene LaFramboise who donated part of her land for construction of the church.  
Photo by the author.



Figures 21-22. Br. James Boynton, S.J., who is also a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, was responsible for the creation of the museum in the basement at Ste. Anne's. Magdalene LaFramboise's remains were reburied in the museum in accordance with her original wishes to be buried underneath the church. LaFramboise's previous grave and monument stands outside the church, with a raspberry bush planted adjacent ("framboise" being "raspberry" in French). Photos by the author.

The museum at Ste. Anne's assumes that most of its audience are practicing Catholics, and as such, no interpretation is attempted to explain why Catholicism appealed to Anishinaabeg. It is almost taken for granted that American Catholic ascendancy went hand-in-hand with the survivance of Native identities. Nowhere is this more apparent than the largest and most prominent feature of the museum – the sarcophagus of Magdalene LaFramboise. This sarcophagus was originally located beneath the previous church building's altar, per LaFramboise's request after she deeded part of her property to the parish. According to a plaque above the slab, her grave was removed to outside the church during the mid-twentieth century when Ste. Anne's built a fellowship hall in the basement.

She lay outside the church until around 2012, when Jim Morse, according to his own recollections while we stood in the museum, exhumed her remains to finally place them back inside the church and in the museum. Morse said that LaFramboise had also been buried with her daughter Josephine, who married the brother of President Franklin Pierce, and a stillborn grandson.

Other than acknowledging her Odawa and French-Canadian mixed ancestry, her identity as a Native American woman is not discussed at all. Rather, her role as a devout Roman Catholic is emphasized on her epitaph:

She devoted her life to the education of children, concern for the poor, devotion to her family, and her Roman Catholic faith. Her home housed the island's first school, hosted both Catholic and Protestant clergy, authors such as Alexis de Tocqueville, and the poor and homeless.<sup>87</sup>

After acknowledging her role in securing the land for the present church, the epitaph concludes with the claim that LaFramboise “stands as a role model of Christian devotion and service.”

After leaving Ste. Anne's Catholic Church, a final ferry trip will take visitors to a site representing a more complicated story of Anishinaabeg Christianity. In contrast to Mackinac Island or Mackinaw City, the modern town of St. Ignace on the Upper Peninsula shoreline is far less commercialized and comparatively restful. St. Ignace also features a heavily Native presence, with over half of the local population identifying as American Indian. During my visit in 2021, the city was in the middle of its 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Banners put up in collaboration between the city council and the Museum of Ojibwa Culture featured Native American veterans.<sup>88</sup> Exiting the ferry docks, some visitors may be attracted to a vintage neon sign with a teepee reading “Indian

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<sup>87</sup> Epitaph above Magdalene LaFramboise grave, Ste. Anne's Catholic Church, Mackinac Island, MI.

<sup>88</sup> While the preferred spelling of the tribe is “Ojibwe,” the museum spells the tribe as “Ojibwa.” As such, I will use “Ojibwa” in reference to the Museum of Ojibwa Culture in St. Ignace and use “Ojibwe” in all other cases.

Village” marking the entrance to a historic souvenir gift shop. Directly across from Indian Village lies the site of the original St. Ignace mission. The mission site presently consists of Marquette Memorial Park (containing the Jesuit missionary’s grave), the Museum of Ojibwa Culture (housed in an 1837 Catholic mission church), and an outdoor sculpture garden and Huron longhouse connected with the museum. The wooden church building and steeple can clearly be seen from the boats approaching the harbor into St. Ignace, although the layperson may not realize that it is an American Indian museum from a distance.

The Museum of Ojibwa Culture operates as a collaborative institution between the village of St. Ignace and the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, which is the largest federally recognized Native nation in the state of Michigan. The museum is not tribally-operated but is owned by St. Ignace’s municipal government, composed of both white and Native residents. Several of the museum’s employees, volunteers, and the museum director are all Sault Ste. Marie tribal members (colloquially known as the “Sault Tribe” or “Soo Tribe”). The composition of the church-turned-museum, memorial park, and historical markers give the appearance of seeming permanence to the old St. Ignace mission site. In fact, the present infrastructure is largely a product of the activities of the Knights of Columbus in the 1950s. In 1954, the local Knights chapter relocated the 1837 mission church from the downtown area and restored it as a city museum. Three years following, they restored and expanded Marquette Memorial Park to erect another statue of the eponymous missionary near his burial monument. The Knights operated their museum and park until 1983, when they sold the location to the city of St. Ignace. From there the interpretation gradually expanded to highlight more the lives of the region’s Native peoples.





Figure 23. The Museum of Ojibwa Culture in St. Ignace is located near the archaeological site of the seventeenth-century Jesuit mission. Operated by members of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the building and museum highlight the complex relationship between Anishinaabeg in the Straits region and Christianity. Photo by the author.



Figure 24. Marquette Memorial Park lies adjacent to the museum and is maintained by the city of St. Ignace. Photo by the author.



Figure 25. The park contains the grave of Fr. Jacques Marquette, whose bones were rediscovered in the 1870s, having been buried by Catholic Anishinaabeg in a birch bark coffin. Photo by the author.

The Museum of Ojibwa Culture plays a significant interpretive role for the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe in particular. Its infrastructure is not merely an example of conservation and adaptive reuse, but it also makes a tangible statement about the relationship between Christianity's spread and Indigenous survivance. In short – they are not contradictory forces. According to a conversation I had with director Shirley Sorrels-Donivan, who also identifies as a Catholic Christian, many Anishinaabeg in northern Michigan fully incorporate Christian and Native spiritual identities, and she largely credits the success of Christianity among her people to the methods used by the Jesuits.<sup>89</sup> Sorrels-Donivan expressed an attitude similar to what I read on a text panel in the memorial park:

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<sup>89</sup> For a nuanced discussion of the Jesuits' influence in Native cultural change during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet*, 199-203.

the Jesuits “believed that native peoples already believed in the Creator, and that native cultures were inherently good.” As proof of the Ojibwe favoring to the Jesuit “black robes,” the museum proudly displays on occasion a communion chalice reportedly belonging to Marquette but kept among Ojibwe families until given to a Catholic priest in 1912. Today, that chalice is held in trust by the Jesuits in Detroit, and Br. Jim Boynton (the same person responsible for the museum at Ste. Anne’s on the Island) carries the artifact back and forth between St. Ignace and Detroit.<sup>90</sup>



Figures 26-27. The Museum of Ojibwa Culture acknowledges traditional Anishinaabe spiritualism alongside Christianity as mutually compatible forms of Anishinaabe religious expression. The sculpture park outside interprets the powers of medicine men, and an exhibit inside the museum seasonally features a chalice reported to have belonged to Fr. Marquette. Photos by the author.

<sup>90</sup> Shirley Sorrels-Donivan, phone interview with the author, August 21, 2021.

Two faces of Christianity are juxtaposed at the Museum of Ojibwa Culture. The first is the apparent congruity of Christianity with Anishinaabe spirituality. No one bats an eye at the parallel exhibitions of Catholic evangelism (represented by the museum being a church building and the artifacts related to the Jesuit mission) and Indigenous religious systems, such as the sculpture of a medicine man (*nenaandawi'iwed*) in the adjacent garden. The favorable memories of Fr. Marquette and the St. Ignace mission of the late seventeenth century give the impression that Ojibwe people embraced Catholicism shortly thereafter. While religious converts certainly did exist, the measure of Christianity among northern Michigan tribes, in actuality, did not flourish among the rank and file until the nineteenth century when threat of removal, swelling numbers of immigrants, and religious revivalism influenced cultural adaptation of Christianity.<sup>91</sup> The other face of Christianity shows an uglier chapter of history, and this is exhibited mainly through the museum's feature exhibit, "Unlocking the Silence: The Often Overlooked History of Native American Boarding Schools." Whereas interpretation about the Jesuits of New France portrays them favorably, the boarding schools are portrayed as generally oppressive and abusive. The exhibit provides a disclaimer that it does not attempt to tell a comprehensive story about the boarding/residential school experience, and its creators acknowledge that "every single student and survivor of the Boarding Schools had a unique experience." Unlike other exhibits, which rely primarily on material culture as evidence, "Unlocking the Silence" builds a narrative mostly through text and archival images and is intended

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<sup>91</sup> Fr. Frederic Baraga was a prominent catalyst for Anishinaabe adoption of Catholicism from a base of influence on Madeline Island in Lake Superior. On archaeological evidence for the impact of the Baraga mission, see Robert A. Birmingham, "The 'Snow Shoe Priest' on Madeline: Archaeology at Frederick Baraga's Indian Mission," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 94, no. 2 (Winter 2008), 2-13. The histories composed by Anishinaabeg writers in the mid-nineteenth century provide clues for how Michigan Native people held Christianity and Midewiwin (or the Great Medicine Lodge) in tension, see Michael Pomedli, *Living With Animals: Ojibwe Spirit Powers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 48-49, 78-79.

to be a travelling exhibit that is easy to set up. Harrowing testimonies of physical and psychological abuse are provided through excerpts, such as the testimony of Claire, who at an unnamed Catholic school was beaten by a nun. While forced assimilation to western Christian culture is briefly discussed in the panels, no attempt is made at explaining what variations might have existed between federally-run secular schools like Carlisle versus Catholic schools who complied with the federal assimilation policy. Two local Ojibwe boarding school survivors are prominently represented in the exhibit – Dalinda Brissette Causley (Wa-sa-waanaa-que-bek) and John Causley (Mukqua O-de-daa-jew). This married couple first met each other in the 1950s at Holy Childhood School in Harbor Springs. Dalinda and John supplied poignant testimonies that indirectly touch on the issue of their faith as part of the healing process. Dalinda shared:

My foundation of faith it has carried me all through my life. But as I've grown in my faith journey, I've come more to believe in a loving merciful God rather than a punishing God. I say God but in our Traditional ways, we call him our Creator.

Dalinda and John together talk about their use of the Talking Circle as a means of healing that straddles both traditional Anishinaabe practices and Christianity:

The steps to restore harmony are to admit, to accept and to forgive. Restorative tools which will be used in our ceremonies in the Healing Lodge are the sacred fire, pipes, eagle feathers, sacred medicines and releasing ceremonies at the water. The physical act of relinquishing our anguish and pain into the Creator's hands shows that for us it is over and we can now move forward in our healing process.

On the issue of memory and place, John also composed a poem in response to a visit to the Holy Childhood School site after the property's demolition in the twenty-first century. The museum exhibit does not add commentary to the issue of place erasure, but John's own words on the subject are thought-provoking:

I returned to Holy Childhood after 60 years...  
 Why was the school removed?  
 Why would the people of the community not talk to me about  
 Holy Childhood of Jesus Indian School?

Why did I not see the graveyard that I used to play in?  
 As an Anishinabe, our healing process  
 Will begin with talking about physical and  
 Mental abuse that once again destroy our people.  
 Let the ***Circle of Healing*** begin. [emphasis in original]

This sentiment expressed by John Causley suggests that the preservation of sites, even those connected with collective trauma, still have power to share truth and bring about reconciliation, and that the erasure of such sites does little to bring closure. Causley's poem was the only subtle reference in the exhibit to the issue of preserving these sites. Only upon further research did I find out that there had been a belated effort in 2007 by former Ojibwe and Odawa students of Holy Childhood to save the building from demolition by the parish, but to no avail.<sup>92</sup>

Museum director Shirley Sorrels-Donivan considered "Unlocking the Silence" to be one of her most important achievements in the last few years, as she orchestrated the funding and collaboration between the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, the Michigan Humanities Council, and the St. Ignace Area Community Foundation. According to Shirley, much of the healing process begins with creating a base level of knowledge from which Natives and non-Natives alike can begin a dialogue with one another. When I asked about how the Museum of Ojibwa Culture navigates the issue of Christianity and cultural change among Anishinaabeg, Shirley responded by emphasizing her people's ability to incorporate new ideas to their own cultural context. Though acknowledging the evils of the boarding schools under the policy of forced assimilation, she also believes that Christianity has ultimately benefitted the Ojibwe, particularly in the manner that the Jesuits first preached it. Shirley characterizes Anishinaabeg as providing the "base culture" for the region.

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<sup>92</sup> Loraine Anderson, "Actress Kateri Walker Tries to Save Old Native American Boarding School," *Traverse City Record-Eagle*, Traverse City, MI, September 21, 2007, <https://www.electricscotland.com/history/america/donna/chiocco71.htm> (accessed September 15, 2021).

Despite the encroachment of settlers and empires over the last four centuries, the Anishinaabeg have survived as a culture by incorporating elements from others and finding ways to make those elements their own. From this perspective, it would only seem natural that a Native American museum would be housed in a historic Catholic mission church and located at one of the most historically significant sites in the Great Lakes.<sup>93</sup>

Other voices might certainly challenge Sorrels-Donivan's optimistic portrayal of the contemporary situation for Native Americans in northern Michigan. Nevertheless, as a spokesperson for a significant cultural institution and historical site in the Mackinac Straits, Sorrels-Donivan provides a compelling path forward to break the misconception of Native cultures being static or incompatible with modernity. When asked about longer-term plans for the museum, Shirley said that she envisions the recreation of a village site that would highlight the interactions between Anishinaabeg, French-Canadians, and other people groups.<sup>94</sup>

### **Conclusion: Religious Preservation as a Vehicle for Indigenous Visibility**

From a macro-perspective, the modern tourist landscape at Mackinac Island and its environs would appear to cater to secular interests. However, a reconsideration of the religious topography uncovers a paradoxical story of Native American vitality in the midst of cultural and economic transformations. I argue that renewed attention to the religious features of the landscape actually boosts the visibility of Native people in a way that honors their ability to adapt. Although the commercial image of Mackinac Island projects a variant of American triumphalism and nostalgia that would make Indigenous people invisible, enough infrastructure remains, whether in the form of

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<sup>93</sup> Sorrels-Donivan, phone interview with the author, August 21, 2021.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

material culture, archaeology, historic buildings, or even the natural landscape, to highlight Anishinaabeg vitality for those who are willing to listen. Moreover, the existence of thriving Native communities in northern Michigan enables them to be active agents in the sharing of their history and culture. The cooperation between area tribes and local and state government agencies, whether the Mackinac State Historic Parks or the St. Ignace City Council, is also commendable and reveals a high degree of sensitivity that other public historians should take notice of.

The multifaceted layers of religious heritage adds even more complexity to Michilimackinac. Regardless of one's personal attitude to the introduction of Christianity among Native Americans, it is undeniable that for hundreds of years, the Straits of Mackinac has held spiritual significance to Native and settler populations alike. These experiences range from the pre-contact traditionalist gatherings at the Straits, the Jesuit Fathers' cultivation of sacramental Indian communities, the "battles for the soul" waged by evangelical Protestants over the hearts and minds of the fur traders and their children, the transcendental rejuvenation sought by American romantics, and even the internationalist experiments of Moral Re-Armament in the mid-twentieth century. Different spaces across the area emphasize different parts of that memory. Most of these monuments and memorialization efforts were made in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when religion played a more prominent role in American life compared to the twenty-first century. At the time when statues of Fr. Marquette were erected, or when wealthy Island visitors sought to enshrine the churches of Christian "pioneers," little attention was given to the contemporary lives of Native Americans. As it may be, the preservation of religious heritage may now have a greater role for Natives than it does for whites, as seen by the veneration of Marquette at the Museum of Ojibwa Culture. For better or worse, Christianity, especially Catholicism, has been part of Anishinaabeg heritage for the past three hundred years and more. This fact may bewilder modern secularists, who



may have a bifurcated view of Christianity as the “white man’s religion” in dialectical contrast with Indian traditionalist faiths as the only viable expression of Indigeneity. Such was also the view of Margaret Fuller, who also assumed that Indians were incapable of living in “modernity.”

On the subject of “modernity,” Mackinac’s tourism scene poses a challenge to the interpretation of religion. Because of the relative secularism of twenty-first century America, overtly religious sites and iconography are more likely to be muted or taken for granted, despite their connection to the lives of Indigenous people. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, much of this has to do with economic priorities and what kinds of historic attractions “sell.” For a largely secular audience, religion does not “sell” when contrasted with the allure of military forts, fudge shops, late Victorian bed and breakfasts, or hiking trails. As Christian practices becomes more peripheral to the lives of many Americans (with the notable exception of politically active evangelical groups), the assumed reaction has been to treat religious sites as mere “heritage” rather than an active part of community formation. By contrast, I would argue that these religious spaces and structures offer some of the best vehicles to highlight Indigenous struggles and their ultimate survivance against all odds. The fate of Holy Childhood School, while a little distance from the Straits, should be a lesson in the power of historic places, even those which evoke controversy and trauma, to become sites of conscience – and ultimately, spaces for healing.

What would happen if Mackinac Island’s Mission House were, instead of a dilapidated dormitory for summer interns, restored and interpreted as a museum devoted to the lives of the mission students who boarded there? Given the nuanced interpretation MSHP has achieved at other sites, especially through exhibits done in collaboration with local Native communities, it would be possible to create an encounter that provides cultural sensitivity yet does not seek to vilify any historical actors. As promising as an idea sounds, the task would be monumental not only in terms

of finances and labor but in emotional labor as well. As public historian Amy Tyson noted in her own study of employees at Fort Snelling in Minnesota, the day-to-day conversations with visitors on historically fraught or politically controversial subjects can take a toll on the wellbeing of employees working in the field.<sup>95</sup> The highly complex histories of American Indian education, Christian evangelism, and racial power dynamics would require workers with high levels of emotional maturity, knowledge expertise, and cultural sensitivity to handle well. More so than other historic sites on the island, Native first-hand perspectives would be vital to the success of any such museum, though the psychological and emotional toll of any Native interpreter having to field visitor interactions would be something to consider.

If a living history museum for public tourists is not viable, an alternative role for the Mission House might be as a seasonal conference center to host workshops and seminars. The space could provide housing and meeting rooms for a selective group of scholars representing both Native American nations as well as Christian denominations who could meet over issues of racial justice, reconciliation, American Indian education, or other relevant issues. Such an initiative would not only respect the two-hundred-year history of the space but also add an additional chapter to its history for the purpose of elevating Indigenous voices and allowing Christian denominations to come to terms with their complex (and often vexatious) relationship with Native peoples. Because the building property is owned by a state government agency, a non-profit organization in collaboration with one or more Native American tribal government or foundation would likely have to take the lead on any such effort that entailed religious mission, with the state park being only responsible for the building's physical maintenance.

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<sup>95</sup> Amy Tyson, *The Wages of History: Emotional Labor on History's Front Lines* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 145-148.

All in all, Mackinac Island and its environs showcase a unique part of America where the legacies of Indigenous survivance and religious heritage form a symbiotic relationship. While the contemporary resources and historical interpretation is laudable, public historians should not be hasty in resting on the laurels of recent collaborations and successes. Like buildings themselves, communities and populations are fragile entities. Just because historic spaces are under public trusteeship or memorialized today does not guarantee their lasting relevance for generations to come. Religious life in the Mackinac Straits may have taken a back seat to meet the expectations of the tourist gaze, but there are new stories to tell if these places are reframed to commemorate the ability for Natives to undergo centuries of change and tribulation yet persist today.

If the “storyscapes” of Mackinac Island demonstrate an Indigenous sense of place and connection to the land, even as they are forced to contend with non-Natives who impose their own structures and stories on the land, similar paradigms exist elsewhere in the Great Lakes. The next chapter will detail one such Catholic mission landscape near the southern stretches of Lake Michigan that bestows vastly different meanings for its Native inhabitants versus the settler community. As with the use of landscapes in Mackinac, the following case study will demonstrate the struggles of a particular Native community to force an institution to acknowledge its own past and acknowledge that it operates on Native land.

## CHAPTER IV

### A MISSION INTERRUPTED

#### INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AT NOTRE DAME AND CATHOLIC RESPONSIBILITY TO THE POKAGON POTAWATOMI

When visitors walk the campus of University of Notre Dame, one of the more idyllic spots they will encounter is a rustic log cabin on the southern shores of St. Mary's Lake, the small body of water that gave the university its namesake. The setting and monuments around the log cabin, today used as a Catholic chapel and small event space, deliberately evokes a nostalgic reminder of a time when northern Indiana was considered the Western frontier and Notre Dame was a "college in the wilderness." Display panels in the university visitor center says the chapel "serves as a reminder of Notre Dame's humble beginnings." The chapel has frequent sacred use today for small weddings, baptisms on football game day weekends, and special liturgies for the "Old College" seminarians located next door.

Despite its frequent traffic, no exterior plaque explains its historical origin and purpose. Inside the chapel, a stone marker left of the altar states (inaccurately) that the building is a "reproduction" of an 1831 chapel on the same spot built by Fr. Stephen T. Badin, the eminent French Catholic missionary and first priest ordained in the United States. In fact, the chapel's design and proportions more closely resemble the first chapel built by Notre Dame's founder, Fr. Edward Sorin, in 1843, a short distance from the earlier chapel of the "proto-priest" Badin from the time when Notre Dame, or rather, St. Mary's of the Lake, was a mission school to native Potawatomi.

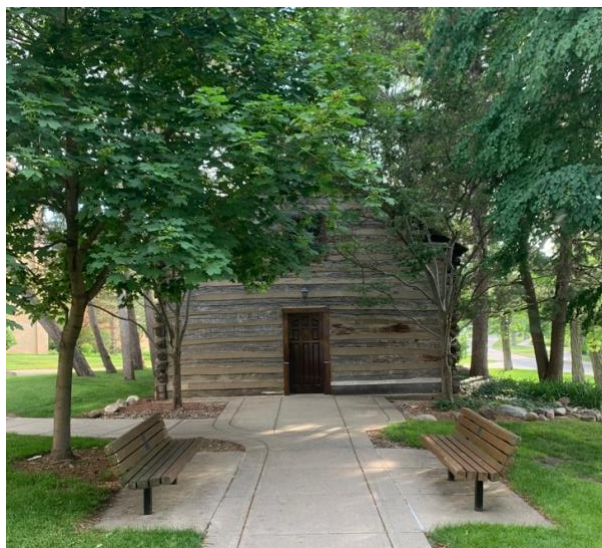


Figure 28. Notre Dame's Log Chapel is a 1906 replica structure that evokes the university's early history as a frontier mission. Photo by the author.

The conflation of history and memory, even if accidental, tells a great deal about how the university envisions its identity as part of a larger saga of American expansionism and the growth of Catholicism in America. Since the chapel's construction in 1906, the university community has endowed this log chapel with sacred value, not only as a living memorial to Notre Dame's "humble beginnings" but as the final resting place of the venerated missionaries to the Potawatomi. In addition to Badin's remains beneath the chapel, three of his immediate successors are buried within. Since 1987, Fr. Badin's remains have been joined by Frs. Louis DeSeille, Benjamin Petit, and Francis Cointet, who together form a quartet of leaders in Notre Dame's original Indian mission. A mural to the right of the altar depicts a dying Fr. DeSeille administering to himself the holy Viaticum (i.e., the Eucharist and Last Rites) in the presence of pious Potawatomi praying for him. Although less accessible to the public, the sacristy behind the altar contains display cases of artifacts used by these

early missionary-priests, including communion chalices, incense censers, and clerical vestments.<sup>1</sup> The whole assemblage of the chapel space and its contents form a founding narrative of the missionaries' bravery, self-abnegation, compassion, and charity from which emerged one of the leading Catholic educational institutions in the United States.



Figure 29. Historical artifacts from the mission period are located in the chapel's sacristy. Photo by the author.

This narrative is inextricably connected to a story of settler colonialism. The startup and growth of a premier Catholic university that attracted scores of settler students, not to mention the pious clergymen and women religious who also came to educate them and minister to growing Catholic communities, rested upon the displacement and marginalization of Notre Dame's first mission – the St. Joseph Potawatomi (also known as the “woodland” Potawatomi). The Founders' Plaque, located outside the memorial log chapel and overlooking St. Mary's Lake, quotes from an 1842 letter written by Edward Sorin but omits important references to Native Americans contained

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<sup>1</sup> My appreciation goes out to Fr. Brian Ching, the rector of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart at University of Notre Dame, for permission to view the interior of the log chapel.

in the original letter. Instead, the plaque gives campus visitors the impression that Sorin walked into a virginal wilderness:

Everything was frozen over. Yet it all seemed so beautiful. The lake, especially, with its broad carpet of dazzling white snow, quite naturally reminded us of the spotless purity of, our august Lady whose name it bears, and also of the purity of soul which should mark the new inhabitants of this chosen spot.

Turning around from the plaque, viewers face the Founders' Monument, a pyramid-like structure topped by a statue of St. Joseph, the Congregation of Holy Cross's patron saint, holding the Christ Child, with an inscription at the base quoting Psalm 105:21, "He made him head of his house and ruler of all his possession."<sup>2</sup> No reference is made to any history prior to the 1842 arrival of Sorin and his Holy Cross brothers.



Figure 30. The original mission overlooked St. Mary's Lake, one of two small lakes on campus. Photo by the author.

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<sup>2</sup> The psalmist quoted on the monument is actually referencing Joseph from the book of Genesis, who, in Genesis 41, is given viceregal command in Egypt after interpreting Pharaoh's dream.

An underlying narrative dissonance exists in the physical monuments to Notre Dame's founding era, particularly in its obligations to Native peoples. On one hand, the log chapel draws upon an Indigenous past, in which French priests in the Indiana frontier dedicated themselves to Potawatomi evangelization and land protection. Meanwhile, other campus cultural icons, from the Italian murals of Christopher Columbus to the Our Lady of Lourdes grotto and the "Fighting Irish" football team, embrace a European immigrant story of progress and Catholic Americanization.<sup>3</sup> This settler colonial paradigm of settler communities imputing their own traditions and narratives onto an invisible Indigenous landscape is hardly unique. The explicitly religious mission to an institution like Notre Dame, however, adds an interesting layer because of Christianity's ethical commands for justice. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the expressly Christian agreement on the part of missionaries to provide Native peoples an education in return for land occupation provides the university a pronounced opportunity and challenge to uphold its end of the bargain, more so than a general population or secular government.

Notre Dame's campus provides an excellent laboratory for studying the confluence of American Christianity and settler colonial processes. As a local institution operating within a defined space and with clear members and stakeholders, Notre Dame also makes for a manageable case site to track the university community's grappling over its own history and identity. As with Brainerd Mission Cemetery and the Straits of Mackinac, religious heritage plays a prominent role in creating a sense of mystique and community belonging at Notre Dame. As with the case studies from the previous chapters, Notre Dame's heritage is tied up with the livelihood of local Indigenous

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<sup>3</sup> For more detail on Notre Dame's football tradition and its role in fostering Catholic American identity, see Mark S. Massa, "Thomism and the T-Formation: Ethnicity, American Catholic Higher Education, and the Notre Dame Football Team," in *Catholics and American Culture: Martin Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 195-221.

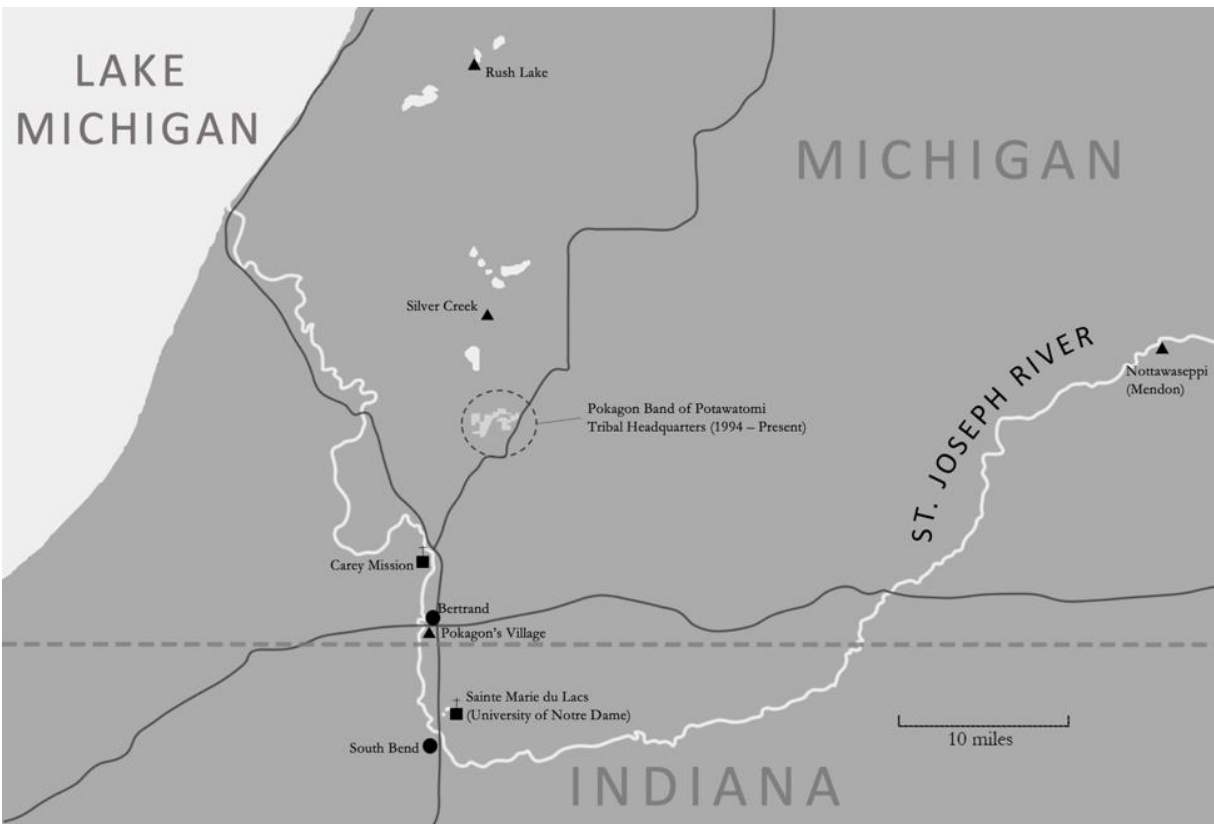


communities affected by the presence of Christianity. However, Notre Dame's "storyscape" is also noteworthy as the story of a singular religious institution's relationship with specific Potawatomi families and their descendants. The campus is a battleground between the impulse on one hand to protect its Catholic image versus the promises owed to members of Indigenous communities who have too often been made invisible. I argue in this chapter that these are not mutually exclusive choices.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter does not intend to unravel a litany of errors and abuses against Indigenous peoples by any particular persons or groups affiliated with Notre Dame. On the contrary, this chapter will have a hopeful tone, as there exist a surprising number of examples in which individuals have used their religious and ethical consciences, albeit imperfectly, to raise visibility to Notre Dame's obligations to Native Americans. These obligations of service apply *not* to abstracted historical peoples two hundred years gone but to living, active Native communities, most particularly, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, headquartered only a few miles north of campus in Dowagiac, Michigan. As such, Neshnabek (the name Potawatomi refer to themselves as, meaning "true people" or "original people") are active participants in the debates over public memory.

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<sup>4</sup> Although not drawing explicit comparisons between University of Notre Dame and Dartmouth College, the structure and themes of this chapter follow in spirit the work of historian Colin Calloway, who wrote a book on Dartmouth College's origins and legacy as an Indian mission. Colin Calloway, *The Indian History of an American Institution: Native Americans and Dartmouth* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2010).



Map 3. St. Joseph River Valley in the nineteenth century. NOTE: Not all Indian villages and white settlements are shown. Map created by the author.

### **The Potawatomi and the Removal Crisis in Northern Indiana, c. 1815 – 1840**

Whether acknowledged or not, the University of Notre Dame owes its existence to Potawatomi survivance strategies during the Removal Era. The present memorials on the campus give the impression that Potawatomi disappearance precipitated the founding of a leading Catholic university with the arrival of Catholic settlers from Europe. The problem with this narrative is that it is overly deterministic and does nothing to acknowledge the continuities of Native Americans living in the region in the twenty-first century. A recapitulation of the history will overturn the misguided notion that Fr. Sorin and the Holy Cross arrived in the area only after Indian removal and therefore bear no responsibility for the past.

During the early nineteenth century, the St. Joseph River Valley shared more cultural affiliations with the French- and Indigenous-infused Great Lakes “middle ground” than it did with an Anglo-dominated, agricultural “Midwest” that would come to typify the area in later generations. As with the Straits of Mackinac discussed in the previous chapter, the St. Joseph River Valley landscape retained elements of its imperial French past as late as the 1820s, including the Catholic affinity among many (though not all) Indigenous persons as well as the presence of French and Métis persons as cultural and commercial interlocutors. While some might question the genuineness of Catholic conversion given the prevalence of Indigenous spiritual practices existing parallel with Catholic beliefs, religion among the so-called mission Potawatomi still proved to be a powerful bedrock for identity and claims to land rights, even at the cost of splintering the Potawatomi into multiple bands led by various *wkamek* (i.e., leaders or elders, singular: *wkama*).

There was no singular trajectory for those who opted for some form of religious and cultural adaptation to the expanding American empire. A few hundred or so Potawatomi formed a coalition with a Kickapoo band under the spiritual leader Kenakuk. Kenakuk, known as the “Kickapoo Prophet,” borrowed some Methodist revivalist ideas, including abstention from alcohol, to create his own syncretic movement. Seeing white society as a source of spiritual corrosion, Kenakuk’s band voluntarily removed themselves first to Illinois and later to eastern Kansas.<sup>5</sup> Others, such as *wkamek* Topinabee, Menominee, Leopold Pokagon, and their respective bands, recruited white missionaries in hopes of securing greater leverage with the federal government and maintain their existence in the St. Joseph River Valley. The 1821 Treaty of Chicago forced Potawatomi land cessions north and east of the St. Joseph River in exchange for a blacksmith, a missionary, and \$5000 in annual annuities.

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<sup>5</sup> James Clifton, *The Prairie People: Continuity and Change in Potawatomi Indian Culture, 1665-1965* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1977), 265-272.

The federal government assigned the missionary position to Baptist minister Isaac McCoy, who was a personal friend to Lewis Cass, the Michigan Territory governor. Although they had initially hoped for a Catholic “black robe,” the St. Joseph bands cooperated with McCoy who set up Carey Mission near the former site of Fort St. Joseph (present-day Niles, Michigan). Not very many Potawatomi were interested in converting to Protestantism, but many more saw Carey Mission as an opportunity to advance their youths’ education to better academies in the East.<sup>6</sup> Hopes with the Baptist McCoy were soon dashed, however, once McCoy became convinced that the only way to cure Natives from the white man was to create a permanent Indian state west of the Mississippi. An 1828 Treaty signed at Carey Mission effectually dissolved most Potawatomi land claims between the St. Joseph River and the Indiana border.<sup>7</sup> Finding themselves in a cinch, these Potawatomi bands resumed their appeals to Catholic aid, but not before redrawing their political lines of communication. These woodland Potawatomi gave permission in 1826 for the construction of a federal road through their lands. This Michigan Road allowed ease of communication and exchange of supplies between key Potawatomi villages in the Indiana-Michigan border region. It would later serve as a highway for Potawatomi allies, including Catholic priests. As historian Ben Secunda has argued, the Michigan Road “helped facilitate the hybridization of cultural identity that blended woodland Potawatomi traditions, a functionally acculturated lifestyle, and a visible, if not uniform, Catholic allegiance.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. David Edmunds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 222-224.

<sup>7</sup> George Schultz, *An Indian Canaan: Isaac McCoy and the Vision of an Indian State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 118-120

<sup>8</sup> Ben Secunda, “The Road to Ruin? ‘Civilization’ and the Origins of a ‘Michigan Road Band’ of Potawatomi,” in *Michigan Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (2008), 130-132, 144.

Around the time of the Michigan Road's construction, Topinabee, the *wkama* most closely associated with McCoy and the Carey Mission died after falling off a horse. His nephew and adoptive son, Leopold Pokagon, assumed responsibility as the new *wkama* for his band, and very soon he would become the dominant voice for the St. Joseph River Potawatomi. Pokagon (whose name means "the rib" or "that which shields") recruited Catholic missionaries to revive the French Jesuit mission work of the eighteenth century, which Neshnabek associated with a time of cultural and political prosperity. In a story often retold in the annals of Notre Dame, Pokagon famously traveled with other *wkamek* to the vicar-general of Detroit to demand that a "black robe" be sent among his people. When initially denied, according to tradition, Pokagon began reciting from memory the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and other Catholic liturgy to convince the bishop of his people's piety.<sup>9</sup> At the time of the Potawatomi delegation's visit, Fr. Stephen Badin, who had an extensive missionary career in the Ohio Valley, happened to be visiting Detroit from Kentucky. Frederick Rese, the vicar-general (and later Bishop) of Detroit, asked Badin to start up the mission in the St. Joseph River Valley. Badin, though already in his sixties, agreed to take on this new project, with the intent of setting up a school and orphanage for the St. Joseph Potawatomi. The first mission house was constructed in Pokagon's Village just north of the Indiana-Michigan border, of which both Indians and whites assisted in the construction. Soon after additional mission houses

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<sup>9</sup> Clifton, *The Pokagons*, 67-68; *A Brief History of the University of Notre Dame du Lac*, 33-34. Leopold Pokagon may have spent his early years in the Odawa community in L'Arbre Croche in northern Michigan, and he was adopted into Topinabee's Potawatomi network through marriage. According to Susan Sleeper-Smith, Pokagon's knowledge of Catholic rituals is testament to Native women who kept Catholicism alive during the decades when there were no more French priests residing in Anishinaabewaki. Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 101.

were established throughout Potawatomi populations in the vicinity, including in Nottawaseppi, Ste. Marie du Lacs (Notre Dame), and Twin Lakes (Chichite Outipe).<sup>10</sup>

Following the provisions made in the 1833 Treaty of Chicago for the Michigan Catholic Potawatomi to be excused from forced removal, other *wkamek* in the St. Joseph River Valley region, most notably Menominee, tried following Pokagon's band to adopt Catholic identities for their villages and were chiefly associated with the missionaries stationed at Notre Dame du Lac. Despite similar religious alliances, Menominee's band of approximately 800 Potawatomi in northern Indiana ended up facing deportation in 1838 while Pokagon's band were able to remain put in southwestern Michigan. The arduous and deathly trek of Menominee's band of 756 people from northern Indiana to eastern Kansas came to be known as the "Trail of Death," almost as a northern counterpoint to the Cherokee "Trail of Tears" which occurred roughly simultaneously. Even so, some members of Menominee's band hid from US troops during the roundup and found refuge with Pokagon. Others still, including the future *wkama* Singowa, returned east after having already gone on the Trail of Death. The military-escorted removal of Menominee's villages was an exceptional case to the over six thousand other Potawatomi who voluntarily went West.<sup>11</sup> Despite the varied responses and outcomes of individual Potawatomi factions, the more tragic story of the Trail of Death found a far stronger appeal to the University of Notre Dame's Catholic consciousness. This is in no small part due to the inopportune death of Fr. Benjamin Petit at the end of the Trail of Death. Petit, who was

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<sup>10</sup> Archaeological excavations at Pokagon's Village and others show clear differences between communities who had "directed" contact with settlers, as seen with the proliferation of domesticated animal bones, vs. communities whose contact was "undirected." Elizabeth Bollwerk, "Controlling Acculturation: A Potawatomi Strategy for Avoiding Removal," *Midcontinental Journal of Archaeology* 31, no. 1 (2006), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Clifton, *The Prairie People*, 280. Clifton provides exact figures. There were 1,195 Potawatomi in two different treks who were forcefully (i.e., militarily) removed west of the Mississippi River. This is roughly one out of every six Potawatomi persons who migrated west, whether forceful or voluntarily. Clifton calculates a total of 7,232 Potawatomi who relocated west of the Mississippi. It is not clear if that figure includes those who migrated to Canada.

later interred on Notre Dame's campus, received the moniker "martyr of charity." Petit's life and the diary he left behind (published a century after his death) amplified the Trail of Death narrative as the definitive version of Notre Dame's relationship with American Indians.<sup>12</sup> The Pokagon Band's resilience and continuity, on the other hand, complicates the convenient narrative of the passing Indian that created a clean slate for the possession of Catholic immigrants and settlers who founded the University of Notre Dame.

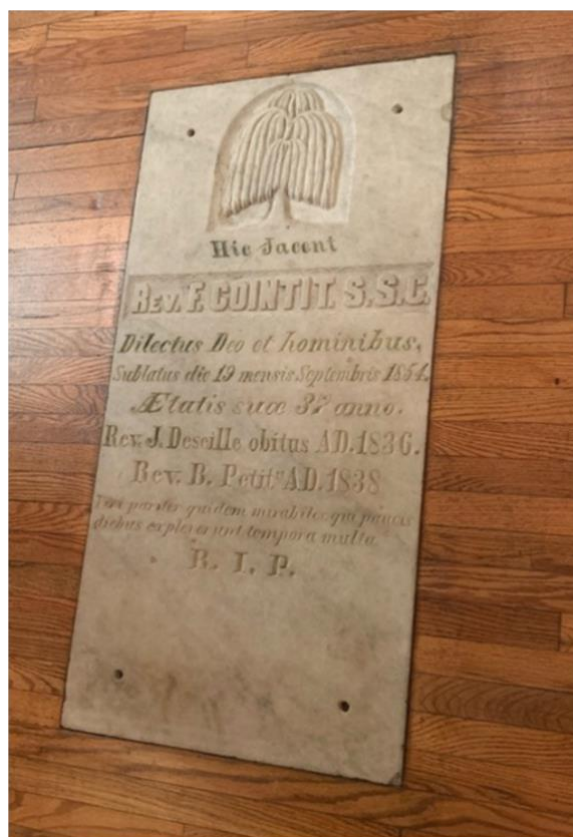


Figure 31. A stone slab marks the graves of Fathers Louis DeSeille, Benjamin Petit, and Francis Cointet, all of whom had a connection to the Potawatomi ministry. Before 1987, their remains were previously interred in the crypt of the Sacred Heart Basilica on campus. Photo by the author.

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<sup>12</sup> See Irving McKee, *The Trail of Death: Letters of Benjamin Marie Petit* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1941).

### Sorin's Mission and the Founding: 1842

As early as 1842 – the conventional birth year for Notre Dame – founder and first president Fr. Edward Sorin wrestled with his conflicting obligations to the Native peoples of Northern Indiana and Southern Michigan (known colloquially as “Michiana”) and the directives of his newly-established order, the Congregation of Holy Cross (Lat., *Congregatio a Sancta Cruce*, C.S.C.). A young man originally hailing from the Brittany region of France, Sorin arrived at the mission lands with seven Holy Cross brothers with the intention of setting up a Catholic university at the bequest of the bishop of Vincennes, who had donated diocesan lands northeast of South Bend, Indiana.<sup>13</sup> At that time, the diocese of Vincennes covered a large territory extending into northern Indiana and eastern Illinois, and it served a heterogeneous population of French Catholic traders, Indian villages, mixed-race or “Métis” families, and some new Catholic settlers. Because of wide population dispersal, many communities lacked a resident curate and had to rely on itinerant priests to receive church sacraments, though many also sustained their own religious practices. The Potawatomi villages in the St. Joseph River Valley were certainly no exception to this, and clergy from as far as Chicago or Detroit had to make frequent, long treks to sustain relationships with these communities. One anonymous German priest who visited Michiana circa 1840 celebrated consecutive Masses with dispersed German Catholics who came from far distances to “listen once again (for some the first time in 20 years) to the Word of God in their old native language,” followed by Potawatomi who had likewise traveled entire days to receive Communion or have their children baptized.<sup>14</sup> From this

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Blantz, *The University of Notre Dame: A History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 26-30.

<sup>14</sup> *Skizzen aus Nord-Amerika: Schilderungen aus der Natur, dem religiösen, politischen und socialen Leben, in Briefen eines katolischen Missionäres* (Augsburg: B. Schmid-schen, 1845), 11-13, 27, English translation and photostan available in Indians of North America Printed Material (PPOT), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, Indiana.



standpoint, the arrival of Holy Cross missionaries near the settlement of South Bend fulfilled a much-needed service for sustaining Catholic influence in an area steeped in the nostalgia of France's colonial empire going back to the late seventeenth century.

Edward Sorin's arrival also would have been significant for the Native groups who still resided in the vicinity, most notably those Potawatomi who had evaded forced removal through Pokagon's efforts. For Pokagon's band, the arrival of more permanent Catholic "black robes" signaled hope that they would continue to receive education and protection – an arrangement they were previously promised by Fr. Badin a decade prior. The tumult of the forced removal crisis, however, thwarted Badin's school and orphanage endeavor. The Indiana Potawatomi communities that refused to migrate north or west were forced at gunpoint to relocate to present-day Kansas and Oklahoma, leaving a small remnant population in Michiana. Having resisted political pressures to relocate, these remaining Potawatomi looked to rebuild their communities and demonstrate their success at adopting to "American" ways. Members of Pokagon's band were not present when Sorin and company first came in snowy November 1842. Most at that point would have resided in Silver Creek, Michigan, though some two hundred Neshnabek still lived in South Bend. However, the Holy Cross brothers would have met the Métis family of M. Charon, who lived in a two-story home next to the Badin mission house. Charon had served as interpreter for the French missionaries the decade prior, and presumably, he would continue to be valuable to Sorin in communicating with the Indians.<sup>15</sup>

While waiting that winter for the return of area Potawatomi, whom he believed were on hunting expeditions, the twenty-eight-year-old Sorin reflected on the true nature of his mission and

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<sup>15</sup> Blantz, 31; "Within two years, a university," *Notre Dame Alumnus* 45, no. 1, January 1967, 52-55.

the opportunities presented to him. Yes, the primary goal was to establish a Catholic college as soon as possible, but what about the ongoing mission to the St. Joseph Potawatomi that Frs. Badin, DeSeille, and Petit had committed their lives to? In a December 5, 1842 letter to his Holy Cross superior Basil Moreau back in France (the same letter on the Founder's Plaque), Sorin expressed his devotion to see American Indians enter the fold of God. In a section of the letter excised from the campus plaque, Sorin wrote:

But to declare everything without reserve, I love, too, the Indians of M. DeSeille and of M. Petit. I thank Heaven that I am now among them. No, I cannot believe that it was without some special design that, for many years, God inspired me with so great a desire to labor for them.<sup>16</sup>

Sorin had virtually no direct knowledge of American Indians when he penned this letter, but that did not stop him from holding a romantic-like zeal toward the possibilities of setting up a mission.

Acknowledging his own youth, Sorin expressed his willingness to take up the challenge of being a missionary to the Potawatomi, making not-so-subtle requests for Moreau's blessing on this.

I am still young, I shall learn their language in a short time; in a year I hope to be able to understand them. I shall often write to you about my dear Indians, and, no doubt, everything concerning them will interest you. Let me then hasten to my dear Indians. Yes, it is settled – you grant my request – you permit me to look upon this flock, now without a shepherd, as my own portion. Thank you, Father; please write me as, soon as possible, that I may secure your permission with my own eyes. To-morrow, or rather, this very day, I shall commence to study the language. When your letter comes, I may be able to return you my thanks in Indian.<sup>17</sup>

No record of Moreau's possible response, if he even penned one, exists. Nevertheless, it is probable the letter was read by others at the Holy Cross seminary in Mans, France, where Sorin's friend and

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<sup>16</sup> Edward Sorin to Father General Moreau, December 5, 1842, in *Circular Letters of the Very Rev. Edward Sorin, Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross and Founder of Notre Dame* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1885), 1:261-262.

<sup>17</sup> Sorin to Moreau, *Circular Letters*, 1:262.

former roommate, Francis Cointet, “accidentally” read Sorin’s correspondence and was inspired to join the Indiana mission, taking with him several other workers for the ministry to arrive in northern Indiana in summer 1843.<sup>18</sup>

### **An Unfinished Indian Ministry: 1842-1855**

Apart from his famous 1842 letter to Fr. Moreau, Sorin commented sparingly on subsequent missionary work among the Potawatomi, leaving mystery and speculation to the evolution of his own private views. Nevertheless, partial bits of evidence from Notre Dame’s earliest years give some clues about the nature of Indian ministry in the post-Removal period. In short, Sorin and the Congregation of Holy Cross seemed to have had an ambivalent relationship with the scattered Neshnabek in Michiana. Many of the Holy Cross missionaries arrived with genuine desire to do Indian ministry alongside the maintaining of a frontier Catholic college. However, most were ill-equipped to respond effectively to the internal factionalism that developed within Pokagon’s band after Leopold Pokagon’s death. Neither could they adequately handle continued machinations by corrupt businessmen and clergymen to steal more lands.

During his first year at the fledgling Notre Dame, Sorin made multiple visits to Potawatomi villages along the Indiana-Michigan border, including more distant Nottawaseppi (which translates to “Snake River,” present-day Mendon, MI) to the northeast. Not all of these villages belonged to Pokagon’s band. Among the approximately two-thousand Potawatomi residents in southwestern Michigan, some had evaded or even returned from the 1838 Trail of Death to eastern Kansas. The

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<sup>18</sup> This story was related by Holy Cross sister Angela Eliza Gillespie, who wrote a posthumous biography of Cointet in 1855. Gillespie was the Mother Superior of St. Mary’s novitiate in Bertrand, Michigan, where Cointet also did ministry work. In 1855, she oversaw the C.S.C. novitiate relocate to Notre Dame, where it is present-day St. Mary’s College. On Cointet’s reading of Sorin’s letters, see Angela Eliza Gillespie, *Life of the Rev. F. Cointet, Priest and Missionary of the Congregation of Holy Cross* (Cincinnati: John P. Walsh, 1855), 15.

financial depression of 1837 had caused a sharp decline in real estate value, thereby reducing pressure on the already few Potawatomi to remove. During the precarious years of the early 1840s, Michigan Indians lived mostly from subsistence harvesting of squash, corn, or beans, and they supplemented agriculture with hunting and fishing. Because of limited access to farming equipment, they often became indebted to white traders. Whites likewise saw Indians as “necessary neighbors” because they had access to highly sought-after cash from federal treaty annuities.<sup>19</sup> When Edward Sorin first interacted with Native Americans in 1842-1843, he stepped into a longer continuum of “black robes” who ministered to people through the sacraments, such as celebrating the Mass, performing baptisms, and officiating weddings. As a newcomer to the region, Sorin gave little comment on the political and economic situation faced by the Potawatomi in his private memoirs of his visits. Rather, he relished walking in what he saw as the heroic footsteps of his predecessors. When he stayed in the crude mission chapels at various Potawatomi villages, Sorin pondered sleeping on the same beds “on which Father Badin the proto-priest, his successor, the saintly DeSeille, and the famous Benjamin Petit who died a martyr of his charity for the Indians, had successively rested their much longer and severer fatigues.”<sup>20</sup> Without a doubt, Sorin venerated these men and desired to be in their shadow.

Sorin’s idealistic hopes for serving the Potawatomis’ spiritual needs were quickly tapered by temporal concerns such as land disputes. Sorin underestimated the extent to which Pokagon’s band expected Catholic “black robes” to serve as legal advocates just as much as their spiritual providers.

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Gray, *The Yankee West: Community Life on the Michigan Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 72-75.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Sorin, *The Chronicles of Notre Dame du Lac*, ed. James T. Connelly (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 312-314.

When a group of Neshnabek came down from the village of Silver Creek to meet the newcomer Sorin and have fourteen of their children baptized, they reported to him the issue of a spurious sale of 674 acres of Leopold Pokagon's lands to the Diocese of Vincennes, orchestrated by the vicar-general Stanislaus Bernier. Upon listening to these Potawatomi informants, Sorin was incensed by the diocese's claims. He even called Bernier a "wretched priest" and asked for God to "efface as soon as possible his memory from this whole country!"<sup>21</sup> Despite Sorin's evident enthusiasm to protect these Potawatomi against the graft of Bernier and of Celestine de la Hailandière, the Bishop of Vincennes, Sorin turned out to be an inept middleman in the affair and achieved little. In the spring of 1843, Sorin spent about three weeks with Pokagon's band trying to ascertain the situation. Bishop Hailandière evidentially wrote Sorin an explanation about the dubious land claim (correspondence has been lost). Sorin tried to communicate with Pokagon's band in Silver Creek and failed to alleviate the matter. To cultivate favor among the Indians, Sorin then promised to build them a school, only to have Hailandière reject the proposal.<sup>22</sup> Pokagon's band ultimately won the lawsuit against Hailandière and Bernier, but only after a Michigan judge ruled in 1848 that the Vincennes diocese had no right to take Pokagon's private land.

Simultaneous to the attempted land theft episode, Sorin's biggest blunder with the Neshnabek in Silver Creek was his naïve support for Leopold's son, Peter Pokagon, who bore little of the virtues and leadership skills of his late father. After Leopold's death in 1841, Peter assumed *de facto* control of the refugee Potawatomi population for whom his father had purchased lands. The

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<sup>21</sup> Marvin O'Connell, *Edward Sorin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 116-117; Sorin to Rev. Augustus Martin, January 31, 1843, Sorin Papers, box 1, folder 2 (CSOR 1/2), UNDA; James Clifton, *The Pokagons, 1683-1983: Catholic Potawatomi Indians of the St. Joseph River Valley* (Lanham, MD: University Press of American, 1984), 73-81.

<sup>22</sup> Marvin O'Connell, *Edward Sorin* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 117-119.

Potawatomi traditionally elected their *wkamək* based on merit rather than heredity, but Peter used his Pokagon name to assert himself as the principal *wkama* before Sorin, who did not question the matter and declared him “chief.” In actuality, a Holy Cross religious from Germany, “Brother Joseph” (né Charles Rother), reported the following about Peter’s behavior in 1845:

[H]e is the only one [of the Silver Creek Indians] who does not always behave well, he has been drunk at least four or five times since I am with them, he is very hau[gh]ty and self-interested, every thing would go well, if he were as he ought to be... If another Chief could be made, it would be the best.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from his intemperance, Peter’s worst crime against his own people was demanding that they pay him rent for occupying his private lands, violating trust they had with his father. A dissenting faction began gathering around another man named Singowa (sometimes spelled “Sinagowa”) who resented both Peter and Sorin’s enablement of a less-than-worthy *wkama*.

It should be noted that neither Sorin, nor Peter Pokagon, nor even Stanislaus Bernier were monocausal “villains” at the scene, for many communities both white and Indian struggled to mete out an existence throughout the 1840s. Nevertheless, the Potawatomi had an even harder time with few allies and the trauma they had already experienced with destabilized communities and relatives who had moved either west to Kansas or north into Canada. Food scarcity and funding were perennial issues. Brother Joseph reported to the Michigan Indian Superintendent that some of the annuity money earmarked for the construction of a school and missionary teacher had to instead go to the purchase of cattle and farming equipment just to survive the next winter.<sup>24</sup> Even the Bishop of Detroit, Peter Lefevre, took notice of the plight of the Indians. He petitioned to the Michigan

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<sup>23</sup> Brother Joseph (Charles Rother), letter to William A. Richmond, April 1845, Folder 5, Potawatomi Nation Collection (CZCN), UNDA.

<sup>24</sup> Brother Joseph (Charles Rother), letter to William A. Richmond, January 11, 1845, Folder 5, CZCN, UNDA.

Superintendent of Indian Affairs, “the scarcity of provisions in that part of the country makes their white neighbours [*sic*] stint their charities towards them more than ever, as if doomed to the severest trials and afflictions[;] game [meat] is also become extremely scarce.”<sup>25</sup> Sorin himself occasionally advocated on behalf of the struggling Holy Cross school in Silver Creek, for which the teachers like Brother Joseph were not receiving the full annuity payment promised from earlier treaties with Pokagon.<sup>26</sup>

Sorin had sympathies for the hard-pressed Indians that his predecessor Stephen Badin was so fond of, but his administrative duties of running Notre Dame and building its infrastructure distracted him from the sidelined Potawatomi mission. Indeed, he struggled often with funding and the discipline of his subordinates, and a six-month long fundraising venture to France in 1846 put him at distance, both physically and mentally, from any intimate knowledge of Indian affairs.<sup>27</sup> At Notre Dame itself, there was a small manual arts school and asylum for orphans and runaway boys. Ostensibly, this was to be a continuation of the training school Badin had founded for the Potawatomi, but few Potawatomi had interest in manual labor schooling. The first asylum burned down in 1849, and the manual arts school came to primarily shelter boys from poor Irish Catholic families.<sup>28</sup> Despite Indian boys becoming a marginal presence at the school, one late-twentieth

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Lefevre, letter to Robert Stuart, February 19, 1845, Folder 5, CZCN, UNDA.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Sorin, letter to William A. Richmond, December 13, 1848, Folder 5, CZCN, UNDA.

<sup>27</sup> O’Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 202-205.

<sup>28</sup> Sorin to Basil Moreau, January 22, 1845, CSOR 1/9, UNDA. The story of the asylum burning down is recounted in the unpublished diaries of Louis Baroux, CSC. “Forty-three years – Seventeen years in the life of a Missionary Apostolic in Europe, Africa, Asia, and America,” 42-43, c. 1875, Archdiocese of Detroit Manuscripts (DET), Calendared Documents, III-2-n, UNDA. The manual arts school continued up through 1919 and was located west of the main campus and adjacent to the farm. Marion T. Casey, “Echoes: Manual Labor School taught boys trades to earn a living,” *Notre Dame Magazine*, Spring 2020, <https://magazine.nd.edu/stories/echoes-manual-labor-school-taught-boys-trades-to-earn-a-living/> (accessed June 22, 2021).

century news story would report that a Potawatomi student was responsible for the stone cutting used to create the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto, which is one of the most frequented pilgrimage sites on campus.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond the manual labor school, Notre Dame itself was never a center for Indian ministry, as most of the remnant Neshnabek lived in Michigan. Sorin ended up delegating most of the Indian mission work to his Holy Cross companion Francis Cointet, who arrived from France in the summer of 1843 with additional religious brothers and sisters in training. Based on contemporary accounts, Cointet had a brilliant mind in addition to effective administration skills needed to launch a novitiate (i.e., training house) for Holy Cross sisters. Only twenty-seven years old when he arrived, Cointet taught Greek and Latin for Notre Dame, but he ended up spending more of his time in Bertrand, Michigan, which was closer to the Potawatomi villages and lay outside the jurisdiction of the bishop of Vincennes, Celestine de la Hailandière. Sorin was technically responsible to Bishop Hailandière as Notre Dame's property lay within the northernmost boundaries of the diocese, but Hailandière had an adversarial relationship with the Holy Cross leadership, in part due to his shady involvement in Bernier's attempt to steal Pokagon's reservation mentioned earlier. After some political struggles with the Catholic hierarchy, an opportunity opened for the Holy Cross to sidestep the Diocese of Vincennes. Sorin managed to secure a sisters' novitiate in the village of French-Canadian trader Joseph Bertrand, who, through treaty reservations to his Métis wife Madeleine (Mouto) Bourassa Bertrand, had obtained lands just across the river from Pokagon's Village.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Coplen, "Promises to Keep," *South Bend Tribune*, December 26, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Madeline Bertrand's mother was Potawatomi and her father was French trader Daniel Bourassa, though in later memory she would often be mistaken for being the daughter of Topinabee, the principle *wkama* for the St. Joseph Potawatomi and uncle of Leopold Pokagon. It is likely that through her association with her husband she was adopted into Topinabee's family, which was not an uncommon practice during that time. See Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men*, 93-95.



Madeleine, who was the glue that held together the religious community, invited the Holy Cross to found a mission church and school next to her home. This school served both Catholic Potawatomi and European settlers, and the church served as an operations base for frontier ministry under Fr. Cointet's direction. In a pragmatic move perhaps mixed with symbolic gesture, the Bertrand community dismantled Badin's old chapel that had serviced Pokagon's village before the move to Silver Creek and used its logs to build a community prayer room affixed to the novitiate.<sup>31</sup>

The mission school at Bertrand, called St. Mary's Academy, had a couple distinctive ministry endeavors for Potawatomi. The second floor of St. Mary's Academy (the building still stands today as a private home) had a small orphan asylum for Indian girls, but hardly any other information about that ministry survived for posterity. Frs. Cointet and Sorin would also assign Holy Cross sisters to do Potawatomi ministry in Silver Creek, where they taught English and religion, of which the Neshnabek had hymnbooks and catechism tracts in their own language. The translation efforts were evidentially successful, and one Holy Cross sister brought Potawatomi black-ash baskets to France in 1845 as part of a fundraising effort for the mission.<sup>32</sup>

Even with these successes, the quality and motivations of those Sorin assigned to do Potawatomi ministry were inconsistent at best. Apart from the two resident Holy Cross sisters who ran a school, many other religious workers were sent to Silver Creek for ten days each as a form of penance, including the seminarian Francis Gouesse in 1845 and Sister Mary of the Heart of Jesus in

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<sup>31</sup> *A Story of Fifty Years: From the Annals of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1855-1905, with Illustrations* (St. Louis, MO: Becktold Printing & Book Mfg. Co., 1905), 37-38; Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men*, 98-109. Sleeper-Smith believes that some of the first Holy Cross novices were Potawatomi women.

<sup>32</sup> M. Georgia Costin, "Beginnings in America: The Bertrand Years, 1843-1855," paper presented at Holy Cross History Conference, June 1987, Manchester, New Hampshire, <https://holycrosshistory.com/index-past-papers/>, 9-11; *A Story of Fifty Years*, 46-48, 56-57; Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men*, 110.

1846.<sup>33</sup> Father Theophile Marivault, a Holy Cross priest who accompanied Cointet's entourage, was the first priest Sorin assigned to Silver Creek in 1844, on account that Marivault expressed his personal enthusiasm to work with Indians. However, Sorin disliked Marivault and considered him incompetent, and Potawatomi people seemed to agree. He was assigned elsewhere after only two years and replaced by Louis Baroux in 1847, who proved to be much better qualified and attentive to the Indian ministry.<sup>34</sup> Circumstantially, these episodes suggest that an assignment to live among the Potawatomi was less-than-desirable and even the result of bad behavior for Holy Cross novices.



Figure 32. Sacred Heart of Mary Church in Silver Creek, MI. The current sanctuary is a later construction but stands near the site of the parochial school established by the Congregation of Holy Cross. Leopold Pokagon is buried underneath the church, but his exact resting place is not marked. Photo by the author.

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<sup>33</sup> O'Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 191, 205.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137; John Wack, "University Notre Dame du Lac: Foundation, 1842-1855" (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1967), 50.



Figures 33-34. Many Pokagon Potawatomi families continue to be buried in the Catholic cemetery at Silver Creek. Many graves are decorated with stone turtles, a traditional Native spiritual symbol. Behind the current church lies a marker to unknown persons buried underneath the church, most likely members of the original Potawatomi community. Photos by the author.

The Neshnabek of Michiana were not totally without clerical allies during this time, even as they suffered from want of many basic needs. “Brother Joseph” (né Charles Rother) was one such advocate. Before joining the Congregation of Holy Cross, Rother had directed a boys’ orphanage at St. Peter’s Mission in southern Indiana when he met Edward Sorin and later became the first postulant for the Holy Cross order in America. Noted by Fr. Sorin as an eccentric character, Rother was assigned principal teaching instruction at Silver Creek and assisted by two Holy Cross sisters. Technically not a priest (or perhaps *because* of that), “Brother Joseph” devoted more attention to teaching farming knowledge he had from his native Germany.<sup>35</sup> He also took up the Indians’ cause

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<sup>35</sup> O’Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 81-82. In Roman Catholicism, only a priest/“father” can celebrate sacramental rites (Eucharist, baptism, etc.) as one who has been ordained through the sacrament of Holy Orders, whereas a friar/monk/“brother” (or nun/“sister”) functions in non-sacramental ministry roles, such as teaching, prayer, and care of the sick and needy. Within a religious order such as the Holy Cross, all priests, brothers, and sisters have taken vows of the order (usually poverty, chastity, and obedience), but only priests have been ordained into Holy Orders.

and alerted the Michigan Indian Affairs office when he got word of a plot (possibly the one involving Stanislaus Bernier) of “hungry fellows of South Bend” who tried tricking the Potawatomi into selling Pokagon’s reserve, to which Brother Joseph said, “if by all means I am able to prevent it, I will do it.”<sup>36</sup> Brother Joseph’s zeal for Potawatomi land rights received the displeasure of Bishop Hailandière, who chastised Sorin for appointing him as missionary-teacher to the Indians.<sup>37</sup> While this fear of another forced removal ended up dissipating, Brother Joseph would continually protest with the Michigan Indian Superintendent the lack of annuity payments deserved for the Silver Creek mission. He charged that the Office of Indian Affairs had failed to send annuity payments for the years 1836-1842. This accusation was corroborated, ironically, by traders like Alexis Coquillard and Patrick Marantette who held claims against Potawatomi debtors because annuity payments had been given in Chicago but never made their way back to the Michiana villages. These traders had cooperated with and encouraged the federal government’s Indian Removal policy in the hopes of making wealth, but they later portrayed *themselves* as victims of government duplicity, since they had not received their promised payments, and many of the Indian debtors were now dead or removed to the west.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Brother Joseph (Charles Rother), letter to William A. Richmond, January 11, 1845, UNDA.

<sup>37</sup> O’Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 165.

<sup>38</sup> An untitled article from April 16, 1842, in the *South Bend Free Press* mentions the creation of a committee, which included Alexis Coquillard, to file grievances against the Office of Indian Affairs for failing to process their claims against Indian debtors. Located in “Papers re: Potawatomi Claims Against US Government,” Indians of North America Printed Material (PPO’T), UNDA. Patrick Marantette had received a land deed signed by President Andrew Jackson to settle near the Notawaseppi reserve (Mendon, MI), and in 1842 he likewise claimed that because the treaty annuities were not received, he had had to supply Indians food and other goods out of his own expenses, to the supposed impoverishment of his own property. The letter excerpted: “The Indians of St. Joseph have with but few exceptions, not received any annuities since the treaty of Chicago of 1833, because the payments were made at Chicago a distance of more than 150 miles; the Indians and even the traders frequently did not know of the payment, and when they did know the amount of the annuities to be received would not bear their expenses in going to receive it. [T]his is the reason why the Indians became so largely indebted[*sic*] to us. They received nothing from the Government and we were compelled to supply them. My account commenced in 1836 at the time the government had, agreeably to the treaty agreed to remove the Indian West, still they were not removed, but permitted to remain in the country without getting anything

Indeed, the Office of Indian Affairs had been recalcitrant on annuities owed to the Michiana Neshnabek, with some agents ignoring or flat-out denying payments to pressure remaining Indians to remove to the west. After 1843, the federal Commissioner of Indian Affairs finally agreed to start sending annuity money but provided only a fraction of what they were owed under the terms of a treaty that the St. Joseph Potawatomi were not even signatories to.<sup>39</sup> Part of the problem (besides certain government agents who refused to honor past treaty arrangements) was the nebulousness of “Pokagon’s band,” since not all Potawatomi who stayed in Michigan were directly affiliated with Leopold Pokagon or even Catholicism. This loophole made it easier for some of the money to be siphoned off elsewhere. Another letter from Brother Joseph claimed that some of the annuity payments owed to Pokagon’s band for their education had gone to Richard M. Johnson’s Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, where a couple Potawatomi students from Michigan (not from Pokagon’s band) had been sent.<sup>40</sup> Brother Joseph’s persistent appeals to justice gained the favor of the superintendent’s office, who finally agreed to provide the annuity payments specifically to Pokagon’s village (Silver Creek) by 1846.<sup>41</sup>

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from the Government and if we did not supply them with such things as were necessary for them, they would steal or take them, and in this way all I am worth in the world has been disposed of and my farm and other property is now advertised for sale to pay the debts I contracted for the very articles which the Indians has got and which constitute my claim...” Patrick Marantette, letter to William Woodbridge, March 11, 1842, Folder 1, Patrick Marantette Papers (CMAR), UNDA.

<sup>39</sup> The treaty in question was the 1829 Treaty of Prairie du Chien. Clifton, *The Pokagons*, 49-51. The issue of the treaty money owed to the Pokagon Potawatomi would not be fully resolved until the late nineteenth century, in large part due to the efforts of Simon Pokagon. John Low, “The Architecture of Simon Pokagon – In Text and On Display,” *Ojibwawke Mitigwaki (Queen of the Woods): A Novel*, Simon Pokagon, ed. Philip Deloria (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> On the Choctaw Academy in Great Crossings, KY, see Chapter Five.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Rother, letter to William A. Richmond, November 3, 1845, United States Bureau of Indian Affairs Michigan Superintendency Records (CZCW), UNDA; William A. Richmond, letter to William Medill, January 14, 1846, CZCW, UNDA; William A. Richmond, letter to Charles Rother, January 14, 1846, CZCW, UNDA.

While Brother Joseph resided in Silver Creek, he had an agenda to reconcile the dispersed groups of Potawatomi as the surest way to guarantee their protection, not to mention the sustenance of the Holy Cross school: “But if the different bands of Potawtomies[*sic*] could be brought together that all might enjoy the benefit of instruction, this would be good, particularly as the teacher’s pay is taken from the common sum, belonging to all.”<sup>42</sup> Brother Joseph’s ambitions for consolidation were challenged not only by problems of payment but also growing internal resentment toward Peter Pokagon. Sorin himself realized his mistake of propping up Leopold’s oldest son as the *wkama* and petitioned the Indian superintendent to remove him and replace him with Singowa.<sup>43</sup> Brother Joseph went further in his denunciations of Peter Pokagon to cast even his father Leopold in a negative light. The Holy Cross brother insinuated Leopold as partly to blame for some of the education fund from the 1832 Treaty of Tippecanoe going to the Baptist-influenced Choctaw Academy in Kentucky instead of to Catholic education.<sup>44</sup> Whatever became of this request is unclear, but Peter Pokagon still held titular control over the Silver Creek community and used the annuity payments for his own benefit when the resident priest and the Holy Cross teachers were absent.<sup>45</sup>

In trying to consolidate their own spiritual and educational foothold with the Michiana Neshnabek, the Congregation of Holy Cross ended up exacerbating factional problems that would effectively shatter its Indian ministry by the following decade. Despite the prevalent myths about

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<sup>42</sup> Brother Joseph (Charles Rother), letter to William A. Richmond, January 11, 1845.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Sorin, letter to William A. Richmond, January 24, 1847, CZCW, UNDA.

<sup>44</sup> Clifton, *The Pokagons*, 81-82. Technically, the Choctaw Academy was a non-sectarian school run through the War Department, although its longest-serving superintendent, Thomas Hutchinson, was a Baptist minister, and its Baptist patron, Sen. Richard M. Johnson, was a nationally prominent member of the Democratic Party. Catholic Potawatomi in Michigan would have associated both Baptists and Democrats with Isaac McCoy and the Removal policy.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Sorin, letter to William A. Richmond, December 13, 1848, CZCW, UNDA.

Indians invariably disappearing, the erosion of Notre Dame's Potawatomi ministry by the mid-1850s was not something pre-determined but resulted rather from unfortunate developments to strike the broader community between 1849-1855. These included the political schism of the Pokagon Band, the reorientation of Holy Cross ministry efforts to other populations, and a plague of typhus that devastated the community.

The first and most influential cause of decline was the division within the Neshnabe communities themselves, though as already mentioned, this was partly due to the Catholic Church's own meddling in the affairs. The Pokagons' lawsuit against Bernier and Hailandière's attempt to possess Silver Creek for the Catholic diocese lasted for seven years until 1848. This problem severely delayed Leopold Pokagon's original plan to allot most of the 876 acres to the heads of Neshnabe families to be in accordance with Michigan law. Instead, Peter Pokagon suddenly announced in 1849 that he would sell his late father's lands, and those families who wished to remain in Silver Creek had to purchase their own land. Unsurprisingly, this upset many who had been under the assumption that the lands would be held communally in trust (the Holy Cross workers had also operated under this assumption, since they never had a previous patent for the approximately forty acres used for the Sacred Heart Church, cemetery, and Holy Cross Indian school). Following the death of Leopold's widow Elizabeth (Kitisse) Pokagon circa 1850, several families left Silver Creek to follow Singowa to a new community several miles north at Rush Lake (Nekaneckenbess) near Hartford, Michigan. Less than half of the Neshnabek stayed with Peter Pokagon at Silver Creek, which dropped in population from 187 in 1849 to 62 in 1851.<sup>46</sup> While many families benefitted in the longer run from Singowa's effective leadership at Rush Lake, the diminished role of Silver Creek

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<sup>46</sup> Clifton, *The Pokagons*, 81-84; Louis Baroux, *Correspondence of Rev. Louis Baroux, Missionary Apostolic of Michigan, to Rev. M.J. DeNeve, Superior of the American College at Louvain*, ed. and trans. E.D. Kelly (Ann Arbor: E.D. Kelly, 1915), 81-83.

proved poorly for the Holy Cross Indian ministry, which already operated on a shoestring budget. Brother Joseph's previous vision to consolidate Michiana's Potawatomi into a single ministry operations base was completely defunct.



Figure 35. All that remains of the Rush Lake site is the Catholic cemetery. Here is buried Leopold's youngest son Simon Pokagon and his wife. Photo by the author.

It also did not help that Brother Joseph had been removed from the Indian mission in 1847 to become a Catholic bookseller in Indianapolis. This reassignment came as part of an appeasement deal between Sorin and Bishop Hailandière, who frequently squabbled with each other over the prerogatives of the Holy Cross versus that of the diocese of Vincennes. Sadly, Brother Joseph would find himself estranged from the Holy Cross order after several failed ventures and chastisements from Sorin and other Notre Dame leadership over his improper handling of finances. In 1850 Brother Joseph earned the dubious distinction of being not only the Congregation of Holy Cross's



first recruit in America but the first person to leave the order. Joseph retained his clerical name and spent a brief stint as an orphanage director in Vincennes before spending the end of his days as a recluse.<sup>47</sup>

Although Brother Joseph's case was a rather exceptional one, his exit from the scene was consistent with the Holy Cross's larger and gradual process of reassigning clergy to other locations and populations while the Potawatomi mission dissipated. Market prices recovered from the earlier depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s, causing an upsurge in white settlers moving to the area. While the 1850 Michigan constitution allowed, provisionally, for Indian men to vote, the path for state citizenship caused further fracturing of Indigenous communities into private land parcels.<sup>48</sup> More parishes became established throughout Michiana, and the Potawatomi towns became small blips in the increasingly intricate network of ministry. Fr. Cointet, who oversaw parochial ministry efforts of the sisters novitiate in Bertrand, proved himself as a competent and well-received bridge between "town and gown" by relating Notre Dame's work to the establishment of new parish communities. His writing indicated that he made itinerant visits to the Potawatomi villages and took them into account in some of his various instructions to Catholic missionaries. "Let them [priests] consider as one of their most important duties to appoint, in every place where there are Catholics some trustworthy and pious persons, especially women, to baptize the children of Infidels and heretics [i.e., Indians and Protestants], when in danger of death... wipe with their handkerchief the forehead of the child, and the incredulous parents will know nothing of the good action." One

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<sup>47</sup> O'Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 213, 276-277; George Klawitter, *After Holy Cross, Only Notre Dame: The Life of Brother Gatian* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2003), 143-144.

<sup>48</sup> On Indian citizenship in Michigan and its unintended consequences, see Theodore Karamanski, "State Citizenship as a Tool of Indian Persistence: A Case Study of the Anishinaabeg of Michigan," *Michigan Historical Review* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 119-138.

anonymous reader of Cointet's private journals (written in Latin and now lost) translated and paraphrased Cointet's highly romantic encounters with Potawatomi people:

Now it was some lone widow who had breathed out her soul to God, in a poor hut, cheered and fortified with the sacraments from his hands, and a troop of desolate orphans fell to the lot of Father Cointet to provide for as best he might. Now he is wandering along the wild banks of the Yellow River rejoicing in the simple touching piety & wondrous faith of his dear artless Indians who become in his eyes God's nobility possessed of a genealogy and an escutcheon, before which the distinctions of a worldly race or family, that cause poor humanity to swell and boast sink into abject littleness...<sup>49</sup>

Like his friend Sorin, Fr. Cointet may have accentuated his brief stays among the Potawatomi because their relative poverty and simple faith provided a reminder to core Christian values of humility and dependency on God. However, Cointet found himself obliged to focus more attention on the waves of Catholic Irish and German immigrants coming to Michiana to work on infrastructure projects like the Michigan Central Railroad. These European newcomers, most of whom came from impoverished backgrounds and brought their own share of spiritual concerns, demanded the missionaries' greatest attention to the further marginalization of the region's Native inhabitants. Even so, Cointet made mention of the Potawatomi villages of Paw Paw, Silver Creek, and Brush Creek to be included on the mission circuit, but he specified that any ministry among the Indians would be "as Fr. Baroux will arrange it."<sup>50</sup>

Louis Baroux, mentioned earlier, was the Holy Cross priest who had been serving the Silver Creek community since 1847, and he would seem to have been one of the more steadfast allies of the Potawatomi. When Singowa's faction departed Silver Creek to form the Rush Lake community,

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<sup>49</sup> Untitled manuscript on history of Notre Dame, c. 1850, pp. 51-52, Folder 1, Box 1, Benjamin Marie Petit Collection (ZCO), UNDA.

<sup>50</sup> O'Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 278; Francis Cointet, Instructions for the Missionary Priest of the Society of the Holy Cross, handwritten original, June 2, 1851, Folder 10, Box 1, Congregation of Holy Cross Priest Collection (CSCP), UNDA.

Baroux ensured the creation of a healthy parish at Rush Lake, but within a year he would be recalled by Father Sorin to launch a new Holy Cross mission across the world in Bengal. Baroux was not even the first choice for the Bengal mission, as the order's motherhouse in France originally wanted Sorin to take on the job. Sorin, with some controversy, declined for fear that Notre Dame would collapse in his absence (he had just become a US citizen in 1850). Sorin likewise saw Cointet as too vital to the parochial ministry throughout Michiana to pull him away overseas. Baroux, then, was considered suitable for the job, presumably because of his effectiveness among people of non-European stock. After a near-death experience overseas, Baroux managed to return to Silver Creek by 1859, and he spoke vociferously on the dignity of Michiana's Native people, though by that point his Potawatomi parishioners had been eclipsed by the waves of Irish and German settlers to the region.<sup>51</sup>

To top things off, an outbreak of typhus between 1854-1855 hammered the nail in the coffin, so to speak, for any lasting ministry engagement with the Potawatomi. In Bertrand, five Holy Cross sisters and three novices perished during the mosquito-ridden summer of 1854, and Fr. Cointet himself perished from the epidemic, which came as a devastating blow to his close friend Edward Sorin. Although more correlational than causal, the loss of life during the typhus outbreak signaled for the Notre Dame community a shift away from its frontier mission focus into becoming a more established center of Catholic institutionalism in the Midwest. In 1855, the novitiate and orphanage originally placed on the reservation of Madeleine Bertrand moved to Notre

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<sup>51</sup> Baroux, *Correspondence of Rev. Louis Baroux*, 83, 87-88; O'Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 290-295; Blantz, *The University of Notre Dame*, 59-61.

Dame now that ex-Bishop Hailandière was gone from the scene.<sup>52</sup> The borderlands boomtown that had been located next to the site of Leopold Pokagon's village receded into obscurity. Shortly after the Bertrand mission left, a mob instigated by the nativist and anti-Catholic "Know-Nothing" political party desecrated the mission cemetery, throwing headstones into the St. Joseph River and vandalizing the interior of the church. The Holy Cross discontinued the Indian school in Silver Creek, and the relocated academy in Notre Dame eventually became Saint Mary's College.<sup>53</sup> The centralization of resources and personnel near South Bend distanced Notre Dame's community both geographically and mentally from the Neshnabek frontier, which facilitated gap in memory for future generations.



Figure 36. St. Joseph's Cemetery is one of the last vestiges of the Bertrand mission community. The footprint of the chapel is still visible. Although some Indians were buried here, including Madeleine Bertrand, most of the surviving headstones are from later Catholic immigrant families. Photo by the author.

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<sup>52</sup> Hailandière had resigned in 1847 and gone back to France, much to the pleasure of Sorin, who could now focus on university's and Holy Cross order's growth without the politicking. O'Connell, *Edward Sorin*, 219-222.

<sup>53</sup> Blantz, 36-37. *A Story of Fifty Years*, 46-48, 56-57. Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men*, 111-112.

While the flame of an active Indian ministry through Notre Dame may have flickered out of existence by the mid-1850s, this did not mean that the Michiana Potawatomi completely left the scene. Even on Notre Dame's doorstep, a few Neshnabek maintained a liminal existence within the South Bend vicinity, though their small numbers and assimilatory practices would render them invisible to later generations of white residents. Some two hundred Potawatomi lived in the neighborhood of Lowell southwest of campus, which was later incorporated into South Bend.<sup>54</sup> A few notable Catholic Potawatomi not connected to the Pokagons, including Stephen Benack, his daughter Mary Ann Benack, and her husband John Peashaway (who may have been Miami but adopted as a Potawatomi), moved to South Bend in the 1850s and were buried in Notre Dame's Cedar Grove Cemetery.<sup>55</sup> By the close of the nineteenth century, South Bend local historian David Leeper commented that "as late as 1882, thirteen living [Indians] on the Grapevine [Creek in St. Joseph County] voted at the general election." He promptly followed up with a declaration that "the recent removal of the Lexis family... to Silver Creek, beyond our state border, was the departure of the last representative of the aboriginal race from within the confines of St. Joseph county."<sup>56</sup> By the early twentieth century, these remaining Indians were assumed to have disappeared, as those who assimilated into mainstream white culture became virtually indistinguishable.

### **Notre Dame Creates Its Foundation Mystique**

As generations passed, living memory of Notre Dame's frontier era (and its expressed commitment to Indian education) all but disappeared. In its wake, the university community

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<sup>54</sup> *A Brief History of the University of Notre Dame du Lac* (Chicago: The Werner Company), 1895, 45; J.B. Sloane, "The Pottawattomies," *The Scholastic* 57, no. 6 (February 1924), 27-28.

<sup>55</sup> The claim that John Peashaway was actually Miami is only found in a line about his burial reported in the Notre Dame student magazine *The Scholastic* 8, no. 20 (February 6, 1875), 282.

<sup>56</sup> David Leeper, "Savage Predecessors," March 22, 1898, *South Bend Tribune*.

developed its own foundation narrative that served the purpose of positioning Notre Dame within a longer continuum of Catholic ascendancy in American life by the late nineteenth century, when overwhelming numbers of Catholic immigrants altered the nation's demographics, especially in the Midwest. Catholics went from representing three percent of the population in 1830 to eighteen percent by 1900.<sup>57</sup> Anglo-Protestant-exclusive narratives about American history now had to accommodate for a broader and more diverse population (though the inclusion of immigrants and new religious denominations most often came at the exclusion of non-whites). It was in this cultural milieu that Edward Sorin set his sights on realizing his dreams of making the University of Notre Dame du Lac a centerpiece of American Catholicism.

Having evolved into an elderly patriarchal figure, Fr. Sorin led the momentum to enshrine the memory of the French missionaries into the university's founding narrative, even though neither Badin, DeSeille, nor Petit had any direct role in launching Notre Dame. For Sorin and many others around him, these missionaries formed part of a larger narrative of Catholicism in America dating all the way back to Christopher Columbus. To counter the anti-Catholic bias laden in many Protestant, or specifically Puritan, narratives of America's founding, many American Catholics sought to prove their own patriotism and belonging by incorporating their own heroes into an American pantheon while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness.<sup>58</sup> Decades earlier, Sorin himself embraced an American identity by becoming an American citizen in 1850 after rejecting a request from his father

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<sup>57</sup> John McGreevy, *American Jesuits and the World: How an Embattled Religious Order Made Modern Catholicism Global* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 9.

<sup>58</sup> For an intellectual treatment of Catholic identity vis-à-vis American citizenship, see McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003). See also Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *American Catholicism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 181-184.

superior to launch a new mission in Bengal (see previous section).<sup>59</sup> After a devastating fire had destroyed much of the campus in 1879, Sorin had the opportunity to implement a new university landscape that could more readily embody the fusion of Catholic and American identities. For example, the new Main Building with its iconic golden dome featured a series of murals, painted by Italian art professor Luigi Gregori, depicting the life of Christopher Columbus. These heavily romanticized murals displayed Columbus as the proto-Catholic missionary to the New World, and Sorin himself even modeled for the scene of Columbus on his death bed (more on the murals' controversy in a later section). Another 1880s Gregori mural in a men's dormitory, St. Edward's Hall, idealized Sorin's first encounter with the Potawatomi at St. Mary's Lake in January 1843, with the Badin log chapel visible in the background.<sup>60</sup> Around the time of major campus construction and beautification projects, Sorin sent a public letter on Christmas Eve 1886 calling for the erection of monuments to Badin, DeSeille, and Petit, as well as Simon Bruté, the first Bishop of Vincennes who had sanctioned the Potawatomi missions. "[Y]ears accumulating tell me that such a just act can no longer be deferred," Sorin said. Four larger-than-life statues, to be sculpted by Gregori, would further cement Notre Dame as the geographical and spiritual meeting ground between the stories of Catholic evangelization and American ascendancy. "I question if there is another spot in the West of America where four such illustrious men of God have, within twelve years, successfully devoted themselves to the salvation of souls and the civilization of the country."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Blantz, 59-61.

<sup>60</sup> Blantz, 136-138; *The Scholastic* 19, no. 1 (August 25, 1885), 2.

<sup>61</sup> Letter reprinted in "The Monument to Bishop Brute," *The Catholic Review*, New York, NY, January 3, 1887.

The increased attention to capturing the spirit of these Catholic missionaries for the Notre Dame community was no mere sentimental nostalgia on Sorin's part – the university was keenly aware of the approaching Golden Jubilee in 1892. Conveniently, Notre Dame's fiftieth anniversary also coincided with the Quadricentennial of Columbus's landing and the upcoming Columbian Exposition to be held in nearby Chicago. The university capitalized on the opportunity to place the Catholic missionary spirit as foundational to the American republic. In a Columbus Day address to the students, Holy Cross brother Stanislaus Fitte celebrated Catholicism's "catholicity" with the American melting pot:

The same spirit of sacrifice and devotion, of justice and benevolence, of gentleness and toleration which came forth from Calvary and permeated, as it were, the whole life of Columbus has united in an immense body nations of all climes, creeds and nationalities under the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America.

To add to Notre Dame's contributions to the civic celebrations around Columbus, one of Gregori's Columbus murals in the Main Building served as the basis of design for the 1893 US commemorative stamp during the Chicago World's Fair.<sup>62</sup> On a serendipitous note, the ailing Sorin also died in 1893. This timing ensured that Sorin would be equally eulogized alongside the missionaries he extolled. The proposed statues for Frs. Badin, DeSeille, Petit, and Bruté at the campus's entrance were apparently scrapped in favor of a statue of Sorin himself.<sup>63</sup>

The Sorin statue's unveiling corresponded with the dedication of another integral icon of campus – a replica of the missionary log chapel. This structure was modeled after recorded specifications from one constructed by Sorin and local residents of South Bend in 1843, which burned down in 1856. To make the construction process authentic to the methods used in the early

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<sup>62</sup> Blantz, 137; speech quoted in *The Scholastic* 26, no. 7 (October 22, 1892), 100.

<sup>63</sup> *The Scholastic* 39, no. 29 (May 12, 1906), 488-493.



nineteenth century, Notre Dame hired William Arnett, a formerly enslaved African American man from Kentucky.<sup>64</sup> However, to great confusion both then and now, the reconstructed chapel blended history of the 1842 founding with the mystique of the university's pre-history as a Potawatomi mission by claiming, erroneously, that the chapel was in fact a replica of one built by Stephen Badin and area Potawatomi circa 1832 (the interior plaque inside the chapel claims 1831). The misconception has persisted to the present. Whether this misrepresentation was intentional or a genuine oversight is not clear. No matter, the memorialists constructed the log chapel not for historical precision but as a shrine to Fr. Badin and the spirit of the missionaries.<sup>65</sup>

Several years earlier, Sorin before his death had negotiated the return of Badin's body from its original resting place in Cincinnati to Notre Dame's campus. Sorin personally knew Badin back when Notre Dame was just getting established, and according to an oral tradition, Badin had expressed a wish to be buried by St. Mary's Lake. The eventual reconstruction of the log chapel and the reinterment of Badin's remains inside it was deemed an act of "poetic justice" to the pioneer priest's wishes.<sup>66</sup> To amplify the chapel as a sacred space, the university also commissioned art professor John L. Worden to paint a mural of DeSeille's Last Communion with the Potawatomi, since DeSeille had died on or very near that site. Beyond this explicit visual reference to Potawatomi people worshipping on the site of Notre Dame, no interpretive signage, interior or exterior, provides

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.; James J. Trahey, "Dujarié Hall," *The Scholastic* 39, no. 24 (March 31, 1906), 401.

<sup>65</sup> The log chapel replica was consistent with other acts of American Catholic shrine creations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Notre Dame's own Our Lady of Lourdes grotto, built only ten years before the log chapel. According to material culture scholar Colleen McDannell, "The site or object becomes authentic in the desire of the spectator, not in the precision of the details." In other words, the sacredness of the spiritual world becomes reified in these physical spaces in ways that trump physical particularities. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 161.

<sup>66</sup> An account of this story was featured in "Father Sorin," *The Scholastic* 39, no. 29 (May 12, 1906), 491-493.

any historical context for the chapel and the role played by Native Americans at the university's founding. Indians, as depicted in the log chapel space, acted as convenient set-dressing for the university's "wilderness" beginnings. Once pilgrims prayed or paid respect to the memory of Fr. Badin and Notre Dame's "humble beginnings," they could exit the shrine to be immersed in the success story of Notre Dame as a leader of American Catholicism – a narrative that would greatly strengthen throughout the twentieth century.

In contrast to the pomp and fanfare of the log chapel's opening and Badin's reinterment, a more quiet and somber reburial took place a couple decades following in the campus' Cedar Grove Cemetery. During the expansion of a road (Angela Boulevard) leading west of campus in 1928, construction workers discovered the bones of Neshnabek people who had died at the Ste. Marie du Lacs mission, for whom Benjamin Petit had erected an iron cross (long lost) just prior to joining the Trail of Death in 1838. The story was the object of much curiosity in the local paper, and the Holy Cross decided to transfer the remains to the campus cemetery and erect a memorial stone. The plaque on the stone (unchanged since 1928) merely stated that there were "Pottawatomie Indians" buried beneath and that the remains were originally located one mile west, but no mention is made of a connection to the Ste. Marie du Lacs mission.



Figure 37. Monument for unnamed Potawatomi in Cedar Grove Cemetery, erected 1928. Photo by the author.

### **Notre Dame's Potawatomi Shadow**

The Potawatomi Trail of Death narrative features the most heavily in Notre Dame's memory of its relationship with the Native peoples of the St. Joseph River Valley. On one hand, the narrative provides a clean Midwestern parallel to the more famous Cherokee Trail of Tears, but this selective memory also served religious purposes for Notre Dame's Catholic identity. In a general sense, themes of redemptive suffering and exile prove exceedingly fitting for a Christian narrative. As seen in Chapter Two with Brainerd Cemetery, ex-Confederate white Protestants found common identity with beleaguered Cherokees when the story of the Trail of Tears was repurposed as a Southern redemption narrative. Catholics in the lower Great Lakes created a parallel narrative of solidarity with maligned Indians who were victims of secular (i.e., Protestant) settler aggression. Notre Dame's Catholic community drew upon their own experiences of anti-Catholicism to make the case for why

the lack of support for Catholic education and ministry had created much suffering for the Indians. Indeed, that was an issue even Fr. Badin complained about in his writing to Fr. Sorin: “The American Gov[ernmen]t has not been much favorable to Catho[lic] Miss[ionaries]. If it had done for us the 10<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> [percent of effort] of what has been done in favor of Prot[estant] minist[ers]. Oh...!”<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps *because* Catholics operated outside the American mainstream during the nineteenth century, Notre Dame affiliates made notable acknowledgements to Native Americans only decades after the events of the Removal Era. As early as 1867, the St. Cecilia Philomathean Association, an early student debating club, debated over the resolution “Do Indians possess a right to the soil?” in which the affirmative side won.<sup>68</sup> Issues of the student magazine *The Scholastic* commonly drew upon the memories of Badin and Sorin’s missionary work among the Potawatomi, reproducing on occasion their correspondence. In 1899, during the outbreak of the Philippine-American War, one student, Andrew J. Sammon, produced an essay that decried militarism as contrary to Christian principles and drew upon the example of Benjamin Petit and Menominee’s Potawatomi band to make a case for peace. His tone was highly paternalistic, but he used the examples of missionaries to argue why Christian instruction of non-white peoples was a far better alternative than warfare. “[W]e have the words of the commander [John Tipton] himself to the effect that the saintly Father Petit did more to control the savages than the whole regiment could do with arms.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Stephen Badin, letter to Edward Sorin, December 20, 1843, Folder 51, Series 2, CSOR, UNDA.

<sup>68</sup> *The Scholastic* 1, no. 15 (Dec 14, 1867), 7.

<sup>69</sup> *The Scholastic* 32, no. 28 (April 22, 1899), 489.

More often than not, the trope of Indigenous peoples as wretched and destitute served to boost Euro-American Catholics' sense of themselves as saviors intervening on their behalf and pitted against aggressive secular (i.e., Protestant) greed. Sammon, who was a former journalist-turned-novitiate for the Congregation of Holy Cross, delivered in 1899 an impassioned oration at Notre Dame's Washington Hall decrying the US government's deprivations of Native Americans. What is striking about Sammon's address is his selectivity of problems and solutions from a Catholic perspective. "Land, money or private reservations are not the Indian's greatest needs. He needs Christian education most." Sammon decried the federal government's platitudes about providing Indian education through residential schools by calling out an apparent lack of commitment and funding for Catholic schools, claiming that only 8 out of 40 Catholic Indian tribes received educational allowances for parochial schools. "But cases are not few where Catholic nuns, who begged to build schools near the reservations, and taught the Indian children successfully for years, lost their contract under the new 'shaving' system, and saw their children forced to attend non-Catholic government schools."<sup>70</sup>

Sammon went on to appeal to the Indians' character of generosity in contrast to the white man's greed. "Unless we take steps to stop these legal robberies of Indian lands, our deeds will cry to heaven for vengeance and go down to posterity as a disgraceful stain on our country's banner." Nevertheless, these calls for justice never pointed to specific examples, either historical or contemporary. He also seemed to have been confused on the persistence of Native communities in the Lower Great Lakes. Sammon claimed that Indians "were the first audience that greeted the saintly Father Sorin on the very grounds we now occupy; but they have been banished; we care not

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<sup>70</sup> Speech quoted in *The Scholastic* 33, no. 10 (November 11, 1899), 157-159.

how.” The proposed solutions were likewise ambiguous: Indians ought to be given “the proper opportunity” to “take up the white man’s burden at the plow or in the work-shop,” and that “the fear and love of God” would redress historical wrongs, provided Catholics stepped up to the plate to take active considerations for those less fortunate.<sup>71</sup>

Into the early twentieth century, Notre Dame students continued to revisit their university’s connection with Indian Removal and grappled to make sense of it from a Catholic perspective. Articles in *The Scholastic* consistently lauded Leopold Pokagon’s bravery and piety in connection with the missionary priests, but these accounts also confused or conflated the fate of Pokagon’s band with that of Menominee and the “Trail of Death.” Because of the presumption that most of the St. Joseph Potawatomi bands were Catholic converts, they readily made comparisons between the plight of Indians and other historical examples of Catholic persecution against Protestant tyranny. In 1914, student writer John Urban Riley gave a highly pathetic account of Potawatomi deportation from South Bend:

But most of them, taken unawares and without a struggle, were herded into carts and prairie schooners by the abusive general and his men and started on their sorrowful journey. Families were separated, those who resisted were, beaten, **and so like the Acadians** [*emphasis added*], they were driven from their homes and lands into exile. Those found in the woods were shot, and the few who gathered around the good priest in the little chapel were imprisoned there, where most of them died of fever.<sup>72</sup>

In the same article, Riley acknowledged Pokagon’s earlier resistance to a Protestant minister (presumably Isaac McCoy) by refusing to sign a treaty, but he never mentions Pokagon’s ultimate success in securing a private land deed for his band in southwestern Michigan.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. A biographical sketch of Sammon is recorded in “His First Mass,” *The Scholastic* 37, no. 6 (October 17, 1903), 102.

<sup>72</sup> John Urban Riley, untitled article, *The Scholastic* 47, no. 28 (May 16, 1914), 654.

References to Native Americans were sometimes placed in context of larger discussions about the role of Catholicism as a civilizing force in opposition to Protestant society's materialism and avarice. At Notre Dame's Diamond Jubilee in 1917, Victor James Dowling, a prominent Catholic justice of the New York Supreme Court, delivered an address to the student body that appealed for Catholic education to save American morals and institutions. He argued:

While non-Catholic civilization has withered and destroyed every savage race which it has sought to reclaim, Catholic civilization has revived and preserved those whom it evangelized. Look at the Philippines, on the one hand, with the only large mass of Asiatics converted to Christianity in modern times, — some six or seven millions living in brotherhood with their conquerors, — and compare their fate with that of our own Indians on the other. — And even in those countries where the Church was most persecuted, she proved herself the sole protector of the stability of Christian society by her promotion of Christian education...<sup>73</sup>

As with other examples, civic-minded and revivalist Catholics at Notre Dame often used Indigenous peoples as rhetorical devices to evaluate their own status as a religious minority (despite being the largest American religious denomination) living within a Protestant-dominated society. This is not unlike white Southern evangelicals from Chapter Two who saw their preservation actions on behalf of Indigenous people as part of a larger moral agenda to preserve religious virtues amid a modernizing and secularizing world.

The specter of an Indian and frontier past continued to reveal itself in subtle ways throughout the twentieth century as the university embarked on its own struggle to reconcile its Catholic identity with modernity. Historian Mark Massa pointed out the importance of Notre Dame's "Fighting Irish" football team as a key instrument in the university's propulsion into modernity and overcoming of anti-Catholic ridicule. Incidentally, the football program launched and expanded under the direction of its Protestant and Norwegian immigrant coach, Knute Rockne,

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<sup>73</sup> Speech quoted in *The Scholastic* 50, no. 35 (June 1917), 584.

who used revenue from campus athletics to develop Notre Dame's overall prestige *contra* "elite" coastal institutions.<sup>74</sup> Coach Rockne, both during his life and in memory, represented a transition in the role of football as a means of cultivating a robust school spirit, and for a Catholic university, elevation to national prominence despite the prejudices of Protestants. Former Notre Dame President John W. Cavanaugh, C.S.C., attributed Rockne's football team with masculine religious character to withstand the many affronts of those who resented Catholics. Strangely, Cavanaugh compared the football team's persecution with that of Native Americans:

It is an interesting circumstance that as our government's treatment of the Indians drove them into what is now Oklahoma and ultimately made millionaires out of so many of them, so the contemptuous attitude of many men and institutions in the Middle West by forcing Notre Dame to play the Army and the Navy and Georgia Tech and the California institutions, for example, was really the means of fixing national attention on Notre Dame games and contributing to their general reputation.<sup>75</sup>

This imagined identification with Native Americans was also manifested in the professed admiration for the Carlisle Indian Industrial School's football team, whom Notre Dame frequently played. The success of Notre Dame's most famous football star, George Gipp, would commonly be compared with that of Jim Thorpe (Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma) of the Carlisle Indians football team.<sup>76</sup>

After Rockne's untimely death in a plane crash, the university worked quickly to memorialize the football program's founder in stone effigy. The Rockne Memorial Fieldhouse, completed in 1931, featured a conglomeration of visual and architectural motifs that rooted Notre Dame within

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<sup>74</sup> Massa, *Catholics and American Culture*, 201-203.

<sup>75</sup> John W. Cavanaugh, Postscript to *The Autobiography of Knute Rockne*, ed. Bonnie Skiles Rockne (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1931), 268-269.

<sup>76</sup> The original attribution comparing Gipp to Thorpe came from the *New York Herald* but was reprinted in issues of *The Notre Dame Scholastic*. Paul J. Halliman, "The Story of a Forward Pass," *The Scholastic* 63, no. 11 (November 29, 1929), 336-338.



European Catholic and American Indigenous traditions. On opposite ends of the main entrance were etched reliefs of Robert de La Salle and Leopold Pokagon, who according to contemporary accounts represented the arrival of Christianity to the Great Lakes and to whom Notre Dame owed its establishment. In the context of other symbols on the gym's architecture as well as Rockne's broader cultural legacy (including the 1940 film *Knute Rockne, All American* starring Pat O'Brien and Ronald Reagan), the inclusion of Native American icons like Pokagon also blended Catholic and American associations of manliness and moral character.<sup>77</sup>



Figure 38. Bas relief of Leopold Pokagon built atop the entrance to Rockne Memorial Gymnasium. Photo by the author.

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<sup>77</sup> Sherry Lindquist, "Memorializing Knute Rockne at the University of Notre Dame: Collegiate Gothic Architecture and Institutional Identity," *Winterthur Portfolio* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 13-15. Lindquist erred in her assumption that the Pokagon relief was an anachronistic portrayal of Simon Pokagon (1830-1899) rather than his father Leopold Pokagon (1775-1841). This error does not destabilize, however, Lindquist's overall argument that the architecture of Rockne Memorial Fieldhouse embodied values of masculinity, race, and civilization that were typical for the early to mid-twentieth century.

Outside of the domain of sports, the missionary character of a Catholic university continued to be evoked during the twentieth century. The injustices suffered by the Potawatomi in particular would frequently be recounted, but Notre Dame's retention of an institutional "underdog" identity as distinct from the majority Protestant America most always exculpated the university from any guilt or responsibility for Indigenous removal and marginalization. At the same time, Notre Dame Catholics were more than willing to claim American traditions that they believed were compatible with Catholic values. In a 1940 radio address to students, Notre Dame President J. Hugh O'Donnell drew upon the 1787 Northwest Ordinance's encouragement of religious missions and schools to claim that "the frontiersmen insisted on this Christian concept of education" and that religious instruction was at the "heart" of the true pioneer spirit (never mind any motive for greed).<sup>78</sup>

The university's centennial in 1942 celebrated this idealized memory of the Catholic frontier as a place of interracial amity and cooperation. For example, newly commissioned paintings in the cafeteria (now the South Dining Hall) by Chicago artist Augustin G. Pall narrated a progression of civilization from early colonial contact to the present. The west wall mural depicted a romanticized view of Sorin, the French trader Alexis Coquillard, and six Potawatomi Indians constructing the first log chapel (the one replicated in 1906).<sup>79</sup>

When persons did point out injustices to Indigenous people, they were equally ready to vindicate the missionaries as heroes. In a 1964 write up for the alumni magazine, Rev. Thomas J. O'Donnell highlighted Benjamin Petit "as one of the first who dared to be counted with a minority

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<sup>78</sup> Radio address quoted in *The Scholastic* 73, no. 22 (April 19, 1940), 11. According to William Halsey, American Catholics were instrumental during the interwar era in appropriating American idealism as a way to hedge itself against the pessimism that crept into Protestant America during this same era. William Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 198), 2-6.

<sup>79</sup> Description of murals given in *The Scholastic* 77, no. 1 (September 18, 1942), 13.

group.”<sup>80</sup> This theme of religious educators defending the marginalized against a predatory government was called upon, interestingly, during a 1975 ceremony for US President Gerald R. Ford, who came to Notre Dame to receive an honorary law degree. In his opening address to the attendees, Notre Dame President Theodore Hesburgh recounted (with some inaccuracies) the familiar story of Leopold Pokagon petitioning for the arrival of “black robes” to minister to his people and the subsequent disgrace of Indian Removal and the shutting down of the Potawatomi mission. Hesburgh used that historical backdrop to display what he claimed as a long historical rift between educators, especially religious educators, and the government. President Ford was lauded as someone who had “thrown a bridge across that gulf.” He went on to honor Ford in a way that fit nicely into Notre Dame’s preexisting narrative of itself as a devoutly Catholic institution that had won over and redeemed American society:

We honor him for that act and for the healing of this rift between the universities and colleges and our government, between the religious groups in our country and government, between so many people who felt alienated and have come to see that under this man and his healing power we can again be one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all.<sup>81</sup>

As with earlier iterations going all the way back to Edward Sorin, the narratives of Catholics as both a foil to the bad aspects of American history and as a savior to the positive qualities of American patriotism remained consistent up through much of the twentieth century. Sins against Indigenous people could be acknowledged and even condemned, but by and large these narratives also relegated Indians as helpless victims of forces that even their pious missionary allies could not shake off.

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas J. O’Donnell, “Man and the Moment,” *Notre Dame Alumnus* 42, no. 6 (July 1964), 16.

<sup>81</sup> Hesburgh’s speech recorded in *Notre Dame Reports* 4, no. 15 (April 11, 1975), 320-321.



Figure 39. The building, located near Dowagiac, MI, was the tribal government headquarters for the Pokagon Potawatomi at the time they applied for and received federal recognition in 1994. The building still retains their former non-profit organization name, “Potawatomi Indian Nation, Inc.” Photo by the author.

### **Native Presence and Campus Reciprocity**

By the 1970s onward, the Notre Dame community began to take more public notice of the Native Americans still residing in Michiana. The *Notre Dame Observer*, the main student publication from the 1960s onward, gave an article in 1976 bringing light to the presence of some one thousand Potawatomi and Miami persons living in the area. A small Miami community of about a hundred lived in a neighborhood north of Notre Dame’s campus and had a community center housed in a garage. Additionally, about 800 Potawatomi lived in the area, particularly in Niles County, Michigan. These were the descendants of Leopold Pokagon’s band, although they were not formally recognized as a distinct Indian tribe until 1994. Nevertheless, the article’s author painted a bleak and deterministic picture. “The cultural loss and social problems besetting the Miami and Potawatomi Indians today are merely the end product of an inevitable process – the advance of civilization.” The article emphasized Indians’ apparent incompatibility with modern living. “The Indians, natural inhabitants of the forest which once stood in place of South Bend, are no longer in an environment

conductive to their cultural traits.” An interviewed South Bend lawyer also remarked, “Many of them could not even be recognized as Indians anymore.”<sup>82</sup>

Putting aside this pathetic portrayal in the student newspaper, the university had long been keeping an unofficial, mostly unacknowledged tradition of exchanging food packages for area Potawatomi families in return for handcrafted baskets. Black ash basket weaving has long served as a cottage industry among Michiana Neshnabek as both a source of revenue and cultural preservation, and Notre Dame for decades served as a major client. In the 1920s and 1930s, the relationship was one of reciprocity and typically occurred around major holidays. As mass-produced storage containers became more commonplace after World War II, and as numbers of Potawatomi persons expert in traditional skills decreased, the exchange devolved into one of “charity” by Notre Dame simply providing cardboard boxes of food each Christmas as ostensible thanks for Notre Dame’s use of Potawatomi land.<sup>83</sup> In a 1970 press release, university purchasing agent Jerome J. Sechowski acknowledged that during his forty years on staff, Notre Dame had annually provided “charity” food donations to Potawatomi each Christmas, which apparently dated back to Sorin’s tenure. Sechowski also reported that “no records are maintained in this particular area of university philanthropy,” but no reason is given for why this particular program had been left “off the books.”<sup>84</sup>

Throughout this time, Notre Dame had long ceased to provide any dedicated educational program for Neshnabe youth. The manual labor school and farm, which was never exclusively for Indian students since Sorin, would shut down after World War I, and many Potawatomi in Michigan

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<sup>82</sup> Don Reimer, “The Indian in South Bend,” *The Notre Dame Observer*, January 27, 1976.

<sup>83</sup> Clifton, *The Pokagons*, 116-117.

<sup>84</sup> Notre Dame Press Release, December 18, 1970, UNDA.

sent their children to parochial Indian schools to get their formal education. As local economies changed toward skilled industrial work, some Neshnabe parents deemed it necessary to apply for and send their children to federally run Indian boarding schools, including Mount Pleasant Industrial School in Michigan and the Haskell Institute in Kansas. At the national level, these boarding schools created (and continue to hold) a highly controversial and stigmatized legacy. In the specific case of Michiana Neshnabek who attended these institutions, they tended to result in both the loss of traditional language and cultural knowledge, but they also facilitated their employment into modern industries, including paper mills, radio manufacturing, and construction work. The schools also exposed the relatively isolated Potawatomi to other Indigenous nations to awaken a “pan-Indian” consciousness.<sup>85</sup> The educational options available for most Native Americans during the first half of the twentieth century set the Michiana bands of Potawatomi on a divergent trajectory from Notre Dame’s rise to cultural and academic prestige.

During the latter decades of the twentieth century, Native American presence at Notre Dame continued to be marginal, with single digits of Native American-identifying students for most academic years in the 1970s and 1980s. However, with the Columbus Quincentennial of 1992 approaching, activist-minded persons began to take more sensitive public stances on Notre Dame’s complicated past with settler colonialism, including unresolved relationships with the school’s proto-mission to the Potawatomi Nation. In sharp contrast to the campus celebrations from a century ago, Notre Dame was in no position to give unqualified encomiums to the Catholic “missionary spirit” and draw a straight line from Columbus to Badin to Sorin. In light of the Native American cultural and political renaissance from the 1960s onward (in sync with other social and racial liberation

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<sup>85</sup> Clifton, *The Pokagons*, 118-120.

movements), Notre Dame had to start acknowledging contributions beyond its majority-white European immigrant influences. The creation of multicultural initiatives could also backfire by exposing ignorance and cultural insensitivities. A Multicultural Fall Festival in 1990 had Potawatomi visitors performing dances in traditional attire. The *Notre Dame Observer*, however, misattributed the performers for students playing Indian and captioned a photo of the dance as “Indian Invasion?”

The newspaper blunder provoked headline backlash from student Monica Tsethlikai (Zuni Pueblo) and Stephen D. Grissom, the Associate Director of Undergraduate Admissions, who demanded apologies for the insensitive caption. Tsethlikai and Grissom also used this opportunity to bring light to Notre Dame’s failure to follow through on historical commitments to the Potawatomi. “The University would not stand where it is today if they [Potawatomi] had not been so generous... The Potawatomi Indians gave this land to the University in exchange for the education of their people. The University is now in violation of this agreement because qualified Potawatomi Indians do not receive a free education. It is very ironic that Notre Dame can so strongly claim that they are a family-based organization and at the same time leave important contributing members out in the cold.”<sup>86</sup>

Perhaps in response to this incident, in 1991 the university announced a financial aid plan, named the Holy Cross Scholarship Program, to provide free tuition “available to all admitted students who can prove Potawatomi tribal membership and demonstrate financial need.”<sup>87</sup> The federal recognition of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians as a distinct tribe certainly boosted their visibility and the imperative for the settler communities to do justice to them. No longer could

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<sup>86</sup> “Caption ironic in its ignorance,” Letter to the Editor, *Notre Dame Observer*, October 5, 1990.

<sup>87</sup> “Financial Aid Provided to Potawatomi Indians,” *Notre Dame Reports* 20, no. 19 (July 12, 1991), 428.

Indians be dismissively talked about as helpless victims of past conquests who were fated to disappear entirely.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, more university students, faculty, and staff had taken it upon themselves to further interrogate the historical relationship between Notre Dame and area Indigenous nations. In most cases, these initiatives were led by individuals rather than as part of a wider administration-sanctioned policy. Anthropology professor Mark Schurr was particularly instrumental in creating networks with tribal members of the Pokagon Band. Between the late 1990s and early 2000s, his field archeology classes collaborated with John Warren of the Pokagon Band to locate the remains of Leopold Pokagon's village and a Catholic chapel from the 1830s. The collaboration was deemed as one of "great pleasure," despite Warren being accused as a "traitor" by a certain faction of his tribe who held deep (and not unfounded) suspicion for academics.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, history and media studies professor Kathleen Biddick organized in 2004 a collaborative venture for a senior capstone class titled, "Haunted Campus" that conducted primary research with the approval of Pokagon Band members to create a video documentary on Notre Dame's ties to the Potawatomi. The course culminated in an outdoor ceremony to plant a commemorative tree and install a plaque outside the Badin Log Chapel (the plaque has mysteriously disappeared as of 2021). Speaking at the event were Father William Lies, C.S.C., Chief Brian Buchanan (Miami Nation of Indiana) and Kevin Daughtery (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi). According to Biddick, her chief concerns for this project

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<sup>88</sup> Sarah Nestor, "Pokagon site reveals treasures," *Notre Dame Observer*, November 7, 2001. Schurr collected the findings of the multiyear excavations at Pokagon's Village to edit a special issue for the *Midcontinental Journal of Archeology* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2006). See especially Schurr, "Untangling Removal Period Archaeology: The Complexity of Potawatomi Sites," 5-14.



were addressing the “critical issues” of memory and forgiveness, which was especially pertinent for a religiously affiliated university.<sup>89</sup>

One of the features produced during the Haunted Campus class was a video-recorded interview with former Pokagon Band elder Greg Ballew. This was one of the first times Notre Dame students had invited a Pokagon Band member to not only speak about the historical relationship between the university and the Potawatomi but also to provide input on what the Potawatomi *currently* desired from Notre Dame. Ballew did not believe that there was some conspiracy-cover up in Notre Dame’s negligence of its original promises to the Potawatomi, but he stated it was “something which happened over a period of time, and I would like to see it corrected.” Ballew also said, “They wouldn’t be here except for us... I would ask them [university administration] to acknowledge at least their history with the Potawatomi.” To assuage misconstrued fears of Indian militancy, Ballew reminded, “We’re not asking them to change the Notre Dame mystique.” In other words, he believed Notre Dame’s existence was a good thing – it would be a moot point to argue over *who* actually “owned” the campus. “The issue of land ownership among Native Americans is a sort of Catch-22... our tradition is that no person can own the land. It belongs to the Creator – we’re just caretakers of it.”<sup>90</sup>

If these public history projects promised to restore productive conversation between the university and Indigenous people, the perspective of Native American students at Notre Dame gave a much dimmer outlook. A February 2001 special inset of the student newspaper provided multiple profiles of contemporary Native American experiences at a major Catholic university. This series of

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<sup>89</sup> Kate Gales, “Haunted Campus’ class honors historical figures,” *Notre Dame Observer*, April 20, 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Greg Ballew, interviewed by Notre Dame students, April 20, 2004, “Haunted Campus DVD,” 19:00, ANDS 21824, Notre Dame Student Collection (NDS), UNDA.

articles covered a wide range of issues, from dealing with institutional memory, financial obligations to Indigenous people, and struggles for Native students to find community. History Professor Emeritus Marvin O'Connell claimed "the University has an obligation to recruit Native Americans because of its Catholic identity." Evidentially admissions offices went to great lengths to recruit Native American students, particularly those at Catholic high schools on tribal reservations.<sup>91</sup> While campus admissions might have put on a great show when it came to reaching out to prospective students and offering generous financial aid, follow through tended to be lacking once those Native students arrived on campus. For one, many of the students in that targeted demographic came from disparate reservations thousands of miles away, making the cultural rift with the majority white Midwest very stark. Student Rochelle Lacapa (White Mountain Apache) testified to a lack of solidarity and cohesion among Native American students given how different individual cultures were, and Native students who did not grow up on a reservation were often ignorant of their own tribal language and cultural traditions. One article identified a particular cultural difference consistent with eighteenth and nineteenth century efforts to educate Indigenous people after a Western fashion: white university culture expected students to learn and develop while separated from their family for extended periods of time on a college campus, whereas in Indigenous cultures, a person's maturity into adulthood maintained the importance of family obligations and kinship support.<sup>92</sup> Still other students expressed ambivalence or even distress over the campus' overwhelming Catholic identity. One Navajo student shared uncomfortable experiences from his freshman retreat when a priest interrogated him about his beliefs about God, heaven, and hell, as well as being forced into

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<sup>91</sup> Maribel Morey, "Sharing a heritage, Building a future," *Notre Dame Observer*, February 19, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> Kiflin Turner, "Uprooting to Notre Dame," *Notre Dame Observer*, February 19, 2001.

awkward conversations with Catholic students who made insensitive remarks about his traditionalist Navajo religion.<sup>93</sup> The *Observer* inset used these multiple factors to draw conclusions for why Native Americans had the highest attrition rate among minority students. Interestingly enough, no information was given about the experiences of Potawatomi students in comparison to Indigenous students more broadly speaking, and it was also not clear if any of the Native students reached out to identified as Christian and/or Catholic.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Notre Dame has embodied a narrative struggle between advancing a more progressive, inclusive agenda for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color) communities while still wanting to remain rooted in the traditional hagiography of the founders. Potawatomi elders began making more regular appearances on campus, primarily through speaking panels during Native American Heritage month. Likewise, the creation of the Native American Student Association of Notre Dame (NASAND) in 1971 and much later the Native American Initiative (NAI) in 2011 provided more avenues for Indigenous students and allies to collectivize and increase visibility, even if the momentum was slow to build.<sup>94</sup> The 2010s in particular saw rising awareness toward problematic symbols in the built environment following tragic mass shootings targeting communities of color, such as the 2015 Charleston A.M.E. church shooting. Iconoclastic currents within American progressivism led nationwide efforts to demand the removal of statues, artwork, and building names that honored persons or themes associated with white supremacy – the most obvious examples being Confederate statues in the American South.

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<sup>93</sup> Kiflin Turner, “Worshipping in their own way,” *Notre Dame Observer*, February 19, 2001.

<sup>94</sup> For highlights of campus events put on by these groups, see Emily Dabish, “SMC hosts Native American panel,” *Notre Dame Observer*, November 25, 2008; Emma Borne, “Group celebrates Native American cultures,” *Notre Dame Observer*, November 10, 2015; “About NAI,” Native American Initiatives, University of Notre Dame, <https://nai.nd.edu/about-nai/> (accessed March 30, 2021).

Notre Dame's most notable contribution to the conversation over problematic symbols was the issue of Luigi Gregori's Columbus murals in the Main Building. As mentioned earlier, these murals were originally commissioned as part of a larger campus building project during the 1880s to solidify Notre Dame as part of a larger trajectory of Catholic "civilization" in the New World. By the twenty-first century, however, expanded perspectives on the negative legacies of European colonization had arguably made the original intent of the murals obsolete and offensive to some. The murals' glorification of colonization and paternalistic depiction of Indigenous people had been the subject of muted controversy since at least the 1980s, although the matter came to a head in light of renewed awareness toward systemic racism. Columbus' high profile internationally perhaps made him an easier target to represent the evils of colonial oppression, but he was also easier to criticize because he had no direct connection to the university. Other Gregori paintings, namely one of Father Sorin and the Potawatomi, escaped criticism and demands for removal, despite the depiction being arguably just as paternalistic as those of Columbus. Upon the painting's rediscovery in a storage closet in 2006, the rector of St. Edward's Hall men's dormitory, Fr. Ralph Haag, C.S.C., praised the restoration as a renewal of the missionary spirit of the founder to be impressed upon the students.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Jennifer Metz, "Historical mural rediscovered," *Notre Dame Observer*, September 25, 2006.



Figure 40. This canvas covers one of twelve Christopher Columbus murals in Notre Dame's Main Building. Marcus Winchester of the Pokagon Potawatomi was involved in the design of the canvas covers. Photo by the author.



Figure 41. An 1880s mural by Luigi Gregori depicting Potawatomis at the founding of Notre Dame, located in St. Edward's Hall. Photo by the author.



Figure 42. The mural was rediscovered and restored during a restoration of St. Edward's Hall men's dormitory. Today the mural adorns a study room and commons, though not accessible to non-residents. Photo by the author.

News stories from the 2010s furthered demands to expunge the sin of Columbianism from Notre Dame's most prominent places, even while there continued to be reticence to inculcate Notre Dame's founders or even outright confusion on what to make of their legacy, particularly with campus icons like the log chapel. A 2013 *Observer* article interviewed the rector of the campus's Sacred Heart Basilica over the early missionary history in the area. Fr. Peter Rocca recounted the familiar if romanticized narratives of the Catholic missionaries founding a mission in a virginal wilderness, epitomized by the memorial log chapel, and the mission serving as the genesis for University of Notre Dame. Fr. Rocca made some odd, inaccurate statements, including the claim that "Badin built the chapel in the 1830s after the United States government forced the Potawatomi Native Americans out of the area." Rocca also made false claims that DeSeille and Petit were Jesuits,

and he made no acknowledgement to Leopold Pokagon or the continuity of Potawatomi people in the area.<sup>96</sup>

Unlike Columbus, the issue with the Notre Dame founders, namely the ones buried beneath the log chapel, was never about vilifying or exonerating these particular men. Rather, it was confusion on how to frame the contributions of Indigenous people to Notre Dame's founding in a nuanced way. In the increasingly polarized political climate of the 2010s, efforts to bring historical nuance have been fraught. A 2014 letter to the editor bemoaned the campus's long-term silence of Pokagon and saw an opportunity to redress those silences with the upcoming bicentennial of Edward Sorin's birth. "For an institution so steeped in stories and practices of tradition, it is disappointing that this integral story has been forgotten. In celebrating Father Sorin's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, Notre Dame ought to include the great Native American influence involved in the founding of this University."<sup>97</sup>

The university began making concerted efforts to address the issue of the Columbus murals as the 2010s progressed, using that as a vehicle for tackling the larger tangled relationship with the Potawatomi and other Indigenous peoples. In 2019, Notre Dame president Fr. James Jenkins, C.S.C., approved the creation of a Murals Committee to include a mix of Notre Dame faculty, administration, and undergraduate students (but no Pokagon Band members).<sup>98</sup> The committee produced a variety of recommendations, which included 1) creating an exhibition on the second floor of the Main Building about the university's founding 2) covering the Columbus murals to

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<sup>96</sup> Meg Handelman, "Rector recounts history of Log Chapel," *Notre Dame Observer*, October 2, 2013.

<sup>97</sup> "The ND-Native American story," letter to the editor, *Notre Dame Observer*, November 21, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> A complete list of the committee members was shared by Dennis Brown, "Father Jenkins Announces Columbus Murals Committee," *Notre Dame News*, February 14, 2019, <https://news.nd.edu/news/father-jenkins-announces-columbus-murals-committee/> (accessed July 6, 2021).

establishing a Native Studies program, and 3) endowing a visiting scholar position for a Native American person. One of the committee members, history professor Patrick Griffin, suggested that this initiative fused together Notre Dame's explicitly Catholic mission and the elevation of Indigenous perspectives and experiences:

As people walk into the Main Building, the living room of the University, they are walking into a complex and very American place. . . . As we situate the history of the University into the broader arc of European history as well as 19th century U.S. history – which must include the history of indigenous peoples – it is critical that our voice be that of a Catholic research university – a distinctive view, rooted in Christianity and a belief in the dignity of all humans.<sup>99</sup>

The following fall, Fr. Jenkins himself addressed criticism over the proposed covering of the Columbus murals. Rejecting accusations of pandering to “coddled students and faculty” and “suppress[ing] historical facts,” Jenkins reaffirmed:

The images painted in 1882 celebrate achievements and values we embrace today: heroic exploration, the coming of Christianity to the Americas and the rich heritage of European immigrants — particularly Catholic immigrants — to this land. Yet the arrival of Europeans was in many ways, in the words of St. John Paul II, a “harsh and painful reality” for the indigenous peoples of this land. Our goal has been to convey the broader story in both its positive and negative aspects, and to do so from the perspective of our mission as a Catholic university.

Such an expressly nuanced statement coming from the university's highest level of administration might have been promising for someone like Greg Ballew, who had shared desire for this recognition back in 2004.

Although the president expected the recommendations would be followed in a public manner, the Coronavirus pandemic had the paradoxical effect of unhinging those plans while at the same time accelerating specific measures of action. Compounding the pandemic, the acrimonious

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<sup>99</sup> Griffin's quote appeared in “Recommendations of the Columbus Murals Committee,” July 25, 2019, President's Initiatives, Office of the President, <https://president.nd.edu/presidents-initiatives/columbus-murals/> (accessed July 6, 2021).



2020 presidential election season and heightened media attention to police brutality and Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests accelerated the action to cover up the offensive murals yet stymied the larger efforts to redress the university's silence on its Potawatomi connection. During the summer of 2020, Marcus Winchester, the Director for the Pokagon Band's Department of Culture, consulted on the design of the canvasses to cover the murals by incorporating floral and faunal motifs from traditional Potawatomi stories of creation. He also spent meticulous effort to create interpretive panels to describe the context of his artwork.<sup>100</sup> The canvasses were quickly installed by the fall semester of 2020. While it received a single mention in the *Notre Dame Magazine*, the action occurred under the cover of a socially distanced and restricted access campus, minimizing (perhaps intentionally so) any controversial publicity.<sup>101</sup>

Late in 2021, Notre Dame's website finally unveiled longer-term plans for addressing the legacy of the murals and the university's early connections with the Pokagon Potawatomi. Recognizing the importance of understanding context and change over time, the administration agreed to keep Gregori's murals covered with the Potawatomi canvasses for the majority of the year while uncovering them two weeks each semester for educational purposes. The university also announced plans to install an exhibit about the murals on the second floor, followed by a permanent exhibit about the university's early history to open in 2024.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Marcus Winchester, personal conversation with the author, June 11, 2021. As of 2021, Winchester's interpretive panels have yet to be installed.

<sup>101</sup> "Columbus Murals Covered," *Notre Dame Magazine*, Autumn 2020, <https://magazine.nd.edu/stories/columbus-murals-covered/> (accessed July 6, 2021). The coverings are easily removable so for specific faculty and researchers to access upon request.

<sup>102</sup> "Teaching with the Columbus Murals," University of Notre Dame, <https://www.nd.edu/about/history/columbus-murals/> (accessed January 1, 2022).

Although the specifics of these initiatives have yet to manifest, let alone community reaction to the changes, Notre Dame's most recent efforts to grapple with its history promises a healthy model of a religious institution's ability to tap into its own traditions to redress historical silences and elevate marginalized voices. All the same, as the demographics of the country, the university, and the American Catholic Church continue to change, Notre Dame's leadership will be challenged to move away from the assumption that the voice of Catholic conscience is a white and European voice.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GHOSTS OF BLUE SPRINGS

#### THE CHOCTAW ACADEMY AND THE POLITICS OF RESURRECTING THE PAST

In the early 1980s, Francine Locke Bray was on a personal hunt for a piece of her family history. In her possession were the personal writings of her great-great-grandfather who had been a student at the Choctaw Academy, the first federally run Native American boarding school, in 1832. Francine had long invested in her family and tribal history, and she also sought out the physical traces of the past. With her family in tow, Francine embarked on a road trip from southeastern Oklahoma to the bluegrass region of Kentucky in search of the former plantation of Col. Richard Mentor Johnson, the site of the Choctaw Academy. Johnson's property had been located in a small community called Great Crossings just a couple miles west of Georgetown, the seat of Scott County. Apart from Great Crossings Baptist Church and a low-profile historical marker off the Frankfort Pike, there was virtually no aid in discovering the location of the former Indian school. To Francine's perplexity, most locals gave her blank stares when she asked them, "Do you know where I might find the Choctaw Academy?"

Eventually, a local sheriff escorted Francine's family through winding rural roads to a place he believed might be what she was looking for. Far down a dirt driveway off Stamping Ground Road stood a lonesome three-story stone structure. Despite the building's disuse and age, the roof and walls were intact. Its bucolic setting created a "beautiful" impression on Francine. Could this be where her ancestor was educated 150 years ago? Still, few persons in Scott County had anything more than a vague idea of what the building was. The person who did know something, Francine

was told, was Ann Bevins, a lifelong historian for the Georgetown-Scott County Historical Society who had written the original application to put the Choctaw Academy on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. Although Francine never had the opportunity to meet with Bevins, she did get access to her articles about the history of Choctaw Academy and confirmed that the old building was indeed the last remaining dormitory of the antebellum school.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 43. The north-facing wall of the surviving dormitory of the Choctaw Academy, built c. 1825. Photo by the author.

Thirty years after Francine’s re-discovery of the Choctaw Academy, very little had changed with regard to local memory. When I visited the history museum in nearby Georgetown, I saw a mildly creepy wax figurine of Richard M. Johnson that talked after pressing a nearby button. Next to

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<sup>1</sup> Francine recounted this story in a recorded dialogue with Chip Richardson, Ian Thompson, and Megan Baker for the Chahta Toshi Virtual Speaker Series. “Restoring Choctaw Academy with Dr Chip,” July 26, 2021, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5nrlLEYNzs> (accessed October 14, 2021).

the mannequin was a glass case housing a handful of artifacts related to Johnson's career. These included an 1843 painting of Johnson killing the Shawnee leader Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames, a few of his letters, an 1823 tract for the abolition of debtors' prison, and a school bell from the Choctaw Academy. Beyond the museum itself, Ann Bevins served as the *de facto* knowledge keeper for the county. While perusing through the museum's single box of records related to the Choctaw Academy, I learned that Bevins in 2007 had led a half-day trip to the old dormitory through University of Kentucky's Cooperative Extension Service, but very few others knew about the Choctaw Academy or how to get there. It did not help matters that Johnson's former farm at Blue Springs was on private property and not along a main road.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 44. The former Richard M. Johnson estate at Blue Springs retains much of the bucolic nineteenth century landscape. Photo by the author.

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<sup>2</sup> A brochure from the September 2007 event was shared with me by staff at the Georgetown/Scott County Historical Society.



Figure 45. The interior of the dormitory contains many original construction materials. Photo by the author.

The odd assemblage of materials begged the question: How did such a prominent if not controversial academy for the education of American Indians on the property of one of Kentucky's most prominent politicians next to Henry Clay come to be forgotten by all except the most assiduous historians? Moreover, how is it that substantial physical remnants still exist relative to its marginalization in popular memory? It is no secret that most antebellum American landscapes were destroyed in the twentieth century to make room for modern infrastructure and suburban sprawl. If, as historian Amrita Chakrabarti-Myers has argued, Johnson's property and the Choctaw Academy were deliberately erased from the local memory due to racism against an Indian school and Johnson's mixed-race children had through an enslaved wife, how is it that a slave cabin, a

schoolhouse, a dormitory, fence, and spring remain standing<sup>3</sup> It may rather be that the site's geographic marginality, not to mention its construction materials, is the happy accident for the historic site's continuing albeit fragile existence.

This chapter will tell the story of the rise, fall, and subsequent rediscovery of a unique Native American boarding school site. The Choctaw Academy in Kentucky, which operated first as a Baptist mission from 1818-1821, and later under the joint sponsorship of the Choctaw Nation, the US War Department, and other Indigenous nations from 1825-1848, was unique in several respects. It was the first Indian school not run by a religious denomination. Unlike most mission schools, Choctaw Academy did not admit female students, as it was seen as a place specifically to train young men to enter public American life. In time, the varied ages of students allowed for the Lancasterian model of instruction, where more advanced students tutored beginners. This particular system later enabled Choctaw alumni to create their own tribally run schools in Indian Territory. The Choctaw Academy was also the second academy funded by the War Department, following the United States Military Academy in 1802 at West Point.<sup>4</sup> Like West Point, students at Choctaw Academy wore martial uniforms and underwent military-style discipline. Choctaw Academy was also unusual for its time as a school not located on tribal lands or in proximity to Native populations. These latter distinctions about Choctaw Academy would foreshadow later assimilation policies at Indian boarding schools, though unlike more notable institutions like Carlisle in Pennsylvania or Mount Pleasant in Michigan, Native students at Choctaw Academy were not coerced into attending, nor

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<sup>3</sup> Amrita Chakrabarti-Myers, "The Erasure and Resurrection of Julia Chinn, U.S. Vice President Richard M. Johnson's Black Wife," blog post, March 3, 2019, *Association of Black Women Historians*, <http://abwh.org/2019/03/03/the-erasure-and-resurrection-of-julia-chinn-u-s-vice-president-richard-m-johnsons-black-wife/> (accessed October 15, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> The US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland was not established until 1845. "History of USNA," United States Naval Academy, <https://www.usna.edu/USNAHistory/> (accessed March 15, 2022).

were they abducted from their families, nor was there ever a goal of stripping students of their tribal identities.

These similarities and differences with other assimilationist boarding schools pose a dilemma for public memory of the Choctaw Academy. On one hand, many people have a preconceived notion (usually negative) when they hear the words “Indian boarding school.” After all, both secular and church-run boarding schools existed well into the twentieth century and are still part of living memory. The popularization of the term “survivor” over “alumnus/a” or “attende” emphasizes a shift in attitude toward the project of assimilation.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the prohibition of Native languages and cultural expressions at the later schools caused severe loss of traditional Indigenous knowledge even as it cultivated a pan-Indian identity. In the age of the Great “*Awakening*,” there may be an expectation to dig up skeletons in the closet (if not mass graves!) at the Choctaw Academy, as occurred at a former Catholic residential school in British Columbia in summer 2021.<sup>6</sup> As such, any effort to salvage some positive narrative for the Choctaw Academy may be construed – indeed, has been construed – as a project that would celebrate settler colonialism or white supremacy. On the other hand, the property’s current state of dilapidation has produced fodder for accusation. Some persons have attributed the decay of the property to racially motivated historical erasure. Is the lack

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<sup>5</sup> For a contemporary reflection by a Red Cliff Ojibwe descendant of a boarding school survivor, see Mary Annette Pember, “Death by Civilization,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 8, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/03/traumatic-legacy-indian-boarding-schools/584293/> (accessed December 18, 2021). Like other contemporary writers, especially non-historians, Pember draws no distinction between the 1819 Civilization Act and the assimilation programs of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, implying that the all educational programs from 1819 onward were continual processes of cultural genocide.

<sup>6</sup> Two hundred children’s graves were discovered at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, followed shortly thereafter by the discovery of some 751 unmarked graves at the former Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. These discoveries sparked international media reactions to condemn and reckon with the historical silences surrounding the residential school program, including demands for Pope Francis to apologize on behalf of the Church’s involvement in compulsory assimilationist programs. Ian Austen, “How Thousands of Children Vanished in Canada,” *New York Times*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html> (accessed March 15, 2022).



of resources and preservation the result of willful neglect? Do Kentuckians neglect the history in their own backyard due to embarrassment or shame about a racially messy family? Or is it fair to say that due to the property's obscure location, it is simply "out of sight, out of mind"?

Underlying this debate over the stewardship of a historic property is the question, "Why should anyone care if a nineteenth-century Indian boarding school is preserved or not?" That issue has been explored in one form or another throughout the preceding chapters: How can historic landscapes shape public consciousness of Native Americans, the historical conditions forced upon Natives to adapt to Euro-American cultures, Christianity's role in these processes, and Native cultural persistence into the present-day? The previous three chapters each explored these issues at individual memory-places. At the Brainerd Mission cemetery in Chattanooga, I recounted a specific historical usage of a Cherokee mission landscape grafted into a Southern and white Protestant redemption narrative. Paradoxically, that redemption narrative promoted suburban boosterism that eventually eclipsed the Cherokee memoryscape by the latter twentieth century. By contrast, Mackinac Island's heritage landscapes of both Catholic and Protestant missions conspicuously feature Native people as central to the story of a colonial borderland between Anishinaabeg, French-Canadians, and Anglo-Americans. Although the modern tourist and recreational scene has not been immune to historical whitewashing, local Anishinaabeg have broken the silence and continue to negotiate their visibility in the Straits of Mackinac. Furthermore, the memoryscape at the University of Notre Dame illustrates a struggle for a settler institution to come to terms with its origins as a Potawatomi mission, acknowledge the ongoing presence of Native people in the Lower Great Lakes, and rectify Native erasure on the campus.

In all of those forementioned locations, there already exist established patterns of memory and infrastructure. These can be robust, such as the tourism sites on Mackinac Island, or muted and

forlorn, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution cemetery at Brainerd Mission, ensconced within a commercial district of Chattanooga. Memory landscapes are never static, if the evolution of the Brainerd Mission cemetery is any indicator. Nevertheless, the previous case studies all concerned built environments that have, for better and worse, already been developed. The Mission House at Mackinac has been summer worker housing for more than forty years, and that is not likely to change anytime soon. The replica log chapel on Notre Dame's campus is not going anywhere, and popular attempts to change an institutional narrative to acknowledge Potawatomi people or erect a memorial to Indigenous people is unlikely to dismantle a campus landscape that exudes power and permanency over the St. Joseph River Valley. The Brainerd Mission cemetery is in a stable condition, but the erasure of its setting with parking lots and shopping malls is irreversible. Choctaw Academy, on the other hand, has a public history story that is yet to be written. It is a fragile site with many contingencies for its ultimate restoration and interpretation. This chapter argues that the parties involved in the potential rehabilitation of a Native American dormitory on a former Kentucky plantation should take lessons from the other memory sites as they develop cooperative relationships with community members, public officials, tribal governments, and other stakeholders. This historic site cannot be shoehorned into a simplistic morality tale or a "trail of tears" narrative. Instead, the Choctaw Academy's public history potential depends upon the willingness of parties to acknowledge a much broader significance to this site: namely, that this place reveals a story about Native nations' complex relationships with American civilization, Christianity, and African slavery.

On a more personal note, the Choctaw Academy site holds significance for my own intellectual journey as relates to issues of memory. As a native Kentuckian, most of my limited exposure to Native American history came through school stories of Daniel Boone and the "Wilderness Trail." I shared with many peers a vague sense of Boone's and fellow frontiersmen's

skirmishes with the Shawnees and other tribes as they were “winning the West” to make way for settlement and “civilization.” Later in life, I learned of my own family connection to this history, having direct ancestors who fought in Lord Dunmore’s War (1774) and who afterward received land grants in western Kentucky for their military services. We were taught that “Indians didn’t live in Kentucky but only came through for hunting – Kentucky means something like ‘dark and bloody ground.’”<sup>7</sup> We also had some baseline knowledge that there was a “Trail of Tears,” but that this happened further South. Needless to say, the general impression among most of my Kentucky connections was that Indians had very little history in the state, and they were certainly gone by the time we achieved statehood in 1792.

All things considered, the overall goal is not to deconstruct Kentucky’s frontier myths or the supposed absence of Indigenous people in my home state. I preface those things mainly to situate a cultural context in which a place like the Choctaw Academy easily escapes notice because it does not fit the conventional narrative many white Kentuckians may have of themselves – many of whom, like myself, can trace their family histories to the first wave of westward migrants. Because Kentucky was in many ways the first Western state “won” from Indians following the American Revolution, its settlers had a different relationship to Native people compared to either the Deep South or the Old Northwest, where whites lived in closer proximity to Native towns and villages. As historian Stephen Aron has argued, Kentucky between Daniel Boone and Henry Clay experienced one of the earliest transformations in the Western political economy – moving from cultural and economic interdependence with the Indians to a self-sustained “Bluegrass system” dominated by land

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<sup>7</sup> This etymological claim is spurious and is said to have originated in 1775 from a statement by Richard Henderson. For more discussion on the myth of the name, see A. Gwynn Henderson, “Dispelling the Myth: Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Indian Life in Kentucky,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 90, no. 1 (1992), 1-25.

speculation, domesticity, and the hierarchical interests of slaveholder families.<sup>8</sup> Aron promulgates Charles Sellers' notion of a "market revolution" but argues that Kentucky's transformation predated and anticipated the changes that would occur more broadly in America by the Jacksonian era. As such, by 1820, Kentucky's landscape, particularly in the central Bluegrass region, was in an advanced state of landed economy in comparison to northern Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, or Wisconsin, and Native peoples still held possession in much of the Deep South, though land cessions and plans for forced removal were already underway.

Because Indians no longer held possession of Kentucky by the early nineteenth century, they were no longer considered a threat to the settler populace.<sup>9</sup> If there were enemies for the yeomen class of white farmers, they were the eastern land speculators and lawyers who swindled poorer settlers out of their pioneer farms. States like Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois provided safety valves for disgruntled families, including Abraham Lincoln's parents, to migrate when Kentucky's economic conditions became less favorable for non-slaveholders.<sup>10</sup>

Elsewhere throughout the South, Southern Indian nations took part in the domestic slave trade as a means of accumulating assets and "civilized" status in the eyes of their Euro-American counterparts. Because Indians occupied a racially "other" category, owning slaves and partaking in "genteel" culture was a means for some Natives, particularly mixed-raced persons, to distinguish themselves from darker skinned people who were presumed to be more "fit" for manual labor.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Aron, *How the West was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3-4, 80-81, 148.

<sup>9</sup> The last Indian land cession in Kentucky was in 1818 with the Chickasaw Nation in the southwestern part of Kentucky west of the Tennessee River, known as the "Jackson Purchase," due to Andrew Jackson's involvement in the treaty negotiations. The cession also included much of western Tennessee. James Klotter and Freda Klotter, *A Concise History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), 41.

<sup>10</sup> Aron, *How the West was Lost*, 80-83.

Notable students at Choctaw Academy came from slave-owning families, which created tensions with Johnson's enslaved workers when students did not receive preferential treatment. These racial complexities dispel the notion that Choctaw Academy was some "charity" school, even though Johnson and other white supporters of the Academy understood their involvement in paternalistic terms.

As will be soon revealed, Choctaw Academy was a highly complex site of interracial and intercultural encounter, which makes for a daunting historic interpretation challenge. The school on Col. Johnson's plantation defies some of the conventional assumptions about American race relations in the nineteenth century, even as it also represents a microcosm of America during its national adolescence. Nuance and complexity tend not to be popular virtues in public discourse, which might explain why the site has been left uninterpreted for the better part of two centuries. Public memorials tend to gravitate toward hero worship, foundation stories, scenes of epic conflict, or narratives of loss. In Kentucky, such interpreted sites would include, respectively, Abraham Lincoln's birthplace, Fort Boonesborough, Perryville Civil War Battlefield, or the Trail of Tears Commemorative Park. As seen previously with the Brainerd Mission memorialization in the early twentieth century, historic sites tend to work best when they draw upon and cement local or regional cultural identity. Choctaw Academy would seem to complicate rather than contribute to regional identity. This may largely have to do with the fact that much of the location's impact occurred outside Kentucky. A handful of successful Choctaw students went on to study at nearby Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, but most of the palpable legacies of the Choctaw Academy occurred through the creation of Choctaw tribal schools in Indian Territory. As for Johnson's enslaved workers, their descendants left Kentucky after emancipation to establish the free Black settlement of Nicodemus, Kansas.

The story of the Choctaw Academy fits into a larger saga of US Indian policy, the Second Great Awakening, American slavery, and nation-building efforts in the Choctaw Nation and other Indigenous peoples who had a connection with this school. Despite such implications for a richer American drama, shockingly few historians have dedicated any real study to this unique environment on R.M. Johnson's property. Apart from a couple sporadic journal articles or brief mentions in other works, the only full narrative of the Choctaw Academy comes from historian Christina Snyder's book *Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in the Age of Jackson* (2017). Even with the paucity of sources, a rich story of this Indian school can still be constructed, and the following historical synopsis will help frame later issues of memory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### **Historical Overview of the Choctaw Academy**

According to their own ancestral traditions, the Choctaw people received life from the Great Spirit by being birthed from the ground of a hill known as Nanih Waiyah, a sacred mound in present-day central Mississippi. Other traditions feature a west-to-east migration account of the Choctaw and their close relatives the Chickasaw establishing themselves in the east bank of the lower Mississippi River Valley. Like other Southern chiefdoms to coalesce by the time Europeans arrived in North America, the Choctaw people descended from the Mississippian culture notable for its construction of mound sites, with their largest city at Cahokia further north on the Mississippi River.<sup>11</sup>

At any rate, the Choctaw coalesced as a cohesive ethnic unit during a time of high instability, caused both by European-introduced diseases like smallpox or frequent slave raids. The Choctaw absorbed smaller and multilinguistic groups to form their own polity by the seventeenth century,

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory Smithers, *Native Southerners: Indigenous History from Origins to Removal* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 22-23, 50-51.

though like other Indigenous nations, ethnic boundaries were porous, and they readily incorporated new technology and even some Europeans into their expanding trade networks. Alliances with foreigners created tension with other Indigenous peoples, as the Choctaw wars with the Creek Confederacy to their east paralleled at a smaller scale the imperial wars between Great Britain, France, and Spain during the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-eighteenth century, a collective Choctaw (*Chahta*) identity had taken full form in Mississippi. Villages were organized into three primary districts interconnected through kinship, and their agricultural advancements made the tribe a breadbasket for smaller surrounding groups. Because of their numerical strength and strategic location in the lower Mississippi River Valley, the Choctaw remained largely neutral during the American Revolution, though individual villages sometimes offered support for both pro-British and anti-British causes.<sup>13</sup>

In the long aftermath of American Independence, the Choctaw gradually solidified a “national” identity, largely influenced by a growing number of mixed-race leaders – offspring of Anglo-American traders who married Choctaw women. This new generation of Choctaw leaders were often accused of promoting their individual interests at the expense of community traditions, but they were nevertheless instrumental in allowing the Choctaw Nation to be recognized as a sovereign political entity by the emerging power of the United States, especially after the 1795 Treaty of San Lorenzo, which extinguished any remaining Spanish interest east of the Mississippi.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 66, 68-69.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 89-91, 123-124. The anti-British factions of Choctaws were not necessarily “pro-American,” but rather supported the Spanish in the fighting along the Gulf of Mexico due to their positioning as a buffer zone between a loyalist British colony (West Florida) and a Spanish possession (Louisiana). See Greg O’Brien, “Defense of Pensacola in the American Revolution,” in *Pre-removal Choctaw History: Exploring New Paths*, ed. Greg O’Brien (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 127-128.

<sup>14</sup> Smithers, *Native Southerners*, 139-140.

Racially-mixed Choctaw families like the Folsoms, Pitchlynnns, and LeFlores would come to dominate tribal politics throughout the nineteenth century. By 1826, David Folsom and Greenwood LeFlore would help institute a written Choctaw constitution and three official political districts in the Nation while maintaining the traditional clan system and matrilineal polities. These reforms did not go unchallenged. Conservative “full-blood” Choctaw elders like Mushulatubbee resented the fact that LeFlore used his mixed-race credentials to elevate his position and style himself “chief of the Choctaw Nation.”<sup>15</sup>

Even so, both factions culturally adapted to the new US power in ambivalent ways. For one, they acquired African slaves. Mushulatubbee and Peter Pitchlynn owned ten Black slaves each. Mushulatubbee, however, was one of few “full-bloods” to become a slaveholder. As with other Southern Indian nations, slaveholding among the Choctaws increased wealth disparity between “mixed-blood” planters with numerous slaves versus poorer non-slaveholding Indians, though slave-hiring was not uncommon within tribal communities. In some cases, Choctaws intermarried with Black people, which was more in step with traditional practices of adopting captives into the tribe.<sup>16</sup> As the institution of slavery grew during the first half of the nineteenth century, proximity and miscegenation with enslaved people created internal consternation over who was part of the “Nation” and how racial boundaries should be enforced within an increasingly racialized society (this problem would later manifest at the Choctaw Academy).<sup>17</sup> Choctaw tribal leaders were also in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 140-141, 149.

<sup>16</sup> Clara Sue Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 80.

<sup>17</sup> The issue of delineating a Black vs. white color line as a measure of tribal citizenship would affect all Southern Indian nations. Some governments, like the Muskogee (Creek) Nation in 1859, went as far as to deny tribal enrollment to persons with enough Black ancestry. See Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 88-90.



accord over the need to expose their youth to Western education, though they differed in the degree to which their children should internalize Western culture. Education was seen as a way of appropriating the tools of the colonial powers. David Folsom, son of a Choctaw woman and Anglo-American trader, was instrumental in requesting the first school in Choctaw Nation through the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), as these missionary societies were the most willing and eager to set up shop in Indian country. Having seen the early success at Brainerd Mission in the Cherokee Nation, Folsom invited Rev. Cyrus Kingsbury to establish a similar type of mission in 1818 on the Yalobusha River, called Eliot Mission after the seventeenth-century English Puritan missionary to the Massachusetts people. Other mission schools in the Choctaw Nation likewise followed.<sup>18</sup>

Mushulatubbee went as far as to host a school inside his own home out of his own expenses and had a Lenni Lenape instructor, Adin Gibbs, for the students, many of whom were Mushulatubbee's own relatives. However, when this Christian Indian from New England started reprimanding his host's morals and propensity for drinking parties, Mushulatubbee harassed the teacher and demanded his ousting, causing the school to close shortly thereafter. Mushulatubbee would come to resent missionaries' moralizing and paternalist attitudes towards his people, eventually expelling them from the district over which he was chief.<sup>19</sup> Controversies aside, the incorporation of African slavery and Christian missionary influence in the Choctaw Nation gained

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<sup>18</sup> Angie Debo, *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 41-43; Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918*, 66-67.

<sup>19</sup> Christina Snyder, *Great Crossings: Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in the Age of Jackson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 29-31.

them a place as one of the “Five Civilized Tribes” alongside their Southern neighbors the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole.

As the Choctaws concerned themselves over the issue of cultural change and the ever-present threat of land cessions and expulsion to the West, Richard Mentor Johnson in Kentucky had his own ambitions for the advancement of Native Americans. One of the first Kentucky politicians to be born in the state, Richard M. Johnson was the son of Robert and Jemima Johnson, wealthy planters who migrated from Virginia during the American War for Independence. Johnson’s eventual involvement in Native American “civilization” is ironic given his family’s bellicose experiences with Indians. While Richard grew up, his father and older brothers had fought against the Western Indian Confederacy. As an adult, Richard would fight against British-allied Natives in the War of 1812, most famously at the Battle of the Thames in present-day Ontario, where he claimed to have killed the Shawnee leader Tecumseh himself.<sup>20</sup> Shortly before going off to war, Richard had become sexually involved with his parents’ enslaved housemaid, Julia Chinn, who was a decade or more younger than Richard, and fathered a child, named Imogene, with her. The exact nature of Richard and Julia’s relationship is unknown, as none of Julia’s writings have survived. Nevertheless, Richard clearly viewed Julia and their children as “my family,” and he never sought out a white woman to marry, much to the chagrin of his parents. Moreover, Chinn was literate and had a degree of autonomy at Blue Springs farm in Richard’s absences. Johnson was additionally protective of his daughters Imogene and Adaline and provided for their education, though they were

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<sup>20</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 42-45.

technically enslaved until Johnson emancipated them prior to their marriages to the sons of neighboring white farmers.<sup>21</sup>

The Johnson family's pastor, Rev. Thomas Henderson, undoubtedly was an influence and encourager for Richard's liberal views toward race relations. Henderson himself had sympathies with the emancipation cause. He came to Kentucky to provide education for free Blacks, and he allegedly performed Richard's private marriage ceremony with Julia Chinn at Blue Springs – doing so despite legal prohibitions in Kentucky to marry an enslaved person. Henderson would also marry their daughters Imogene and Adaline to white men at Great Crossings Baptist Church, provoking no little controversy.<sup>22</sup> Henderson would go on to play a major role in the Choctaw Academy's story as its longest-serving superintendent. His religious sensibilities loomed largely at this technically secular school.

Henderson and Johnson's first intrigue with Native American education dated back to 1817. Johnson, a decorated war hero serving as a US Representative in Washington, D.C., became acquainted with Thomas McKenney, the federal superintendent of Indian Affairs and a huge proponent of the so-called Civilization policy. Motivated by both economics and his religion, Johnson returned to Kentucky and convinced Henderson and several other friends to form the Kentucky Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen. This small society operated under the auspices of the Baptist Board for Foreign Missions, a rival to the Presbyterian-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>22</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 8-9, 62-63. A November 29, 1832 article in the *Lexington Observer and Kentucky Reporter*, a Lexington-based newspaper with pro-Whig leanings, promoted a scandalized account of Henderson's willingness to perform marriage ceremonies between white men and racially-mixed women. "The Rev. Thomas Henderson, Principal of the Choctaw Academy, is said to have performed the marriage ceremony between Mr. Scott and Miss Adeline. We incline to doubt his having done so; for we have a higher opinion of Mr. Henderson than to believe he would be guilty of such an outrage against public opinion and the laws of his country." Microfilm, MIC 6876, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, Kentucky. Courtesy extended to Gary Brooks and Margaret Pence Brooks for identifying the article.

dominated ABCFM. The print circulars produced by the Kentucky Baptist Society served as marketing materials that McKenney would later use to push through Congress the Civilization Act of 1819. Through the provisions of this congressional act, Great Crossings Baptist Church started a small Indian academy on Johnson's Blue Springs plantation the same year, enrolling eight Native students, both adults and children, recruited from tribes in Missouri.<sup>23</sup> The fledgling Baptist school was poorly funded, however. Part of the issue lay with Johnson himself. Johnson pocketed assets received directly from the Civilization Fund, but in reality, these federal expenditures should have gone through Native nations for the creation of civilization programs within tribal territories. A combination of limited funding, low enrollment, and expansion of mission schools within Native communities forced Johnson's Indian school to shut down by 1821.<sup>24</sup>

A few years afterward, the Choctaw leaders continued to find themselves dissatisfied with the quality of education at the mission schools. Additionally, these Choctaw leaders prepared for looming treaty negotiations in 1825 to cede further tribal land holdings in the Arkansas territory to secure more funding and federal protection. In the middle of these treaty talks, Johnson found another opportunity to renew his philanthropic interests in Indian "civilization" through a personal connection to the Choctaw federal agent, William Ward. Ward, who was married to Johnson's sister, had financially benefitted from an earlier 1820 treaty between the United States and the Choctaw Nation (the Treaty of Doak's Stand), after which he purchased real estate and enslaved people on ceded Choctaw lands in western Mississippi. After becoming the federal agent to the Choctaw

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<sup>23</sup> Ella Wells Drake, "Choctaw Academy: Richard M. Johnson and the Business of Indian Education," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 91, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 263-264. It is not clear what the tribal identities of these early students were, if they were indigenous to Missouri, or the rationale for recruiting.

<sup>24</sup> Drake, "Choctaw Academy," 265; Ellen McMillan, "First National Indian Training School: The Choctaw Academy," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 28, no. 1 (1950), 54-55.

Nation, Ward travelled frequently between Kentucky and Mississippi, where he was in closest proximity to the Choctaw “lower towns” district (*Olka Tannap*) and became acquainted with Mushulatubbee. There, the lower towns district chief petitioned Ward for an alternative institution to the mission schools established by Cyrus Kingsbury and the ABCFM. As already mentioned, Mushulatubbee already had a falling out with the ABCFM missionaries, who seemed to be more prioritized with gaining religious converts than providing holistic improvements for the Choctaws. Mushulatubbee also sought a way to undercut his political rivals. He had grown agitated by the growing influence of rival mixed-race Choctaws like David Folsom, a Christian convert who favored Kingsbury and the ABCFM. A way forward presented itself when Mushulatubbee accompanied the leaders of the other Choctaw districts to Washington, D.C., to negotiate annuity payment for the cessions of their Arkansas lands. On the route to Washington, the Choctaw delegation passed through Ward’s home in Scott County, Kentucky, where Ward organized a meeting between his brother-in-law Richard M. Johnson and the aged Choctaw district chief. Johnson, Ward, and Mushulatubbee arranged a back-door deal in which Johnson would house an “elite” academy for the Choctaws outside of Choctaw Nation. The agreement was created with the premise that this academy would be for the entire Choctaw Nation, and that funding would come directly from the 1825 treaty annuities. Mushulatubbee in a sense bypassed the authority of other Choctaw district chiefs. Thanks to Ward’s political influence, the decision to use the entire educational annuity – \$6,000 per year for a twenty-year period – on Johnson’s Choctaw Academy was *a fait accompli* at the 1825 treaty negotiations made in Washington.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 266-268; Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 38-40; Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi, 1818-1918*, 99-100.

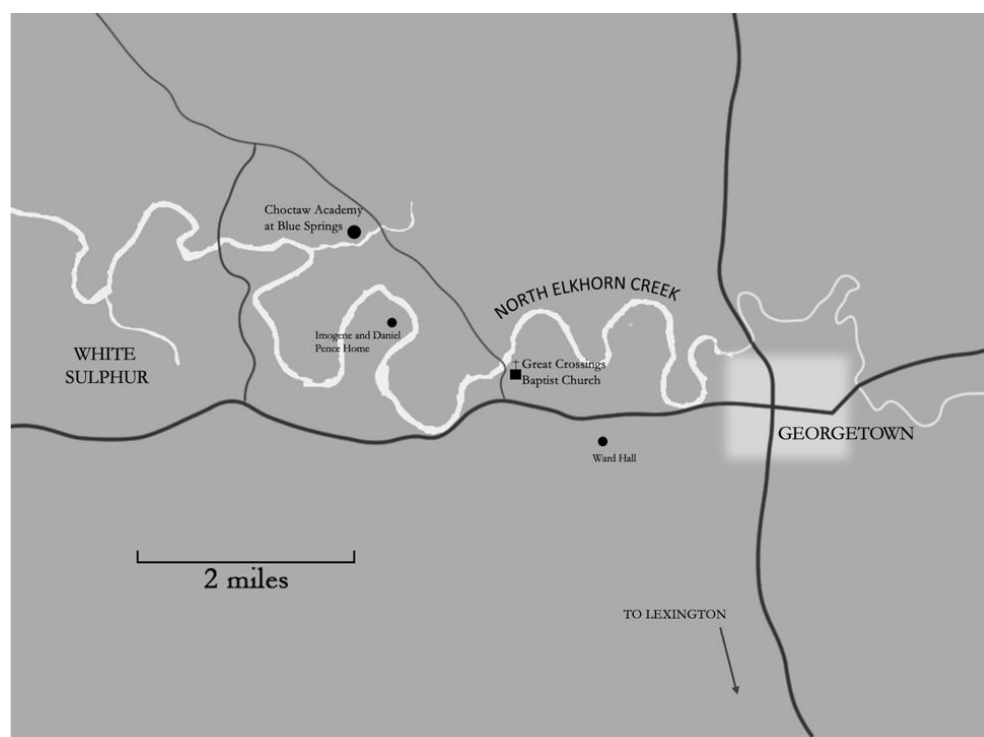
Mushulatubbee's controversial part in this deal would have upset David Folsom, Cyrus Kingsbury, and their allies, but much of the Choctaw Nation rallied to Mushulatubbee's side. This was largely thanks to support from Mushulatubbee's nephew Peter Pitchlynn (Katchoctucknee), who was seen as a rising star in the Choctaw Nation. Pitchlynn, desirous himself of a better education, believed that exposing bright young Choctaw men to white society outside of tribal territory would enable his people to bypass the oversight of the missionaries. Before the final arrangements had even been approved for the Academy's administration or the treaty, Peter Pitchlynn escorted twenty-one Choctaw boys to Johnson's Blue Springs farm in Great Crossings in November 1825, with Rev. Henderson serving as superintendent. Peter's short sojourn was officially for the business of the Choctaw Nation, but his trip to Kentucky was also a scouting activity for his personal educational advancement. Only a year later, Pitchlynn would return to enroll himself as a student for a few months. Given his role in tribal politics, including the drafting of the 1826 Choctaw constitution, Pitchlynn only intermittently pursued formal education. Even while resisting government removal policies, Pitchlynn's savvy and charm gained allies like Thomas McKenney in Washington, who then provided sponsorship of further education at University of Nashville (future Peabody College for Teachers, now part of Vanderbilt University).<sup>26</sup>

Choctaw Academy enjoyed meteoric success in its first years at Blue Springs. Part of this success stemmed from the apparent contrasts with the mission schools. Families of Native students were particularly relieved by Rev. Henderson's disbelief in corporal punishment, which had been a sore point of contention with the mission schools in Indian country. Additionally, Choctaw young men would not be subjugated to do agricultural work, which they associated as "women's work" or

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<sup>26</sup> David Baird, *Peter Pitchlynn: Chief of the Choctaws* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 23-24, 27-31.

worse yet, carried the connotation of slave labor, as there were already plenty of enslaved people making food for the Choctaw students. The Academy's curriculum emphasized training in the liberal arts, including history, geography, classical languages, arithmetic, moral philosophy, and "Italian bookkeeping" (i.e., accounting) – many of these courses were not offered to such holistic rigor at the mission schools.<sup>27</sup> Within less than a couple years, the Choctaw Academy had gained such curiosity and reputation that it became the scene of exhibition in 1827, when hundreds of public visitors flocked to Blue Springs farm to see an impressive display of Choctaw, Creek, and Potawatomi youth performing musical numbers, reciting speeches of Cicero, and even providing linguistic demonstrations of their native languages before an awestruck audience.<sup>28</sup>



Map 4. Vicinity of Choctaw Academy in Central Kentucky. Map created by the author.

<sup>27</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 81, 84-87.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-3.

Undergirding this spectacle, however, was a lot of unease on the parts of both whites and Indians about the effects of proximity with enslaved Black people. While Julia Chinn, Imogene, and Adaline had some measure of protection, there were multiple instances of sexual contact (or sometimes misconduct) between Indian youth and enslaved Black women. Some Choctaw students chided at the notion that they had to share similar diets and clothing as slaves, as they came from influential Choctaw families and were used to receiving preferential treatment. Some of the wealthier students from Southern Indian nations would even receive allowances from their families to spend money in local taverns when they found the food at Blue Springs farm less than satisfactory.<sup>29</sup> Despite such sources of anxiety, several whites, Henderson and Johnson especially, still believed in the ultimate good of exposing Native students to white society and to Christianity. The Choctaw Academy did not mandate any religious instruction, although Henderson encouraged students' attendance at local churches on Sundays. During a religious revival in 1828 at Great Crossings Baptist Church, where Henderson preached, at least seventeen Native students joined in membership. One of those, Choctaw Sampson Birch, was ordained as a Baptist minister, and another convert, Robert Jones, preached to a congregation of whites, Blacks, and Indians.<sup>30</sup>

Johnson, being stationed most of the time in Washington during his Senate tenure, was dependent upon Henderson and enslaved women like Patience and Parthena, not to mention his enslaved wife and daughters, for the everyday maintenance and running of the school. Despite his physical absence for most of the year, Johnson still micromanaged from afar. Some of his

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 108-110.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 95. John Nicholas Bradley, *History of Great Crossings Church* (Kentucky: 1876), 9 [https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7c599z0p4v?q=fact+books&f%5Bdc\\_language\\_t%5D%5B%5D=english&f%5Bpub\\_date\\_sort%5D%5B%5D=1876&per\\_page=20#page/1/mode/1up/search/fact+books](https://exploreuk.uky.edu/catalog/xt7c599z0p4v?q=fact+books&f%5Bdc_language_t%5D%5B%5D=english&f%5Bpub_date_sort%5D%5B%5D=1876&per_page=20#page/1/mode/1up/search/fact+books) (accessed January 28, 2022).



correspondence with Superintendent Henderson goes into the details about shirt orders and other measures of cleanliness. In giving laundry directions for Parthena, Johnson admitted, “I have always found most confusion in the washing department” but he considered Parthena to be “the only one that I can trust to attend to the matter.”<sup>31</sup> Johnson was also privy to the reports of sexual liaisons between Indian students and Black slaves, which he considered a violation of his “property.” Ironically, Johnson offered no moral qualms about his own sexual activity with slaves, but he was incensed that one of the students had committed the deed – and in his own bedroom! In response, Johnson decided after 1830 to relocate the Choctaw Academy further away from the slave quarters at Blue Springs to another property across the Elkhorn Creek called White Sulphur, where Johnson ran a hotel for out-of-town guests wishing to enjoy natural springs. The convenient pretexts Johnson gave to his federal sponsors were a need for more firewood and more spacious living quarters. Enrollment indeed was doubling, from 95 in 1829 to just shy of 200 by 1836.<sup>32</sup>

The presence of such large numbers of “civilized” Indians in the Bluegrass continued to fascinate whites, and alumni such as Choctaw William Trahern and Potawatomi Joseph Napoleon Bourassa (nephew to Madeleine Bertrand, see Chapter Four) both went on to study law and medicine, respectively, at Transylvania University in Lexington. Bourassa was among a cohort of Anishinaabe students who had transferred to Johnson’s Academy after beginning their education at Isaac McCoy’s Carey Baptist Mission in Michigan. In writing back to another Baptist missionary with whom he had been acquainted at Carey, Bourassa remarked on his ambitions to study law in

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<sup>31</sup> Richard M. Johnson to Thomas Henderson, April 30, 1833, Box 1, Folder 8, Thomas Henderson Papers, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky. Parthena was Julia Chinn’s niece, and Christina Snyder also claims that Parthena was one of Richard’s sexual liaisons after Julia’s death. *Great Crossings*, 195.

<sup>32</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 100, 120-121.

Kentucky. “I think I can do them [my Native kinsmen] much good if I can prepare myself sufficiently for the work; for there will be many obstacles in the way, yet I think by perseverance I shall overcome all the most powerful ones.”<sup>33</sup>

The high achievements of a model student like Joseph Bourassa served to boost local whites’ views of themselves as progressive uplifters. A laudatory 1835 article in the *Kentucky Gazette* claimed that Johnson’s academy was to bring a sort of interracial amity:

...we are satisfied too, that he [Johnson] has availed himself of the chance to draw closer the bonds of union between two populations, and to impress deeply upon the minds of these children of the forest, an exalted character of the American Union, and an admiration for their religion, manners, and institutions.<sup>34</sup>

The visibility of Indian students was enhanced when Johnson opened a health resort at White Sulphur in 1837, which brought many affluent visitors desirous for the property’s natural springs.<sup>35</sup>

The growth in students, while good for Johnson’s coffers, disguised a grimmer context: many of the students lived at Great Crossings while their families were being forcefully evicted from their homelands as a part of Indian Removal. The Choctaw Nation was the first to make a treaty effectively giving up their remaining Mississippi homeland (the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830). In a disturbing irony, R.M. Johnson’s brother-in-law William Ward, who had supported sending Choctaw boys to Johnson’s school, denied land registrations to numerous students’ families who wished to stay in their homeland by becoming US citizens under the provisions of Article 14 of

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<sup>33</sup> Jack Walker Reynolds, “Carey Mission: Protestant Missionaries and Native Americans on the Indiana-Michigan Frontier,” PhD dissertation (Indiana University Bloomington, 1998), 123-124. Bourassa’s original correspondence was located in the Robert Simmerwell Papers, Kansas Historical Society.

<sup>34</sup> “The Indian Academy,” *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington, Kentucky), March 25, 1835, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Lindsey Apple, Frederick A. Johnston, and Ann Bolton Bevins, *Scott County, Kentucky: A History* (Georgetown, KY: The Scott County Historical Society, Inc., 1993), 109-110, 138-139.

the treaty. Instead, Ward made way instead for the large slaveholders who wished to create cotton plantations on ceded Choctaw lands.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, just as the execution of tribal removals was swelling, in the summer of 1833, the cholera pandemic that had stricken much of the country arrived at the Choctaw Academy. Enslaved people took the worst hit: fourteen died within a month. Additionally, six Choctaw, one Miami, and two Seminole students died, and instruction halted for a month. In the effort to treat the victims, Johnson had to rely on Julia Chinn as well as Joseph N. Bourassa, who was skilled in traditional medicine practices and thereafter studied medicine at Transylvania University. Unfortunately, Chinn herself contracted the disease and died in early July, which spelled a turning point for the management of the school. Over the next several years, the living conditions declined. Although enrollment continued to incline (even to overcapacity) up through 1836, Choctaw Academy would suffer a slow and agonizing demise over the following decade.<sup>37</sup>

While bad for Johnson, the slow decline of the Choctaw Academy was not altogether a net negative, as it also signaled for Indian nations now rebuilding in Indian Territory an effort to assert more tribal control over education. After Removal, sending boys to Kentucky was far less attractive for the Choctaw Nation in particular. Such sentiment was reinforced by a shift in the academy curriculum from its original liberal arts model to one centered on manual trades. (This transition presaged the Indian educational model in later decades.) What had once been seen as a novel institution for the brightest young Native men to study was becoming increasingly an asylum for

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<sup>36</sup> Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries in Mississippi*, 165, 167; “Choctaw resistance to removal from ancient homeland,” Iti Fabvssa, *Biskinik* (Durant, OK) August 2014, 11. *Biskinik* is the official newspaper publication for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

<sup>37</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 147-149, 164. Enrollment numbers were at 175 in 1835 to just under 200 in 1836, after which those numbers fell consistently through the end of the decade.

misfits, orphans, and other “problem” cases of various Indian nations. While other Indian nations from the western Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley, notably Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Sauk, and Sioux, continued to sponsor cohorts of their own, the Choctaw Nation’s leadership grew fed up with paying between ten and twelve thousand dollars each year to Johnson’s academy, which produced increasingly poor reviews from students returning to Indian Territory. At the most severe, at least two alumni of the Choctaw Academy committed suicide after returning to their tribes and having been disaffected from their kin networks. Far more alumni, however, persevered through the emotional and social turmoil of adjusting to new realities.<sup>38</sup>

One-time student Peter Pitchlynn, now a member of the Choctaw National Council, lobbied himself to becoming superintendent of the Choctaw Academy in 1840. Pitchlynn believed that the Academy had served its purpose and was eager to transition all efforts toward the establishment of a Choctaw tribal education system, the first of its kind for an American Indian nation. After multiple, intense trips between Indian Territory, Great Crossings, and Washington, D.C., Pitchlynn was finally successful in terminating the Nation’s financial arrangement with Johnson’s academy and accompanied the last cohort of Choctaw boys to Indian Territory in fall 1842.<sup>39</sup>

The Choctaw Academy at White Sulphur fritted out a moribund existence for the next few years as enrollment numbers from other tribes steadily declined until reaching 55 students in 1848. Although Richard M. Johnson tried repeatedly to keep his project afloat, he underestimated the willpower of the tribes, most of whom had moved to Indian Territory, who collectively sought to

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<sup>38</sup> The two instances of suicide are recorded in William Wilson, Choctaw Agency, West, to Col. Armstrong, Acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Western Territory, August 30, 1842, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1842* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1843), 502.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-242; Baird, *Peter Pitchlynn*, 61.

end their various contracts with the War Department to send students to the Academy, arduous and bureaucratic a process as it was. The closure of Choctaw Academy coincided with Johnson's own economic decline and waning political influence. Between 1837-1841, Johnson had been the Vice President under Martin Van Buren, but the Democratic Convention of 1840 did not go forward with re-nominating Johnson due in part to the smear campaign resulting from the uncovering of Julia Chinn and their racially-mixed daughters. Johnson never regained the former influence that he once held. He died in 1850 at age seventy, and his former estate was divided among his brothers, since Imogene was labeled illegitimate.<sup>40</sup>

### **Reclaiming Memory**

In the long aftermath of Johnson's death and the end of Choctaw Academy, so much of that history came to be lost or shrouded in mystery, at least with the fragmentary documentation. In 1876, a professor at nearby Georgetown College, John N. Bradley, wrote a short history of Great Crossings Baptist Church, where he makes passing reference to the presence of Indian men from the Choctaw Academy at the church, particularly during the 1828 revival. Apart from the connection with the revival, no comment is made on the church's earliest attempt with Indian education between 1817-1821, nor is Thomas Henderson's involvement as superintendent listed. While relatives of the Johnson family are mentioned, Richard M. Johnson is not mentioned as having been involved with the church. Unsurprisingly, the official history contained zero reference to Julia Chinn

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<sup>40</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 269-271, 303-304. Andrew Jackson had supported Johnson's bid during the 1836 election, but he failed to do so in 1840. In a May 22, 1840 letter written to Francis Preston Blair, "His late family connection which has gone abroad will prevent the whole religious portion of both states [Kentucky and Tennessee] to vote against him." Andrew Jackson Papers, Manuscripts/Mixed Material, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/maj016493/> (accessed February 14, 2022).

or names of other enslaved people, though the church ledgers Prof. Bradley consulted clearly had details on Chinn's attendance and baptism.<sup>41</sup>

Another early surfacing of the Choctaw Academy in local memory came in 1905 in an inquiry letter published in the *Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society*. The inquiry came from a Cherokee man in Oklahoma, John M. Ross, who was nephew to the more famous John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation during the Trail of Tears. The younger Ross claimed his father Andrew Ross had personally known Richard M. Johnson. He also revealed that had an older brother and one other Cherokee relative who had attended the Choctaw Academy in the 1830s. Ross requested further information about "Col. Dick Johnson's Indian School."

The historical society published their response to Ross. Unfortunately, they had a gap in memory and sources. "As this Indian school was a thing of the past before even the History of Scott county was written, or perhaps its editor or author born, we have no data for it save that of tradition."<sup>42</sup> Much of the oral folklore about the academy came from Great Crossings Baptist Church, the congregation to which Johnson, Julia Chinn, and their daughters had belonged. The sparse bits of information gathered reveals in many respects how religion dominated the memory narrative of an apparently secular school. The church completely glossed over its messy history as a congregation that in Johnson's time would have included both slaveholders and the enslaved in the same worship gathering (not to mention Imogene Johnson Pence becoming a slaveholder herself). Instead, local memory had developed a memory that equated civilization with Christianization.

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<sup>41</sup> Bradley, *History of Great Crossings Church*, 9. On primary sources and the narrative silences of Chinn in particular, see Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, "Disorderly Conduct: Julia Chinn, Richard Mentor Johnson, and Life in an Interracial, Antebellum, Southern Church," *The Journal of African American History* 105, no. 2 (2020), 213-241.

<sup>42</sup> "Something About Col. Dick Johnson's Indian School: in Reply to Letters of Inquiry from Choctaw and Cherokee Chiefs," *Register of Kentucky State Historical Society* 3, no. 9 (September 1905): 39-40.

Indian students at Johnson's academy were portrayed as "stars in a dark night," reflecting the extent these "civilized" students contrasted Kentuckians' perceptions of warlike "savages" that older generations had fought against in the frontier wars and in the War of 1812. Johnson's academy was portrayed almost entirely as an enterprise of Christian charity. Seventeen students were claimed to have been converted and baptized during the 1828 revival at Great Crossings Baptist Church. Choctaw alumni Robert Jones and Sampson Birch were both regarded highly for their later careers as ministers in Indian Territory. The 1833 cholera epidemic is also mentioned for its devastating effects on the students, with a doctor's claim that seventeen boys died at the Academy (compare with Christina Snyder's calculation of nine Native students and fourteen enslaved Blacks who died of cholera).<sup>43</sup>

As for the properties at Blue Springs and White Sulphur, very little was known or reported in writing. After Johnson's death in 1850, "White Sulphur became simply the everyday, crossroads hamlet." During Johnson's lifetime, the natural springs at both Blue Springs and White Sulphur were used as "fashionable resorts for the wealthy Southerners," but by the twentieth century, the buildings disappeared, and the "delightful sylvan abodes" faded from memory. No mention is made of Julia Chinn or other enslaved people who would have lived on the premises.<sup>44</sup>

Much of the local history and folklore during this era was collected and published by a man named William Oliver Gaines in his *B.O. Gaines' History of Scott County*, which saw multiple printings and editions. Many of the dates, names, and claims made are dubious or apocryphal. Nevertheless,

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<sup>43</sup> It is possible that the oral tradition of 17 students, provided by a "Dr. Gano," may have conflated Native and Black victims of cholera, given that they would all have been treated in the same building, likely in the same room, and Julia Chinn herself nursed many of the victims. "Something About Col. Dick Johnson's Indian School," 41-42. Dr. Stephen F. Gano, who studied medicine at Transylvania University, would have been the physician in question. Apple, Johnston, and Bevins, *Scott County, Kentucky*, 140-141.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

these texts give an impression for types of narratives most commonly shared among the local white population. Oral traditions by the early twentieth century were grossly misrepresentative, such as a false claim that a 180 out of 200 Indian students died of the cholera outbreak as well as a strange claim that Gray Eagle, brother-in-law of the famed Hunkpapa Lakota leader Sitting Bull, was a student at the Choctaw Academy.<sup>45</sup> (In truth, there had been a few small cohorts of Northern Plains students from Dakota, Iowa, and Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) ethnicities represented at Choctaw Academy. The collective grouping of those identities under the name “Sioux” may have inspired later legends of famous Indians with apocryphal connections to Johnson’s boarding school.)<sup>46</sup> No mention is made about Rev. Thomas Henderson’s involvement with the Academy, which is surprising given how heavily he featured other religious figures, including R.M. Johnson’s brother, John Telemachus Johnson, a minister in the Christian Restorationist movement.<sup>47</sup> One might speculate if the absence had anything to do with the fact that Henderson was complicit in Johnson’s interracial marriage, but it could also be likely that subsequent generations simply forgot their own history.

A case in point lies anecdotally with the descendants of Imogene Johnson and Daniel B. Pence. After Richard and Julia’s oldest daughter married into a neighboring white family in 1830, Richard Johnson deeded his daughter and son-in-law a farm (the house still stands today) across the creek bed from the Blue Springs estate. The Johnson-Pence family soon acquired large assets in

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<sup>45</sup> William Oliver Gaines, *The B.O. Gaines History of Scott County* (Georgetown, KY: B.O. Gaines Printery, 1905), 505.

<sup>46</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 74.

<sup>47</sup> Gaines, *The B.O. Gaines History of Scott County*, 376-380.



land, slaves, a paper mill, and even a private school in the vicinity of White Sulphur.<sup>48</sup> Within two generations, the Pence family had extended to multiple branches of grandchildren and great-grandchildren who had moved to multiple states. Grandson William C. Pence sold the property in the 1910s and moved his family to Cincinnati. William Pence's granddaughter, Margaret Pence Brooks, recounted that she had no knowledge of her family's history until she was an adult. When her sister Harriett attended Morehead State University in Kentucky, she befriended someone from Great Crossings, to whom her father Frank Pence remarked, "Our family's from there." After further interaction with her father, Margaret learned that her great-great-great-grandfather was the US Vice President under Martin Van Buren. She went to the library to find more information, and she brought home to her father a copy of Leland W. Meyer's 1932 biography *The Life and Times of Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky*, which he eagerly read and even wrote his family's genealogy in the marginalia. Frank Pence remarked that Johnson had married a "mulatto" woman, but Margaret claimed that his attitude was very "matter-of-fact." Margaret objected to historian Amrita Chakrabarti-Myers' theory that willful ignorance to family genealogy was fueled by embarrassment of a Black ancestor. This descendent suggested a much simpler explanation for the memory lapse: namely, that later generations were too concerned with day-to-day subsistence to pay much attention to genealogy.<sup>49</sup>

Richard M. Johnson's legacy is convoluted precisely due to these issues of memory and forgetting. For a family and estate so historically significant, is the lapse in memory benign, or were there insidious attempts to erase the presence of people of color, either for Julia Chinn or Native

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<sup>48</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 303-304.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Pence Brooks, phone conversation with the author, November 8, 2021.

American boarding students? During his lifetime, Johnson's epithet of "the Great Amalgamator" could be construed either positively or pejoratively. One perspective – emulated by the Choctaw Academy's current property owner Chip Richardson (more details below) – tries to hold Johnson in a charitable light, using his credentials as evidence for progressive views about race and the possibility for a diverse America. A contrasting opinion, which appears more in vogue with African American and feminist interpretations of history, claims that R.M. Johnson was exploitative in his personal relationships and used the Choctaw Academy as a cash cow to the detriment of Native American nations. Evidence used to support this viewpoint include the facts that Johnson never emancipated Julia Chinn (implying that Julia never consented to their relationship), he likely fathered other children with other enslaved women after Julia Chinn's death, and he was involved in financial graft by lying on his financial statements for the Choctaw Academy and charging exorbitant tuition and board fees to cover up his debts.<sup>50</sup>

If the legacy of R.M. Johnson himself is contested, so also is the real significance of the historic site for Native Americans. How does one measure "significance"? For some, significance and claim to positivity are blurred lines, especially when there is so little historical knowledge. When Scott County historian Ann Bevins composed a National Register nomination for the Choctaw Academy's remaining building in 1973, few others had working knowledge of the site or how to attribute historical significance. In fact, some of the application's reviewers doubted the claims Bevins had made about its contributions to the Choctaw Nation. One unnamed historian said, "I think any Indian historian [*underline in original*], especially Dee Brown, would dispute the success

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<sup>50</sup> Snyder, *Great Crossings*, 239-240; Myers, "Disorderly Communion," 221-222.

implied of the school.”<sup>51</sup> This remark referenced the widely popular book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, published in 1970, which transformed the dialogue surrounding the US government’s treatment of Indigenous people and further advanced the “Red Power” or American Indian Movement (AIM) that was in full force throughout the early 1970s. At the exact time of the application’s review, a few hundred Oglala Lakota activists for AIM were occupying the Wounded Knee massacre site on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. This episode put the issue of American Indian rights at the forefront of national attention, though hardly any observers recognized the symbolic significance of the stand-off site being a Catholic church.<sup>52</sup> As such, an effort to acknowledge significance to a place where Indians were “civilized” did not fit the national sentiment and could even be construed as reactionary. Setting aside that context, the nomination of the property to the National Register was considered benign enough to pass. The branch chief of the State Historic Preservation Office review board stated, “The ‘success’ of the school is stated in paleface terms but is not detrimental to the significance of this property.”<sup>53</sup>

Despite being listed on the National Register, the former Choctaw Academy at Blue Springs largely escaped notice. The former Blue Springs estate retained much of its undeveloped and bucolic setting, but many of the buildings dating from Johnson and Chinn’s lifetimes had disappeared by the mid-twentieth century. The original manor house where Johnson lived had burned in a fire, and a more modest twentieth-century frame home was built on the original foundations by Asa Grover (unrelated to the Johnsons or Pencens). Grover and his descendants passed down oral knowledge

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<sup>51</sup> National Register of Historic Places nomination form, Choctaw Indian Academy, filed March 1973, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/123851757> (accessed October 29, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> David Treuer, *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2019), 320-322.

<sup>53</sup> National Register nomination, Choctaw Academy.

about the property's history, but they never had the resources to invest in the historic buildings, using the dormitory, slave cabin, and schoolhouse for storage.<sup>54</sup> Native Americans, however, did remember the Choctaw Academy, even if many, like Francine Locks Bray mentioned in this chapter's introduction, had limited knowledge to its location. Every few years or so, Native groups returned to Great Crossings to perform powwows on the grounds of the Choctaw Academy.<sup>55</sup>

By the 2010s, Rodes Kelly was the fourth and last generation of Asa Grover's descendants who still lived on the former Blue Springs farm, and without means to farm superfluous land, he put up 168 acres with shallow soil for sale that included the former Choctaw Academy dormitory.<sup>56</sup> In January 2012, the land was purchased by William "Chip" Richardson, an ophthalmologist based in Georgetown, who was looking for property to develop. Richardson, a self-professed history buff and the child of historical reenactors, admitted that he had no idea of the Choctaw Academy and the historical significance of the property at the time of his purchase, but after some cursory investigation, he became enthralled by the prospect of recovering the neglected property to a proper historical consciousness.

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<sup>54</sup> Ann Bolton Bevins, email correspondence with the author, October 26, 2021.

<sup>55</sup> The testimony of Native powwows comes from a press interview with current resident Rodes Kelly. Dan Adkins, "Time, Weather Eat Away at Historic Choctaw Academy," *Georgetown News-Graphic*, Georgetown, Kentucky, August 30, 2016, [https://www.news-graphic.com/news/time-weather-eat-away-at-historic-choctaw-academy/article\\_5705d738-6e56-11e6-81a7-0f7efffd31a.html](https://www.news-graphic.com/news/time-weather-eat-away-at-historic-choctaw-academy/article_5705d738-6e56-11e6-81a7-0f7efffd31a.html) (accessed October 13, 2021).

<sup>56</sup> Parcel boundaries and property value is publicly available at qPublic.net GIS services, <https://qpublic.schneidercorp.com/Application.aspx?AppID=948&LayerID=18565&PageTypeID=1&PageID=8262> (accessed January 30, 2022).

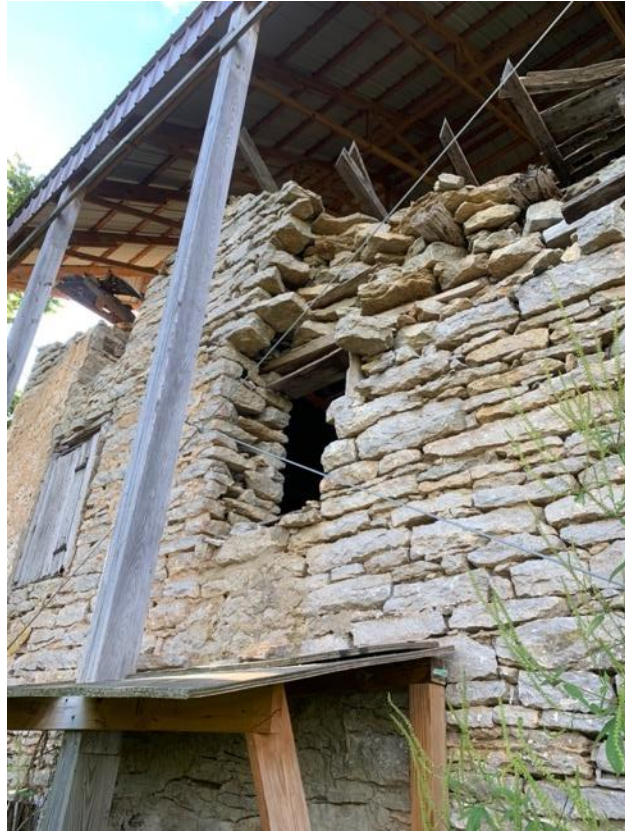


Figure 46. The south-facing wall of the dormitory, partially collapsed. Photo by the author.

Serendipitously, within a year after Richardson's purchase of the dormitory parcel, the almost 190-years-old roof apex gave way to decades of neglect and water damage, and part of the south-facing wall collapsed. Realizing the urgency of his situation, Richardson set out to gather various allies, including the Georgetown & Scott County Museum, the Kentucky Humanities Council, Kentucky Heritage Council, and the Chahta Foundation, a private philanthropic arm for the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma who had a board member living in nearby Bourbon County, Kentucky. Through legal advice, he brokered a preservation easement with the Scott County Museum to share responsibility for the physical maintenance of the dormitory. The next immediate task was the raising of funds to erect an emergency rain shelter to mitigate further environmental damage to the building. In 2016, through a joint effort of Richardson's local fundraising, including

\$500 raised by fifth graders at Stamping Ground Elementary School, and a matching grant approved by the Chahta Foundation, the Choctaw Academy received a \$17,000 roof structure built over it. In addition, wooden shoring was installed to prevent the interior floors from collapsing; this assuaged the many fears that the building's total collapse was imminent.<sup>57</sup>

The years 2017-2019 saw greater momentum for the possibility of a wholesale restoration of the Choctaw Academy. Richardson had garnered support from the Choctaw Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), who, while reticent on the possibility of financial support from the Nation given the resource was located outside tribal territory, was nevertheless enthusiastic about the project. The THPO, Ian Thompson, identified the 1825 dormitory as the oldest extant building in Choctaw history. Also in 2017, the publication of Christina Snyder's *Great Crossings* book boosted conversation and notoriety for the site's significance. By placing Choctaw Academy and the Johnson/Chinn family within current historiographical trends, *Great Crossings* and the involvement of Choctaw Nation members as project participants proved that attention to this historical site's preservation was not an effort at white nostalgia about the "civilization" of American Indians. Rather, representatives of local, state, and tribal governments who gathered at the property in 2018 recognized the possibility for this site to reaffirm the ongoing vitality of contemporary Native nations and recover historical silences. Plans were announced for a feature-length documentary to be produced for Kentucky Educational Television (KET) as a means to boost fundraising. The US Representative for Kentucky's 6<sup>th</sup> District, Andy Barr, also lent moral support that same year,

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<sup>57</sup> Adkins, "Choctaw Group Gives \$9,000 to build Shelter for Academy," *Georgetown News-Graphic*, Georgetown, Kentucky, December 17, 2016, [https://www.news-graphic.com/news/choctaw-group-gives-9-000-to-build-shelter-foracademy/article\\_aeb50e8c-c3cf-11e6-bc7a-c32cbf4c5e85.html](https://www.news-graphic.com/news/choctaw-group-gives-9-000-to-build-shelter-foracademy/article_aeb50e8c-c3cf-11e6-bc7a-c32cbf4c5e85.html) (accessed October 9, 2021).

arguing that “the Academy is an essential part of American history deserving of efforts to reverse the environmental decay that threatens its memory.”<sup>58</sup>

In addition to garnering moral allies, the Choctaw Academy restoration project’s most critical financial partner was the Roof Consultants Institute (RCI, Inc.), based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Through a mutual contact with Richardson, RCI’s CEO, a South African named Lionel van der Walt, received a request for his company to provide fiscal sponsorship for a \$400,000 endeavor to reconstruct the roof and restore the building’s structural integrity – this would be the first step of any larger restoration and interpretive process. Van der Walt, given his first-hand knowledge of apartheid, recognized the historical value of the opportunity. Seeing a means to support racial reconciliation and acknowledgement, Van der Walt publicly signed a memorandum of understanding, photographed in front of the academy building in June 2018.<sup>59</sup>

In the first six months of this partnership, RCI, soon renamed International Institute of Building Enclosure Consultants (IIBEC), created a conditions assessment report. The report provided detailed recommendations for restoration in alignment with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.<sup>60</sup> Even with the success of the report’s publication, actual funding lagged throughout the next year as IIBEC worked to secure an Indigenous partner unit. After the initial year of partnership, IIBEC had only raised \$17,000 of the

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<sup>58</sup> Representative Andy Barr, public letter, April 26, 2018, in possession of William Richardson, digital photo of letter available on “Save the Choctaw Academy” Facebook group, <https://www.facebook.com/Save-the-Choctaw-Academy-356091604736264/> (accessed January 31, 2022); “New Group Will Bring 1820s Choctaw Academy Back to Life,” *Lexington Herald-Leader* YouTube channel, June 22, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_ah6vycwY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_ah6vycwY) (accessed January 31, 2022); William Richardson, phone interview with author, June 29, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Tara Wilson, “RCI and RCIF Kick Off Choctaw Academy Initiative,” *International Institute of Building Enclosure Consultants*, December 1, 2018, <https://iibec.org/choctaw-academy-kicked-off/> (accessed February 1, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> “Conditions Assessment: Choctaw Academy on the Blue Run, Scott County, Kentucky,” January 7, 2019, original document held at the Georgetown/Scott County Museum, Georgetown, Kentucky.

projected \$400,000 needed to do the complete exterior restoration. In the summer of 2019, the south wall of the Choctaw Academy experienced further collapse, much to Richardson's dismay. To make matters worse, Lionel van der Walt, who had been an ardent supporter in the project, stepped down as CEO of the company in June 2019, and the subsequent leadership were not nearly as motivated for heritage projects like the Choctaw Academy restoration.<sup>61</sup>

As 2019 drew to a close, developments took a turn for the worse. IIBEC, still unable to come up with the necessary funds, continued reaching out (unsuccessfully) to Indigenous groups. During one meeting with representatives from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), an unidentified woman took offence at IIBEC's labeling the restoration for a "boarding school," attributing the project with memorializing a dark moment in Native history. Although many of the details were obscured in communication, there may have been confusion or conflation of the Choctaw Academy with later assimilationist boarding schools from the late nineteenth century. By December 2019, IIBEC's new CEO, Brian Pallasch realized that IIBEC would be unable to meet their own fundraising deadline by failing to gain Indigenous financial support. Consequently, Pallasch formally dissolved the memorandum of understanding.<sup>62</sup> The Kentucky Humanities Council subsequently abandoned their involvement and delivered any money that had been raised up to that point to Michael Breeding Media, based in Lexington, for the creation of a documentary about Choctaw Academy.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Richardson, interview with the author, June 29, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Brian Pallasch, letter to William Richardson, December 5, 2019, in possession of William Richardson.

<sup>63</sup> Bill Goodman, letter to William Richardson, February 7, 2020, in possession of William Richardson; Richardson, interview with the author, June 29, 2020.



Roughly concurrent with the collapse of the restoration project at Choctaw Academy, a related but separate search-and-rescue project focused on Julia Chinn was gaining steam. Amrita Chakrabarti-Myers, a history professor at Indiana University-Bloomington and one-time colleague of Christina Snyder, garnered media attention from Kentucky Educational Television (KET) and the National Park Service during her research for a Julia Chinn biography (forthcoming, 2022). A February 2020 TV special for the popular series *Kentucky Life* featured interviews by Myers, Snyder, Richardson, and Ann Bevins describing Chinn's life and historical significance. At counterpoint with each other were the perspectives of historian Myers and property owner Richardson. Myers unequivocally stated in the interview, "She's literally been erased... We've literally lost a vice president's wife, but because she was enslaved, no one cared." The video editors juxtaposed Myers' voice with Richardson, who, while standing in front of the Choctaw Academy dormitory, framed Julia's story, particularly her management of the Choctaw Academy and Blue Springs estate, as "a story of empowerment." This episode of *Kentucky Life* left to viewers the job of sorting out the complex and contradictory meanings of Chinn's life as the enslaved Vice President's wife (even though she died three years before Johnson successfully ran for Vice President). Curiously, the video showcased B-roll footage of the Choctaw Academy and its protective roof, but no commentary was given to the building's physical state, efforts to restore it, or any involvement of Native communities.<sup>64</sup>

Years prior, Myers herself had visited Blue Springs and photographed the dormitory (post-roof collapse but pre-protective covering) as well as the remaining slave cabin (which oral tradition

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<sup>64</sup> "Julia Chinn," *Kentucky Life*, Season 25, Episode 14 (February 15, 2020), Kentucky Educational Television, <https://www.ket.org/program/kentucky-life/julia-chinn-barbara-kingsolver-enid-yandell-mary-todd/> (accessed February 3, 2022).

identifies as Julia Chinn's cottage). Myers used her photographs as illustrative in her argument for Chinn's erasure in a published article for the *Journal of African American History* in 2019. "The whole thing is sad," wrote Myers. "[T]he main house at Blue Spring Farm is gone, the cemeteries on the land are overgrown and have disappeared to the naked eye, and the only remaining Choctaw Academy building is about to crumble into the ground."<sup>65</sup> Although Myers expressed in her article's conclusion a desire for ground penetrating radar to locate Julia Chinn's grave, she has not engaged with any of the restoration efforts. The extent of Myers' participation in local memory was as a guest speaker at a Scott County Historical Society event held in May 2017.<sup>66</sup> Myers' biography of Chinn, once published, will provide expanded interpretation on the roles of slavery, gender, and Christianity in the local landscape, but its potential impact in stimulating restoration interests for the Choctaw Academy dormitory is tenuous. In Myers' own perspective, the dilapidation of the historic property serves instead a narrative of historical whitewashing and shame.

The financial woes of Richardson's ill-fated project, not to mention the interpretive battles over Julia Chinn's legacy and the cause of Blue Springs' neglect, presaged larger cultural and economic fallout that erupted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Was the failure to fundraise within a specific timeline just one more example to decry public apathy for historic and cultural resources? Or was it, as Richardson believes, representative of a nefarious "cancel culture" and misunderstanding of the purpose of historical preservation? Was Choctaw Academy to be remembered as a noble though imperfect effort to bring together different races? Or was its neglect

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<sup>65</sup> Myers, "Disorderly Communion," 240.

<sup>66</sup> "Slave Julia Chinn topic of Historical Society talk," *Georgetown News-Graphic*, May 11, 2017, [https://www.news-graphic.com/news/slave-julia-chinn-topic-of-historical-society-talk/article\\_ca56e77a-35b8-11e7-ab87-fb60372c0ef7.html](https://www.news-graphic.com/news/slave-julia-chinn-topic-of-historical-society-talk/article_ca56e77a-35b8-11e7-ab87-fb60372c0ef7.html) (accessed March 17, 2022).

a testament to racism and the inabilities for America to overcome its own prejudices and hatreds? Whose narratives should take precedence? The Johnson/Chinn family? Enslaved Black people? American Indians?

As of this writing in 2022, the saga of the Choctaw Academy's pending restoration is indeterminate. The present hiatus among the various stakeholders, while not ideal, provides opportunity for reflective practice. The complexities involved in restoring and interpreting the Choctaw Academy's surviving dormitory are much larger than individual constituents may realize. Choctaw Academy, and by extension the former Johnson estate, intertwines Native American survivance with the histories of American evangelical religion, slavery, and interracial relations in antebellum America. Choctaw Academy's "storyscape" bears many similarities with the Cherokee James Vann's Diamond Hill plantation. Tiya Miles, in her history of Diamond Hill, reveals that, like Blue Springs farm in Kentucky, the Vann estate in Georgia hosted at its core an Indian "civilization" project (the Springplace Moravian Mission) while being one of the largest centers of slavery in Cherokee Country. Although Springplace was a Christian mission while Choctaw Academy was technically the first Indian "secular" school, both locales featured prominent women who found themselves at the confluence of racial identity, religion, and the meaning of American civilization. Peggy Scott, the Cherokee wife of James Vann, shared many similarities with Julia Chinn. Both were literate women of color with an exceptional degree of autonomy for their eras. Although Chinn was enslaved, both Chinn and Scott managed their respective properties and the Indian schools in their husbands' absences. Both also underwent Christian conversion through the influence of missionaries or preachers who worked with Indian students. Both women died prematurely to disease, and both have since been overshadowed by their more famous husbands.

Although Julia Chinn and Peggy Scott never met, nor would they have been aware of each other's existence, their commonalities become more apparent when studying the places and "storyscapes" they each occupied. Miles' book title *The House on Diamond Hill* most obviously calls to attention the Vann House, the chief vehicle by which the story of Diamond Hill plantation and Springplace Mission can be told at the Georgia state historic site. In the early- to mid-twentieth century, the Vann House had been preserved and interpreted primarily as "a symbol of Georgia's proud history" or "the show place of the Cherokee Nation." However, Miles upends that traditional narrative by broadening the storyscape beyond the house itself to focus on enslaved Black people's lives and their interactions with Cherokees and white missionaries. While the mansion may still serve as the chief attraction for visitors, Miles' research and her subsequent public history projects with students at the University of Michigan helped in reinterpretation efforts for the historic site to include a more holistic understanding of the environment as one where various negotiations of race, religion, freedom, and slavery took place.<sup>67</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Two, acknowledging religious elements to Black and Indian experiences at Diamond Hill remains an uphill battle, but the efforts are at least aided by the fact that the Vann House is already an operating museum with state funding.

At first glance, the property at Blue Springs has comparative disadvantages. One obvious setback might be that Blue Springs no longer has a "big house" to titillate the interests of would-be tourists to the site. However, the lack of the "master's house" leaves more room to center stories around people traditionally marginalized at Southern plantations – namely, Indian residents and enslaved workers. The Choctaw Academy dormitory would be the most likely "showpiece" as it is the largest and most preserved infrastructural resource, but the survival of Julia Chinn's stone

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<sup>67</sup> Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill*, 3, 201-208.

cottage should also be noted as a significant part of the landscape. Any broader initiative to tell the story of the Choctaw Academy cannot solely focus on the existing dormitory, important as it might be to save the structure for posterity.

A more holistic public history effort should think about how the various properties related to Richard M. Johnson and his complicated family complement each other to create a “memoryscape.” Just down the road from Blue Springs lies Great Crossings Baptist Church, which is still an active congregation. The original sanctuary from Johnson and Chinn’s lifetime was destroyed by a tornado in 1923 and replaced with the present sanctuary in 1925. While the church maintains a historic cemetery that contains the graves of Robert and Jemima Johnson, among other white founders of Great Crossings, the church does not interpret or engage with its over 230-year history.<sup>68</sup> Other nearby buildings have struggled to attract heritage tourism, let alone remain in good condition, even though listed on the National Register. Two historic properties across the Elkhorn Creek still stand on the former lands of the White Sulphur estate. One is Longview, a house purchased by Johnson in 1837 while he was US Vice President but sold in 1841 due to personal debts. At present, it is private property and lies in good condition.<sup>69</sup> The other is the “Johnson-Pence House,” a modest 1830s home deeded by Johnson to his daughter Imogene and her husband

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<sup>68</sup> “Our History,” Great Crossings Baptist Church, <http://www.greatcrossing.org/about/history/> (accessed March 17, 2022).

<sup>69</sup> Johnson sold the house to Fabricus McCalla in 1841. After passing to a relative, the house was eventually sold in 1885 to the Baptist-run Georgetown College, which incidentally used the proceeds for American Indian education. Presumably, this might have been in token memory of the estate’s one-time association with Johnson and early Baptist Indian missions. National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Richard M. Johnson-David Thomson House, October 25, 1973, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/123851801> (accessed February 14, 2022).

Frank Pence. The family graveyard, including Imogene's headstone, remain, though the house has been vacant for some time.<sup>70</sup> As of 2022, public access to the property is blocked by a keycode gate.

A mile away, on the opposite side of the Frankfort Pike, the stately Ward Hall has fared somewhat better though still suffers from deterioration and lack of funding. (Ward Hall, built in 1857, was the summer mansion of R.M. Johnson's nephew, Junius Ward, whose family had financially benefitted from the cession of Choctaw lands at the 1820 Treaty of Doak's Stand.) While hailed as one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in Kentucky, Ward Hall did not come into preservationists' hands until 2004. Since initial restoration and opening to the public in the mid-2000s, the Ward Hall Preservation Foundation has attempted to create revenue through supporting a niche tourism market for horse farms (the Wards reared Kentucky Thoroughbreds for racing). Ward Hall also aspires to tell the story of complex race relations in antebellum Kentucky, including Richard M. Johnson's and Julia Chinn's story. Their website acknowledges that Junius Ward hired out his uncle's enslaved people as well as the fact that a free man of color, James Bailey, oversaw the construction of Ward Hall. All the while, the concerted efforts to tell a nuanced story faced backlash at a 2005 reunion of Johnson/Ward family descendants and descendants of their enslaved workers at Ward Hall. Some Black attendees accused the invited speaker of pandering too much to white nostalgia and characterizing the Wards and Johnsons as "good" slaveowners whose enslaved populations somehow had it better in Kentucky than in the Deep South. Needless to say, the awkward reunion did not become a recurring event. For more than a decade, Ward Hall has

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<sup>70</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Johnson-Pence House, November 20, 1978, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/123851793> (accessed February 14, 2022).

struggled to accrue funding for much-needed exterior restoration, and it is open for public tours only by appointment.<sup>71</sup>

Taken as a conglomerate, do the historic sites connected with Richard M. Johnson convey a deliberate “erasure” of history out of some deep-seated shame over miscegenation? Any such claim is speculative at best. The survival of multiple other historic homes decades after the Johnsons and Pence descendants sold them challenges that notion. Another possible cause of amnesia may be the dispersion of wealth and property following slavery’s abolition in Kentucky in 1865. Prior to the Civil War, Scott County had a large Black population per capita: 33% in 1820, and 41.5% in 1860. After emancipation of their slaves, the Wards fell into financial ruin, partly due to investment in Confederate bonds. The Black population in Scott County declined, and in 1877 a large group of freedmen left the area to found new communities – in particular, Nicodemus, Kansas.<sup>72</sup>

All this discussion over memory and erasure, however, glaringly leaves out Native people. As touched on throughout this chapter and in previous case studies, Native support and cooperation is essential to the success of any project dealing with American Indian history and associated historic sites. As concerns the restoration of the Choctaw Academy, geographic distance and interpretive dilemmas pose a challenge for Native participation. There are no federally recognized Indian tribes in Kentucky. The Choctaw Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office has pledged moral support behind preserving the remaining Academy dormitory, but they have remained reticent to pledge any

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<sup>71</sup> “The Unique Opportunity at Ward Hall,” Ward Hall Preservation Foundation, <http://www.wardhall.net/history/article3.html> (accessed February 14, 2022). The story of the 2005 “family reunion” at Ward Hall is recounted in an African American newspaper. “Georgetown family reunion far from typical,” *The KEY Newsjournal*, August 14, 2005, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Apple, Johnston, and Bevins, *Scott County Kentucky*, 116, 207-208. Nicodemus is now a National Historic Site. “Kansas: Nicodemus National Historic Site,” Department of the Interior, last updated August 4, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/nicodemus.htm> (accessed February 22, 2022).

financial support given the property is far outside tribal territory. Moreover, the issue of Indians from slaveholding families voluntarily enrolling at a boarding school undermines the cleaner “colonized” vs. “colonizer” narrative that some Native activist groups thrive upon.

With these challenges in mind, it is all the more important to acknowledge a multiplicity of Indigenous perspectives and not overly rely on a single historian’s interpretation. It makes sense for the Choctaw Nation to be the primary Indigenous partner in this public history project, given the Academy bears the tribe’s name and had its closest ties to Choctaw people. Nevertheless, the involvement of other Indian nations ought to be considered, as their histories are also tied to former students at the Choctaw Academy. Such a gesture promotes the practices of shared authority but also creates a double-edged sword. As public historian Raney Bench makes clear in her own work with Indigenous exhibitions, Native people cannot be expected to adhere to a singular view of history, let alone their experiences with assimilation practices.<sup>73</sup> A successful courting of Native sponsors or allies should emphasize the opportunity to honor students who were in many ways trailblazers in intertribal solidarity and the creation of a pan-Indian identity.

As for non-Natives who work in historic preservation, a shift in perspective ought to occur for historic sites that have been made “invisible” to be reclaimed. Public historian and human rights activist Jamie Kalven has articulated a view where the community sense of stories that matter should revolve around “places rather than buildings.” This is especially true for marginalized histories. “The practice of historic preservation should directly engage the ways structural inequalities in our society

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<sup>73</sup> Raney Bench, *Interpreting Native American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 37.



are expressed, reinforced, and hidden by the built environment.”<sup>74</sup> Kalven’s statements had the inner-city explicitly in mind, but the principle should also apply to rural landscapes and “flyover country” that is too often made obsolete or irrelevant by urbanization. Rather than some racially or culturally homogeneous “God’s country,” Great Crossings as a *place* conveys several layers of meaning and identity. Despite the disappearance of many historic buildings, Great Crossings continues to draw whites, American Indians, and African Americans searching for answers tied to their ancestors. In most cases their seeking remains unfulfilled. Reclaiming the Choctaw Academy, whether through listing as a National Historic Landmark or site restoration with the support of Native peoples, would be a major step toward shifting a narrative of Indigenous presence and resilience beyond the Indian Removal Act.

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<sup>74</sup> Jamie Kalven, “Preservation and Invisibility,” in Max Page and Marla R. Miller, eds., *Bending the Future: Fifty Ideas for the Next Fifty Years of Historic Preservation in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 124-125.

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## VITA

Sean Thomas Jacobson was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and TV/Film Production, with a minor in Latin American Studies, from Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky in 2016. He moved to Chicago, Illinois in 2017 to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy in American History and Public History at Loyola University Chicago. Along the way, he also received a Master of Arts in Public History in 2019.

Over the course of his academic career, Dr. Jacobson has worked in a variety of settings while developing public history skills. Examples include the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C., the Pritzker Military Library and Museum in Chicago, Illinois, and the Chicago's First Lady River Cruises. Through a doctoral assistantship at Loyola, Dr. Jacobson also served as a Teaching Assistant, Teacher of Record, Media Assistant, and the Career Pathways Assistant. In 2022, Dr. Jacobson accepted an offer for an Assistant Professor of History position at the University of North Alabama to begin in the fall, where he will be teaching Native American History and Public History.