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FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS IN COLORADO: 1880-1920

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## Note on Acronyms and Glossary

There are several acronyms used throughout this report. Some, such as NARA, are attached to national institutions like the National Archives and Records Administration. Others are acronyms that the current team assigned to the schools or other organizations to help assist with the organization of documents, materials, and data. Finally, there are acronyms associated with methodologies or technology used in different aspects of the current research effort.

### *Government:*

BIA: Bureau of Indian Affairs (while historically the bureau was often referred to as the Office of Indian Affairs, Commission of Indian Affairs, Indian Office, or Indian Service, for consistency I am using the name it formally adopted in 1947 and by which it is known today)

CIA: Commissioner of Indian Affairs, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs since presidential decree in 1832

ARCIA: Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs

CCIA: Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs, a State agency since 1976

### *Archives and Repositories:*

NARA: National Archives and Records Administration

NARA Denver: the National Archives branch in Broomfield, Colorado

NARA D.C.: the National Archives Research Center in Washington, DC

DPL: Denver Public Library

### *School Acronyms:*

In some cases it was practical for maps and databases to have acronyms for the schools themselves. In text we have done our best to always use the full name of the school.

1. (GJIS) **Grand Junction Indian Boarding School/Teller Institute**
2. (FLIBS) **Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School**
3. (SUIB) **Southern Ute Indian Boarding School**
4. (ADS) **Allen Day School**
5. (GSID) **Good Shepherd Industrial School**
6. (CSDB) **Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind\***
7. (NVSD) **Navajo Springs**
8. (SIS) **State Industrial School for Boys**

## I. The Native American Boarding School Research Program, HB22-1327

The Native American Boarding School Research Program, Colorado House Bill 22-1327 directed History Colorado to perform a number of activities in order to understand the impacts of the federal Indian boarding schools, particularly the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School in Hesperus, Colorado. A summary of the work conducted to meet the directives as per the legislation is provided below. Each section has been expanded upon in subsequent chapters or sections of this report.

Section 2(b)(I) THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY MAY ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT WITH A THIRD-PARTY RESEARCH ENTITY TO CONDUCT PARTS OF THE RESEARCH DESCRIBED IN THIS SUBSECTION (3).

History Colorado entered into several third-party agreements in order to meet the requirements of the legislation, including agreements with Alpine Archaeological Consultants; Statistical Research, Inc; AECOM; Heritech Consulting Services; Living Heritage West, LLC; and Steve Grinstead Editing and Writing Services. These subject matter experts were procured using funding provided by the Colorado State Legislature in association with HB22-1327. In addition, the services of the Colorado School of Mines have been procured to conduct geophysical investigations at the Teller Institute, also known as the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School, in Grand Junction, Colorado. The Colorado School of Mines has applied for and been awarded State Historical Fund grants in order to complete this research.

Section 2(II) IDENTIFY AND MAP GRAVES OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS BURIED AT THE FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL AT FORT LEWIS AND OFF-CAMPUS CEMETERIES BY USING RESEARCH METHODS DETERMINED DURING CONSULTATION WITH THE SOUTHERN UTE TRIBE AND THE UTE MOUNTAIN UTE TRIBE;

The services of Dr. Jennie Sturm of Statistical Research, Inc. were procured to meet the requirements of identifying and mapping graves of students who were buried at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School cemetery. Dr. Sturm used a suite of geophysical survey methods including drone-deployed LiDAR, Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), Red-Green-Blue

(RBG)/Near-Infrared (NIR) photography, and magnetic gradiometry. Given the tight deadlines associated with HB22-1327, as well as rigorous State procurement processes, standard methodologies for investigating unlocated graves were employed. These methods have been determined to be “best practices”<sup>1</sup> in both the United States and Canada, and have been approved by Indigenous practitioners and scholars. These are also the methods being deployed at the Teller Institute by the Colorado School of Mines, and were determined appropriate by representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe, and representatives of other tribal nations who were involved in the April 26, 2022, consultation on the Teller Institute in Grand Junction. Geophysical investigations were conducted in November and December of 2022. The results of the geophysical survey are discussed in Section VII.

(III) REVIEW EXISTING RESEARCH AND CONDUCT NEW RESEARCH AS  
NEEDED ON EXISTING RESOURCES AND MATERIALS TO REVEAL NATIVE  
AMERICAN STUDENT VICTIMS AT THE FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL  
AT FORT LEWIS;

There has been extensive research conducted between July 1, 2022, when this bill went into effect, and today, June 30, 2023, when the final report is due. Archives at the federal, state, and local levels have been combed for information, and the methodology of that archival research is described in more detail in Section II. In addition, the subject matter experts who have participated in this study have spoken to tribal members, survivors, descendants, local historians, cemetery operators, and others regarding the history of the federal Indian schools in this state, as well as engaging with the previously published scholarly literature on the subject. The results of that extensive research are in the following pages of this report.

(IV) REVIEW WRITTEN AND RECORDED HISTORY AND ORAL HISTORY  
DESCRIBING THE EXPERIENCES AND TRAUMA OF STUDENTS ATTENDING THE

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Archaeological Association (2021), *Recommended Pathway for Locating Unmarked Graves Around Residential Schools*. Guidance Document; Hamilton (2021), *Where Are the Children Buried? A Report Prepared for the National Center of Truth and Reconciliation*, University of Manitoba, Manitoba, Canada; (2018), NCHRP 25-25, Task 98, *Practical Guide for Developing Effective Scopes of Work for the Geophysical Investigations of Cemeteries*. Manuscript prepared by WSP, Inc., and New South Associates, Inc., for the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO); Small et al. (2021), *Native American and Indigenous Protocols for Surveying Indian Boarding School Burial Sites*. Unpublished Manuscript.

FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL AT FORT LEWIS AND THEIR FAMILIES;  
AND (V) INTERVIEW THOSE WITH KNOWLEDGE OF THE EXPERIENCES AND  
TRAUMA EXPERIENCED BY NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS ATTENDING THE  
FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL AT FORT LEWIS AND THE EXPERIENCES,  
INCLUDING INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA, OF THE STUDENTS' FAMILIES AND  
DESCENDANTS.

This particular directive has been more challenging to achieve than the directives listed above. Much of the recorded history of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was not recorded by the students or their families, and instead we have had to rely primarily on government reports or newspaper accounts of the lived experiences of the students. When we have been able to, we have accessed the few accounts that do exist.

Oral histories were not collected during this past year. Given the short time frame for the implementation of HB22-1327, and the need to intentionally approach oral history interviews from a perspective grounded in knowledge of the history of schools in Colorado, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed approaches, it was not a directive that could be accomplished responsibly this State fiscal year.

While the directive to conduct oral histories arose from good intentions, I would ask that we as a State government identify the purposes of oral histories. It cannot be simply a performative action. The first logistical issue is that the off-reservation boarding schools, Fort Lewis and Grand Junction, both closed by 1911, so there are few, if any, living survivors of these specific schools. Many people note that their parents and grandparents did not speak at great length about their experiences. Oral histories should be firsthand accounts of survivors of these institutions. I would caution that oral histories must serve a greater purpose than simply recording the trauma of already victimized people, who do not owe the State their emotions or stories. If in the process of the State seeking reconciliation with tribal communities oral histories are recorded, then we must also carefully consider the storage, access, and use of those oral histories. The recording of oral histories must serve a purpose identified by the victimized community and be put to their sole use alone.

It is my belief that individual oral histories will not provide any additional information about the experiences of Native people in boarding schools that would change either our historical understanding of the system or the impact of that system on tribes and families. If

conducted appropriately, however, these oral histories can be a valuable resource for families and descendants. These oral histories may also prove to be therapeutic for survivors of boarding schools, and could potentially provide explanations and greater context for their own experiences. So when oral histories are conducted, they should be approached as a resource for individuals and for tribes.

Some important aspects to consider as the State ponders collecting oral histories are questions around ownership and access. It may not be appropriate for some or any future oral histories to be publicly accessible, and it is appropriate to consider that such recordings, even if paid for and collected by the State of Colorado, should belong to individual families and descendants, or to Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, leaving tribes with the discretion of when and how to share them.

To better inform the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs and the Colorado State Legislature on how to collect these sensitive oral histories, History Colorado commissioned Living Heritage Anthropology, a cultural resource firm that specializes in ethnographic and tribal consultation services, to produce a robust research design for an oral history project. The research design, with greater detail regarding best practices, can be found in appendix B.

The inquiry related to the boarding schools in Colorado predates HB22-1327. Fort Lewis College had acknowledged the history of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School and has been working towards understanding the implications of that history and creating programs of reconciliation for both the college and the wider Durango community. Similarly, the Colorado Department of Human Services has been involved in a complementary, but different, investigation of the boarding school that operated on what is today the Grand Junction Regional Center since early 2021, although some efforts go back to 2017. We were fortunate that when HB22-1327 passed, there had already been a multi-nation consultation specifically about the Teller Institute in Grand Junction but that also included conversations regarding appropriate methods of investigations, tribal ceremonies, and other matters relevant to both of the off-reservation boarding schools in Colorado.

## Colorado Boarding School Timeline

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| January–November 2021 | Teller Institute Task Force met monthly  |
| September 2021        | Fort Lewis College held a panel removal ceremony   |
| November 2021         | Teller Task Force visit to the Grand Junction Regional Center  |
| December 2021         | Teller Task Force recommends disbanding, moving to tribal consultation   |
| Spring 2022           | Fort Lewis College, Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe advocate for a bill and funding to research boarding school history  |
| April 2022            | First Multi-Nation Tribal Consultation for Teller Institute  |
| July 1, 2022          | HB22-1327 is signed into law   |
| September 2022        | First progress report to the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs (CCIA)  |
| October 2022          | Second Multi-Nation Tribal Consultation for Teller Institute and First Multi-Nation Consultation for the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School<br>Listening session with Fort Lewis College faculty, staff, and students |
| December 2022         | Second progress report the CCIA  |
| February 2023         | Listening session with Fort Lewis College students   |
| March 2023            | Third progress report to the CCIA  |
| June 2023             | Final progress report to the CCIA  |

## II. The Archival Record

Not everything is written down. The boarding school superintendents were good bureaucrats, but also shrewd political players. They sent missives back to Washington to complain about buildings and supplies, offering excuses for not having more students. They didn't always write down the names of the students, or the tribes that the students were affiliated with. You have to dig for that information. But if you want to know the exact number of potatoes that were eaten or the shoes that were worn, that information is there. American bureaucracy always accounts for the money spent, and the resources that the State hoards, when really those resources came from the very people they are oppressing.

And so you only ever get so close to a truth, to a history. The stories of children crying as their hair is cut come from the children as adults, not from the records of those doing the cutting. The records talk about lice and hygiene. We never hear what happens to the items that are confiscated from the children. It is too easy to imagine that beaded moccasins or a special shirt are simply thrown away, because those things weren't perceived as having value but, rather, were evidence of a "dying race."

### Nature of the Documents

Documentation regarding federal Indian boarding schools in Colorado can be found in multiple locations. The primary location of the documents related to the schools is with the US federal government at various National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) locations. Records related to the boarding schools and other federal education institutions are part of Record Group 75, the official archival record for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It consists of an estimated over 187,000,000 textual pages of documents related to all the business of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The school records are a separate sub-category within the overall record group.

In regard to the schools, these records consist of correspondence among superintendents, US Indian agents, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; memoranda and circulars created by the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Education Department for use by various schools; annual reports from schools; personnel records; equipment and supply requisitions; construction and demolition requests; and other miscellaneous documents.

The arrangement of these records is not necessarily intuitive, and in some ways they are artifacts of how documents were both created and submitted to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs historically. To that end, staff at NARA have numerous finding aids as well staff for whom Record Group 75 is their area of expertise, and they can help researchers and others navigate the documents. What they cannot do is identify individual students; records are grouped generally by type and year, and then by state, school, Indian agency, or reservation. This arrangement can change from historical year to year, meaning the way records were organized in 1890 may be very different from how they were organized in 1900. So, you have to sort through a lot of information to find specifics.

While these records are extensive, they are not necessarily complete or consistent. As discussed in Section III, each individual school and superintendent was responsible for itself or himself and therefore operated somewhat independently. This independence applies to both record keeping and reporting. While in several instances the Commissioner of Indian Affairs sent memos to all schools requesting certain types of reporting, the responses were not uniform. In many cases, for the period we are concerned with, 1880–1920, the official reports of the superintendents to Washington, DC, were in narrative form, as formal letters from the superintendents to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Individual letters are not necessarily related to just one topic, and there may be information related to individual students intermingled with information regarding school supplies, building conditions, personnel items, and larger tribal events.

In some cases these letters were unique missives, while at other times you see superintendents borrowing language from previous letters; thus, the information in some cases is inconsistent. One example is a series of letters from Southern Ute Boarding School Superintendent Charles Werner. In 1910 Werner reported that there were no Ute children in public schools. The following year he reported five Ute children who were in public schools in La Plata County, then he followed in 1912 by repeating verbatim the language from 1910 indicating that no Ute students were in public schools. Then, he immediately followed with a statement identifying Ute students in public schools.

A consequence of this type of reporting is that the individual superintendents were able to weave their own narratives about the everyday experiences of students under their care, and indeed we see those stories pushed forward to Washington. Superintendents used these letters

and the distance from DC to conceal internal issues except the ones they wanted to bring to the attention of Washington. It is clear from the documents that they had almost full autonomy.

Especially frustrating for modern researchers, information is not always as specific as one would like. For instance, in many cases even in reports of a serious illness or death, individual students' names or tribal affiliations go unmentioned. Instead, individuals are often referred to generically in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial identification of "Indian Child." If familial relations are identified, it is exclusively who the superintendent identifies as the biological father. It is clear that the majority of the US Civil Service is dismissive of the complex social relationships that existed in many tribal nations, with the exception of the occasional US Indian agent. Similarly, mothers, even biological mothers, are almost never identified, and when they are it is not by name but only in relation to the biological father. This preference for prioritizing the biological father of Native children over all other familial relations would have had a profound effect on how the Bureau of Indian Affairs carried out its directives of obtaining parental consent when enrolling children in boarding schools.

All of this pertains to the records that are still extant. Archival records are by their nature fragmentary and incomplete. For instance, large portions of the copy books from Superintendent Thomas Breen were heavily water damaged, making them illegible. This affected hundreds of pages of documents that may have contained intimate details regarding individual children that are currently lost to us.

We also accessed local and State archives to identify information pertinent to the Native American Boarding School Research Program as directed by House Bill 22-1327. These archives include the Colorado State Archives; the Stephen H. Hart Research Center at History Colorado; the University of Colorado Boulder; Colorado State University; the Center for Southwest Studies at Fort Lewis College; and the Denver Public Library system.

Of particular interest at the Hart Research Center, CU Boulder, and to a lesser extent the Denver Public Library were the papers related to Henry M. Teller, the Colorado State Senator and Secretary of the Interior who was a strong proponent of federal Indian education programs. Teller is discussed in greater detail in Section V. Suffice it to say, the majority of Teller's papers at all three repositories were related to his extensive mining interests in Clear Creek County.

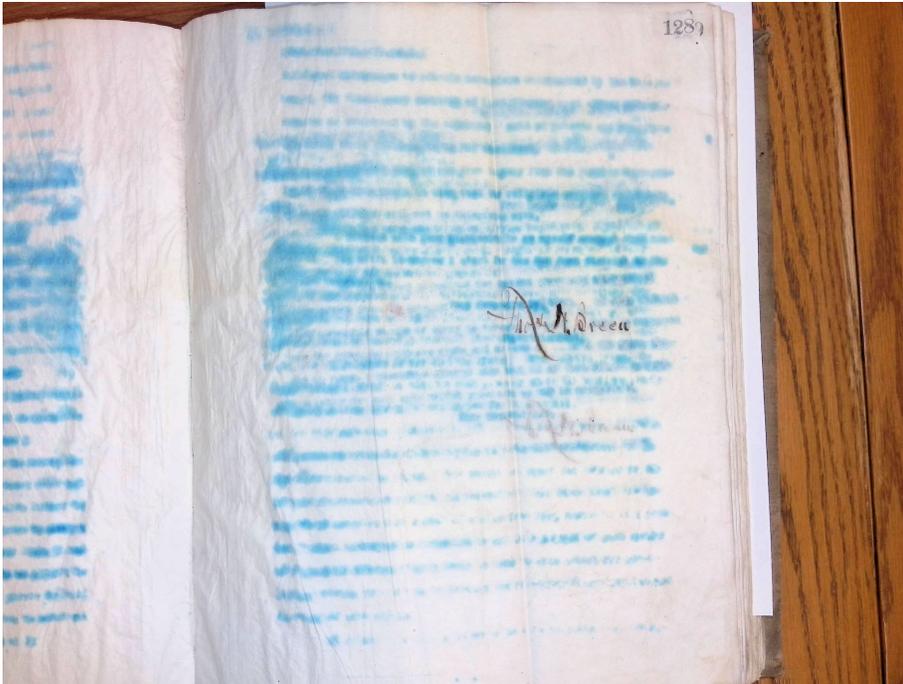


Figure 1. A page from the copy book of Superintendent Breen, Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, showing severe water damage. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_entry 44010\_Box 3\_journal 1\_pgs 1-436, NARA Denver.

The documentation that does exist regarding Native affairs is focused largely on issues around reservations and conflicts with white settlers and Indian agents, including the Nathan Meeker incident. The Stephen H. Hart Research Center contains primarily photographic documentation related to several federal Indian schools in Colorado.

### Methodology

Archival research for this effort was undertaken at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC (often referred to as “Archives 1”) and NARA Denver, which is located in Broomfield. Information about boarding schools is held with Record Group 75, documents relating to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which currently consists of more than 58,000 containers of information, equaling millions of documents. Individual documents have not necessarily been cataloged at an individual level. In some cases, documents are grouped by subject, by year, by individual schools, or by school staff. The team had assistance leading up to the trip by National Archives staff, including Rose Buchanan, the expert archivist on Record Group 75. Additionally, the National Archives staff gave the entire team tremendous support and technical assistance during our time in the research room. This was considered a preliminary

reconnaissance effort to identify what records may exist and formulate a plan to access and gather them. The staff from Alpine Archaeological Consultants focused on retrieving information related to the Teller Institute; staff from the Center for Southwest Studies focused on documents related to Fort Lewis; and AECOM focused its efforts on identifying information for the day schools at both Ignacio and Towaoc as per a suggestion received from tribal representatives in October 2022 consultations. However, all team members were directed to retrieve any information regarding schools in Colorado if they came across the documents.

The records at both NARA facilities are arranged either by year or by school, occasionally both. The individual schools recorded the incoming and outgoing students, so we do not see information related to when the children are sent away, unless there are transfers between schools, such as Teller Institute to Carlisle Institute. In the case of records arranged by year, they are typically in chronological order of when the letter or report was received in DC. In all cases we have to cross-reference several indexes and finding aids to identify documents related to the specific schools.

It took a team of thirteen people hundreds of hours to pull information from these documents, primarily regarding the names and fates of children who attended the schools in Colorado. The information was entered into a variety of Google Excel spreadsheets, and then pulled together in an Access database. The database administrator simultaneously cleaned up the data—looking for errors, but more often redundancies, and also ensuring that all the data was consistent so reports could be pulled from the database to answer any number of potential questions.

### Interpretation of the Documents

While written documents seem like very black-and-white artifacts from another time, they are in fact politically, ideologically, and culturally charged and require deep historical analysis in order to retrieve reliable information from them. Unfortunately, no one left us the “big book of boarding schools”; instead, what documents we retrieved from archives and what information we mined from those documents was determined by our research questions.

For this particular report, HB22-1327 made it clear that our primary research question was to understand how many children passed away at boarding schools, and to identify the burial places of those children. Our secondary research question was: What was the context of the federal education system in Colorado between 1880 and 1920? That is, what schools existed,

when and where did those schools exist, and who attended them? What was the overall experience of those students in Colorado? An assumption in the legislation was that it was Ute children who experienced these schools. It became clear that this was not the case, so an additional research question emerged: What was the Ute experience with the federal educational system during this same period of time?

The historic designations for individual tribes differ greatly from how tribal nations are identified today. In some cases, the historic terminology was racist or derogatory. In other cases, it conflated very different and unique tribal groups into a single group, making it difficult to affiliate an individual in the historic documentation with a modern-day governmental entity. In many cases, because the officials in question were not concerned with appropriately identifying tribal affiliation, individuals were racially identified through the generic term “Indian,” thereby obscuring their cultural and family history.

The research team had to make decisions regarding contemporary affiliation from historic identification. This was done in part through historical and cultural research, and in part through direct conversations with tribes. Determining affiliation was especially necessary to engage in meaningful consultation; in order to send invitations, it is necessary to decide specifically with whom one is going to consult. It is also necessary to make these decisions because it was determined by tribal representatives involved in this process that only those tribes whose children attended these schools should take part in consultations, and for good reason. There are times to spread a net far and wide when considering consultation partners, but there are other times, especially involving sensitive issues, when those most affected want a decision-making body to remain intimate. It may mean that some tribal nations were inadvertently excluded. However, that does not mean that further information, whether from the dissemination of this report or from other sources, may not come to light which would include additional tribes.

Different types of documents hold different information, all part of the much larger puzzle. The annual reports from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs provide a very general overview not only of the Department of Education in general, but also individual schools. This information, however, was still self-reported by the individual superintendents. Through the early aughts, the information was inconsistent and varied greatly from individual to individual and year to year. Some superintendents focused on the students; others focused on the state of their campus buildings; still others focused on the farming or other vocational practices their

school depended on. When student demographics were mentioned, it was always at a high level; so, we rarely get the refinement in data at an individual level that today we are looking for.

We can occasionally find that refinement in data from the quarterly school reports that were required to be sent to Washington, DC, school pupil lists, or health reports. Again, it wasn't until well into the twentieth century that these reports were required to provide consistent information, or that there was an enforcement mechanism to submit these reports at all. For both Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School and the Teller Institute, these are completely missing for many years.

Over the course of several weeks, the archives team scanned over 7 GB of data from NARA DC and NARA Denver, which is roughly equivalent to 5,500 pages of high-resolution PDF documents. The documents were then analyzed to identify the names or other identifying information of students who attended the schools, as well as other pertinent or interesting information that was relevant to the current report. Many of the documents were read by multiple researchers or were referred to multiple times; other documents may still be sitting in folders and were unable to be analyzed during this very short year.

In addition to the PDFs of archival documents, the team also pulled relevant historic newspaper articles from the Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection and the Readex Newsbank Historical Newspaper Collections, federal reports related to the Bureau of Indian Affairs dating back to the early twentieth century, and miscellaneous documents and photos from a variety of sources. All of the information collected and analyzed to date is publicly available.

It is difficult to ever know the complete truth or story of what occurred in any historical event or time. Archival research and archaeological methods such as remote sensing can complement each other and provide a larger picture, but each takes time and expertise to understand and contextualize. This report is neither final nor definitive. Additional research, or research looking at the topic from different angles and different theoretical viewpoints, may provide additional information to the tribes, descendants, and the public about the history of federal Indian boarding schools in Colorado.

### III. A General History of Federal Indian Boarding Schools in the United States

#### **Introduction**

The boarding school experience can be challenging to discuss, not in the least because there is a difference between structural harms and individual experiences. Overall, the federal Indian education system wreaked violence on Native communities and families. The school system purposely tore families apart and separated children from their parents, knowing the full extent of the harm this caused to both adults and children.<sup>2</sup> Survivors of boarding schools do identify personal benefits they may have received, such as learning a skill or meeting a future spouse.<sup>3</sup> Both of these factors are simultaneous truths that can be understood together, as parts of a very complex whole. This report focuses on the systemic, structural issues of the federal education system as it was enacted in the state of Colorado. It is recommended that future phases of this research explore the individual experiences of students through oral histories and other methods.

While there has been much attention given to federal Indian boarding schools, for good cause, US federal education policy was a deep and complicated web of institutions and facilities, many overseen by the federal government, but that also included contracts to third-party groups including religious organizations, State-run facilities, and philanthropic organizations. The federal Indian education system had three types of schools: day schools, on-reservation boarding schools, and off-reservation boarding schools. These schools were intended to serve different ages of students, and ideally were meant to feed one into another to achieve the greatest success. In practice, however, that often didn't work, as students were shuffled to the schools nearest them or to ones where the superintendents or Indian agents were most active with recruitment.

The boarding school experience for Native youth started later in Colorado than in other places in the United States. Although boarding schools were overseen by the federal government, specifically the Education Department within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the system was loosely managed; the way the school was operated, who attended the school, and even funding often depended on local conditions. For instance, in earlier eras of Indian education, particularly the pre-1880s, a number of religious schools had financial support from the US government. However, long-standing anti-Catholicism, concerns with curriculum oversight, and the de-

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<sup>2</sup> Reyhner, Jon and Jeanne Eder (2004), *American Indian Education*, pg 7.

<sup>3</sup> Adams (2006) *Beyond Bleakness*

emphasis on religious institutions and a greater emphasis on military-style education a la the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania greatly diminished the number of religious schools by 1900.<sup>4</sup> And while the US government oversaw the education system from 1880 onwards with attempts to standardize curricula and various reforms to the federal Indian Service, there were important differences in how schools operated from state to state and region to region, even down to individual schools. Some of this variety can be explained through the different treaty agreements that included federally provided education, while other aspects are the natural differences that emerge from local control over an institution.

The model of schools was very different as well. Not only were there both on- and off-reservation boarding schools and day schools, but even the boarding schools had varying relationships with different tribal nations, reservations, and local communities. Some off-reservation boarding schools, such as the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, were still geographically and politically related to a nearby reservation, while others, like the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School, were completely independent. We see this same dizzying variety here in Colorado, which helps to explain the range of experiences.

What is similar across this variety of institutions is that the goal of assimilation remained the same. It is useless to try to discuss any of these types of schools as better or worse than the others, and belies the fact that all of these schools brought harm to Native children and communities.

### American Indian Education Policy

American Indian education as a project pre-dates the US government and can be traced back to the British and Spanish colonizers who first settled in North America. Beginning in 1788 with the establishment of a constitution for the nascent United States, the US federal government embarked on an uneasy relationship of both waging war and waging assimilationist policies, such as educational programs, with the intent to destroy Native Americans as a legal identity—and thus incorporating them, and their resources, into American culture. Educational policies, therefore, are not uniform across all historic periods, and are often divided by scholars into different periods that are marked by changes in US Indian policy that informed the direction of education policies. Some of the key pieces of legislation, such as the Indian Civilization Fund,

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<sup>4</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*; Reyhner and Eder (2004), *American Indian Education*.

can be seen in Table 1. Not all the pivotal moments in US Indian education policy were related directly to education legislation. In fact, changes to education programs were responses to other Indian policy, such as the Dawes Act of 1887.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1. American Indian Education Timeline**

Early Era

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1802 | The Factory System  |
| 1819 | Civilization Fund established   |
| 1824 | Office of Indian Affairs established  |
| 1832 | Office of Indian Affairs moved to War Department<br>Federal support of mission schools east of the Mississippi ends |
| 1834 | Department of Indian Affairs (Bureau of Indian Affairs) established<br>Factory System revoked                       |
| 1841 | Bureau of Indian Affairs moved to newly formed Department of the Interior   |
| 1868 | Kit Carson Treaty   |
| 1869 | President Ulysses S. Grant's "Peace Policy"<br>Board of Indian Commissioners established                            |
| 1871 | Congress appropriates \$100,000 for industrial schools  |
| 1873 | Civilization Fund revoked   |
| 1874 | Brunot Agreement  |

Reform Era

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 1879 | Carlisle Indian Industrial School opens   |
| 1880 | Ute removal to Utah   |
| 1887 | General Allotment Act, aka the Dawes Act  |
| 1904 | Ute reservation split, creating Southern Ute Indian Reservation and Ute Mountain Ute Indian Reservation   |
| 1905 | Allotted Southern Utes placed under authority of superintendent of Southern Ute Boarding School; Unallotted Utes at Navajo Springs officially placed under authority of superintendent at Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School |
| 1906 | Burke Act   |

Progressive Era onward

|      |  |
|------|--|
| 1928 | Meriam Report                          |
| 1934 | Indian Reorganization Act              |
| 1973 | BIA report of History of Indian Policy |
| 1988 | Report on BIA Education                |
| 1990 | Native American Languages Act          |

“Education” in this context can be a loaded term, and belies the motivations of erasing Native cultures from the United States. It was an explicit project: At no point in the history of the United States was that goal hidden or a secret. In fact, the erasure of Native Americans was a common conversation not only within the federal government but also at other levels of

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<sup>5</sup> Please see the bibliography/references cited section of this report for a list of scholarly work that delves more deeply into this history.

territorial, state, and local governments, as well as within everyday institutions and among the American people. Efforts at education throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth were aimed to re-create Indian civilizations as mimics of Euro-American society and to incorporate Native peoples into the larger society. This is often couched in terms of destroying Native culture. And, “destroying Native culture” was the means to an end, the end being the destruction of the American Indian as a legal identity. Education in this context, then, was not about reading, writing, and arithmetic but about severing Native people’s ties to their traditional knowledge systems and instilling in them Euro-American ideals of religion, labor, private property, and even family dynamics.

For most of the existence of the United States, education sat alongside physical domination, such as warfare, as a means of eradicating Native peoples. Education policies were intimately tied to policies of trade and economics as well as to conflicts. Education was incorporated into most treaties—trading the promises of future economic and social stability for vast swaths of land. By the late nineteenth century, conflicts in the western United States had largely ended, and education was seen as the next tactic to end the reservation system and fully incorporate Native Americans into mainstream American society as most Native American tribes had been segregated onto reservation lands. For some political leaders, reservations were never an end in and of themselves, but were seen as a transition to American-style private property ownership.

The United States Congress, which reserved for itself the right to interface with Native American tribes, enacted a number of pieces of legislation throughout the 1800s to address education. These programs tended to be small, poorly funded, and decentralized. The first significant piece of legislation to address education was the Civilization Fund of 1819 that provided an annual appropriation of \$10,000 for the education of American Indians. This money was meant to be used by third parties, such as missions or churches, to support their education efforts. Many early boarding schools were mission schools; that is, missionaries or officials associated with various religious denominations established local schools in or near Native communities, primarily for religious education but also for the academic basics of letters and math. Boarding schools were always part of the approach to American Indian education. As early as 1822, there were fourteen established schools with more than 500 students.<sup>6</sup> Religious schools

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<sup>6</sup> Reyhner, Jon, and Jeanne Eder (2004), *American Indian Education*, pg 43.

did not conform easily to the model of education that the US federal government advocated. Particularly, in a virulently anti-Catholic nineteenth-century United States, there was a large amount of unease with Catholic-run schools for Native children, and the federal government took pains to limit access to funding for all denominations east of the Mississippi after 1834.<sup>7</sup> Catholic schools, and other denominational institutions such as those run by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, were an important part of the federal Indian school system in some parts of the country, especially in places such as New Mexico and Wisconsin. There is no indication that religious schools were a dominant model in the state of Colorado, with the exception of the Good Shepherd Industrial School for Girls in Denver, which contracted with the federal government for a very brief amount of time in the 1890s. For the most part, the federal government advocated for a secular education that encouraged Christianity—which is not necessarily the same as a religious education. At times the religious and federal schools competed with each other for students.

It wasn't until 1879, with the establishment of the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania, that the boarding school system as many Americans have come to understand it began. Much has been written about the United States Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and its infamous founder, Henry Pratt. In some ways the influence of Carlisle has been overstated. Pratt developed his model for the Carlisle School from the Hampton Institute, a school for newly emancipated African American children in Virginia. Pratt combined the model of the Hampton school with the immersive assimilation experience to which he subjected military prisoners of war. However, from the beginning there was a deep philosophical divide between the Carlisle School and the Hampton Institute, which did accept Native students alongside the African American students for whom the school was established. Pratt intended for his students to become part of mainstream America, while Samuel C. Armstrong, the superintendent and founder of Hampton, intended for his students to return to their communities.<sup>8</sup> A major structural difference was that Pratt, and many Indian agents and superintendents, bridged the American experience of fighting against Native Americans in violent conflicts, largely in the West, by then becoming their teachers, or more accurately the teachers of their children. Pratt began his grand experiment when he was put in charge of Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and Comanche prisoners

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 116.

of war from the Red River War in 1874.<sup>9</sup> These adult prisoners of war were sent to Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida, for imprisonment, and it was there that Pratt experimented with re-educating the men to instill Euro-American values. In the wake of that success, Pratt requested from the federal government permission and resources to open a school that would use the same model but with Native children, and the Carlisle School was established.

Henry Pratt was not necessarily an educational visionary. As stated, he was deeply influenced by the Hampton Institute, although the two models did diverge in significant ways. Both schools also existed within a larger philosophical change to public education in the United States and in Europe, as industrialized nations grappled with how to create ideal workers who could participate in the emerging economy. By the mid-nineteenth century the United States enjoyed the reputation of having the best public education system, and therefore the best-educated populace, in the world.<sup>10</sup> Literacy rates among the general population were higher than in most European countries. Education theory and practice were highly debated and respected areas of intellectual thought. How children should be educated was the subject of legislation, conferences, and emerging disciplines.<sup>11</sup> Public education continued to grow in communities alongside the emergence of a federally run education system, which was completely different from any other model in the United States, where education was always a locally controlled institution. Where the federal system did fit in with the rest of the country's was in the unshakable belief that education could solve a variety of societal problems.

The Carlisle School therefore became the flagship of the federal Indian school system. It was larger than most other schools, with enrollments that topped 1,000 students annually. It received more funding than other schools in the system—on average \$300 to 400 per child, whereas the typical federal boarding school budget was \$167 per child. The Carlisle School was in the East, and closer to urban areas, allowing it access to resources that were denied to other schools. And, because of Henry Pratt's own tendencies toward self-promotion, Carlisle loomed larger in the American imagination and was the subject of newspapers and other popular media of the time. Carlisle was the Ivy League Indian school. It even became part of the college-level

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<sup>9</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 36.

<sup>10</sup> Golden, Claudia (1999), *A Brief History of Education in the United States*. National Bureau of Economics Research.

<sup>11</sup> Bates, Julia (2016), "The Role of Race in Legitimizing Institutionalization: A Comparative Analysis of Early Child Welfare Initiatives in the United States." *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 9(1):15–28.

sports circuit, with students playing actual Ivy League universities in football. The Carlisle Indians, the school's football team, played against the University of Denver at least once in Colorado in 1908.<sup>12</sup>

The Carlisle School actively recruited the best and brightest of the American Indian population to attend, often focusing on high-profile students such as the children of chiefs and other important Native people. It was not a place to which students were “assigned” but, like some other large schools, was meant to be a crowning achievement on a lustrous academic career. So in many ways Carlisle was not illustrative of the typical boarding school education at the turn of the twentieth century.

Some of the parallels or standards that were set by Carlisle, Hampton, and the other big schools, however, were reinforced by federal laws and policies. Education was not compulsory during the period that this report covers, 1880–1920. During the Reform Era, compulsory education for American Indian children was suggested and encouraged, but it was never enacted into law. As more Native children were ushered into local public schools in the 1920s, the federal government depended on county and state school compulsory laws to ensure that Native youth who were on allotted or severalty land attended school. It wasn't until the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 gave Native tribes more power over education decisions that Native youth were subjected to local compulsory education laws. Officials within the Commission of Indian Affairs did attempt to compel Native children to attend federal schools in various ways. US government officials were authorized to use the means of coercion, threats, and sometimes even military violence to compel students to attend schools. These strategies were applied differently across tribes.

One of the most common misconceptions is that the federal government was assigning students to various schools. During the Reform Era, this could not have been further from the truth, primarily because the federal government lacked the logistical wherewithal to be that organized. The most consistent way that students found themselves in boarding schools was through active recruitment. Early in the period, Indian agents, school superintendents, and other staff visited reservations, often spending days or weeks with parents and tribal leaders, trying to convince them to send their children to their schools. These recruitment efforts were often within

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<sup>12</sup> Trafzer et al. (2006), *Boarding School Blues*, pg 27; *The Daily Pickings*, Football Notes, November 20, 1908.

a region. With the exception of places like the Carlisle School, even the federal government did not want to send children too far from their homes—although it was not for altruistic reasons but, rather, out of concerns about transportation costs. These recruitment efforts were also very dependent on the networks and relationships developed by the individuals involved. US Indian agents and superintendents were often men with military experience who had built relationships on reservations in other contexts. They exploited these relationships in an attempt to secure children to fill their schools. For instance, Theodore Lemmon, the superintendent of the Teller Institute from 1892 to 1904, had previously worked on the Mescalero reservation, and so recruited a number of students to Colorado from Arizona.

Recruitment methods were a concern at all levels of the government. While parents had legal rights, and were supposed to provide consent for their children to attend school, the consent was often coerced and ill-informed. There was no consensus even among Commissioners of Indian Affairs regarding how to respect Native parents. What is clear is that the official policies were to gain consent, but there seem to have been few consequences for superintendents and Indian agents who used harsh methods or resorted to illegal activity such as kidnapping. Because these schools depended on recruitment for enrollment numbers, the competition between superintendents and schools could be fierce. Individual superintendents or agents would seek permission from Washington to recruit from any particular reservation. Despite this, staff would sometimes travel to a reservation within their region, even if it had been assigned to someone else. Schools would attempt to poach each other's students, either by encouraging parents and tribal leaders to change alliances or by throwing a tantrum to Washington and demanding that the students be placed with them. In the 1892–93 academic year, the Phoenix Indian School, Albuquerque Indian Boarding School, and Grand Junction Indian Boarding School fought viciously over fifty Mohave students who had been recruited to the Teller Institute in Grand Junction. Ultimately, “Washington awarded the fifty Mohave students to Albuquerque.”<sup>13</sup> How much input the parents of these boys had on the decision is unknown. Finally, in 1908 then–Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis E. Leupp ended the practice of assigning recruiting territories. Schools also eventually created brochures and other propaganda to try to illustrate to parents and reservation officials how beneficial their schools would be for their children, much

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<sup>13</sup> Gram, John (2015), *Education at the Edge of Empire*, pg 70.

like college recruiting materials today.<sup>14</sup> This included highlighting the vocational and other programs they offered students, and sometimes highlighting the lives of successful graduates, or highlighting the care students received, such as the St. Labre school pamphlet (figure 2). To date, we have not identified such literature for either Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School or the Teller Institute, but it is expected that the Teller Institute in particular may have developed such recruitment materials.

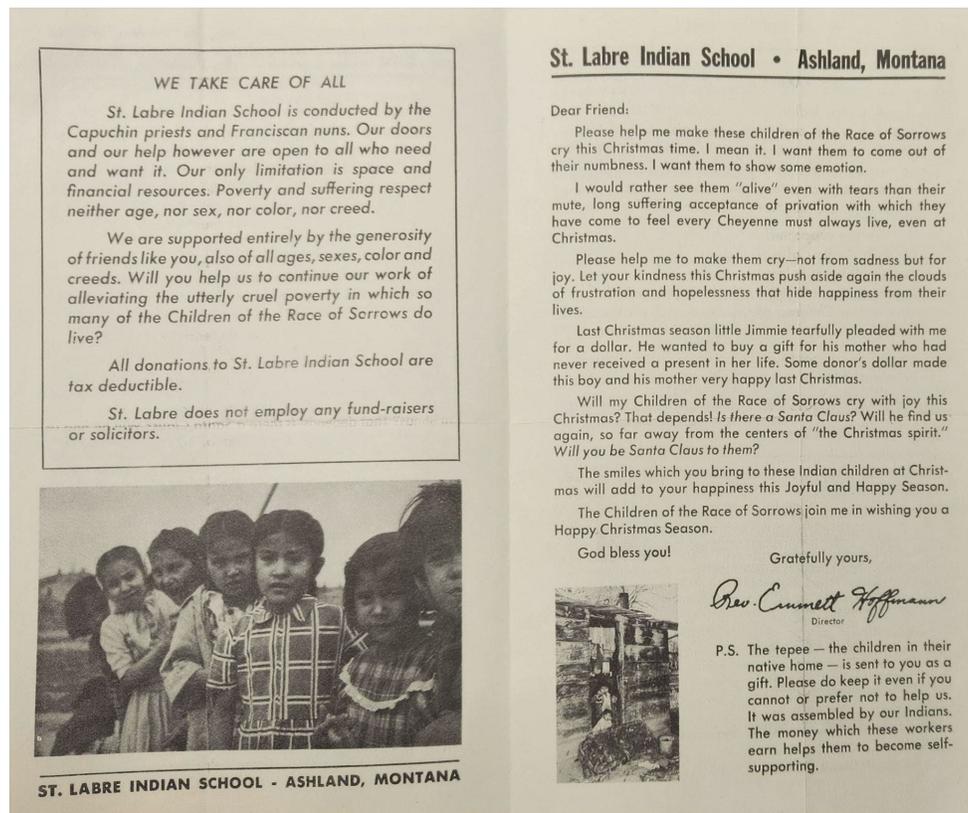


Figure 2. A recruitment pamphlet from the St. Labre Indian School. Such pamphlets were sent to Indian agents and parents to encourage their children to attend the school. Courtesy of the Stephen H. Hart Research Center, History Colorado.

It appears from the documentation that methods of recruitment differed between federal schools and religious schools. Throughout the entire era, while staff within the Indian Service and elected officials maintained that Native youth had to go to school, there did appear to be lines that they would not cross. It was important to the success of assimilation that the integrity of bureaucratic

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pg 73.

functions be maintained, and that the methods used to secure children for enrollment in federally run schools were always legal. In the American Southwest the schools that most openly used violence and kidnapping within the primary documents were the religiously run schools, particularly the Catholic-managed schools. Where the federal government failed was in a lack of enforcement on Catholic school officials to adhere to the legal rights of Native parents under United States law. This does not mean that the federal agents did not use coercion bordering on violence to secure children for schools, but the distinction in how different schools were managed may be important to understanding the experiences of survivors.

Despite the desire on behalf of Washington to have all Native children in schools, many schools struggled during the Reform Era. Coupled with the lack of willingness to fully invest in the education system, that struggle meant that there were not necessarily enough schools to educate all Native youth who were of school age. This in turn meant that there was competition among schools for the students who were considered the best and the brightest. That competition eventually became policy under Commissioner William Jones, who headed the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1897 to 1905. Jones believed that educating “dullards” or “physically weak” students was a waste of government resources.<sup>15</sup> Prior to this time it had long been both practice and policy not to recruit or accept students with illness or infirmities to schools, and to return seriously ill students home. This policy was foiled in practice in large part due to the bureaucracy required for superintendents to request permission, and funds, from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to return sick students home, causing unnecessary delays and inconsistent permissions.

The consistent resistance of Native parents to boarding schools was one reason that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs promoted policies to coerce children to attend school. Most infamously, the threat of withholding rations and annuities from parents who refused to send their children to school was used nationwide—and was codified by Congress in 1893. This method was tried at the Southern Ute Reservation, apparently unsuccessfully. Charles Bartholomew, US Indian agent from 1889 to 1893 and one of the individuals responsible for establishing the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, reported that withholding rations and annuities was an unsuccessful tactic with the Ute and appeared to quickly give up. This was echoed years later, in 1904, by Superintendent William Peterson, who claimed that it was no use

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<sup>15</sup> Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pg 93.

cutting off rations as “the Utes did not care if they got paid at all.”<sup>16</sup> Another tactic that was used, again unsuccessfully, was to deny employment. In the 1880s and 1890s, the federal government employed several tribal leaders as police, including Severo, Buckskin Charlie, and Ignacio, who was employed as the Chief of Police due to his tribal rank. In 1893, when the Ute pulled all their children from the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School and refused to send their children away from home for schooling, Washington, DC, ordered then Indian Agent Patterson to fire Ignacio. That firing lasted for approximately a week before Patterson felt he had to reinstate Ignacio for the proper governance of the reservation.<sup>17</sup> The Ute continued their steadfast refusal to send their children to any school for many years.

Some agents and superintendents did resort to more brutal methods of coercion. Oral histories and written accounts of the boarding school experience by survivors of the schools often include stories of children being rounded up, or even kidnapped, by school officials and taken away to school. In 1891, Southern Ute Indian Agent William Clark complained to Washington that Elmore Chase, the superintendent of the Ramona School in Santa Fe, was using violent methods to recruit Jicarilla Apache children and force them into his school.<sup>18</sup> He was accused of kidnapping San Carlos Apache students for Fort Lewis in 1891 and of taking Navajo children from their on-reservation school without their parents’ consent and sending them to the Teller Institute in 1889.<sup>19</sup> These letters, and other discourse among school and Commission officials, make it clear that these were not universally used or approved-of measures. By 1892 the Commission of Indian Affairs was requiring that all children who attended boarding schools did so with parental permission. By 1893 Congress had intervened, requiring that this permission be in writing. It was important to the assimilation strategy of the US government that there be acceptance of schooling by American Indian parents, even if just in perception.

Once students were recruited and physically separated from their parents and the reservation, the government assumed complete control of their lives. It was in this status that parents often had difficulties in getting their children home. Most enrollment “contracts” were for two to three years, although many superintendents advocated for and attempted to enforce a

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from William Peterson to CIA, November 28, 1904.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to CIA, November 21, 1892; Letter from Bartholomew to CIA, November 30, 1892; Letter from Bartholomew to CIA, December 1, 1892.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from Clark to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 21, 1891.

<sup>19</sup> 1892 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 210.

period of five years. The federal government paid transportation costs for students to arrive at the schools. Once there, because of both difficulties in getting children to return to school after a vacation and the costs of transportation, the superintendents and officials in Washington, DC, were reluctant to allow students to return home.

The period from 1880 to 1920 was one of growth and experimentation for the Education Department. While there was an oversized focus on off-reservation boarding schools, officials also encouraged other school models. They saw off-reservation boarding schools as ideal because they allowed the federal government to completely remove Native children from any influence of their parents and tribal community. Many within the Education Department advocated that only complete immersion in Euro-American lifeways could remove Native culture from students' practices and beliefs. From the earliest periods, however, even federal officials understood that being separated from their families was not healthy for children. Officials in Washington understood that very young children should not be removed from their parents, and so vocalized support for day schools for young children, ages 6 to 12, or what today we would call elementary-aged children, although these day schools were not supported with other resources. Federal officials advocated on-reservation boarding schools for slightly older children and encouraged off-reservation boarding schools for teenagers, or what should have been high school-aged children. The ideal was that one school type would feed into another; children would acquire basic skills at day schools, graduate to on-reservation boarding schools, then attend off-reservation boarding schools to finish their education and prepare to enter mainstream society.

This did not work in reality, however, at least not in Colorado. While Washington expressed these ideals, the guidelines were rarely enforced. The schools, everywhere, were subject to local conditions. Individual superintendents' past experiences and philosophical approaches to schools, relationships between Indian agents and tribal leaders on reservations, local cities' and towns' relationships with schools, and even geographical location all impacted how the education system operated. Another major factor that plagued the Department of Education within the Bureau of Indian Affairs for more than a century was adequate funding. While Washington, DC, prescribed ideal models of Indian education, they were reluctant to pay for it. In addition, despite treaty obligations, day schools were seen as a "privilege" for tribes, and were denied based on indifferent attitudes towards tribal relationships.

While the Southern Ute Agency had a very small school from at least 1884 until 1890, Colorado lacked consistent day schools until 1903, when an on-reservation boarding school was established in Ignacio on what is today the Southern Ute Reservation. Allen Day School near Bayfield, and the Navajo Springs Day School near Towaoc on what is today the Ute Mountain Ute Reservation, quickly followed. However, even the day schools often doubled as boarding schools, and vice-versa. Children from other tribes and reservations did attend these schools. Even for children who lived on the reservation, the reservation was so large that attending the school as a day school was often challenging, so boarding was common.

The curriculum at all these schools has been highly discussed in a number of publications, monographs, and books, and will not be discussed at great length here. The ideal curriculum, again set by Washington, was a half day of academic instruction and a half day of vocational training. Again, the conditions on the ground at individual schools dictated what students learned. The Department of Indian Education also lacked any methods to track what students were learning or to measure their progress or academic success. While many of the teachers within the Indian Service were dedicated, or at least started out that way, the service had a reputation for low pay and high burnout, meaning that often the teachers were of poor quality. Many of these schools, Fort Lewis and Teller included, focused on agricultural training. This, coupled with the low funding from the government, meant that the students and staff alike depended on school gardens and farms to feed the attendees. The schools depended on the Native attendees for facilities maintenance; construction of new buildings, irrigation, fences, and other infrastructure; laundry and sewing; and cooking and cleaning, among other activities. These vocational skills were the primary focus of the curriculum. It was never expected or encouraged that Native children would enter mainstream society to compete economically with their white peers. Instead, they were meant to compete with other marginalized groups as laborers and domestic servants.

#### Lasting Impacts of the Federal Education Model

There was never any doubt that the separation of children from their families, and the military-style immersion tactics used to indoctrinate Native youth, were harmful. In proceedings of the Sixth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference in 1888, an education conference that discussed child welfare policies, practices, and philosophies for children of all races, officials noted the psychological harm that institutionalization caused white children, and the pain that was visited

on families and communities when children were separated. Despite this, the same conference reaffirmed boarding schools as the best path to American Indian education.<sup>20</sup> Even within individual schools, superintendents, agents, and others recognized that children needed their families and attempted to ameliorate the harm through different policies, such as family visitation. But ultimately, racist beliefs that separating children from families was fundamental to a successful education process, and that this separation was less harmful to Native children than it was to white children, meant that this practice continued until late in the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

The progressive 1920s brought a change to many aspects of society, and Indian education policy was no exception. Criticism of the boarding school system grew both within and outside the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The detrimental effects of boarding schools on the physical health of Native children was investigated in a 1912 Congressional report, followed by a reorganization of the health services within the Education Department.<sup>22</sup> These concerns, and changing attitudes towards child welfare, culminated in the 1928 Meriam Report.<sup>23</sup> The Meriam Report was a 1926 investigation into the American Indian policies of the United States and their implementation by the Bureau of Indian affairs. The report touched on all aspects of governance, including education, and was a scathing critique of every aspect of the education system until that point in time. The report had a powerful effect on policy moving forward, and was a sea change in education.

Nor was this the last word on the detrimental effects of American Indian education policy. After the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, tribal governments were able to wrest control of many aspects of schooling back from the federal government and to have a greater influence on both curriculum and practice. The federal government was still a poor substitute for local community control of schools, and many of the harmful practices, and long-term effects, that took root at the turn of the twentieth century continued through the 1980s, and some even continue today. Other government-sponsored reports and a large peer-reviewed literature from

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<sup>20</sup> Bates (2016) *The Role of Race in Legitimizing Institutionalization*

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Dejong (2007) *Unless They are Kept Alive*

<sup>23</sup> Meriam et al (1928) *The Problem of Indian Administration*

scholars and academics largely demonstrate that federal schools continued to fail Native children and families.<sup>24</sup>

Academic failures that kept Native youth from competing with other demographics of American children were not the only ill effects of these schools. Many scholars from multiple disciplines have studied various disparities that can be traced back to the federal education system and the separation of children from their parents during critical formative periods of their lives. These include health disparities and important sociocultural impacts on family dynamics.<sup>25</sup> Collectively, this entire suite of negative impacts is often referred to as *intergenerational trauma*. This is a widely accepted concept that trauma experienced by an individual can be passed down to subsequent generations, psychologically, emotionally, and even physically.

Native communities, tribal governments, survivors of boarding schools, and descendants of boarding school students all cite the federal education system as having a detrimental effect on tribal culture and on individuals. These effects, while not always understood or widely acknowledged by the public, are not unknown.

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<sup>24</sup> Greyeyes, Wendy Shelly (2022) *A History of Navajo Education*; Tippeconnic (1991) *The Education of American Indians*; Tyler (1973) *A History of Indian Policy*; Birchard (1970) *National Study of American Indian Education*

<sup>25</sup> Brave Heart et al (2012) *Wicasa Was'aha Restoring the Traditional Strength of American Indian Men and Boys*; Chapman (2012) *Colonialism, Disability, and Possible Lives*; Elias et al (1982) *Trauma and Suicide Behavior Among a Canadian Indigenous Population*; Running Bear et al (2019) *The Impact of Individual and Parental American Indian Boarding School Attendance on Chronic Physical Health of Northern Plains Tribes*

## IV. Establishing a Boarding School System in Colorado

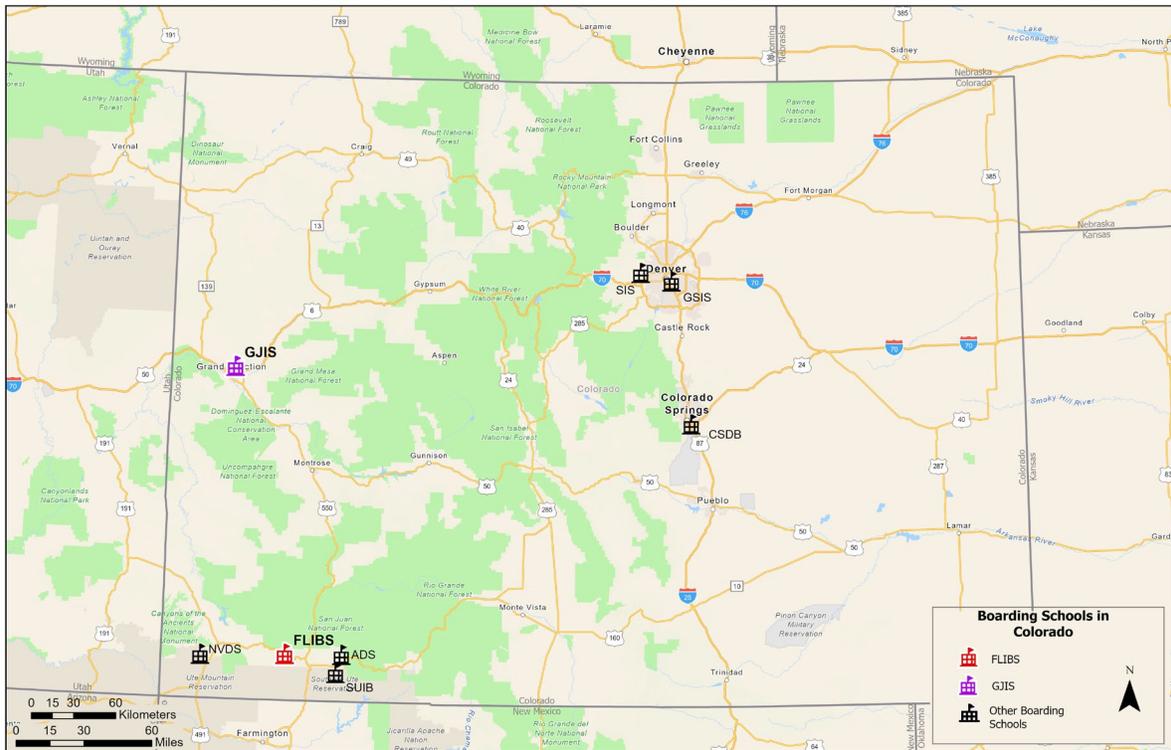


Figure 3. The locations of all the federally supported Indian schools in Colorado between 1880-1920, including Teller Institute (GJUS), Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School (FLIBS), Southern Ute Indian Boarding School (SUIB), Navajo Springs Day School (NVSD), Allen Day School (ADS), State Industrial School for Boys (SIS), Good Shepherd Industrial School for Girls (GSIS), and the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind (CSDB).<sup>26</sup> Map courtesy of Holly Mckee-Huth, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

The Bureau of Indian Affairs established schools in Colorado throughout the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries that were intended to serve and assimilate the Ute population. The Ute were largely resistant to federal education policies until the beginning of the twentieth century. The story of the boarding schools, therefore, is not the story of Ute education in Colorado, as the two were largely divergent until after 1900.

The schools established by the federal government did not just serve the Native population within Colorado, but brought in students from the larger region. While the Ute themselves put up heavy resistance to distance education, many of the superintendents and US

<sup>26</sup> Data Sources: City (location of other boarding schools), State, and Basemaps were all Esri Map Layer Service or Esri Vector Tiles Service Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, @OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Indian agents responsible for recruiting students to their schools had networks and relationships with other American Indian tribes that allowed them to recruit students from out of state. Also, the federal government contracted with non–federally managed institutions for a variety of reasons. In Colorado, between 1880 and 1920 approximately nine schools had served Native youth. By 1920, however, the off-reservation school was a thing of the past in Colorado as the federal Indian education system entered a new era.

While the educational tensions played out on the Ute reservation in the 1880s, one Colorado senator turned Secretary of the Interior was trying to establish Indian boarding schools in Colorado. Henry Moore Teller was a nineteenth-century Colorado lawyer, businessman, and politician. He served as a state senator from the time of the state’s admittance to the Union in 1876 until 1882, when then President Chester A. Arthur appointed him as Secretary of the Interior. As a senator, Teller had been deeply involved in Colorado in what politicians of the time called “The Indian Question.” The Indian Question was a set of policy decisions around the dispossession of Native land, attempted genocide, and obliteration of Indigenous culture, language, and political power in what is today the United States.

Teller held complicated views about Native peoples that have been oversimplified in many biographical sketches. He identified as a “Friend of the Indian”—a common term that was used unofficially and officially by advocates for Native peoples, although it was almost always devoted to ideals of assimilation. Teller therefore eschewed the genocidal views of contemporaries such as John Chivington.<sup>27</sup> Teller’s views can best be described as centrist; he espoused that self-reliance was necessary for Native survival, but he also advocated for the retention of reservations that most tribes had been limited to by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> He was not, therefore, a proponent of allotments or full assimilation for Native peoples. He believed that they had the right to retain some of their Indigeneity but should still be full participants in the American economic system.

Teller was a state senator during the 1879 Meeker Incident, in which Ute leaders defended themselves against violent practices by then US Indian Agent Nathan Meeker at the White River Agency. The consequences of the incident were that several bands of Ute were

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<sup>27</sup>Ellis, Elmer (1941), *Henry Moore Teller, Defender of the West*; MacKendrick, Donald (1993), “Cesspools, Alkali, and White Lily Soap,” pg 3; Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pg 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis (1941), *Henry Moore Teller*; Smith, Duane (2002), *Henry M. Teller*.

removed to Utah. For Teller, this incident reinforced ideas that education and assimilation were less costly methods of securing peace than war and conflict, declaring as Secretary of the Interior that, “over a ten year period the annual cost of both waging war on Indians and providing protection for frontier communities was in excess of \$22 million, nearly four times what it would cost to educate 30,000 children for a year.”<sup>29</sup> Biographers have claimed that Teller was deeply inspired by Henry Pratt, the military captain turned school reformer who ushered in the boarding school era, and believed that educational reforms for Native children were the best way to achieve the assimilation necessary for the survival of Native peoples.<sup>30</sup>

In 1882 Teller was appointed Secretary of the Interior, a position in which he oversaw the Bureau of Indian Affairs and advocated for increased funding for the federal Indian education project. The following year, in 1883, it appears that Teller was trying to establish a school in Colorado while also ensuring that Ute children attended schools. For a brief period of time the Agricultural College in Fort Collins, today’s Colorado State University, was attempting to recruit Native students. A handful of telegrams between Secretary Teller and US Indian Agent to the Southern Ute Warren Patten indicate that Teller was involved in directing where the Ute students were to go, and Fort Collins was at the top of this list.

Despite their best efforts, there is no indication that the Agricultural College was able to get a Native education program off the ground. Teller and Patten, who had sixteen Southern Ute boys in a hotel in Pueblo, Colorado, were scrambling to find a school these students could attend. Interestingly, Teller told Patten that he preferred “the students to remain in state...[and that] Carlisle was completely out of the question.”<sup>31</sup> These students were the ill-fated group who found themselves at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School (see Section VIII).

Teller only served as Secretary of the Interior for three years, until 1885, then returned to Colorado and his practice at the Teller and Orahood Law Office, where he redoubled his efforts to establish boarding schools in Colorado, and was elected as a senator in 1888. The Orahood Law Office assisted in establishing both the Grand Junction and Fort Lewis Indian Schools.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 20.

<sup>30</sup> Ellis (1941), *Henry Moore Teller*; MacKendrick (1993), “Cesspools, Alkali, and White Lily Soap,” pg 3.

<sup>31</sup> Western Union Telegrams, from Teller to Patten, March 31, 1883, April 19, 1883, April 30, 1883, May 2, 1883, May 9, 1883, May 7, 1883, May 10, 1883.

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Teller to CIA, October 18, 1891.

The federal school system was one part of an intricate web of assimilation practices undertaken simultaneously by the United States government. The education system, at least in theory, was meant to support the various methods of land dispossession, including the allotments. The schools were supposed to teach children how to be independent farmers and laborers to engage in private farming endeavors. Even without their receiving a federal education, allotments themselves were also meant to integrate Native people with non-Native homesteaders.<sup>33</sup> An additional insult was that the boarding school system was largely funded through the extraction and sale of land from various reservations and eventually the allotment system.<sup>34</sup> Despite treaty promises, the school at Ignacio was probably not constructed until 1903 because there had not been a threshold of allotments sold, and therefore money taken in to support treaty promises.

History Colorado followed the criteria in identifying federal Indian schools established by the Department of the Interior. These criteria identified a federal Indian school as one that *“1) Provided on-site housing or overnight lodging; and 2) Was described in records as providing formal or vocational training and instruction; and 3) Was described in records as receiving Federal Government funds or other support; and 4) Was operational before 1969.”*<sup>35</sup>

Between 1880 and 1920 there were two off-reservation boarding schools, two on-reservation boarding schools, and at least three day schools managed by the federal Indian Service. In addition, there were two schools that held federal contracts for Native students, for a total of nine institutions that served American Indian youth in some capacity or other. The primary focus in this report is on the two off-reservation boarding schools, but all the schools will be discussed to some degree.

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<sup>33</sup> Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pg 73.

<sup>34</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pgs 65–66.

<sup>35</sup> Newland (2022), *Federal Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report*, pg 6.

Table 2. Federally supported schools for Native youth in Colorado

| <b>School</b>                             | <b>Years in Operation/<br/>Contracted</b> | <b>Type</b>                     | <b>Management</b> |
|---|---|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Ignacio School                            | >1884–1890                                | On-reservation boarding school  | BIA               |
| Grand Junction Indian Boarding School     | 1886-1911                                 | Off-reservation boarding school | BIA               |
| State Industrial School for Boys          | 1890–1926<                                | Boarding and reform school      | State of Colorado |
| Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School         | 1892–1909                                 | Off-reservation boarding school | BIA               |
| Good Shepherd Industrial School for Girls | 1893-1895<                                | Boarding school                 | Catholic Church   |
| Southern Ute Boarding School              | 1903–                                     | On-reservation boarding school  | BIA               |
| Navajo Day School                         | 1910–                                     | On-reservation day school       | BIA               |
| Allen Day School                          | 1912–                                     | Off-reservation day school      | BIA               |
| Towaoc Day School                         | 1916-                                     | On-reservation day school       | BIA               |

Fort Lewis and Grand Junction were meant to complement each other. Ideally, the day schools (which did not exist in any substantive way until 1903) would feed into Fort Lewis, and then into the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School, which was meant to serve as a high school.<sup>36</sup> The schools in Colorado were never that well coordinated. Additionally, as both Fort Lewis and Grand Junction recruited students from the same tribes, they were effectively in competition with each other for students. Both of these institutions are discussed at greater depth in sections V and VI of this report.

<sup>36</sup> 1889 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 100.

The staffing at federal Indian boarding schools was equally as complicated, and a constant source of discussion for policymakers and officials with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. If Native youth were to be trained to enter the workforce, then opportunities had to be open to them. Some Commissioners of Indian Affairs, such as Thomas J. Morgan, and Superintendents of Schools, such as Francis Leupp, advocated for the placement of graduates from the federal education system into the boarding schools as teachers and staff. Other powerful officials, such as Estelle Reel, the Superintendent of Schools from 1898 to 1910, did not believe that American Indians had the abilities to hold the same jobs as whites, and under her the number of Native youth in the Indian Service plummeted.<sup>37</sup> The employment of Native graduates, even when heavily encouraged by the BIA, still appears to have been at the discretion of superintendents, who made all hiring decisions for their individual schools. Nearly 50 percent of Thomas Breen's employees, for example, were Native, many of them having attended Fort Lewis and stayed on as staff.<sup>38</sup> Theodore Lemmon, on the other hand, rarely hired Native people at the school, even graduates of the Teller Institute. Those whom he did hire were often graduates of the more prestigious schools, such as Carlisle. As with white teachers and staff, Native staff moved often between schools. There is much literature on the history of the schools, and particularly the history of students and survivors of the boarding school system. The historical study of Native staff would be beneficial to understanding the assimilation process that was mandated by the US federal government and its consequences on individuals.

#### Daily Life at Colorado's Off-reservation boarding schools

We have very few firsthand accounts of what life was like for the students at either Fort Lewis or Teller. Those that do exist were probably written under a certain level of coercion, or at least surveillance. We can surmise what it was like based on the large number of firsthand accounts left by a number of former students, beginning as early as the memoir of Luther Standing Bear, a student and at times ambivalent critic of Pratt and his methods.<sup>39</sup> There were also standard practices and guidelines that can allow us to imagine what may have happened with students at

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<sup>37</sup> Lomawaima and Lomawaima (1996), *Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Indian Schools*.

<sup>38</sup> 1899 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 390.

<sup>39</sup> Trafzer et al. (2006), Introduction, *Boarding School Blues*.

these places, and finally the reports from superintendents who would have finally been forced to report issues of running away or other behavior problems.

Schools that followed the Pratt methods were military-style institutions. This was reinforced by the fact that it was rarely educators who were in charge of the schools, but often former military officers. Even those who hadn't served in the military were given a military rank upon entering the federal Indian Service.<sup>40</sup> The typical day for a boarding school student, therefore, started early in the morning, usually before dawn with roll call and getting ready for breakfast. As labor was a primary aspect of the training that these students received, some of them would have had to wake early to prepare ovens and food for themselves, their classmates, and their teachers. Students were supposed to receive half a day of academic training, that is, the "Three Rs": reading, writing, and arithmetic. Reports for both Fort Lewis and Teller hint that this was not occurring, especially in the early years of their existence as they lacked an adequate number of trained teachers and other academic resources. The students always worked, however. They were responsible for all aspects of keeping the school running. If the school was an agricultural school, like Fort Lewis and Teller, then they were responsible for simultaneously learning to be good farmers while having to also keep themselves fed by succeeding at raising dairy cows, growing crops, and digging irrigation ditches. The girls were expected to learn "domestic science," so they were employed sewing, doing laundry, cooking, washing dishes, and scrubbing floors. The patriarchal attitudes of the time preferred male students, as they were expected to become wage laborers, but superintendents bitterly complained about the lack of girls when they had to assign "lesser chores" such as laundry to the boys.

Every hour of the day was prescribed for students, at least on paper. After dinner, when some students again had to feed their fellow students and teachers, there were study hours, often led or overseen by an instructor. Larger schools had clubs that could occupy the students' free time; Fort Lewis and Teller always lacked the wherewithal to provide such opportunities to their students. Both schools did have a band, and both schools also organized sports teams, such as football and baseball. While seemingly benign, these were still politically laden activities that reinforced the cultural hegemony of mainstream America.

Hair cutting was a standard practice across the Indian education department, and all newly arrived students at any institution would have been forced to have their hair cut—often

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<sup>40</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 48.

literally forced, as there are reports of teachers holding students down. It was messaged as a hygiene issue, with both the government and school officials claiming that it was a necessary delousing procedure. There was no acknowledgment that hair length was an important aspect of social identity for students, most likely due to obstinate apathy rather than cultural ignorance. We know that at Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, in addition to being highly traumatic, this was also a physically uncomfortable experience as the school lacked adequate indoor showers, baths, or hot water, so an outdoor pool was utilized for at least some bathing purposes.<sup>41</sup> This would have probably heightened the psychological trauma the students experienced. The directives for short hair were not just aimed at students: Those returning to the reservation from school, as well as Native men employed by the Indian Service, were expected to maintain short hair or face punishments such as the withholding of rations.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to adopting Euro-American standards of hairstyle, students were expected to adopt Euro-American styles of dress. Beyond the schools, US Indian agents enumerated how many adults within their reservations or agencies wore “civilian” clothes, meaning western-style, and used that as a metric for how “advanced” the tribes were. Students were not only expected to wear western-style clothing, they were subjected to military-style uniforms. These may have been nearly identical across schools, as a small number of federal warehouses supplied the same materials to all schools. Schools that had large sewing rooms were responsible for manufacturing their own clothes, and so occasionally superintendents commented on a new style or design that they were using. Likewise, many schools, especially agricultural schools like Fort Lewis and Teller, had saddle shops that specialized in leather tooling and would also manufacture items such as shoes for student use.

The other major change to which students were immediately subjected was the stripping of their Native names for an American-style name. The guidance out of Washington, DC, was not just to simply anglicize a family name as a last name, but to provide the student with a new, or alternative, identity, although a 1902 circular directed that names should be “as close to their tribal counterpart as possible, both for simplicity and to facilitate legal matters...”<sup>43</sup> Oftentimes the method behind ascribing these American names was not recorded. However, Teller

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<sup>41</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 27, 1905.

<sup>42</sup> Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pgs 91–92.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 91.

superintendent Theodore Lemmon reported that at Grand Junction pupils' surnames were changed to their father's first name. He took exception to this method on a few occasions: Once, two brothers were very well known and so it was best to leave their names as they were. In another case, a group of students were related to a notorious outlaw, whose name Lemmon did not want perpetuated.<sup>44</sup> The rolls of students for both schools are almost entirely in anglicized or Hispano names. Sometimes, schools gave students the names of famous people, such as presidents, or even the name of a teacher or other staff member at the school.

Accusations of abuse of students by superintendents, teachers, and other staff were also common. The abuse took many forms. As early as 1883, Ute students complained of starvation conditions at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School. Just a couple years later students from the Ute Tribe reported abuse at the hands of the head teacher at the Teller Institute, and it was cited as a reason that neither parents nor students wanted to return to Grand Junction. Neglect, unsanitary conditions, and poor nutrition also accounted for sicknesses that often swept across the schools.

While the Bureau of Indian Affairs officially banned corporal punishment and on-campus jails in 1893, these common practices occurred well into the twentieth century, in part because their unlawfulness meant that Washington could pretend they no longer occurred.<sup>45</sup> Physical abuse, especially for minor indiscretions, took many forms. Gilbert Coon, the father of three students who attended Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, told *The Denver Post* that his two young sons were punished by being forced to sleep in the coal shed on cold winter nights without adequate blankets. In addition, they were psychologically tortured by being threatened with wild animal attacks on those occasions.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the superintendent of the Teller Institute unabashedly threatened runaways with jail and other forms of punishment into the early 1900s. Some of the most horrifying reports were of sexual abuse that the students were subjected to. In 1903, Polly Pry, an investigative reporter for the *Denver Post*, broke an investigation about the years of sexual abuse that Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School Superintendent Thomas Breen subjected girls and young women to. Breen was never prosecuted for these crimes, and he died with supporters proclaiming his innocence.

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<sup>44</sup> Letter from Lemmon to CIA, November 10, 1897.

<sup>45</sup> 1895 ARCIA, pg 343.

<sup>46</sup> *The Denver Post*, April 23, 1903.

It is impossible to quantify the abuses that occurred at schools where students, and even staff, did not have avenues of recourse or adult advocates responsible for their well-being. There was high staff turnover across the federal Indian Service due to poor working conditions, poor pay, and conditions where female staff in particular were also subject to abuse by predominantly male superintendents. Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been removed from the War Department decades earlier, it still retained a military-style hierarchy that made it challenging for staff to bring abuses and neglect to light. This culture was made worse by Indian School Superintendent Estelle Reel, who often forbade staff from reporting issues and demanded that teachers stand by superintendents unwaveringly.<sup>47</sup>

### Recruiting Students

The appropriate means of recruitment was a constant topic of conversation and policy at all levels of government. One of the characteristics of the federal government is a deep reliance on a style of American bureaucracy that insists on the legality of actions undertaken by government officials. The government had also put itself in a difficult position in regard to American Indian welfare, in that the trust relationship also required adherence to policies and laws. It was important that the government maintain a veneer of legality in its exchanges with Native tribes. Additionally, there was no consensus during this period regarding how heavy-handed the government should be in recruiting children to schools. While some commissioners, like William Jones, believed that the government should implement draconian compulsory education laws, others, such as Francis Leupp, believed that Native parents had as much right as other parents to make decisions for their children. Additionally, it was not universally accepted that completely separating children from their families and tribes was in the best interest of the students.<sup>48</sup>

Parents and guardians had an important role in the education system. So while it is easy to say that children were “stolen” from parents, it belies the much more complicated relationships that were negotiated on a daily basis between individuals, tribal leaders, and government officials. The basis of student recruitment was always coercion. But it was done in a context of Native elders attempting to make sense of, and find a new place in, an emerging world that had changed significantly in a single generation. Some parents and tribal leaders believed,

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<sup>47</sup> Reyhner and Eder (2004), *American Indian Education*, pg 162.

<sup>48</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 57; Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pg 94.

with varying degrees of enthusiasm, that their children needed a federal education to succeed in this brave new world. They would have reacted to the changing conditions of education, the reports of abuse and unhappiness, and the inconsistent demands of school officials in equally varying ways. There was no monolithic Native response to federal education policy.

While it was difficult to enroll a student and required parental consent, once a student was enrolled the superintendent and/or Indian agent seemed to have almost complete power over a student. Students were enrolled in schools on contracts signed by their parents, originally for just two to three years. As the system gained more and more power, superintendents increased those contracts to five years. This seemed to be a standard practice at the Teller Institute by the beginning of the twentieth century. During that two-to-five-year span, oftentimes children did not return to their homes. While the federal government paid for the initial transport costs, or reimbursed parents for travel and other costs associated with bringing their children to schools, they often did not pay for students to travel home; those parents had to collect their children at the end of the school year. Correspondence is full of superintendents bickering with other superintendents, Indian agents, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to determine who had financial responsibility for sending children home and picking them up again. These conversations illustrate the deep indifference these officials showed towards the students as human beings. For instance, in 1910, Teller Institute superintendent Charles Burton wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs with concerns about sending a boy home to visit his sick mother, as he felt the expenditure would be a waste of money in the event that the boy's mother did not die.<sup>49</sup>

School years were not as predictable during this time period, so parents and guardians had to rely on communication from superintendents, matrons, and Indian agents. In some cases, apathetic or particularly careless Indian Service staff failed in their communications entirely or refused to be consistent. In 1893, the Jicarilla Apache showed up in June to collect their children from the Albuquerque school as they had been instructed to, and the superintendent sent them away for another month. The agent informed the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that this cost the superintendent dearly: While he forced an additional month on the students, the parents refused to bring them back the following year.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Letter from Burton to CIA, September 7, 1910.

<sup>50</sup> 1894 ARCIA, pg 210.

While superintendents went to great lengths to keep children at the schools year round, the propensity towards “winning hearts and minds” that is a longstanding characteristic of American imperialism encouraged parents, families, and tribal elders to visit the schools frequently.<sup>51</sup> Some superintendents used this tactic of parental appeasement more than others. Thomas Breen, of Fort Lewis, regularly invited Navajo and other parents to the school, going so far as to request funds to feed and entertain them while they were on campus. The local newspapers ran stories about such visits and the progress their children displayed during various school programs.<sup>52</sup>

There are instances of schools complying with parental or guardian preference. In one case, the father of three students protested their admission to the Teller Institute, partially on the grounds that they were half Mexican. These students were discharged and returned home to their father.<sup>53</sup> The following year, when students were being discharged from Fort Lewis as it transitioned into closing, the grandmother of a Navajo girl refused to allow her transfer to the Haskell School in Kansas and she was instead returned home, even though the superintendent vehemently disagreed.<sup>54</sup> The parental consent policies were misused during this time, and it is unclear how informed parents were regarding the consent forms they were coerced into signing.

### Sickness and Injuries

Diseases were an everyday occurrence at the boarding schools. During recruitment only healthy children were wanted, so the trauma and humiliation of the process began at home, at the agency, or on the reservation when the prospective students were often screened by a physician or an Indian agent to determine health and fitness. During this time period the relative health of Native people on reservations was lower than that of the average white American, with a variety of diseases and ailments ravaging a population that was denied access to self-provisioning, and haphazardly issued rations that, even when they did arrive, were usually of poor quality. Once the children were at the schools, the conditions did not improve. As we see below, these schools were often filled beyond capacity as more students enrolled meant more money for deeply

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<sup>51</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 31.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Breen to CIA, April 8, 1895; Letter from Breen to CIA, July 23, 1895; *Durango Semi-Weekly Herald*, July 24, 1902.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Burton to CIA, August 23, 1907

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Spear to CIA, 1908.

underfunded schools. The food rations were the same, and, additionally, students at agricultural schools were expected to learn farming while performing farming to support the school population—usually on land that was ill suited for the purpose. The students also suffered from heavy labor and long working hours. When both Teller and Fort Lewis opened, they lacked sanitation facilities that met even 1890s standards, much less today’s standards. Particularly at Teller, raw sewage and putrid groundwater were consistent problems. Fort Lewis was further plagued by poor-quality military buildings that were difficult to heat in the winter.

The students at both schools, therefore, suffered from pneumonia, chicken pox, tuberculosis, and “sore eyes” or trachoma, a bacterial eye disease that was highly communicable and could cost students their sight, their hearing, or even their life. All superintendents submitted orders for vaccines, medicines, and staff to support the health of students throughout the operation of the schools. As discussions at the individual schools reveal, what passed for adequate healthcare, especially in terms of professional staff, is questionable.

At both Teller and Fort Lewis, the policy was to return sick children home. In some of these cases subsequent reports indicate the passing of the students once they returned home, but it is logical to presume that once the students were on the reservation they were no longer the concern of the superintendent, and so that information may not have always been relayed or recorded. There are also reports of students who died in transit, and what happened with the remains of those students is completely unknown. Sometimes students recovered at home and then returned to the school. This practice raises serious questions that are beyond the scope of this report, regarding how transporting children with highly infectious diseases negatively impacted the health of the reservations.

While the Bureau of Indian Affairs claimed to take Native health seriously, both on the reservations and at schools, it was not until 1912, after both Fort Lewis and Grand Junction closed, that a systematic effort to investigate student health and reform the healthcare system within the federal school system was undertaken.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Dejong (2007), “Unless They Are Kept Alive.”

## The Outing Program

The federal Indian education system had as its ultimate goal creating American citizens who were skilled as industrial or agricultural laborers. Different schools, especially off-reservation boarding schools, had as a primary curriculum either industrial or agricultural education for boys, with domestic labor skills for girls. In the West, the off-reservation boarding schools were focused exclusively on agricultural education. To achieve these ends, schools employed farmers to teach classes, and students were expected to grow crops and husband domesticated animals not only for educational purposes but also to subsidize the school rations. In addition, schools had “outing programs” both officially and unofficially that placed boys and girls with white American families to work as agricultural or domestic laborers. While students could be sent anywhere, and many were hosted by families in the relative vicinity of their respective schools, they were often sent far from both their schools and their families to find work. The outing program was intended to provide students not only with new opportunities for learning agricultural skills but also the opportunity to earn a wage. The host families were supposed to send the money for the students to the superintendent of their school for safekeeping in the interest of the student. This was open to a large amount of abuse, as was seen around the turn of the twentieth century at Teller Institute, when then Superintendent Theodore Lemmon was accused of embezzling student funds.

Another Pratt-inspired program, outing became a common practice in Indian schools across the country by the turn of the twentieth century. Students earned a wage and learned a variety of skills, both vocational and social, and it was believed that living with white families allowed them to absorb even more Euro-American cultural norms to replace cultural practices from home. For boys or young men, outing could mean a variety of things, although the most common wage labor was agricultural. We also saw documents of students who worked in shops or in industrial settings such as printing presses. For girls or young women, the outing system exclusively meant domestic labor; female students were live-in maids and nannies to white families. While the daily lived experiences of students within the boarding schools is opaque, their experiences in private homes is invisible. It is impossible to know what conditions individuals experienced and what impacts the outing system had on them and their families. Wages were earned, although they were not as high as for other wage laborers because the students were “apprenticing” and supposedly gaining an educational benefit.

The system was rife with abuse. Gram describes how, especially in the West, white society saw the outing system as an opportunity for free labor.<sup>56</sup> While few stories about outing have survived, there are glimpses of the issues. While the superintendents were still supposed to oversee the welfare of students at private homes, they largely shirked their duty. One young woman, Lucy Head, complained to Superintendent Spear at Fort Lewis in July 1906 that she was unhappy with her placement at the Carr residence in Mancos and wanted to return to the school. Spear's response to Lucy was that she would remain with the family. In addition, Spear reported his conversation with Lucy to the Carrs.<sup>57</sup> Lucy's complaints were not recorded, but one can only guess at the level of discomfort she had experienced if she brought it to the superintendent's attention. It also illustrates how these students completely lacked adult advocates in their lives. Lucy's complaints did make it back to her father in Farmington, who wrote to the superintendent furious that his daughter had been outed without his permission and wishing his girls to return home. Spear informed Head that the youngest daughter, Hattie, had to remain at the school for another year, but he appeared to acquiesce to Head's request that Lucy be placed with a family in Farmington.

Outing may have been more common at the Teller Institute than at Fort Lewis. In 1908, a ledger listed ninety-one students as participating in the outing program, most of them matched with families or ranches in the Grand Junction area.<sup>58</sup> In addition to the typical agricultural and domestic work, students were apprenticed to a drugstore, the railroad, and a public school. Similarly, a student from Fort Lewis left school and traveled to South Dakota with a former teacher, who was seeking his fortune opening a general store.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, outing programs were not the only external employment opportunities afforded to the students. Some entered the Indian Service as teachers or staff, as discussed below. In addition, some students may have just matriculated out of the system and made their own way in the world. Superintendent Lemmon touted the success of three of his former students who started their own orchard in Grand Junction. While trying to get the small enterprise off its feet, one of

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<sup>56</sup> 1899 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 391.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Spear to Lucy Head, July 9, 1906; Letter from Spear to George Carr, July 9, 1906; Letter from Spear to Mr. P.H. Head, July 25, 1906.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Burton to CIA, August 5, 1908.

<sup>59</sup> RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 4\_journal 2.

the men remained employed at the school while the other two were hired as laborers around the city.<sup>60</sup> What this meant for the men's relationship to their tribes and reservations is unknown.

The outing programs should be targeted for future research. Outing and external employment may have been the final path to separation from the reservation that resulted in the students losing their tribal enrollments.

### *Rocky Ford*

Rocky Ford, Colorado, appears over and over again in primary documents and secondary peer-reviewed sources as an area that hosted many students. As the melon industry took off in Rocky Ford beginning around 1900, the region's farmers needed a vast supply of laborers to help harvest and pack those melons for what was fast becoming a national market. Sugar beets, a staple of early-twentieth-century agricultural pursuits, also required large numbers of field laborers. Students from schools as far away as Chiloco, Oklahoma, and Santa Fe, New Mexico,<sup>61</sup> found themselves apprenticing in these industries. The Grand Junction Indian Boarding School was also a large supplier of students to Rocky Ford. Much of this activity can be traced to one of the former superintendents of the school, J.M. Collins, who left the school prior to 1905 and started his own farm in Rocky Ford.<sup>62</sup>

The region became so important to the federal education system in the western United States that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs noted in his report to Congress in 1909 that not only students from schools across the Southwest, but individual Native men and their families also migrated seasonally to Rocky Ford for work in the sugar beet fields.<sup>63</sup> The federal Indian schools, at least during this early reform period (1880–1920), sometimes paid their students for labor done for the benefit of the school or nearby enterprises.<sup>64</sup> Surprisingly, the schools in Colorado may have been in competition with places like Rocky Ford that afforded decent wages. In 1909 Teller Superintendent Burton intercepted a group of Ute, presumably from Utah, on their way to Rocky Ford, and requested permission from Washington to put them to work at Grand Junction instead; he proposed offering them a place to stay for the summer, including a tool shed

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<sup>60</sup> 1899 Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 391.

<sup>61</sup> Gram, John (2015), *Education at the Edge of Empire*, pg 125.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Superintendent Burton to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 1, 1905.

<sup>63</sup> Valentine, Robert G. (1909), Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Washington, DC.

<sup>64</sup> 1895 ARCA, pg 351.

that could be converted into a summer residence. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs did not approve the request.<sup>65</sup>

Students within Colorado were not the only ones interested in making some money in the beet fields. In 1908 the superintendent for San Ildefonso, New Mexico, wrote to the superintendent in Albuquerque, asking if six of their boys could join the Albuquerque students on their trip to the fields. The following year, a matron at Cochiti sent money to Albuquerque for the travel of two students, Nestor Herrera and his brother Frank, so they could work in Colorado.<sup>66</sup> This brief research effort identified Utes, Puebloans, and Hopi who spent time in the beet fields.

The immense amount of labor needed in the sugar beet industry has been long known in Colorado. During this time period, many migrant laborer populations worked the fields—including German Russians, Japanese, and Mexicans, all with very complicated histories—so in some ways it is surprising that the use of Native students as a labor source has gone largely unacknowledged. However, the goal of Indian education was to render American Indians obsolete as a group. Destroying that Native identity meant they had to become something else. Within the American racial hierarchy of the nineteenth century, many of the Native students who worked in the fields were probably identified as Mexicans, a migrant laborer population that far outnumbered American Indians in the fields. Agricultural labor is also potentially an area where we see the “success” of the assimilationist goals of federal Indian education policy. As Native students were increasingly separated from their traditions, they had to become something else. That something else would take on a variety of forms across the United States, but in Colorado and the western United States in general, that something else may have been a Mexican identity and incorporation into that community. This all invites a deeper look into the participation of tribal members in the agricultural labor markets of Colorado.

#### On-Reservation Boarding School: Southern Ute School and the Navajo Springs/Ute Mountain Ute School

For various administrative reasons, six boarding schools and seventeen day schools were closed as a group between 1908 and 1911, including Fort Lewis and the Teller Institute.<sup>67</sup> Both Fort

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<sup>65</sup> Letter from Supervisor Dagnett to CIA, May 4, 1908.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Fuller to Crandall, May 28, 1908; Letter from Luella Gallup to Crandall, May 15, 1909.

<sup>67</sup> 1911 ARCIA, pg 28.

Lewis and Teller closed at a time when there were increasingly shifting sentiments favoring on-reservation schools as opposed to boarding schools.<sup>68</sup> Beginning in the early twentieth century, the policy of the US government increasingly favored on-reservation schools. These schools had several advantages over off-reservation schools, not the least of which was cost. From a social-engineering perspective, on-reservation schools had the added benefit of being able to directly influence parents and grandparents, who would see the benefits and progress of their children’s education firsthand. By 1920 many off-reservation schools, and even on-reservation schools, were closing as a result of the dominating policy of integration into the local public school system.

**Table 3. Southern Ute Indian Boarding School Superintendents**

|           |                          |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| 1884–1890 | Mary Orr                 |
| 1890–1903 | <i>No School Existed</i> |
| 1903–1904 | Joseph O. Smith          |
| 1905      | Burton Custer            |
| 1906–1907 | William Leonard          |
| 1908–1909 | C.E. Werner              |
| 1914–1916 | Walter Runke             |
| 1917      | E.E. McKean              |

The Southern Ute Indian Boarding School in Ignacio had two distinct phases of operation. The earliest recorded operation of a school in Ignacio was 1884, although an informal school may have existed as early as 1880. This school was technically a boarding school, housing students overnight due to the large size of the reservation and the dispersed nature of the Utes across that amorphous landscape. The school closed in 1890 due to inadequate facilities and was not re-established until 1903. The Utes agitated for an on-reservation school for nearly two decades, resistant to sending their children off-reservation. A more in-depth history of the school and the Ute relationship with federal Indian education policy can be found in Section VIII, Ute Experience with Federal Education.

The Navajo Springs Day School was established while the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was closing, and was a shift towards on-reservation schools to meet the needs of a newly established Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. The relationship between the separation of the Southern Ute and the Ute Mountain Ute into two governments was intimately entangled in federal Indian

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<sup>68</sup> Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pg 93.

education policy and practices of allotment and severalty. The Navajo Springs Day school may have become the Ute Mountain Ute Day School in 1915, although it is unclear if it was simply a name change or a change in location and facilities as well. The final school that was established during this period was the Allen Day School in the Bayfield, Colorado, area. During the nineteen-tens, both the Navajo Springs Day School and the Allen Day School had small student populations. While they were considered day schools, they did have some boarding occurring, again to accommodate students who lived great distances from the schools. Allen Day School also assigned older students overnight boarding during the summer months when the school needed additional labor in the gardens or in the facilities. All of these on-reservation schools changed drastically during the 1920s and into the mid-twentieth century. A future investigation focusing on the progressive era of the Ute schools is recommended.

*Other Educational Institutions*

In 1893, four Ute children—Ida Black and Ellen Ross, age nine, and John Green and Moses Red, both eleven years old—were struck with permanent disabilities from an epidemic of trachoma that swept through the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School in its first year of operation. The US Indian agent to the Southern Utes at the time, Major H.B. Freeman, appears to have been scrambling to address the situation and immediately contracted with the Colorado School for the

**Table 4. Navajo Springs Day School and Allen Day School Superintendents**

| <b>Navajo Springs Day School</b> |                  | <b>Allen Day School</b> |               |
|----------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1910–1912                        | John S. Spear    | 1912                    | Unknown       |
| 1913                             | Claude Covey     | 1913                    | Stephen Abbot |
| 1915                             | James E. Jenkins | 1914–1917               | Unknown       |
|                                  |                  | 1917–1924               | E.E. McKean   |

Deaf and Blind. It is only in one document that he names the children specifically; in all the others he simply refers to them as an anonymous group. He put them on a train in Durango, along with “three Mexican children” who also presumably lost their eyesight, hearing, or both at the Fort Lewis school. He wrote to John Ray, president of the Colorado School for the Deaf and

Blind, that none of the children could speak English and they were traveling by themselves. They never again appear in the Bureau of Indian Affairs records.

Fortunately, the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind ledgers do pick up the trail from there. By the time the children arrived in the school's care, Ellen Ross and John Green had been "orphaned" by the federal government, with Major Freeman listed as their guardian. The school also identified their Ute names, something that was stripped from them at Fort Lewis. Ellen is most likely Wah-car-ve-tact, and John appears to have gone by many monikers in his long life, although his Ute name may have been Pike. Unfortunately, we lose track of both Ida Black and Moses Red, although the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind ledgers provide an additional name missing or altered from the US Indian agent letters, and that of Emma Crane, or Satapuites. The ledgers do indicate that a fourth student was enrolled but may have never attended the school as they are missing from the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind ledger.

US Indian Agent Charles Bartholomew reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that, "The blind son of Colorow and the daughter of Amavaricio have returned home from Ft Lewis. I shall endeavor to have Colorow send the boy with the other blind children and deaf mute to the State asylum in accordance with your instructions."<sup>69</sup> This may account for the missing Moses Red, who never left the reservation. It is also not clear whether the daughter of Amavaricio is also blind or deaf and whether her presence in this statement complicates the one missing and one additional girl in the records.

We-car-ve-tact (Ellen Ross) was also known in the ledger as Chewawa, and is identified in the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind ledgers as Weeminuche. She had exceptionally high grades, as did Satapuits (Emma Crane). Both Ellen and Emma passed away at the school, Ellen in 1896 from cerebrosplinal meningitis. She was one of six student deaths at the school that year, five of which occurred at the school. Emma passed away in 1898 from tuberculosis. In both cases the remains of the students were returned to Ignacio.<sup>70</sup>

The Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind was a "common school" that operated within the State school system. As such, while it was a boarding school, it operated on a standard nine-month academic year and all the children would have had to return home during the

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<sup>69</sup> Bureau of Indian Affairs (1893), Sixty-Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior; Report of the Agent in Colorado, pg 133.

<sup>70</sup> Taylor and Hastings (2023), personal communication. A full copy of the records report for these students can be found in the reports appendix of this report.

summer.<sup>71</sup> It is therefore presumed that the Ute students returned to Ignacio and Towaoc somewhat regularly. It is also interesting that the students' Ute names appear in their school records, indicating that they may not have been forced to abandon their Native names in Colorado Springs. Like the boarding schools, the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind had a curriculum that included both academics and vocational trainings such as carpentry, sewing, printing, and farming to prepare their students to enter the American economy upon graduation.<sup>72</sup>

### Religious Schools in Colorado

Colorado did not have the preponderance of religious schools that were found in other places. In addition to a small school run by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions on the Southern Ute reservation that was not supported by the federal government, Native students were sent to the Good Shepherd Industrial School for Girls in Denver under government contract between 1884 and 1887. Good Shepherd was not a school that was exclusively for Native youth, but was established in 1885, in part by the efforts of Elizabeth Byers, as a home for delinquent and orphaned girls.<sup>73</sup> Around the time that the reform school was contracted by the federal government, it was also under contract with the State of Colorado, which had failed to establish an Industrial School for Girls in the same way that the Industrial School for Boys had been established in Golden.<sup>74</sup> The school focused on training young girls to become domestic servants, and by 1919 it was supporting itself through the services of a large commercial laundry at which the inmates labored.<sup>75</sup>

During the brief time period that the Indian Service had a contract with the Good Shepherd Industrial School, forty-six Chippewa girls, specifically from Turtle Mountain, were the only Native students attending the school. During the Reform Era the Catholic Church operated nearly all the schools on the Turtle Mountain Reservation.<sup>76</sup> While more research is needed, it is reasonable to assume that this was the direct connection with the House of the Good

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<sup>71</sup> Slingerland, W.H. (1919), *Child Welfare Work in Colorado*.

<sup>72</sup> Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum (undated), *The Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind*.

<sup>73</sup> Wroble (2020), *Elizabeth Byers*.

<sup>74</sup> Whitmore (2022), *State Industrial School for Girls*.

<sup>75</sup> Slingerland (1919), *Child Welfare Work in Colorado*.

<sup>76</sup> The State Historical Society of North Dakota (2023), *Culture—Turtle Mountain*.

Shepherd in Denver, and these Chippewa students were perceived as either orphans or incorrigibles and were removed from the standard boarding and day school system.

### *The Original School-to-Prison Pipelines*

The final institution of note is the Colorado State Industrial School for Boys in Golden. While it was not established with the sole purpose of serving Native youth, students who found themselves at odds with a superintendent, who had rebelled multiple times, or who were in trouble with law (sometimes for serious issues but often for minor infractions) could find themselves placed in a reform school or juvenile prison that had contracted with the federal government.

If there are few extant records relating to the lived experiences of students at the industrial and agricultural schools, then there are no records regarding the experiences of Native youth who were removed from the system altogether and placed into the mainstream penal system.

In 1890 the federal government contracted with the State Industrial School for Boys. Typically the federal government did not make a contract with a school without having specific individuals to fulfill the financial obligations, so there must have been certain students that the Indian Service was sending to Golden. Records do indicate that in 1900, two seventeen-year-old runaways from Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, Jim Bush and Vicenti, were detained in Durango by the US Indian Agent after a crime spree. The Indian agent wrote to Washington, DC, requesting permission to send these boys to “the reform school,” which most likely meant the State Industrial School.<sup>77</sup>

The State Industrial School for Boys ran on the same model as the industrial and agricultural schools managed by the Indian Service, that is, they were military-style schools that emphasized discipline and military activities such as drilling while splitting the day between academics and industrial training. The boys who were incarcerated in Golden were engaged in agricultural labor that helped to supplement the food supplied by the State of Colorado. Excess produce was also sold, as well as the boys’ labor, for wages. The boys engaged in extracurricular activities such as baseball. As with the Indian schools, parents and families were encouraged to

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<sup>77</sup> Letter from US Indian Agent Louis Knackstedth to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 10, 1900; RG75\_Special Series A\_Salaries List\_Box 98\_old box 21.

visit their children. And just as with the Indian schools, the State Industrial School has faced its own scandals and accusations of abuse and neglect over the decades it has been in existence.<sup>78</sup>

The relationship between the penal system and the Indian school system has only been grazed in this report, and as with other topics, a more thorough study is recommended to understand the role of State institutions in assimilating Native youth, and how the reform schools may have served as a conduit away from tribal affiliations.

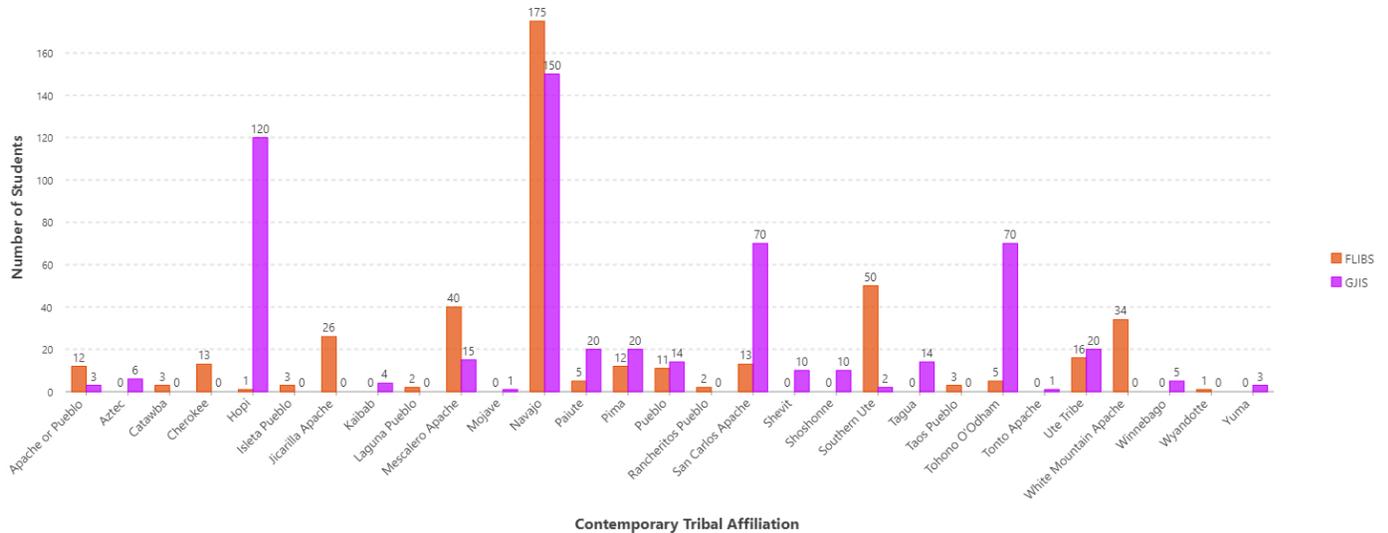


Figure 4. The number of students who attended both Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School and the Grand Junction Institute by tribal affiliation. Map courtesy of Holly Mckee-Huth, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

<sup>78</sup> Colorado State Industrial School (1899) Biennial Report of the State Industrial School; Slingerland, (1919) Child Welfare Work in Colorado; Zimmer (2016) Time Machine Tuesday: State Industrial Schools

## V. A Brief History of the Teller Institute

It wasn't until 1886 that Colorado had a boarding school within the federal system: the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School in Grand Junction, Colorado. The school was established after what was a campaign by local and state officials for a federal Indian boarding school. Ultimately a local citizen donated land for the campus. In all official documentation with Washington, DC, the school is consistently referred to as "the Grand Junction Indian School." It appears that only within Colorado was the moniker "Teller Institute" used, although there are a small number of occurrences of the name in federal documents through 1894. It appears that as late as 1905, newly appointed Superintendent Charles Burton was admonished by Washington, DC, for using the name "Teller Institute"; he excused his ignorance by pointing out that this was the name used locally for the institution.<sup>79</sup> The name "Teller Institute" was an homage to Senator and Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller, who was instrumental in the establishment of the school, albeit behind the scenes.

Schools like the Teller Institute, truly off-reservation schools, were also referred to as "Independent Schools" and included only a very few, but well-known, institutions such as Hampton, Chiloco, and Carlisle, to name a few. The Teller Institute was built about two miles outside of what was then the border of the City of Grand Junction, on land donated for the purpose by locals. Communities saw boarding schools as an important source of both civic pride and potential economic windfall, and the people of Grand Junction probably actively lobbied Senator Teller to establish a school in their city.

All the Ute bands, in Colorado and Utah, heavily resisted sending their children away from home, so Ute attendance at the schools was always nominal. Like many boarding schools, the Teller Institute experienced a lot of running away by students, and Ute students were no exception.

The Teller Institute opened to an inauspicious start in 1886 under the direction of Superintendent William J. Davis. Davis struggled to recruit children to the school. Teller was an off-reservation boarding school that was not directly related to a reservation, although it was intended to serve the Ute Indian Tribe of Uintah and Ouray in Fort Duchesne, Utah. Because the Ute Tribe largely resisted sending their children to off-reservation schools, they joined in the call

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<sup>79</sup> Letter from Charles Burton to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 25, 1905.

for on-reservation schools that would keep their children closer to home while fulfilling treaty obligations (see Section VIII).<sup>80</sup>

**Table 5. Teller Institute Superintendents**

|           |                      |
|-----------|----------------------|
| 1886–1887 | William J. Davis     |
| 1888      | Dr. Thomas Breen     |
| 1889      | George Wheeler       |
| 1890–1891 | Sanford Perry Record |
| 1891–1904 | Theodore G. Lemmon   |
| 1905–1911 | Charles Burton       |

In addition to students from the Ute Tribe, it was also expected that Southern Ute students would attend school in Grand Junction. When parents remained reluctant to send their children there, Davis relied on his ties to the Mescalero Apache and Pima, reservations he had worked on prior to his assignment to Teller. The issues Davis faced in recruiting children may have been compounded by his personality: Before his arrival, Southern Ute tribal leaders had seemed inclined to allow their children to attend Teller, but they changed their minds upon Davis's arrival.<sup>81</sup> It is a pattern that plagued Davis during his short tenure as superintendent. When he was finally able to collect children, Davis had to seek funding from Washington to house them at a hotel or boarding house in Grand Junction since the school buildings lacked heating, cooking stoves, blankets, clothing, and furniture, including beds.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs faced not only issues in recruiting students, but personnel challenges at the school as well, including difficulty in contracting with staff at the school's inception. The staff that eventually arrived had numerous problems, epitomized by the man appointed school physician, Dr. Robertson, who faced accusations of "poor character."<sup>82</sup> Not only was Robertson a gambler, he was accused of being a poor doctor who made dire mistakes prescribing medicine to patients. In one case he prescribed four times the maximum dose of Hyoscyamus, a medicine derived from poisonous plants called henbanes and used to treat nervous disorders; he also prescribed opium to patients.<sup>83</sup> Several affidavits, all similar, were collected and sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. To defend himself, Robertson went so

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<sup>80</sup> Letter from W.J. Davis to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 24, 1886.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from Eugene E. White to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 17, 1886.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from J.L. Robinson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 1, 1886.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from C.L. Thompson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 1, 1886.

far as to write support letters under false names.<sup>84</sup> The school did not remove him from his post, however, instead employing him through at least 1888, when he was sent to Nevada on an unsuccessful recruitment trip.

It also was not until December of that year that the seven students Davis recruited—six from the Ute Tribe and one from the Southern Ute—were able to be moved into the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School from the boarding house in town. That spring, nineteen Paiute students also joined the school. It appears that Davis used unethical methods of recruiting students, even by the standards of the day. The US Indian agent for the Paiute lamented in 1887 that “ten of the most advanced scholars” from the Pyramid Lake Reservation Boarding School and eight boys and one girl from Walker River Reservation were transferred to Grand Junction.<sup>85</sup> Later, the Paiute were skeptical of recruiters from Grand Junction, as the recruiters lied to them about the types of programs and other amenities available to the children.<sup>86</sup>

Davis was not the only superintendent to deceive parents and tribal leaders. Later superintendents, such as Lemmon, were accused of similar tactics, as well as kidnapping, to secure children for the school. In 1892 the US Indian agent for the Navajo reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that Navajo parents were reluctant to send their children to the on-reservation school because thirty of them had been “hurried away and taken to Grand Junction without the consent or even knowledge of their parents.”<sup>87</sup> While such tactics were technically illegal, there is no indication that the superintendents ever faced disciplinary action for these methods.

In 1887, Superintendent Dr. Thomas Breen replaced Superintendent Davis. Breen also had a short tenure and is only notable for two facts. The first is that a majority of the staff resigned when Breen was hired, forcing him to refill almost every staff position. Breen took it personally, complaining to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in the annual report, for the entire federal government to see. What caused the mass resignation is unclear, but the incident portends Breen’s subsequent actions at another Colorado school. A special investigator found that much of the bickering centered around Republican and Democratic political divisions—a situation that

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<sup>84</sup> Letter from J.L. Robinson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 1, 1886.

<sup>85</sup> 1887 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

<sup>86</sup> 1888 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

<sup>87</sup> 1892 ARCA, pg 210.

was not uncommon in a federal agency that depended on political appointees.<sup>88</sup> Breen would leave Grand Junction after just a year, transferring to Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School where he became the longest serving and most notorious superintendent. His career ended after a public investigation into abuse at Fort Lewis (see Section IV).

The school grew slowly. Grand Junction was not an ideal location for an Indian school as it was too far from any single reservation to logistically serve any single tribal nation. While that model worked for schools like Carlisle in Pennsylvania, there were no charismatic staff members to build the program. The Teller Institute was intended to be a “highschool,” with the model being that young children would go to day schools on the Southern Ute and Ute Tribe reservations, attend nearby boarding schools for middle school–level education through the sixth to eighth grades, and then graduate to Grand Junction. The federal government overextended themselves, however, and failed to establish stable day schools on the Southern Ute reservation until 1903. The Ute Tribe, from their reservation in Utah, repeatedly refused to send children to Grand Junction. Instead, they opened their own small day school, accommodating thirty-six students as early as 1888 that the US Indian agent was forced to support.<sup>89</sup>

The Teller Institute was plagued with runaways, potentially at a higher rate than Fort Lewis—although, as with all other metrics regarding the schools, superintendents self-reported runaways to Washington. The first truly notable runaways occurred in 1890, as reported by the US Indian agent to the Navajo Nation who took thirty-one students to Grand Junction. Eight of the students ran away during the dead of winter, “making their way to their homes over mountains and through deep snow.”<sup>90</sup> By the end of the following year nearly half of the students had run away, returning to Arizona.<sup>91</sup> Theodore Lemmon took over as superintendent of the Teller Institute in 1892, serving in that position for the next fourteen years before leaving for a post back east in 1904. Under Lemmon, runaways became an even bigger problem. One of the most infamous stories is that of seven boys who ran away, and only two found their way to their homes. One of the other boys joined the army, but no one heard from the other four boys again,

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<sup>88</sup> MacKendrick (1993), “Cesspools, Alkali, and White Lily Soap,” pg 6; Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*; Reyhner and Eder (2004), *American Indian Education*.

<sup>89</sup> 1888 ARCIA, pg xviii.

<sup>90</sup> 1890 ARCIA, pg 163.

<sup>91</sup> 1892 ARCIA, pg 210.

and the survivors refused to tell anyone what occurred on their journey or where the boys might be.<sup>92</sup>

Runaways had more agency than self-emancipation from the school. The experiences and testimony that returned with them to their tribes influenced the subsequent decisions regarding sending children to Grand Junction, or elsewhere. In 1888, on a recruiting trip to the Ouray and Uintah Reservation in Utah, Breen came face to face with the accusations of a former student, Turoose, who attempted to run away from the school at least twice before finally succeeding. Turoose told his people of being starved and abused at the hands of the teachers, and then being chased down with pistols when they tried to leave, as well as of receiving threats of imprisonment and even hanging. It was many years before the Ute Tribe entrusted any of their children to Grand Junction again.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to running away, students voiced their displeasures with schools, and the Teller Institute in particular, through petitions and requests to return home. These types of petitions were sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Indian agents, tribal leaders, and parents. During the special investigation of the school in 1888, Welton noted a dozen students, out of twenty-one, as having filed such petitions.<sup>94</sup> The following year the new superintendent, Wheeler, arrived to only seven students, probably Ute and Southern Ute, all of whom returned home on their own initiative.

The school was a complete failure after just a handful of years and was slated for closing. Then, it was revitalized in 1890 under the direction of the newly appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas Jefferson Morgan. In addition to hiring appropriate staff, Morgan also enlisted the local community to support the school and instituted the outing system that would come to be a significant aspect of the student experience at Teller. Finally, there were major investments in the infrastructure of the school.

Theodore Lemmon was appointed superintendent in 1892 in the wake of these new improvements and strategies to ensure the school's success. Under Lemmon we know more about the buildings on campus than the children who inhabited them. Unlike Fort Lewis, the Teller Institute had to be built from scratch, and federal officials often found it difficult to hire

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<sup>92</sup> Adams (1995) *Education for Extinction*, pg 228.

<sup>93</sup> MacKendrick (1993), "Cesspools, Alkali, and White Lily Soap," pg 7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 6.

contractors on Colorado's Western Slope to work for the budgets provided. The land that was "donated" to the federal government was of extremely poor quality, having high clay contents and with a very high water table. This caused long-term issues for the campus regarding the flooding of buildings and with sewage disposal. For many years, the school relied on a series of cesspools to control the sewage for the campus, which the students dug themselves.<sup>95</sup> Grand Junction, which was established as an agricultural training school, proved completely inadequate for successful farming.

Lemmon spent much of his time constructing new buildings, many of which he later moved to make a more aesthetically pleasing property. The construction often involved the labor of students, just as the digging of cesspools did. In 1901 Lemmon gave an extensive report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs regarding the moving of the new hospital, the schoolhouse, and the assembly hall in addition to the building of a new dormitory.<sup>96</sup> There was no information related to the health and well-being of the students, in a year when three deaths were reported.

Along with the buildings, Lemmon also expanded the outing program. The program placed students with white families, often over the summer or "vacation" months, so that they could be exposed to white familial practices and systems while earning a wage for various chores and activities. The school usually sent boys and young men to work agricultural jobs, while sending girls and young women to work as domestic servants for families. When Lemmon left his position in 1904, Charles Burton, a career Indian Service superintendent who had served at schools such as Keams Canyon, Arizona, took his place.<sup>97</sup> Burton and his clerks found huge discrepancies in the books regarding the stewardship of student wages. Lemmon himself confessed to putting his personal and school funds in the same accounts, and to using student wages to pay staff and teachers. In other cases, he had failed to pay invoices and accounts to local businesses in Grand Junction. During the investigation, Lemmon attempted to correct some checks that were left outstanding, but there is no indication that students were ever reimbursed for their stolen funds.<sup>98</sup> Both Burton and Lemmon placed the blame on incompetent clerks. At the time of the investigation, Lemmon was serving as superintendent of the Moqui School in

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> 1901 ARCIA, pgs 533–536.

<sup>97</sup> Reyhner and Eder (2004), *American Indian Education*, pg 171.

<sup>98</sup> Letter from Lemmon to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1905; RG 75\_Special Series A 1859-1934\_Box 25\_old box 6\_Grand Junction Investigation 1906.

Arizona, and it appears that he was never punished for his embezzlement of federal funds—despite the conclusion of the special investigation that stated, “Mr. Lemmon has been weighed in the balance and found wanting.” Lemmon does not appear to have faced any real consequences for his incompetence, and instead moved on to other positions within the Indian Service.

The financial mess Lemmon left behind was not the only issue Burton faced. Lemmon’s departure brought a litany of accusations against school personnel for misconduct, the most serious of which were leveled at the school nurse, Laura Curtis. Curtis was accused of abusive behavior toward students and staff as well as incompetence in her duties—shortcomings that could have resulted in serious illness, injury, or even death for students. An investigation into the school revealed a larger web of issues, with the physician, Dr. Hanson, accused of incompetence the following year and several staff members accused of drunkenness and ineptitude.<sup>99</sup>

Burton was a hard man, and had no empathy for students returning home. On several occasions, although he would allow the travel to occur, he refused to expend government funds on it. One very complicated incident involved the superintendent of Fort Defiance, Reuben Perry, who wrote to Burton soon after he took office requesting that all Navajo children (universally referred to as boys) who had been in attendance for three years be allowed home for a visit. Burton elevated the matter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs after refusing the request because Lemmon had not provided travel consents for the students, all of whom were on five-year contracts signed by their parents. There seems to have been some back and forth between the two superintendents, with Burton claiming at one point that the boys didn’t want to return home, and that maybe their parents didn’t want them either—a common tactic among superintendents to avoid student travel. When Burton refused Perry’s request, the superintendent for the Navajo accused Burton of “taking advantage of a technicality against the good of an Indian.”<sup>100</sup> Perry seems to have fought hard for the students to come home. It is unknown what the ultimate outcome was, but the students may have had train fare only as far as Durango, and then been forced to ride their bikes the remainder of the way home, a distance of over 150 miles.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> RG75\_Briefs of Investigations\_Entry 726\_Vol 2.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from Burton to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 18, 1905.

<sup>101</sup> Letter from Perry to Burton, July 13, 1905.

Burton also seemed intent on filling the school, regardless of whether children were eligible to attend. Early in his tenure he claimed that he just happened to have very tall students, and that it was not indicative of age, despite the fact that several of the students in question were apparently over six feet tall, although he did admit that two students were over the age of twenty.<sup>102</sup>

These are patterns we see to a lesser degree at the Teller Institute. While it appears that Lemmon, and later Burton, may have kept students on the rolls who had aged out of the education system, it seems to be a smaller number of students than at Fort Lewis. Burton, however, did also enroll a number of Mexican American students, and he appears to have hidden behind racist tropes to feign ignorance regarding the difference between a Mexican student and a Native one. When pushed by Washington to un-enroll these thirty students, Burton disassembled—sending some students who failed to meet “blood quantum” home but finding excuses to keep other students enrolled.<sup>103</sup> Burton went so far to keep the school full that he attempted to enroll a student he claimed was a Navajo boy from the Manitou Cliff Dwellings in Colorado Springs.<sup>104</sup> The Cliff Dwellings were (and are) a pueblo that was disassembled outside of what is today the Ute Mountain Ute reservation and reassembled in Colorado Springs as a tourist attraction.

There is an important note in regard to understanding information about students at the Teller Institute. It has been shown that superintendents were not careful in identifying the tribal affiliations of students. It was common practice for all of the superintendents who served at both Teller and Fort Lewis to identify students by where they came from, i.e. the name of the tribe or the agency to which they lived closest. Some of the superintendents were more careful than others. Despite having been in the Indian Service for decades, Charles Burton displayed an absolute ignorance regarding tribal affiliations, leaving a greater degree of question about two tribal groups in particular. The first issue was that Burton claimed to have enrolled six “Aztecs.” He did not say so, but we can surmise that they were most likely Navajo students from Aztec, New Mexico, and so we have treated them as such in the quantitative analysis. There are other possibilities, including that these were individuals with Mexican or South American heritage

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<sup>102</sup> Letter from Burton to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 25, 1905.

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Burton to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 7, 1907.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Burton to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 19, 1907.

who were enrolled and Burton was attempting to ascribe a tribal identification to them. The other glaring issue Burton left us is the identification of students as “Tigua,” which we have not been able to translate with certainty. Based on the primary geographic area that the students were recruited from, we are surmising that these students were Tewa speakers, and thus most likely Pueblo of Isleta, but they may have been other Pueblo or Apache students, again from New Mexico. It is hoped that other tribal cultural experts may be able to shed some light on these affiliations.

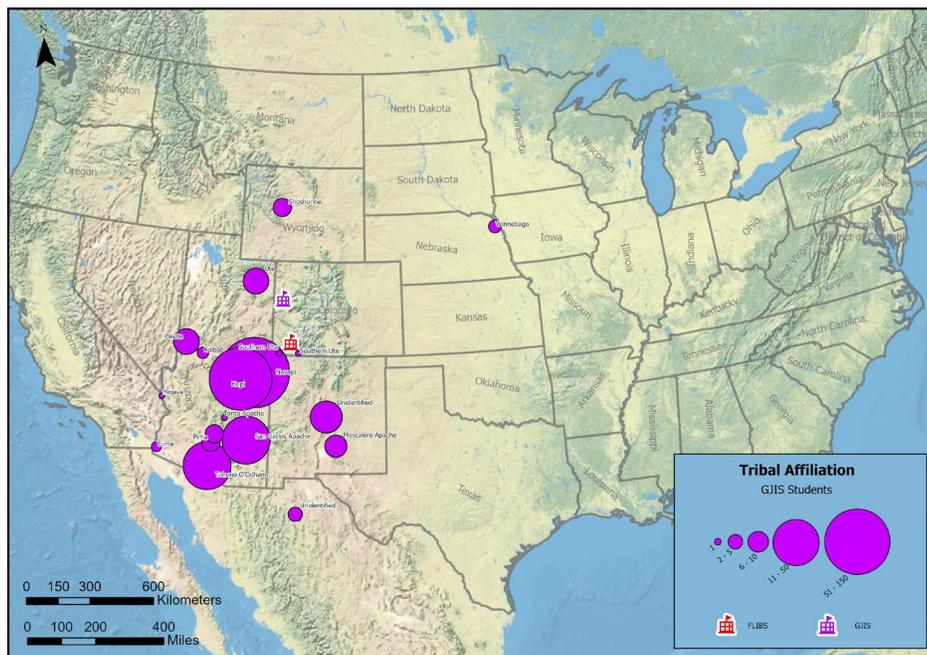


Figure 5. Known Attendance of Students by Tribal Affiliation at the Grand Junction Indian School/Teller Institute. Map courtesy of Holly Mckee-Huth, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

Even with the constant construction projects on campus, the state of the buildings was abysmal, and construction continued right up until the school closed in 1911. The school was home to perhaps 600 students over the course of its twenty-five-year existence. To date, twenty-two tribes have been identified as having students who attended the school, including the Aztec, Southern Ute, the Ute Indian Tribe of the Ouray and Uintah Reservation, Navajo, Mescalero Apache, San Carlos Apache, Mojave, Kaibab, Tohono O’odham, Hopi, Paiute, Pima, Pueblo, Shevits, Shoshone-Bannock, Tagua, Tonto, Winnebago, and Yuma. Figure 5 illustrates the attendance of students by tribal affiliation at the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School. The

numbers have been compiled through both official reporting and the annual reports, as well as by extrapolating from identified correspondence and other documents. These numbers are subject to revision with future research.

### Sickness and injuries

As detailed in the previous section of this report, diseases were a persistent occurrence at the boarding schools due to various factors, including inadequate healthcare, food rations, and sanitation and the heavy labor and long working hours the students often endured. From a purely documentary perspective, students at the Teller Institute experienced more of the ongoing epidemics—such as pneumonia, chicken pox, and tuberculosis—than those at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. The groundwater issues would have caused serious issues throughout the life of the school, and they were the primary complaint not only in annual reports but also as the subject of numerous letters. Superintendent Lemmon consistently blamed any of the students' adverse health conditions on the groundwater and sewage.

The fact that the Teller Institute was within an urban area and more integrated with the city at large may have also played a factor in higher incidents of illness and disease. In the late spring of 1907, a measles epidemic swept through the city of Grand Junction. Superintendent Burton reported 1,500 cases in the city, followed closely by outbreaks of both scarlet fever and smallpox. He placed the school under quarantine for nearly a year, but he complained bitterly about the local and State health boards' inadequate actions to support the school or to address the epidemics that ravaged Grand Junction, including a lack of quarantine within the public school system.<sup>105</sup> Burton did not report any deaths in the annual report, but research identified two: one in 1907 from rheumatism and one in 1908 from unknown causes.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Letter from Burton to CIA, December 30, 1907; Letter from Burton to CIA, January 30, 1908; Letter from Burton to CIA, February 5, 1908.

<sup>106</sup> Millward (2023), *Results of Research Regarding the Cemetery at Grand Junction Indian School*.

## VI. A Brief History of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School

The Fort Lewis Indian Boarding school was established in 1892 at the site of the former Fort Lewis military post in Hesperus, Colorado. The Fort Lewis school was relatively short-lived, being in operation for sixteen years but open for eighteen, sending children home in 1909 but finally closing in 1910–11. It had several superintendents, as all the schools did, but Dr. Thomas Breen was the superintendent of Fort Lewis for nearly a decade, and it is the scandals and abuses of Breen that overshadow every aspect of the school's operation and the experiences of the students who attended it. The abuses came to light in a shocking series of *Denver Post* articles in 1903, which ultimately resulted in Breen's ouster. It is unclear just how long the federal government was aware of the issues at Fort Lewis, although it is very clear that they refused to act until the stories went public. The story of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School under Breen and the failure of the federal government to protect Native children is a microcosm of the deep neglect that was visited on the children by the government throughout the entirety of the school system. The narrative of the schools as seen in the official documentary record is in stark contrast to the reporting of Polly Pry, and later Frank Lundy Webster, but the tensions with DC can be seen if analyzed closely. And, one can read all of the official reports through the lens of attempts to obscure abuses of power from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as the bureau's own willful ignorance.

In 1903, *Denver Post* reporter Polly Pry (the pen name of journalist Leonel Ross Campbell) acted on a letter sent to her by a former teacher in the school. The letter accused Dr. Thomas Breen of sexual abuse and violence against women and girls who attended the school as students, and against staff and faculty, apparently both Native and white. During the course of her reporting, the *Post* talked to several former staff members, primarily women who held roles in the kitchen and laundry, many of whom were also former students. The accusations included very specific cases of impregnating students who were then sent away. In the case of one very young woman (it is unclear if she was student or staff, although she quite possibly was both), she gave birth to the child at Fort Lewis, but the infant was immediately taken away. In addition, Breen was accused of drunkenness and essentially embezzlement, using money and government resources for personal projects or those of friends and acquaintances. The *Post* ran stories about the scandal for several months, initiating a full investigation from the federal government that

resulted in Breen’s removal as superintendent.<sup>107</sup> The school matron, Mrs. Miller, was implicated in assisting Breen in his abuse—by giving him access to the female students, punishing those students for reporting the abuses to her, and helping to cover up consequences of the abuse, such as the fate of the infant.

It is important to note when reading the 1903 articles that reporting standards were different at that time: The names and very personal and sensitive details of abuse victims were shared without the victims’ consent or their comment.

**Table 6. Fort Lewis Superintendents**

|           |                  |
|-----------|------------------|
| 1892      | Louis Morgan     |
| 1893      | Osman Parker     |
| 1894–1903 | Dr. Thomas Breen |
| 1903–1905 | William Peterson |
| 1906–1910 | John S. Spear    |

The decommissioning of the Fort Lewis military post came at an opportune time for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). In 1890–91, the government found itself at loggerheads over education policy with the Ute Tribe in southwestern Colorado, specifically on the practice of sending children away for school. The Ute had always been apprehensive about the practice. The US Indian agents consistently reported to Washington, DC, year after year that the Utes had “an overabundance of affection” for their children, and would not be parted from them.<sup>108</sup> Then, in 1883, when they had allowed nearly two dozen students of various ages to be sent to school in Albuquerque, nearly half did not return home. Since that time, the Ute had steadfastly refused to send their children to any boarding school, even the on-reservation school in Ignacio that closed in 1890. Despite this, the Fort Lewis installation, while technically “off-reservation,” seemed close enough to the reservation from the perspective of the BIA officials that the Ute would probably accept it as being a suitable site for their children. It was US Indian Agent Charles Bartholomew who first proposed the idea to Washington.<sup>109</sup> Eventually, Henry Teller was also involved in the decision to transform the Fort Lewis military installation into a boarding school

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<sup>107</sup> *The Denver Post*, March 21, March 26, April 5, April 10, April 21, April 22, April 23, April 24, April 28, May 5, May 6, May 23, July 27, July 28, and September 27, 1903.

<sup>108</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 3, 1890.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Clark to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 23, 1891.

during his time as Secretary of the Interior, and offered the services of his law office, Teller and Orahood, in the decision.<sup>110</sup>

To be used for Indian education, the property of Fort Lewis had to be transferred from the Department of War to the Department of the Interior. Large amounts of equipment and other sundry goods either went to other military bases or were sold. Heated debates ensued about the water and mineral rights associated with the land on which Fort Lewis was situated. In the end, the lack of clear water rights would vex the boarding school for its entire existence, while the Department of War was clear on not transmitting the mineral rights to the Department of the Interior, opting instead to sell them to the State of Colorado for sale and use by private citizens.<sup>111</sup> The buildings were equipped with the items from the Southern Ute Boarding School that had closed the previous year.<sup>112</sup> It is unknown how adequate that was; when the original Southern Ute school closed, it only accommodated a dozen students, and it is unknown how many of those students were boarders as opposed to day students. Regardless, the opening of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was similar to its operation and eventual closing: The federal government had grand plans for education, but refused to provide adequate resources.

The school opened in 1891–92, with the full expectation that it would primarily serve the Southern Ute. As a former military post with twenty-two extant buildings, the school was able to accommodate 300 children. The Southern Ute at the time were a relatively small population widely dispersed across a large landscape; Fort Lewis did not serve them as a day school. The Southern Ute—most visibly the chief of the Weeminuche Band, Ignacio—were still largely opposed to allowing their children to attend. Bartholomew had such a difficult time “securing children” for the school that Washington sent Supervisor for Indian Schools Daniel Keck to help convince the Ute, further irritating Bartholomew.<sup>113</sup> Bartholomew maintained that the Ute were deeply suspicious of the government because of the lack of adherence to their treaties, not to mention their past experiences with the education system. Eventually, the “Eastern” Utes, the Capote and Mouache Bands, allowed seventeen children to attend the school.<sup>114</sup> At some point a

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<sup>110</sup> RG75\_E91\_Letters Received 1891\_Letter#35885.

<sup>111</sup> Smith (2006), *A Time for Peace*, pg 112, 187; 1896 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pgs 368–370; Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 25, 1904.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 1, 1892.

<sup>113</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 2, 1892.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 10, 1892; Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 3, 1892.

very small number of Weeminuche children were also allowed to attend. The school officially opened in 1892 with forty-eight students. Approximately a quarter of those students were Southern Ute; more than half of the students were Mescalero Apache, with the remainder of the inaugural class being White River Ute and Navajos (see figure 6).

The year 1892 was immediately disastrous for the students who attended the school. Very soon after its opening, a tuberculosis epidemic broke out among them, and parents who attempted to collect their children were prevented from doing so, sowing very deep mistrust among the Ute.<sup>115</sup> Many Southern Ute parents also complained to Bartholomew that the superintendent, Louis Morgan, was not adequately feeding their children.<sup>116</sup> In an attempt to quell the parents' fears, Bartholomew invited Chief Ignacio to visit the school, but this visit was immediately delayed as a second epidemic, this time of trachoma, known historically as "sore eyes," afflicted the children.<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, the government was increasing its pressure on Ute families and tribal leaders to send their children to Fort Lewis, by means such as denying them horses.<sup>118</sup> Despite these heavy-handed tactics, all Ute children were removed from Fort Lewis and the refusal to send additional children was nearly universal. The trachoma ravaged the students, killing two. Three other children were rendered blind or partially blind, while a fourth child suffered from both blindness and deafness. All the afflicted children were nine or eleven years old.

These events essentially ended the participation of the Southern Ute in the off-reservation school system at the turn of the twentieth century. Additional attempts to enroll Ute children at Fort Lewis proved unsuccessful over a long period of time. In 1899, eight Ute children were somehow enrolled in the school. But almost immediately they were withdrawn.<sup>119</sup> The following year, twenty-five Southern Ute children were sent to Fort Lewis; many ran away, and three students died at the school of unspecified causes.<sup>120</sup> There was an almost universal halt to Southern Ute students attending schools within the federal system, with just a few exceptions. It

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<sup>115</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 2, 1892.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 2, 1892; Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 7, 1892.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to David Keck, September 29, 1892.

<sup>118</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to David Keck, September 29, 1892.

<sup>119</sup> 1899 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

<sup>120</sup> 1900 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 214; 1902 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 204.

wasn't until 1903 that Ute children would attend an on-reservation boarding school, and years later that their elders would allow them to attend an off-reservation boarding school.

With the enrolling of Southern Ute students proving unsuccessful, the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School turned its sights to other regional tribes. Despite the resistance of the Southern Ute to attending the school, by 1894 Fort Lewis had 124 students enrolled, predominantly male. Throughout its history the student body was dominated by Navajo students, but their ranks also included students from several Arizona tribes including Pima and those who today self-identify as the Tohono O'odham, as well as Mescalero Apache, White River Ute, and others. Still, Navajo students accounted for 99 percent of the student population (172 out of 175) in 1904.

Fort Lewis experienced rapid turnover of staff, including superintendents, in the first few years after it was established. The longest serving, and most notorious, superintendent to lead the school was Dr. Thomas Breen, who took his post in 1894. Breen led the school for nearly a decade before being embroiled in the scandals that cost him his position.

The school never appears to have achieved parity between male and female students. In 1895 Breen complained that there were 187 pupils, 150 of whom were boys. He was most concerned that these male students had to take on domestic chores such as cooking, laundry, and sewing, of which he said, "again I submit it is not a suitable industry for members of the male sex."<sup>121</sup> Breen also used the lack of girls and young women to request money for a steam laundry to lighten the chores on the boys.<sup>122</sup> Breen would go on to have demonstrable contempt for women in general, both students and staff, white and Native, in his reports back to Washington. He did seem to advocate for his male students and staff, seeking opportunities for their employment and advocating for their advancement.

Under the early years of Breen's leadership the enrollment and attendance numbers rose rapidly. Breen was an active recruiter of students who, in many cases, appears to have used underhanded methods. The US Indian agent for the Southern Ute Agency and Jicarilla Sub-Agency reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1894 that twenty-six students originally sent to the Santa Fe Indian School had been transferred to Fort Lewis "Without their consent or even knowledge."<sup>123</sup> Just as significantly, Breen was machiavellian in his attempts to

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<sup>121</sup> Letter from Thomas Breen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 5, 1895.

<sup>122</sup> Letter from Thomas Breen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 3, 1895.

<sup>123</sup> 1894 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 210.

keep students at school. By 1895 parents and tribal leaders from the Mescalero Apache Tribe were unhappy with the school; they petitioned Washington, DC, for the return home of their children after two Mescalero students died of consumption and another child was returned home ill. Breen's response to the petition was to claim that, "These pupils express no desire to return home but wish to remain here two years longer,"<sup>124</sup> further claiming that there were no local schools for them to attend if they were to return home.

Claiming that children didn't *want* to return home was just part of Breen's modus operandi, one he used on several documented occasions. He also claimed at one point that he sometimes told students that their families didn't want them to return home, enticing them to remain at school. He used the tactic both to keep children from returning home for vacations and to increase the contractual time—from two years to as long as five years—that children would remain in attendance at Fort Lewis. His reasons for not wanting the children to return home, even during vacations, were similar to the rationale expressed by school officials across the Indian Service, namely that once children go home they rarely return to school, or the cost to "round them up again" breaks their annual budgets.

While he refused to allow children to leave the school, even for summer vacations, Breen encouraged parental and other visitation to the school to offset the challenges of familial separation. This was not a unique tactic, and superintendents at other schools in the region also encouraged visitation by family members as well as inspections by tribal leaders and other elders who could vouch for the safety and efficacy of the schools.<sup>125</sup> Breen understood the need to compensate and to some degree court the Native families who came to visit, and he requested funds for feeding and entertaining parents and reimbursing them for travel and transportation costs, which he still saw as a savings for the government. As we only have historical documentation from the school officials, who had a self-interest in reporting everything in the best possible light, we don't have any firsthand accounts from students or parents about these visits. They did occur, however, and with some frequency, as they are reported by both school officials and Indian agents over the course of the school's existence.

What is also unclear is exactly how long officials in DC were aware of the severe moral and other issues at Fort Lewis under Superintendent Breen.

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<sup>124</sup> Letter from Thomas Breen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 23, 1895.

<sup>125</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 245.

Although guidance from the Education Department was clear that children of “tender years” should not be attending boarding schools, it appears that Breen fought to maintain a “kindergarten” and that one was supported for many years. The school newspaper, the *Outlook*, reported in 1896 that there were “fifteen little boys and girls” in the kindergarten room, although neither their ages nor any other identifying information was reported.<sup>126</sup> In 1897 there were forty children under the age of six at Fort Lewis.<sup>127</sup> By 1903, DC was ordering Breen to eliminate the position of kindergarten teacher; he fought the order, suggesting instead that the school could do without the use of a harness maker or the clerk. As opposed to recognizing that the order also came with the unspoken order to return the children either home or to more appropriate schools, Breen insisted that the kindergarteners would stay and the older children would have to take on their care without an appropriate teacher. This was another instance in a long pattern of refusing to allow children to leave the school for reasons other than sickness.

While the account of the kindergarten room in the *Outlook* describes a classroom and class activities that we might recognize today, the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, established as an agricultural industrial school, was a place of long days and hard labor. The school was what today we would think of as a “middle school,” teaching academics to a sixth-through eighth-grade level. Advanced students, or those who performed particularly well in academics, were expected to graduate into one of the “highschools”: Haskell, Carlisle, Chilocoo, or even Grand Junction.

As with other schools, the days started very early and students were expected to work to support themselves, each other, and the school. These jobs were what Euro-American society would see as gender appropriate: farming, digging ditches, carpentry for the boys, and the “domestic sciences” for the girls, which included very menial tasks such as laundry and sewing. Many of the jobs were physically demanding, and children at all schools were severely injured regularly.

The students also had other training and academic programs available that may have sparked more joy than the daily hard labor. In 1896, Breen organized telegraph classes for both

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<sup>126</sup> *Outlook*, February 1896, pg 3.

<sup>127</sup> 1897 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

advanced boys and girls, acquiring telegraph equipment from an acquaintance.<sup>128</sup> The school also had its newspaper, the *Outlook*, as well as a cornet band and sports teams.

Very few issues of the *Outlook* still exist. Students performed all the mechanical aspects of printing. The editorial control of the paper was, based on the three extant issues in the collections of History Colorado, maintained by a white male teacher. The publication does not give us reliable glimpses into the lives of the students or provide an avenue for their voices. It does reassure us that their daily existence may have been more rich than our overarching narratives of boarding schools sometimes allow for, reminding us of that tension between the structural and the personal. From the school newspaper we learn about students visiting Durango, or even home, and about little successes such as essay contests. We also learn about the social life of the school, the evening study hours and dances the students held in their dormitories, and how the older students visited the younger ones in their classrooms to support their progress. In 1896, four dogs lived alongside the 189 students, one of which was a poodle brought back to the school after a visit home by a San Carlos Apache student turned teacher, Oscar Litzen.

The cornet band was also a point of pride for both students and staff. In a letter published in the *Outlook* in February of 1896, Thomas Damon noted that he was the only Navajo boy in the band. The band itself traveled the region quite extensively, including to Salt Lake City and Denver, and even performed at the Hopi reservation. Several teachers held the position of bandleader voluntarily, without receiving compensation as DC did not consistently fund the position. They included Frank Robitaille, a Navajo graduate of the boarding school system who came to Fort Lewis first as a baker but who had served as a bandleader at both Riverside and Rainy Mountain School.<sup>129</sup> Eventually, Fort Lewis used ticket sales to support a faculty position of bandleader.

Fort Lewis also had a baseball team, and potentially a football team, although these activities were not as emphasized at Fort Lewis as at other schools. At one point Peterson complained that they were too rural to “raise revenue” from ticket sales, indicating that the student athletes needed to earn an income to support the existence of the team.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> 1896 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pgs 368-370.

<sup>129</sup> RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 4\_Journal 1.

<sup>130</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 25, 1904.

The students, while at the mercy of the power dynamics between the federal government and their tribal leaders, and adults over minors, did not completely lack agency. They showed their own resistance in a variety of ways, some of the most visible being running away and arson. Stories of runaways have become woven into the overarching narrative of Indian boarding schools, with students attempting to return home, returning to more familiar or hospitable schools, or disappearing into wider society. We don't know how many children ran away from the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. Breen, and subsequent superintendents, failed to provide thorough reports despite admonitions from DC. The reports they did provide were usually narrative letters highlighting the successes of the school and requesting additional resources. Occasionally the Indian agents reported runaways when they were responsible for bringing them back to school. On other occasions we see reports about runaways, or other incidents, because a superintendent or official was trying to defend themselves against the appearance of misconduct. As early as 1895 the Commissioner of Indian Affairs claimed that the Indian Service had ended the use of corporal punishment against students,<sup>131</sup> including physical punishments, jails, and other violence. But it has been widely documented that at schools across the country the use of corporal punishment continued for decades.<sup>132</sup> In 1899, Breen wrote that discipline at Fort Lewis was carried out on a "modified military plan":

Corporal punishment is not allowed, and the guardhouse is only used for offenses of the gravest nature.... Eighteen years in the Regular Army, and nearly eight as superintendent of an Indian school convinces me that confinement for children is barbarous in the extreme.... Violence begets violence, and the surest means to make a high-spirited child vicious and reckless is to throw him in jail for some boyish prank...the rare instances of runaways, or "desertions," as some aping the military, apply to thoughtless acts of children, who are too frequently the victims of the petty tyrannies...and who run away to escape them.<sup>133</sup>

Knowing that Breen will be plausibly accused of abusing his students, the comment about "petty tyrannies" seems particularly ironic. It also feels, in that lens, as if Breen was defending himself

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<sup>131</sup> 1895 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 343.

<sup>132</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 123.

<sup>133</sup> 1899 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 390.

from unnamed accusations from his superiors in Washington. Despite this bravado in letters to his superiors in Washington, and the historical record, Breen was deeply involved in trying to keep all children at the school, including runaways. Breen's record on runaways, if taken at face value, is better than what was occurring at the other Colorado school, Teller Institute, which was plagued by dissent and runaways. We only have a small handful recorded for the Fort Lewis school, including the young woman depicted in the *Denver Post* expose. In some cases we only know about runaways because we see payment to local Indian police or others for the service of retrieving and returning them.

The personal accounts that surface later in *The Denver Post* identify numerous attempts at running away by female students. In one case, two of the runaways were staff members who sought refuge with a sympathetic Mexican woman associated with the school. In another, a Native student ran away twice, eloping on her second attempt—an act that finally granted her protection from Breen and the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School.<sup>134</sup>

Superintendent Breen also seems to have given some students multiple chances, both as students and as employees. Two such examples are Thomas Damon, a Navajo student, and Crawford Joaquin, a Tohono O'odham student, who were listed as being “discharged for insubordination” and then several months later or the next year could be found back at school, both working in various departments and enrolled as students.<sup>135</sup> In the case of Thomas, after being discharged on multiple occasions between 1892 and 1896 he won first place in an essay contest in 1897, and a month later married another student, and later employee of the school, Daisy Ellis. In a letter published in the school newspaper, the *Outlook*, Thomas also reported that he was “the only Navajo boy in the cornet band,” a highly celebrated group that traveled extensively in the Four Corners area giving concerts. Ms. Ellis's tribal affiliation was never identified, but she was reportedly born in Arizona.<sup>136</sup>

The most extreme case of a runaway recorded at Fort Lewis was that of Jim Bush, a Southern Ute student, and Vicenti, whose tribal affiliation remains unidentified. The two seventeen-year-olds ran away multiple times; the final time, in 1900, included a small crime spree with attempted robbery of the guardhouse, threatening with a knife, and stealing a wagon.

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<sup>134</sup> “The Denver Post Demands Supt. Breen's Immediate Removal,” *The Denver Post*, April 23, 1903.

<sup>135</sup> 1896 Dr. Hailmann's Report; *Outlook*, February 1896; RG75, No. 123, Box 1; *Outlook*, April, 1897.

<sup>136</sup> Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School Employee Records; RG75, No. 123, Box 1, NARA Den.

The US Indian agent caught them in Durango but stated that Breen “didn’t want them back” and requested permission to send them to “*the* reform school” (emphasis added), presumably the State Industrial School for Boys in Golden, Colorado.<sup>137</sup>

On at least two occasions students ran away from a different school to return to Fort Lewis. In 1899 Tulie Cadman, a Navajo student, was sent to the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School. A year later, he ran away, reportedly “returning to” Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, although he does not appear earlier in the historical documents.<sup>138</sup> Tulie may have been attempting to reunite with family or friends who were present at Fort Lewis, or Fort Lewis may have been a more viable destination than attempting to return home. In 1898 William Emerson, a student of unknown tribal affiliation, was transferred to the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas.<sup>139</sup> He had been a student at Fort Lewis since at least 1896 and most likely “graduated” to Haskell’s high school–level academic program. There he suffered from poor health and was largely unhappy, so he ran away from Haskell and returned to Fort Lewis. He was told he could not remain at Fort Lewis and had to either return to Haskell or find employment. William chose to work for a sawmill in “Gradens, Colorado,” and there suffered a severe accident that required the amputation of one of his limbs. (The document is probably incorrect, as there is no record of a Gradens, Colorado, as a locality. However, a Guyles, Graden & Co. owned the San Juan Mill in La Plata County in the 1890s.) William’s return does not seem to be an occurrence unique to Fort Lewis, and may not indicate that it was a more welcoming environment than other schools; scholars writing about other institutions have occasionally noted the same phenomenon. Like so many other choices in the life these students faced, returning to the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School may have been the best choice in a range of difficult or simply painful choices.

Running away and “incorrigible insubordination” were not the only ways students showed their resistance to the school system. While many acts of resistance may have been hidden (it is common for resistance of marginalized people to take subtle forms—slowing work, feigning illness, breaking tools or equipment—that might go largely unrecognized by those in power), a common and very visible act of resistance across the federal boarding school system

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<sup>137</sup> Letter from US Indian Agent Louis Knackstedth to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 10, 1900. RG 75: LTR REC 1899: Entry 91: Box 1742: letters 2582, 2583, 2944, NARA DC.

<sup>138</sup> RG75\_LTRREC\_1900\_Entry91\_monthly health report; RG75\_Examination Papers 1888 1899 1915\_752\_Folder 4\_Grand Junction School, March 1899, NARA DC.

<sup>139</sup> RG 75\_LTR REC 1899\_Entry 91\_Box 1713\_ltrs 50250, 50260-50263, 50265, NARA DC.

was arson.<sup>140</sup> Fires occurred frequently at boarding schools, and while they could be explained by antiquated heating and lighting systems, the common perception among scholars is that students were setting the fires themselves. This evidence is largely circumstantial but compelling, given the conditions: Many fires at these schools broke out in empty buildings while the students were congregated elsewhere, for instance. Fires were such a problem that it was a common topic of discussion even at the level of policy makers in Washington.

The Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was no exception. In January of 1896 a large fire destroyed three buildings on campus, including a boys' dormitory, a boys' playroom, and a lavatory that was under construction. That August, Breen further reported that the superintendent's residence and all of its contents were completely destroyed by fire in the middle of the day.<sup>141</sup> There was no accusation of arson at the time.

As discussed throughout, in 1903 Thomas Breen was accused of a litany of crimes while serving as superintendent of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, the most serious of which was sexual abuse of girls and women who resided there. He was removed after an investigation that same year, but was never charged with a crime. He died just a few months later from complications of bladder cancer.<sup>142</sup> He was succeeded by William Peterson, who had been serving as superintendent of the Chilocco Indian School in Oklahoma.

Because Breen was obfuscating what was occurring at the school, especially during his final years, it's difficult to know just how many students passed through the doors. In 1896, Breen reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that no deaths had taken place at the school. However, the same year, in the same report, the Indian agent for the Mescalero Apache reported that, "At Fort Lewis four out of 25 children from this reservation have died from consumption in the past fifteen months" as well as an additional girl who died of consumption at home after returning from the school, and whose "death should not be credited to the school."<sup>143</sup> The following year Breen also reported no deaths, then he further stated that "of the five deaths occurring here, three were from pulmonary tuberculosis and two were from acute pneumonia, *the*

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<sup>140</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg 229.

<sup>141</sup> 1896 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; Letter from Thomas Breen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 3, 1896.

<sup>142</sup> *The Durango Democrat* (1904), "Dr. Breen Dead." January 19, 1904. Vol. VII, no. 14, pg 1.

<sup>143</sup> 1896 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pgs 211, 368–370.

*latter the result of the wanton absence of common prudence upon the part of the individuals concerned*" (emphasis added). While failing to note the time period in which these five deaths occurred, he also laid the blame at the feet of the very students who died. Similar reports follow year after year, finally with no reports being submitted after 1899 and until the time of his dismissal. In the last report he submitted to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Breen stated that "the capacity of the school, 300, was severely taxed..." (the official number of enrolled students was 370). He went on to say that "15 tribes were represented, Navajoes [*sic*], Apaches and Pueblos being the majority," although we do not have a list of all tribal affiliations. He also stated that the high death rate was among students from "lower elevations" and recommended sending all children from Arizona and New Mexico home to other schools.<sup>144</sup> While Breen was a prolific writer, it is clear that he was providing Washington with only the information that was useful to Breen himself, including incongruous student numbers, and he was not held accountable.

When William Peterson took over the school as superintendent, it was highly depleted. The student body had been reduced, as had the number of faculty, in light of non-Native children being sent home (as is discussed below). While DC was reluctant to openly punish Breen, officials' cutting of resources proved detrimental to the school and thus the superintendent. In his final years, Breen was fighting for staff members, going so far as to counteroffer the elimination of positions as the orders came from Washington. Peterson was an experienced Indian Service employee, and coming from Chilocco had run a much larger school. The change in administration must have provided some cold comfort to parents and tribal leaders as Peterson reported in October of 1903 that "students were slowly returning" and that the school enrollment was back to 102. He went on to report that the parents and elders who delivered the children to the school "evidently go home and make a report, for when the second party from a given neighborhood comes in, the spokesman almost always says that such and such a man who was here for some time since said it would be all right to bring the children."<sup>145</sup> Finally, he requested substantial time away from the school for reservation trips to recruit additional students, recognizing that it took a long time to build a relationship with parents to convince them that

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<sup>144</sup> 1899 Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pgs 361–363.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 29, 1903.

children should come to the school. By the end of the calendar year, Peterson had recruited an additional fifty boys from the Navajo reservation and had collected four runaways.

Peterson was the most complex of the superintendents. In many of the letters he was a company man, through and through, meaning that he seemed to accept and follow the precepts out of Washington almost without question. When he was pressured to get Southern Ute children enrolled in the school, he asked how far he was allowed to go to secure them.<sup>146</sup> He went as far as threatening to cut off Ute rations if their children were not enrolled.<sup>147</sup> He reported the following month that he did not withhold rations and annuities because “the Utes do not care if they get paid at all” but instead told the trader to refuse credit to parents of school-age children. Despite these tensions, in November of 1904 Ignacio took six children out of the newly opened Southern Ute Boarding School and personally enrolled them at Fort Lewis, refusing to allow them to return to Ignacio but also refusing to explain his reasoning to Peterson.

William Peterson not only turned his sights on managing the school successfully, but was serious in his responsibilities as superintendent of the unallotted Utes and was deeply involved in issues of importance to the tribe as a whole—such as securing water rights and the cessation of Mesa Verde to the federal government, issues that previous superintendents had also been involved with. Where he differed from the previous superintendents was in the areas where he was a more vocal advocate for both the students and the tribe as a whole. Peterson was persistent in complaining about how the lack of water rights, particularly for the Weeminuche Band, was devastating to their subsistence practices, and he went so far as to sue for water rights for the school.

While Peterson was a complicated man, he must have built some level of trust with Ute people. In 1904 he reported that an unnamed Weeminuche man and his ten-year-old daughter had come to the fort looking for medical care. Peterson and the staff reportedly did what they could, with Peterson himself tending to the man, although both passed within a few days of their arrival.<sup>148</sup> The following year, in 1905, Peterson wrote to DC seeking funding to send an unnamed Ute woman with uterine cancer for thirty days’ hospitalization and treatment in Durango.<sup>149</sup> Peterson also seems to have had less patience for the pettiness out of Washington.

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<sup>146</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 9, 1904.

<sup>147</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 24, 1904.

<sup>148</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 21, 1904.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 24, 1905.

When he was reprimanded for the “extravagant” spending of ten dollars on glasses for a Navajo student, Custer Sims, his exasperated response was that he took Sims “to the same oculist to whom I take my own boy for treatment, believing that the Indian boy needed skillful treatment as much as anyone.”<sup>150</sup>

Peterson also found himself crosswise with his superiors in Washington over staff promotions, particularly for Native staff. He often requested that he be allowed to administer the civil service exams to the students to spare everyone the time and expense of taking the exam at a federal office. In early 1905 Peterson wanted to promote Frank Robitaille from baker and voluntary bandleader to farmer, and to pay him for his service as bandleader. In the fall of that same year, Washington charged Peterson with helping Robitaille cheat on the exam. Peterson hedged, but he eventually admitted that he allowed Frank to have extra time and that other staff members may have helped coach him.<sup>151</sup> Peterson also fiercely defended Robitaille, who does appear to have received his promotion, and Peterson went on to administer the exam to other staff members.

William Peterson was superintendent until 1906, when John S. Spear, the final superintendent of Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, took over. In his first annual report back to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Spear stated that he found the school in “excellent condition.”<sup>152</sup> He oversaw the school as it was slowly decommissioned, and during his tenure the faculty was gradually furloughed. He reported sending students to larger schools, such as Haskell and Santa Fe. The full closing of the school seemed uncertain until 1909, when the student enrollment was only forty students.<sup>153</sup> From 1909 until 1911, Spear oversaw the transfer of all remaining students and staff, then served as an unsatisfied caretaker for the campus until it was transferred to the State of Colorado in 1911. At that time, Spear became the first superintendent of the Navajo Springs School in Towaoc.

Ultimately, as many as 1,100 students were ushered through the doors of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, which was estimated to be able to accommodate 300 students at a time. At its height in 1900 the school purportedly had 412 students. Some of these student numbers may be apocryphal, as it was common practice for superintendents to exaggerate the number of

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<sup>150</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 8, 1904.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 7, 1905.

<sup>152</sup> 1906 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

<sup>153</sup> 1909 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

children they had enrolled to increase the amount of funding they received from the government. To date, twenty tribes or tribal groups have been identified as having students who attended the school, including the Cherokee, Southern Ute, Ute Indian Tribe of the Ouray and Uintah Reservation, Navajo, Mescalero Apache, San Carlos Apache, Jicarilla Apache or Pueblo, Catawba, Tohono O’odham, Hopi, Paiute, Pima, Pueblo, Taos Pueblo, Isleta Pueblo, Laguna Pueblo, Rancheritos Pueblo, and Wyandotte. Figure 4 illustrates the attendance of students by tribal affiliation at the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School. The numbers have been compiled through official reporting and annual reports, and by extrapolating from identified correspondence and other documents. These numbers are subject to revision with future research.

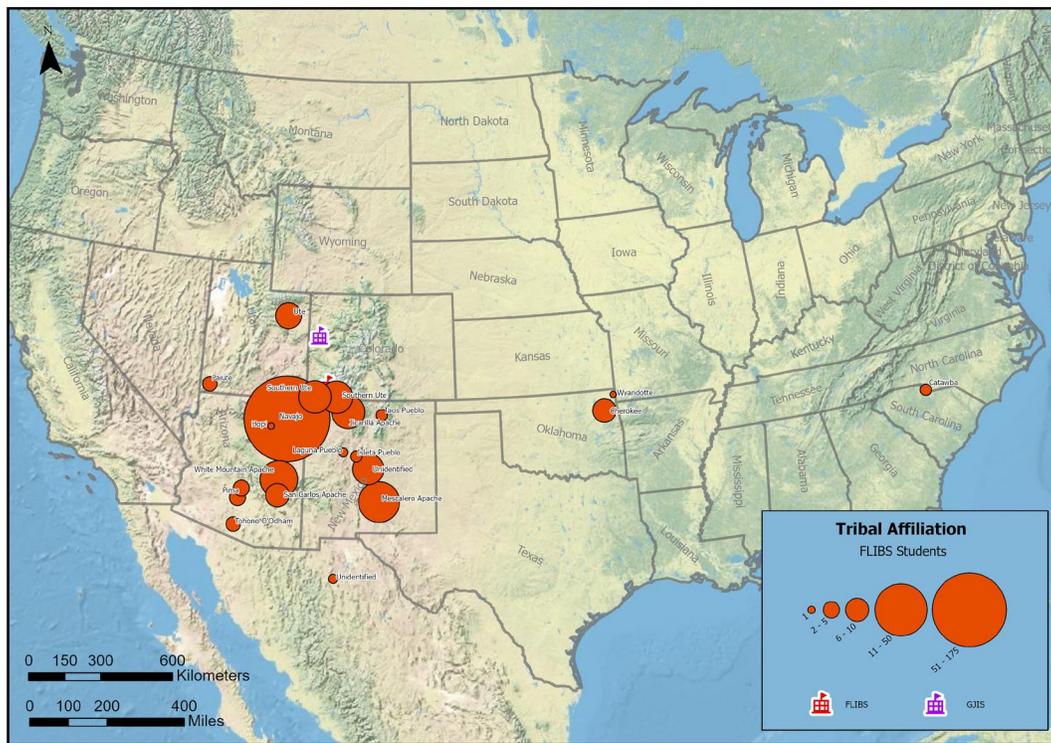


Figure 6. Known Attendance of Students by Tribal Affiliation at Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. Map courtesy of Holly Mckee-Huth, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation

### Students and Staff

Unfortunately there is no straightforward way to identify and account for all the students who attended boarding schools. While superintendents were mandated to send regular reports to Washington, the requirement went completely unenforced. For some superintendents, like Breen and Lemmon, it was in their best interest to obfuscate who was attending the school and what their experiences were. Ultimately, those in Washington were apathetic to the experiences of

individual Native students, focusing instead on the larger colonial project of assimilation. The ideals of education were not met with the appropriate resources to ensure the successful education of Native children: adequate financial investment, good buildings, healthy food, and well-trained staff. Instead, the federal government was attempting to transform entire nations of people into an echo of the poorest white Americans, and on a shoestring budget. The bureaucracy was therefore focused on counting the cost of every potato while failing to record the names of children under their care. Therefore, numbers in this report have been compiled from a variety of written sources, and still may only approximate the truth on the ground. Final numbers are drawn from the annual reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; however, individual reports from Indian agents responsible for collecting and transmitting children, as well as for communicating with parents and tribal leaders, were used to weight the official numbers. As can be expected, there are often discrepancies between these numbers. In general, we favor the numbers provided by individual Indian agents for their particular reservations, as they have a different agenda than the superintendents and provide more specific information about individuals and families.

While the ideal for Indian education policy was that students travel far from home, it appears that, especially in the western United States, students were typically recruited from within a geographically related area. This was due to the practicalities of travel restraints in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. There were also the illogical priorities of the Indian Education Department, which refused to adequately fund student travel for getting to and from schools. Another factor that influenced where students came from was the superintendents and the faculty; as many of these positions changed frequently, or were themselves recruited from other departments within the BIA, they came with their own networks of relationships with Indian agents and tribal leaders from whom they recruited students. For both Fort Lewis and the Teller Institute, what this means is that the majority of the students came from tribal nations with deep ties to the American Southwest, including the Navajo, Ute, Apache, Hopi, and Tohono O'odham. Unfortunately, given how government officials saw Native peoples, at times there is a significant lack of clarity to enable us to understand the identities of the students with greater granularity. This may come with time as families identify their ancestors and can provide more specialized information.

It should be noted that identifying historic tribal affiliations can be challenging. At least one school superintendent faked the number of students, or listed non-Native students as Native—most likely as Navajo since that was the largest population of students at the school at any given time. Additionally, the way tribes were identified historically and the way they self-identify now is very different, and so there is a degree of cultural interpretation represented in the identification of these students that is subject to change. The numbers in the tables below are compiled from several different sources, including correspondence from the superintendents to a variety of sources, such as the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and local Indian agents; the reports of the Indian agents of various agencies and reservations; quarterly reports; annual reports; and newspaper articles. The columns should not be interpreted as representing a total number of students, since individual students would have attended a school for multiple years and been represented for each year they were in attendance. The only “official” numbers are the “Total” columns, which are the enrollment and average attendance numbers as reported in the annual reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Finally, the tables are arranged by weight, with the tribes that had the greatest number of students in attendance on the left. A final note on understanding the tables: When there is a blank cell, that indicates that no information was reported or found; if a “0” is shown, then that was the actual number reported by school officials at the time. There were, of course, additional schools—such as the Good Shepherd Industrial School for Girls in Denver—which cast a much wider net and had students identified as Catawba girls and young women in the few years that it was under contract with the federal government. Again, this is illustrative of how each school was truly unique and operated under its own internal logics. Good Shepherd had pre-existing relationships with the Catawba Nation, whose homelands and reservation are in northwestern South Carolina, potentially an indication of a deeper historical association of the Catholic Church with the Catawba that is outside the scope of this report.

During the course of our research, we identified students from twenty tribal affiliations who attended the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. The majority of those students came from the Mountain West and Southwest region of the United States. The Navajo were by far the largest group of students to attend Fort Lewis. Historically, the educational policies of the United States government have disproportionately affected the Navajo more acutely than many other

tribes.<sup>154</sup> This is a condition of size and geography: The Navajo Nation has long had the largest population of any contemporary tribal entity; they also have one of the largest reservations, dispersed across a very arid and rugged landscape. These factors made the government reluctant to open on-reservation day schools for the Diné well into the mid and even late twentieth century, instead forcing children and their families to travel great distances for centralized schools rather than supporting smaller but more costly schools closer to their homes. Just as the Southern Utes requested their own on-reservation schools in the late-nineteenth century, so did the Navajo. When Fort Lewis was first established, a Navajo school for those families around the San Juan River was denied until Fort Lewis, "...just 50 miles above it, is filled."<sup>155</sup>

Thomas Breen, the longest-serving superintendent for Fort Lewis, claimed to have recruited hundreds of Navajo students, mostly boys, in his ten years at the school. Most of these students were from within 125 miles of the school.<sup>156</sup> Beyond that, there is very little known about the Navajo students. It is also highly likely that circa 1901–1903 Breen was “hiding” Mexican and other non-Native children enrolled in the school by claiming them as Navajos in the rolls, so it is difficult to say with certainty how many Navajo children attended Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. Current research has identified the names of 530 students, which can be found in appendix A.

After the Navajo, it was Pueblo and Apache students who comprised the largest proportion of the Fort Lewis student body. The numbers become even more uncertain, though, as Breen was not careful to distinguish between different Pueblo or Apache bands or tribes. In some cases, Breen did not even bother to differentiate between Pueblo and Apache students. When possible, we have identified students by their specific Pueblo or band in the table above, as well as in the list of student names in appendix A. Future research may be able to refine these identifications with more delving into the papers from the Indian agents of those tribes. For instance, the numbers of reported Mescalero Apache students, as well as the Mescalero children who did not return home, are based on the reporting of the Indian agent for their agency to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

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<sup>154</sup> Birchard (1970), *Education of American Indians: Boarding Schools for American Indian Youth*.

<sup>155</sup> 1892 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 578.

<sup>156</sup> M211\_Bx2\_F03.

For many years the Jicarilla Apache were a sub-agency to the Southern Ute Agency, so the same Indian agent represented both. The Jicarilla were just as resistant to boarding schools as the Southern Ute, also largely refusing to send their children to schools and demanding their own school on their reservation. The Jicarilla also had no compunction about keeping their children if the conditions at school seemed unfavorable. Because of this, when Jicarilla students did become enrolled in schools, some of the superintendents went to great lengths to keep the children over summer breaks and other holidays. In 1894, while some of the Jicarilla children were allowed to return home, it appears that Superintendent Breen retained some of the children. The “larger boys” were treated to a two-week hunting and fishing camp in the La Plata Mountains.<sup>157</sup> The Jicarilla Apache were victim to some of Breen’s more underhanded tactics to recruit students, tactics that were supposedly illegal. The Indian agent for the Jicarilla reported in the same document that tribal leaders and parents “were greatly displeased last fall when, without their consent or even knowledge, their children whom they had sent to Santa Fe were removed to the Fort Lewis School, Colorado.”<sup>158</sup>

The inclusion of Pueblo students at Fort Lewis is somewhat perplexing. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War in 1848, gave the United States 55 million new acres of land on which many communities of Mexican citizens resided, including the Pueblo. The Pueblo, therefore, had a different legal status than other American Indian tribes in the United States, having retained their citizenship when the international border was shifted south. This also gave Pueblos different rights in regard to Indian education policy.<sup>159</sup> In addition, New Mexico Territory had a number of schools managed by the federal government, the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions, and others. How some Pueblo students still found themselves at Fort Lewis is unknown. The Pueblo students may have retained some privileges over other students, such as a greater degree of ability to return home during summer vacations.<sup>160</sup>

Given these circumstances, it seems perplexing that Pueblo parents would enroll their children in Fort Lewis. However, where the Pueblos may have differed from other tribes in regard to legal status, their experiences with the federal school system were just as fraught and

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<sup>157</sup> 1894 Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 374.

<sup>158</sup> 1894 Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 210.

<sup>159</sup> Gram (2015), *Education at the Edge of Empire*.

<sup>160</sup> RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 3\_journal 1\_pgs 1-436\_pg 10.

complex. Just as we see Ute leaders constantly reacting to changes in conditions in Ignacio that informed the decision to enroll students, so too do we see Pueblo, and other tribes, in a constant state of reassessment. In the 1896–97 school year, sixty Isleta Pueblo students were removed from the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School for unknown reasons.<sup>161</sup> Some of those students may have been sent to Fort Lewis.

A theme that was consistent was the inclusion or participation of Mexicans within the education system. Mexican and Mexican American participation in federal Indian boarding schools is not completely unknown. Some scholars note that in New Mexico, Mexican students who wanted access to education were often enrolled in federal Indian schools, although it was a controversial practice.<sup>162</sup> Some superintendents made Mexican students “Indian” on the rolls to inflate their numbers, and therefore their funding. Officials in Washington often ordered the removal of Mexican students from schools. In Colorado we see superintendents and agents lumping the need for schools for Mexican students with the need for Native students, especially as the two groups lived and worked closely together in southwest Colorado.<sup>163</sup> Those officials on the ground, however, such as Indian agents, did advocate for the inclusion of Mexican children with Native children in the classroom, both because the Mexican families were seen as “good role models” for the Utes in their work habits and assimilation, and for the very practical acceptance that these were not two easily separated or compartmentalized groups of people.<sup>164</sup>

While we see glimpses of Mexican American children on the periphery, it is unclear what their participation and experiences with the Ute education models were in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. We know that these families are close enough to the system in 1893 to become victims of the trachoma epidemic that swept through Fort Lewis. We occasionally see mentions of these children in the sparse reports from US Indian agents and even superintendents, who sometimes mentioned the additional need for education for these children in addition to the education of the Utes. The unique relationship of the federal government with American Indian tribes, however, meant that Washington made it a policy to separate federally managed Native-serving institutions from those that included other racial or ethnic groups.

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<sup>161</sup> Gram (2015), *Education at the Edge of Empire*, pg 39.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*; Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*.

<sup>163</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 10, 1905.

<sup>164</sup> Letter from Henry Freeman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 17, 1893; Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 2, 1905.

A further complication is the revelation that just two years prior to his removal, Breen was reprimanded by Washington, DC, for “stuffing” his attendance rolls with Mexican and even white students. These students were further rendered invisible by being masqueraded as Native students, perhaps accounting for the very large number of Navajo students that Breen reported for many years. This was not a practice of Breen’s alone. In 1902 Andrew Viets, the superintendent for the Santa Fe Indian School, was removed from that position for also padding his student rolls—although in his case for making up students to collect the extra money that came with each student enrolled.<sup>165</sup>

Regardless of whether officials thought it was a positive or negative influence, Mexican and Mexican American families were a significant part of society in southwestern Colorado at the turn of the twentieth century, and had been since Spanish colonization roughly 200 years prior. Families were living side by side, often working together and intermingling their families through marriage and other social contracts. Some of the Indian agents even voiced approval for the integration of Mexican and American Indian social interactions, believing that the western-style work practices of Mexican Americans were “good role models” for the Utes and might help inspire them to send their children to Fort Lewis or other schools.<sup>166</sup> These students and families are an integral, and invisible, part of the story of Indian education in the United States.

The ages of students were just as varied as their self identities and tribal identities. While again the ideal students at both Fort Lewis and the Teller Institute were considered to be those of roughly “middle school” age, or about ten to thirteen years old and having achieved the equivalent of a sixth-grade academic education, the ages of students at both schools actually ran the gamut. As has been discussed, Fort Lewis maintained a kindergarten class for very young children, as young as six years old, for many years despite guidance from Washington that this was too young for children to be separated from their families. There was also strict guidance that students should not exceed the age of about twenty. Several students were in their late teens or even early twenties as students of Fort Lewis. We also see in the historical documents that on several occasions the listed age of a student changed on the rolls from year to year—remaining, for example, seventeen years old for three or even four years in a row. In some cases Breen reluctantly removed students from the rolls, only to turn around and place them on the employee

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<sup>165</sup> *The Denver Post*, May 23, 1903.

<sup>166</sup> Letter from H. Freeman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 17, 1893.

lists. Again, this is not unique to Fort Lewis. It's difficult to understand some of the reasoning or motivations behind these practices. In some cases it may have been yet another attempt to pad the rolls. In others, it may have been a sincere attempt to get students who had never had a formal education into the system. In 1883, Ute men in their mid-to-late twenties were enrolled in the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School. And, finally, it may have reflected a recognition that with the severing of familial and tribal ties for some students, they had nowhere to go when they matriculated out of these schools.

A disturbing pattern that occurred more often at Fort Lewis than at Grand Junction was the categorization of students as "orphans." The status of orphan did not seem completely dependent on whether a student's parents or guardians had actually passed away, but rather was an arbitrary designation based on estrangement—whether forced by the federal government or through other factors. Two specific cases stand out. The Cherokee Nation was not a tribe that was actively recruited from, nor was it within the superintendent's geographical range from which to recruit students. But in 1898, the local sheriff brought thirteen Cherokee students to Fort Lewis to live permanently. The children, some of them siblings, were described as "orphans" whose father had died while the family was traveling to New Mexico for work. There is no indication that an attempt was made to identify relatives in Oklahoma. The Cherokee students went on to spend the next eight years of their lives at the school. One student, Edward Slaughter, graduated into a staff position and later a teaching position, leaving only when his unnamed bride, also a graduate of Fort Lewis, became unwelcome at the school. The wife had two sisters still in attendance, and Breen was concerned that she had inserted herself into her sisters' lives so he transferred Edward's employment to another school.<sup>167</sup>

Another notable orphan was a Southern Ute—identified boy by the name of Frank Taylor. For many years Frank was the only Southern Ute in attendance at Fort Lewis; the school newspaper even called him out as such. An event described in the same issue of the paper depicts the troubling way that "orphans" may have been brought into the school in the first place. In 1896 Frank "found" a young girl, not much older than a toddler, and brought her to the school. They had cut her hair and changed her into a school uniform before her father figured out where she might be and collected her. Frank spent at least six years at the school before dying of

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<sup>167</sup> RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 4\_Journal 2\_pg 75.

pneumonia in 1897, when he was about eleven years old.<sup>168</sup> Because of the role of Fort Lewis as not only a school but a part of the Southern Ute reservation system in ill-defined but jurisdictional ways, the opportunities for students of various legal status to attend may have been greater than at Grand Junction.

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<sup>168</sup> RG 75\_LTR REC\_1897\_box1414-ltr 16894; RG 75\_Census of Southern Utes at Fort Lewis\_Entry 742A\_NARA\_DC; *Outlook*, May 1897.

**Please note: This chapter explicitly discusses children who did not return home, as well as other matters involving illness, bodily harm, and the end of life. Statements about the natural processes that act on human bodies at the end of life are explicit. Portions of this section may violate cultural practices regarding how children who did not return home are spoken of.**

## VII. Children Who Did Not Return Home

### Burial Practices in the Nineteenth-Century United States

Burial practices and treatment of the dead are among the most ingrained cultural expressions within any culture. These practices are so ingrained that oftentimes people have a difficult time conceiving of how other cultures treat their dead, or do not consider that other cultures would treat their dead differently than they themselves do. Those practices and treatments change over time, for a variety of reasons. The relationship of the living with the dead is also quite complicated, predicated on cultural belief systems, and it changes over time. Finally, many people think about culture or cultural practices as something that *other* people have, because what *they* do is just normal. This is particularly true for mainstream, twenty-first-century America. Today, many Americans do not have an intimate relationship with the rituals of death, and we often project that fact into the past when thinking about the actions of our predecessors.

In nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America, death was a more daily experience across all cultures than it sometimes feels today. In addition, there were very strong, specified rituals of death and burial that were taboo to violate as good, Christian, middle-class Americans. It is for this reason that school officials at boarding schools chose Christian-style burials for children whose parents and families would not have recognized those as an appropriate treatment of the dead. It was both a colonial practice that negated the deepest beliefs of Native people and a practice that the white school officials literally could not contemplate doing differently, because it was ingrained within them as the only appropriate treatment of the dead based on their own belief systems. This idea of appropriate burial practices was a point of assimilation for American Indian tribes, right beside “civilian,” or western-style, clothing, farming, and the speaking of English.

The rural cemetery movement emerged in the United States beginning around the 1830s. This movement was both aesthetic and functional; as cities became larger, it was no longer practical to bury the dead in individual family plots or in churchyards. Simultaneously, notions around health risks posed by the dead, even those in cemeteries, meant that cities were moving towards municipal cemeteries that were located away from population centers, had strict ideas of deep burial, and were aesthetically pleasant to serve as parks and recreational areas. This model of the municipal cemetery became the predominant model that still dominates ideas of appropriate interment today. Cities in Colorado were emerging and growing alongside these

ideal notions of middle-class appropriate cemeteries. By the late-nineteenth century, the rural cemetery movement was supplanted by the lawn-park cemetery model, which still predominates in many places across the United States. In both cases these cemeteries were ordered by Christian ideals of east-west facing, burials along Euclidean lines, family plots, and a designed landscape that invited visitation.

There are indications that the schools in Colorado and other nearby locations adhered to traditional Christian burials. Some of the newspaper obituaries related to students who passed at the Teller Institute describe funeral processions involving the entire school, and the student body being present at the burials of their classmates. In 1884, Superintendent Bryan at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School described the burial ceremony of Peter Black in a letter to US Indian Agent Patten. Bryan reports to Patten that they dressed Peter:

...in a new suit of black and had placed [him] in a neat coffin. This morning Rev Mr. Menaul held a short service in the school room and we then took the body to the cemetery, We had three wagons. Ten of the boys and five of the officers of the school with the minister saw the coffin placed in the ground.<sup>169</sup>

In 1890, during the initial push to assimilate the Southern Ute in Colorado, then US Indian Agent Charles Bartholomew was concerned with what he termed the “decent burial” of the dead, and he wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs of his attempts to encourage the Ute and Apache to use a specified graveyard, as well as to have coffins and headboards provided by the government to encourage the abandonment of their traditional burial practices.<sup>170</sup> This was at the time when the US military abandoned the Fort Lewis post and Bartholomew was integrating the property into the boarding school system. The military had a small cemetery associated with the post, where soldiers, their family members, and other civilians associated with the fort were buried when they passed away.

The cemetery at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was established alongside the Fort Lewis post, with the first recorded burials occurring in 1880. At that time, the cemetery was used for military personnel, their families, and the other workers related to the post. An unknown

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<sup>169</sup> Letter from RWD Bryan to Warren Patten, June 4, 1884.

<sup>170</sup> Letter from Charles Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 31, 1890; Letter from Charles Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 20, 1891.

number of civilians were also buried on site for any number of reasons during the time that it was a military cemetery.<sup>171</sup> Archival research indicated that at least forty-seven members of the military, their families, and government contractors were buried at the site, with approximately twenty-nine reported to have been exhumed by local contractors in Durango and shipped to Fort McPherson National Cemetery in Nebraska for reburial. It was this cemetery that Bartholomew was most likely thinking of. Not only was it hallowed ground that was already being appropriately utilized for the purposes of Christian burials, the cemetery sat on a bench above the San Juan River, making it geographically accessible for burials. The Fort Lewis cemetery, therefore, would have been ideal and fit perfectly into the Euro-American concept of the rural cemetery movement.

This was not unique to the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. Across the federal education system, boarding schools had cemeteries that fit the rural or lawn-park cemetery movements. As with Fort Lewis, the Carlisle Indian School was established on the grounds of a decommissioned military post, which had an already-established cemetery. Other schools, such as the Stewart Indian School in Nevada, Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School in Michigan, and the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School in New Mexico, all exhibit similar patterns of cemeteries located on the outskirts or edge of the built-environment property.<sup>172</sup> This placement of cemeteries and graveyards is logical when thinking about the schools as sites of assimilation. The project of assimilation was carried through every aspect of the schools: the architecture of the buildings, how they were laid out, the curriculum of the schools, and how students' bodies were treated in life and in death. They were forced to conform to Euro-American society, even in death.

How successful Bartholomew was in changing the practices of the Ute is unknown, but he was not alone in the endeavor. Earlier that year Bartholomew also reported that he had buried a young Ute girl, "Nannice's daughter," at the agency after she died of a brief illness.<sup>173</sup> There was no indication that Bartholomew or others at the agency ever considered returning the girl to her family for a Ute-appropriate burial. Another major factor that may have influenced a change

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<sup>171</sup> Charles (2023), *The Archaeology of Old Fort Lewis, 2008–2011*.

<sup>172</sup> Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center; Cowie et al. (2019), *Collaborative Archaeology at Stewart Indian School*; Sabatini (2017), *A History of the Cemetery at the Albuquerque Indian School*; Surface-Evans (2016), *A Landscape of Assimilation and Resistance: The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School*.

<sup>173</sup> Letter from Charles Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 2, 1891.

in burial practices was removal to reservations and allotments. As the territory that the Ute had was restricted by the US government, the ability to practice traditional burial rites was also restricted. This would have been even more exaggerated as allotments were taken up by the Southern Ute: Not only were individual families confined to a specified piece of property, but the ability of the community to utilize land in traditional ways was also deeply confined. Many Ute families—and other families living and working beside them, such as Mexican Americans—may have had burial in the Fort Lewis cemetery as their only option when they lost a loved one. It was also common for staff and faculty to be buried at school cemeteries, and at least one local family in the Hesperus area identifies the cemetery as the burial place of their ancestor who worked at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School.<sup>174</sup>

While never explicitly stated in historic documents, it would have been unthinkable to the nineteenth-century school officials not to use the Fort Lewis cemetery for burials. While eschewing Native practices as “uncivilized,” schools officials saw it as their duty to Native students to provide a “proper” Christian burial if the student passed away at school. In many cases this included culturally appropriate, although very simple, caskets or coffins that were manufactured at the school. For instance, in the 1901 annual report for the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School, Superintendent Lemmon reported that two coffins were among the goods manufactured by the carpentry department that year.<sup>175</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the coffins were intended for student burials.

A caveat is that while it is most likely that students who passed away at the school were buried at the school, this may not have always been the case. In 1884, with the death of Ute student Peter Black at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School in New Mexico, Superintendent Bryan telegraphed Southern Ute Indian Agent Warren Patten offering to embalm and “express” the boy’s body to Ignacio.<sup>176</sup> Patten declined, and Bryan wrote two days later saying he had made arrangements for Peter to be buried in Albuquerque. Later, in 1896 and 1897, when We Car Ve Tact, also known as Ellen Ross, and Satapuits, also known as Emma Crane, passed away at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, their remains were returned to Ignacio.<sup>177</sup> It is unknown where Ross and Crane were interred.

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<sup>174</sup> Charles (2023), *The Archaeology of Old Fort Lewis*.

<sup>175</sup> 1901 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pgs 533–36.

<sup>176</sup> Telegram from Superintendent Bryan to US Indian Agent Patten, June 2, 1884.

<sup>177</sup> Hastings and Taylor (2023), *Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind Ledgers*.

It is also unknown how common it was to return the remains of children who passed away to their respective reservations. This may be where tribal custom and burial practices would have come into play; if there were beliefs around the receipt of the dead, or how quickly the dead should be interred, different tribes may not have wanted remains returned to their reservations. There are also practical considerations about how quickly a body may have deteriorated in conditions that lacked modern refrigeration, or there may have been concerns about contamination after certain epidemics and illnesses. Finally, officials in Washington, DC, who ultimately counted the financial, and not the human, costs of the school system, may have denied the return of children's bodies as too costly. Suffice it to say that even with the outlier cases of some children being returned to their reservations, or offers thereof, most children who passed at the schools were buried at the school cemeteries.

#### Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School

Since Fort Lewis practically functioned as an on-reservation school, and as the superintendent was given authority over the governance of the unallotted Utes, the school was a dynamic part of the community. That being the case, the Fort Lewis cemetery also functioned as more than a school cemetery; it was a community burial place through at least the first quarter of the twentieth century, if not through the mid-twentieth century. The school functioned as a place where some individuals sought medical care. In one heart-wrenching case, in 1904 an unnamed Weeminuche man and his young daughter came to the Fort Lewis school ill, looking for care. Superintendent Peterson reported that soon after arrival the girl passed away. He personally cared for the man, who unfortunately also passed away within a few days.<sup>178</sup> The most reasonable idea as to the interment of these two individuals would have been at the Fort Lewis cemetery.

While it was standard practice for sick children to be returned home, this was not always possible, and deaths occurred at both Fort Lewis and Grand Junction Indian Boarding Schools. As discussed in [Section #](#), many of the records for Fort Lewis have been lost or damaged beyond use. We therefore have an incomplete record of both student attendance and student deaths at the Fort Lewis school. However, we can achieve a close approximation based on careful

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<sup>178</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 21, 1904.

reconstruction of existing records. For this investigation we used self-reported numbers from the school superintendents to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, as well as missives from superintendents to Indian agents and reservation officials, reports from US Indian agents to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and newspaper reports or obituaries.

There is no threshold where the death of children at the boarding schools is acceptable. Every single death was a tragedy to the families who lost their loved ones. This report seeks to contextualize what happened to these children, and to understand not only the conditions within the Fort Lewis and Grand Junction schools but also the social, political, and other conditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is not done to excuse any deaths or other impacts on Native people subjected to these institutions. *No child should ever die at school.*

Through archival analysis we identified thirty-one deaths of students over an eighteen-year time frame at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. The number of deaths is a nearly threefold increase over what appear to have been the deaths officially reported to Washington, DC, in annual reports (although more accurate accountings of students were included in quarterly reports and health reports, documents which have a lower survival rate). The total number of students who attended Fort Lewis is not as easy to approximate as the number of deaths that occurred at the school. We have total numbers for each year; however, there was not a complete, 100-percent turnover of the student body each year. Students were typically enrolled for two-year, three-year, or five-year contracts. Some students attended for many years. For instance, the thirteen Cherokee students at Fort Lewis were orphaned and sent to Fort Lewis to live full time, more as an orphanage than as a boarding school. We also know that many students, such as Ute students, only attended for a year or less, as their parents pulled them from the school as soon as a tragic event occurred. Very rough calculations, therefore, indicate that approximately 1,100 students attended Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. Currently, there are no national averages regarding death rates at federal boarding schools. A common statistic that is often cited is that in the first ten years of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute's admission of Native

Table 7. Vital Statistics for Fort Lewis Indian School, 1892 to 1909

| Academic Year Ending | Enrolled | Average Attendance | Ill           | Deaths Reported at Time | Deaths Identified through Archival Research |
|----------------------|----------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------------|---|
| 1892                 | 51       |                    | 6             | 2                       |   |
| 1893                 | 94       | 63                 |               |                         | 2   |
| 1894                 | 132      |                    | 108           | 2                       |   |
| 1895                 | 183      | 175                |               | 1                       | 4   |
| 1896                 | 189      | 159                |               | 0                       | 1   |
| 1897                 | 297      |                    |               | No report               | 5   |
| 1898                 | 314      | 285                |               |                         | 4   |
| 1899                 | 370      | 324                |               |                         | 1   |
| 1900                 | 412      | 307                |               |                         | 1   |
| 1901                 |          |                    |               | No Report               | 5   |
| 1902                 | 341      | 266                |               |                         | 1   |
| 1903                 | 186      | 118                |               |                         | 1   |
| 1904                 | 175      | 151                | “lots”        | 0                       | 1   |
| 1905                 | 198      | 180                | “Very little” | 0                       |   |
| 1906                 | 199      | 187                | 100           | 2                       | 1   |

|                   |     |     |  |   |    |
|-------------------|-----|-----|--|---|----|
| 1907              | 242 | 192 |  |   |    |
| 1908              | 214 | 128 |  |   |    |
| 1909              | 40  | 35  |  |   |    |
| Total/<br>average |     |     |  | 7 | 27 |

students, a rate of one in eleven died,<sup>179</sup> or 31 out of 304, which amounts to approximately three students per year who did not return home, for a 9-percent death rate. If that statistic held for Native deaths at Fort Lewis, this would mean we could reasonably expect an upper limit of 100 deaths to have occurred. Currently, that number is not supported by data.

It is important to understand where those statistics come from, and how one in eleven may or may not apply to Fort Lewis. The boarding schools in Colorado were very short-lived, on the order of only twenty years. Many other boarding schools—particularly the large boarding schools that dominated the school system such as Carlisle, Chilocco, or Albuquerque—existed for much longer periods of time. These schools also served much larger student populations, which exacerbated the conditions that support epidemics and illness in these institutions. There was harsh criticism from tribes about the conditions at the eastern schools early on; the Navajo refused to send their children east because of the high rate of failure to return home, which may account, in part, for why so many Navajo children attended Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School. And finally, there were no reports of epidemics that affected Fort Lewis, when serious outbreaks of illness decimated student populations at many other schools within a single academic year. For example, an epidemic of measles broke out at the Phoenix School in 1899, infecting 325 students, nine of whom passed in just ten days, for a 2.7-percent rate of mortality *for the students who contracted measles*.<sup>180</sup> The 1907 annual report for the Phoenix school reported an average attendance of 624 students in total, meaning that the epidemic affected 52 percent of the school

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<sup>179</sup> Dejong (2007), *Unless They Are Kept Alive*.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, pg 264.

population, with an overall mortality rate of 1.4 percent. Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, by contrast, often reported being the “healthiest” school in the system.<sup>181</sup>

Fatality rates do not need to be in the double digits to be high. For instance, the Covid-19 fatality rates in the developed world were 1.15 percent.<sup>182</sup> Also like what we are experiencing with Covid, epidemics such as the measles outbreak were not only concerning for the number of individuals who perished, but also for the large number of individuals taken ill. Any of these epidemics would have affected individuals differently, causing everything from minor illness to long-term issues. Death was not the only concerning health outcome.

Does this mean that Fort Lewis was a better alternative to other boarding schools, or that the conditions at Fort Lewis are not a cause for critique? Absolutely not. Superintendent reports, the US Indian agents’ reports, and the *Denver Post* investigations show that the buildings at Fort Lewis were sub-par and often lacked adequate heating, food rations were often inadequate, and despite large numbers of empty buildings, students were still overcrowded in dormitories. The students were also subjected to harsh labor conditions and abuse. However, it is important to understand the actual conditions that these students experienced, as well as how local circumstances made each school a unique part of the system as a whole. A slightly more agreeable environment was a small blessing in an otherwise degrading situation.

The archival analysis attempted to account for all deaths that took place at the school, whether student or otherwise. The children who were identified through archival records as having passed away at Fort Lewis were from seven identified tribes and included one student with an unidentified tribal affiliation, as well as one ten-year-old girl who was not a student at the school but who was a Southern Ute tribal member. The tribal affiliations include Navajo, White Mountain Apache, Southern Ute, Ute, Pueblo, Mescalero Apache, and Pima. The ages of the victims tragically range from very young at just five years old to a young adult of 22. Identified names of victims can be found in appendix A.

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<sup>181</sup> 1899 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 11.

<sup>182</sup> Van Elsland (2020), “Covid-19 Deaths: Infection Fatality Ratio Is about 1%.”

**Table 8. Tribal Affiliations and Ages of Students Who Passed at Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School**

| Age     | Navajo | White Mountain Apache | Southern Ute | Ute | Pueblo | Pima | Mescalero Apache | Unidentified |
|---------|--------|-----------------------|--------------|-----|--------|------|------------------|--------------|
| 5       | 1      |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 6       |        |                       | 1            |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 7       |        |                       |              |     | 2      |      |                  |              |
| 8       | 1      |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 9       |        |                       | 1            |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 10      |        | 1                     | 1            | 2   |        |      |                  |              |
| 11      | 1      |                       | 1            |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 12      |        | 1                     | 1            |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 13      |        |                       | 1            |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 14      |        |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 15      |        | 2                     |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 16      |        |                       | 1            |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 17      | 1      |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 18      |        |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 19      |        |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 20      |        | 1                     |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 21      |        |                       |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| 22      |        | 1                     |              |     |        |      |                  |              |
| unknown | 1      | 1                     | 1            | 1   |        | 1    | 4                | 1            |

*Ute Vitality Statistics*

The health, and deaths, of the students was not the only concern at Fort Lewis, which had an active role in tribal governance and life (see Section VIII). Like superintendents, US Indian agents were required to submit comprehensive reports on many factors and characteristics of the tribes they were working with. Indian agents recorded much information about the demographics, subsistence practices, and other statistics of tribes in an effort to measure how “progressive” a tribe was, or, in other words, how successful the assimilation policies were for their agency. The health of all tribes was also closely monitored, with detailed statistics about various illnesses, diseases, injuries, and deaths recorded. The US Indian agents for the Southern Ute were no exception. This does not mean that we can take all their enumerations at face value. For instance, we see inconsistencies when various agents recorded allotments and other private property transactions for the Ute. A look at the basic demographic and vital statistics, however, are fairly consistent across years. This provides an understanding of the basic population growth or decline, even though the exact numbers do not stand up to modern scrutiny.

**Table 9. Vital Statistics for Ute Bands within Colorado, 1880–1917**<sup>183</sup>

| Year | Ute Mountain Ute | Southern Ute | Navajo Springs School | Fort Lewis School | Southern Ute School | Allotted | Unalloted | Tabeguache | Capote | Mouache | Weeminuche | Births | Deaths |
|------|------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|------------|--------|---------|------------|--------|--------|
| 1880 |                  |              |                       |                   |                     |          |           | 1,200      | 1,330  |         |            | 113    | 80     |
| 1881 |                  |              |                       |                   |                     |          |           | 1,500      | 1,100  |         |            | 98     | 75     |
| 1882 |                  |              |                       |                   |                     |          |           |            | 925    |         |            | 31     | 21     |
| 1883 |                  |              |                       |                   |                     |          |           |            | 208    | 269     | 491        |        |        |

<sup>183</sup> All information is compiled from annual reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Reports were not available for 1918–1920.

|      |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  |     |     |     |    |     |
|------|--|--|--|--|-----|-----|-----|--|--|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|
| 1884 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 991 | 35  | 27  |    |     |
| 1885 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 206 | 279 | 498 | 24 | 60  |
| 1886 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 199 | 278 | 501 | 33 | 46  |
| 1887 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 197 | 281 | 517 | 25 | 18  |
| 1888 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 192 | 277 | 518 | 35 | 18  |
| 1889 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 195 | 286 | 532 | 27 | 31  |
| 1890 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 985 |     |     | 37 | 18  |
| 1891 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 181 | 266 | 551 | 32 | 39  |
| 1892 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 986 |     |     | 26 | 20  |
| 1893 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 183 | 274 | 545 | 27 | 12  |
| 1894 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 190 | 273 | 553 | 23 | 16  |
| 1895 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 193 | 269 | 680 | 19 | 16  |
| 1896 |  |  |  |  |     |     |     |  |  | 193 | 272 | 694 | 28 | 24  |
| 1897 |  |  |  |  |     | 420 | 717 |  |  |     |     |     | 35 | 57  |
| 1898 |  |  |  |  |     | 400 | 601 |  |  |     |     |     | 35 | 172 |
| 1899 |  |  |  |  |     | 396 | 602 |  |  |     |     |     | 16 | 19  |
| 1900 |  |  |  |  |     | 420 | 575 |  |  |     |     |     | 28 | 2   |
| 1901 |  |  |  |  |     | 413 | 528 |  |  |     |     |     | 20 | 74  |
| 1902 |  |  |  |  |     | 415 | 540 |  |  |     |     |     | 9  | 18  |
| 1903 |  |  |  |  |     | 408 | 533 |  |  |     |     |     | 12 | 26  |
| 1904 |  |  |  |  | 559 | 403 |     |  |  |     |     |     | 33 | 40  |
| 1905 |  |  |  |  | 502 | 385 |     |  |  |     |     |     |    |     |
| 1906 |  |  |  |  |     | 381 |     |  |  |     |     |     | 19 | 17  |
| 1907 |  |  |  |  | 453 | 354 |     |  |  |     |     |     |    |     |

|      |     |     |     |     |     |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |    |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|--|--|--|--|--|----|----|
| 1908 |     |     |     | 448 | 360 |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |    |
| 1909 |     |     |     | 454 | 352 |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |    |
| 1910 |     |     | 463 |     | 352 |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |    |
| 1911 |     |     | 479 |     | 362 |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |    |
| 1912 |     |     | 493 |     | 367 |  |  |  |  |  |  |    |    |
| 1913 |     |     | 510 |     | 360 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 43 | 33 |
| 1914 |     |     | 504 |     | 360 |  |  |  |  |  |  | 34 | 40 |
| 1915 | 524 | 366 |     |     |     |  |  |  |  |  |  | 28 | 18 |
| 1916 | 533 | 365 |     |     |     |  |  |  |  |  |  | 28 | 25 |
| 1917 | 526 | 372 |     |     |     |  |  |  |  |  |  | 30 | 31 |

As can be seen from table 9, the population of the Ute, in this case the three bands of the Capote, Mouache, and Weeminuche, was fairly consistent between 1880 and 1920. The demographic reports treat each of the three bands separately until 1896/1897, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) instead tracked demographics between “allotted” and “unallotted” Utes, which roughly separates along bands and geographic lines, but not cleanly. The reports changed again in 1904, when the Ute were grouped by school—that is, who was under the authority of the superintendent at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School and who was under the authority of the superintendent at the newly established Southern Ute Boarding School. When Fort Lewis shut down, the categories shifted to the Southern Ute school and the Navajo Springs Day School, until finally in 1915 the BIA settled on the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the Southern Ute Tribe as the defining entities. Please note: As the Tabeguache Band was still present in Colorado in 1880–81, they are also included in the demographics table. However, all discussions below exclude the Tabeguache.

There are not vital statistics available for the Ute for every year of the forty-year period between 1880 and 1920, and there are reasons to think that the numbers that are available may be incomplete. The Indian agents struggled with knowing individuals in the community and frequently had issues tracking information required for rations, annuities, and allotments, much

less the more intimate events such as death. The Ute population in Colorado appears to have stayed fairly consistent for this period of time, between 925 individuals in 1882 and 1,137 individuals in 1897. (There was a higher population recorded for the Capote, Mouache, and Weeminuche in 1880—1,330 individuals—but it is unclear how the Tabeguache removal to Utah influenced the drastic drop in population just a year later.) For this period, deaths each year ranged from ten to sixty, averaging approximately twenty-seven per year. The year 1898 was an incredibly tragic one for the Southern Ute. Pneumonia and tuberculosis (also known as consumption) ravaged the tribe and caused a shocking 172 deaths that year, far exceeding anything in this period before or after.<sup>184</sup> Unfortunately we do not have further information about how this impacted the Ute, but the consequences to families and tribal structures must have been devastating.

The total number of deaths recorded by the US federal government in this period was 960 individuals. When considering community use of the cemetery, we have to recognize the potential for swiftly changing burial practices of some Ute ancestors and account for where they might have been interred. The East Cemetery at Ignacio was established in 1918, with the West Cemetery established in 1926; the Ute Mountain Tribal cemetery in Towaoc was established within the same period.<sup>185</sup> It is therefore reasonable to assume that for community members living within the vicinity of the Fort Lewis cemetery, it would have been a viable option for reburials.

#### *Archaeological Investigations at the Fort Lewis Indian School Cemetery*

Several types of geophysical collection methods are used in archaeology and related disciplines. The interpretations below are based on the data collected by Statistical Research Inc. (SRI) in the fall of 2022, including drone-based LiDAR and Red-Green-Blue (RGB)/Near-Infrared (NIR) photography; ground penetrating radar; and magnetic gradiometry. Each of these technologies uses a different type of signal to collect data which complement each other, so that in aggregate we get a more complete picture of what is under the ground. In all cases, these data-collection methods were non-ground disturbing, meaning that at no point in time was the surface of the

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<sup>184</sup> 1898 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 140.

<sup>185</sup> Sapphire Ortiz, Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act Trainee, Southern Ute Cultural Preservation Department, personal communication.

physical earth broken by any machines or hand tools. These technologies do not identify graves. Instead, they identify anomalies under the ground that look different than the surrounding soil. A trained professional then interprets these anomalies. These interpretations are based on the educational background of the archaeologist, as well as their experience with similar cultural features and understandings of geology, hydrology, and sedimentology. This is a highly specialized skill set, and very few archaeologists are considered geophysical specialists.

Fort Lewis College held field schools at the site between 2007 and 2011, with two years of field schools, 2007 and 2008, focused on the cemetery.<sup>186</sup> Preliminary geophysical investigations in 2007 and 2008 included a gradiometer and an electrical-resistivity survey. These methods are non-ground disturbing as well, using electricity to identify anomalies under the ground. In addition, the 2007–08 survey indicated evidence of seventy-seven graves. In addition to the geophysical surveys, some of the graves were identifiable as depressions in the ground, or as areas encircled with rock rings, or both.

SRI revisited the site during the current investigation in the fall of 2022. At that time, geophysical specialist Dr. Jennie Sturm identified a much larger and more dynamic cemetery that encompasses not only the military era but also the time period of the boarding school. There is also substantial, although circumstantial, evidence that this cemetery was additionally used as a community burial ground, as evidenced by the discussion above. To date, the cemetery is the final resting place of 350 to 400 individuals, with an “absolute” number of 387. Of these, 46 are hypothesized to be children, with the remainder either adults or adult-sized juveniles.<sup>187</sup> If we can reasonably assume that 25 to 50 of the burials are associated with the soldiers stationed at Fort Lewis, with another 30 to 100 burials, or more, associated with students at the boarding school, we must still account for the 250 burials that are identified at the site. Some were civilians who were buried at the time of the military post, although who those civilians were is its own mystery. The remainder may have been community members, including Ute tribal members, perhaps Mexican and Mexican American neighbors and kin. This is also particularly likely with the push for the Ute to adopt Christian-style burials in the 1890s and the sudden availability of the former military cemetery for such activities. The cemetery may also be the final resting place for some white individuals, particularly those associated with the boarding

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<sup>186</sup> Charles (2023), *The Archaeology of Old Fort Lewis*.

<sup>187</sup> Sturm et al. (2023).

school such as the teacher and farmer, Hans Aspaas, whose death was also not reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs but whose family stories indicate that he was interred at the Old Fort Lewis cemetery.<sup>188</sup>

Variations in the anomalies also suggest that the cemetery was used over a long period of time, with the heaviest use being in the forty-year period of the military post and boarding school, but other subsequent use continuing through at least the early-twentieth century. The graves themselves are oriented nearly in an east-west direction, in keeping with Euro-American traditions of Christian burial. The orientation varies, sometimes directly east-west, while other times the orientation is skewed towards the land form or the historic fenceline. This indicates that the cemetery was not a planned one, with individual plots laid out in advance, but that it was known where burials had taken place and there was an effort to maintain an appropriate order. This probably also indicates that the graves were in fact marked at some point in time. It was not uncommon for boarding school cemeteries to be marked. The burials at the Carlisle Indian School cemetery were marked with stone markers, and the Stewart Indian School had wooden markers with black paint. This style of marker may have been the most common across the federal school system, but it is also impermanent and subject to weathering, rotting, and vandalism across the century. Charles (2023) noted that as late as the early 2000s there were wooden fragments that may have been remnants of old head markers. It is reasonable to assume that Fort Lewis cemetery also had wooden markers at some point that have been lost to time.

The geophysical data reveals that there were “groupings” of many of the burials, further indicating a knowledge of where previous burials were interred, as well as suggesting the possibility of family plots or plots for other kinship groups. Also important to note is that there were no indications of overlapping burials, or mass graves that would contain multiple individuals. This indicates an active cemetery, one that had a logic of burial that conforms to Christian ideals of caring for the dead.

#### Grand Junction Indian Boarding School

Grand Junction Indian Boarding School, otherwise known as the Teller Institute, differs in significant ways from Fort Lewis, as discussed in Section V and VI. As Teller was a truly off-reservation boarding school that was not affiliated with a reservation, there were no Indian

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<sup>188</sup> Charles (2023), *The Archaeology of Old Fort Lewis*.

**Table 10. Vital Statistics for Grand Junction Indian School/Teller Institute, 1886–1911.**<sup>189</sup>

| Age     | Ute | Mescalero Apache | Apache | Yuma | San Carlos Apache | Navajo | Paiute | Winnebago | Shoshone | Tohono O’Odham | Unknown |
|---------|-----|------------------|--------|------|-------------------|--------|--------|-----------|----------|----------------|---------|
| 7       |     |                  |        | 1    |                   |        |        |           |          |                |         |
| 8       |     |                  |        |      |                   |        |        |           |          |                |         |
| 9       |     |                  |        |      |                   | 1      |        |           |          |                |         |
| 10      |     |                  |        |      |                   |        |        |           |          |                |         |
| 11      |     |                  | 1      |      |                   |        |        |           |          |                |         |
| 12      |     |                  |        |      |                   | 1      |        |           | 1        |                | 1       |
| 13      |     |                  |        |      |                   |        |        |           |          |                |         |
| 14      |     |                  |        | 1    |                   |        |        |           |          | 1              |         |
| 15      |     |                  |        |      |                   |        |        |           |          |                | 1       |
| 16      |     | 1                |        |      |                   |        |        |           | 1        |                | 2       |
| 17      |     |                  |        |      |                   | 1      |        | 1         |          |                | 1       |
| 18      |     |                  |        |      | 1                 |        |        |           |          | 1              |         |
| 19      |     |                  |        |      | 1                 |        |        |           |          | 2              |         |
| 20      |     |                  |        |      |                   | 1      |        |           |          |                | 1       |
| Unknown | 1   |                  | 1      |      | 1                 | 2      | 1      |           |          |                | 5       |

agents to provide supplemental information for the superintendents. Another difference that greatly affected the current research effort was that, as a boarding school within a larger urban area, there are more newspaper accounts about the students; so, we do not have to rely only on the superintendents for information regarding illnesses, deaths, or other life experiences. Many of the reports of student deaths are obituaries from the *Grand Valley Star-Times* and the *Daily*

<sup>189</sup> Millward (2023), *Results of Research Regarding the Cemetery at Grand Junction Indian School*.

*Sentinel*. In addition to providing important vital statistics for the current effort, this also illustrates the role the school and students played as an integral part of the community in Grand Junction.

During the course of the current research effort, thirty-seven individuals who passed away at the Grand Junction Indian Boarding School were identified, including one teacher, the daughter of a carpenter, and one former student. The teacher and carpenter's daughter are not included in table 10, although we have included the former student.

#### Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind

The federally managed boarding schools were not the only places where deaths of students occurred, and in the late-nineteenth century instances of disease and terminal illness were unavoidable. A large part of the tragedy surrounding student deaths is the separation from their families. The Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, which was, by all accounts, a more well-managed and student-centered place of care, also saw deaths occur. Two of the Southern Ute students who attended the school passed while in attendance. Ellen Ross, also listed as We Car Ve Tact or Che-wa-wa, died in 1896 from pulmonary tuberculosis, but also suffered from pneumonia and consumption. The following year, 1897, Emma Crane, also known as Satapuits, died from cerebrospinal meningitis. Ellen and Emma were not the only fatalities at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind in that time period. Unfortunately five other non-Native students also passed away from various illnesses at the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind in the 1896–97 school year.

The circumstances around the deaths of Emma and Ellen, as well as the subsequent return of their remains, also indicate complicated experiences of death and rituals of interment. We see glimpses in the historic record of the opportunity for Native remains to have been returned, such as the 1884 death of Peter Black at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School as discussed above. How often remains may have been returned is currently unknown; the option would have changed due to family or tribal economic circumstances, or due to the cultural beliefs and practices of parents or of tribal leaders who had the agency to request the return of a child—or because a faraway superintendent was acting on their own initiative without consulting parents.

## VII. The Ute Experience with Federal Education

The story of federal Indian education in Colorado is not necessarily synonymous with the Ute federal educational story. First, we are careful here to make the distinction between *federal education* and the idea of *education* in general. To think that “education” refers only to formal learning conducted through specialized spaces (in this case schools established for that purpose), and performed only by a certain type of professional, is to reify the erasure of Native knowledge production with which the federal government was engaging in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mainstream American society rejected the notion that traditional, Indigenous learning methods were valuable. But many children were caught in a tension between their traditional knowledge acquisition and formalized education. While the following pages will focus solely on Ute engagement with the federal education system, we must recognize that students were still engaged in a process of valuable knowledge production with their elders and peers.

The Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was a dynamic part of a larger community, not an isolated entity. The federal Indian boarding schools in Colorado were not established to educate Ute youth, or any other Native youth. These schools were established to further the goals of the federal government—a dual role of both assimilation and removal in regard to the Indigenous cultures and societies that existed in North America. Indeed, it is quite telling that for many years, although Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was created at the behest of the Indian agent who oversaw Indian Affairs for the Southern Ute Agency, that no Ute students attended the school. And yet Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, and the larger education department within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, had deep and direct impacts on Ute life in the late-nineteenth century—transforming the tribe, informing the creation of both the Southern Ute and the Ute Mountain Ute reservations, and influencing the direction of these two Colorado tribes into the twentieth century.

### The Original Southern Ute Indian Boarding School

In the 1868 United States Treaty with the Ute, also known colloquially as the “Kit Carson Treaty,”<sup>190</sup> the US government committed to building two agencies on what were then the reservation boundaries, encompassing much of Colorado’s Western Slope. One of the agencies

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<sup>190</sup> Colorado Encyclopedia. Ute Treaty of 1868. <https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/ute-treaty-1868> accessed 21 April 2023.

was on the Yampa River, at what became known as White River Agency, and the other was designated along the Rio de los Pinos near what is today Saguache, Colorado. For both agencies, the federal government agreed to the construction of several buildings with specific functions, including a “...school-house or mission-building, so soon as a sufficient number of children can be induced by the agent to attend the school, which shall not cost exceeding five thousand dollars.”<sup>191</sup> When the boundaries of the Ute Reservation were again modified by the Brunot Agreement of 1874, the federal government committed again to “...erect proper buildings and establish an agency for the Weeminuche, Muache, and Capote bands of Ute Indians at some suitable point, to be hereafter selected, on the southern part of the Ute Reservation.”<sup>192</sup> As the US government had been incorporating educational facilities into treaties with American Indian tribes since 1788, it can reasonably be assumed that proper buildings at a new reservation included a schoolhouse.<sup>193</sup>

**Table 11. US Indian Agents to the Southern Ute**

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1879–1882 | Henry Page, US Indian Agent, Southern Ute and Jicarilla Agency                |
| 1880      | W.H. Berry, US Indian Agent, Los Pinos Agency                                 |
| 1882–1884 | Warren Patten   |
| 1884–1886 | William Clark, US Indian Agency, Southern Ute and Jicarilla Agency            |
| 1886–1888 | C.F. Stollsteuven, US Indian Agent  |
| 1889–1893 | Major Charles Bartholomew, US Indian Agent, Southern Ute and Jicarilla Agency |
| 1893      | Major H.B. Freeman, Acting Agent, Southern Ute and Jicarilla Agency           |
| 1894–1896 | David F. Day, US Indian Agent   |
| 1897–1898 | William H. Meyer, US Indian Agent   |
| 1899      | Louis A. Knackstedt, US Indian Agent  |
| 1900–1903 | Joseph O. Smith (Last Agent)  |

It is not currently known whether a school was ever established at the locations of earlier agencies, including the Los Pinos Agency, but a school was established sometime soon after the

<sup>191</sup> Oklahoma State University Libraries: Tribal Treaties Database. Treaty with the Ute, 1868.

<https://treaties.okstate.edu/treaties/treaty-with-the-ute-1868-0990> Accessed 21 April 2023.

<sup>192</sup> Fort Lewis College, Forest Plan Roundtable. Brunot Agreement with the Ute Nation - 1874.

<https://ocs.fortlewis.edu/forestplan/roundtable/brunotAgreement.pdf> Accessed 21 April 2023.

<sup>193</sup> See Adams, David Wallace (1995), *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience 1875–1928*; Reyhner, Jon, and Jeanne Eder (2004), *American Indian Education: A History*.

agency was moved to Ignacio, Colorado. From all current information, it appears that a school was established perhaps by 1880 or 1881. Due to the size of the Ute lands at the time, the school functioned as an on-reservation boarding school, meaning that for many of the students it was difficult to go home every evening and return again in the morning for classes because of the distance of their families from the school.

The school itself was a large building made of what the Indian agent, Charles Bartholomew, described in 1890 as “Mexican Haskell,” but which was probably what we refer to today as *jacal*, a wattle and daub type of construction that consists of closely placed poles or boards that are then filled in with mud or clay.<sup>194</sup> Bartholomew included a hand drawing of the building (figure 7), which he called the “Southern Ute Dormitory,” and his drawing indicates that it consisted of three large bays. We believe that this single building was used for all school functions; as a dormitory, kitchen, and other living areas; and as a classroom.



Figure 7. 1890 drawing of the original Southern Ute Indian Boarding School in Ignacio, Colorado. The handwritten caption reads, “Front View Southern Ute School Dormitory Showing Props Charles Bartholomew, US Indian Agent.”

Little is known about how the school operated daily, but it can be safely assumed that it roughly adhered to the federal guidelines of the times, such as they were. We don’t know the

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<sup>194</sup> Letter from Charles Bartholomew to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 28, 1890. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 2\_Journal 2\_1890\_pgs 1-120, pg 14. NARA Denver.

names or the ages of the students who attended the original school, but it appears that between 1880 to 1890, when the school had to be closed down for safety concerns, on average thirteen children lived at the school somewhat regularly. During this time period agricultural and domestic skills would have been emphasized. The school was also an opportunity for US government employees to indoctrinate Native youth with ideas of Americanization and Manifest Destiny.

For instance, in 1890, the school celebrated “Allotment Day.”<sup>195</sup> Mary Orr, the superintendent for the school from at least 1884 to 1890, described the celebrations:

I beg that you will bear in mind the youth of the children and also that with two exceptions, none of them speak English.

We have no U.S. flag. The farmer being indisposed, we had no evergreens for decorating, however, we made the school as cheerful and bright as possible with pictures and drawings.

After the usual morning exercise and prayer, and appropriate recitations and songs, by the aid of the Interpreter I explained, to the best of my ability, the Dawes Bill and why Allotment Day should be a day of rejoicing among the Indians.

At the Dormitory the ladies gave the children a feast, and the house was given as much of a holiday appearance as was possible in such a miserable buildings. I think the day was very satisfactory to the children.

Orr’s letter is revealing in several ways. We have little correspondence between Orr and the Indian agent, yet these narratives provide more insight into the individual students and their experiences than other types of government documentation such as the statistical school reports. It is unknown what kind of woman or teacher Orr was with her students. It’s clear that she was invested in the federal government approach in regards to the Dawes Act, teaching the children from a young age that allotment was something to strive for. One also gets the feeling that this is a largely marginalized and under-resourced school, down to the veiled complaints of the building itself.

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<sup>195</sup>Letter from Mary Orr to Charles Bartholomew, February 26, 1890. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 2\_Journal 2\_1890\_pgs 1-120, pg 32. NARA Denver.

The building was a serious detriment in regard to the welfare of the children and the survival of the school. Bartholomew complained on multiple occasions to Washington, DC, that it was increasingly unsafe and unsuitable for the children to be in. Hence the “props” that he illustrated in a hand drawing of the building he sent to Washington (see figure 1). Earlier that spring, Bartholomew had warned that the building was more than 4.5 inches out of plumb, and that he had the “gravest apprehension that the school dormitory building was ready to tumble to the ground.” He blamed much of the low attendance of Ute children at the school in part on the condition of the building, claiming that the Utes loved their children too much to allow them to come to a school like this.<sup>196</sup> By March 16, 1890, the Commissioner of Indians Affairs had allowed the school to be abandoned, and all the children were sent home.

#### The Earliest Ute Victims of the Federal System: The Albuquerque School

In 1883 then Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller wrote a quick series of telegrams to then Southern Ute Indian Agent William Patten. Patten had an indefinite number of Ute children in his care, and Teller was trying to find them a place to go to. It is clear that the intention was to get these children into a school: Teller instructed that he would prefer the boys to stay in Colorado, preferably Fort Collins. He did not want them to go to the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania under any circumstances. Ultimately Teller ordered Patten to take the children to Pueblo and, “if you can get a good man to take charge, do so.”<sup>197</sup> These were the first Ute students sent to a federal Indian boarding school, and they would end up outside of Colorado, to the south in New Mexico. Why Patten and Teller had children in their care without a plan for where they were to go, and what the urgency was, is lost to history. What this episode does illustrate is that federal officials at all levels—elected officials, appointed staff, men of the highest positions in Washington, and men working on the ground—had a singular goal of removing children from their families, in this case Ute children. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, “education” was a catch-all term used by the federal government to justify the assimilation of Native people. This episode also illustrates how close men in the highest echelons of power could be to decisions being made locally.

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<sup>196</sup> Letter from Charles Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 28, 1890. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 2\_Journal 2\_1890\_pgs 1–120, pg 14. NARA Denver.

<sup>197</sup> Western Union Telegrams from Teller to Patten, March 31, 1883, April 19, 1883, April 30, 1883, May 2, 1883, May 9, 1883, May 7, 1883, May 10, 1883.

In August of 1883, twenty-seven students (twenty-four boys and young men, and three girls) were sent to the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School in Albuquerque, New Mexico.<sup>198</sup> At that time the Albuquerque school was run by the Presbyterian Home Missions, although funded through federal contracts. It was transferred to the federal government in 1886. While we cannot verify all the identities of the children, their ages ranged from approximately ten years to married men as old as 29.<sup>199</sup> Almost immediately the students experienced severe problems, and the Ute students themselves agitated against Superintendent R.W.D. Bryan by running away, complaining to their parents and other authority figures, and even setting fire to the dormitory. A rare letter written by the students survives, to US Indian Agent William Clark and signed by four young men, James Allen, Francis Carter, William Oak, and Daniel Sun, on November 6, 1884. In this letter the students claimed that they “are almost starved” and had run away from the school to the Pueblo Agency, from which they were writing. They also reported that four Pueblo boys, two Zia boys, and four Apache boys had run away with them because they were also starving, but all were sent back to Albuquerque. They ended the letter by reporting that “William Au [sic] and another girl, Margaret, are very sick.”<sup>200</sup>

James, Francis, William, and Daniel were not the only students trying to seek protection from the Southern Ute agent. Two men—James Deer, also identified by his Ute name, Sha-Poo-We-Ren (although with mangled English spelling), who may have been as old as twenty-nine years, and his compatriot Ten-e-At Liecitureant, who was twenty-eight—both left the school because “they had not heard from their people.”<sup>201</sup> Both men, who were married, complained of being separated from their wives, who remained in Ignacio. In addition, they felt they were set to menial tasks and hard labor instead of being trained as farmers, as had been promised. William Clark complained to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that Superintendent Bryan had failed to report the missing students. Surviving correspondence indicates that Bryan regularly reported to Clark that the students were happy and thriving in Albuquerque. Clark did visit the Ute students

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<sup>198</sup> Letter from Henry Price to Pedro Sanchez, August 22, 1883.

<sup>199</sup> RG 75\_Northern Pueblos Agency\_Box 5\_folder 102\_1883-84 NARA Denver; RG75\_LTR REC\_1886\_Box356\_ltr31332\_TWDS\_Student and teacher names NARA DC; Letter From Henry Price to Pedro Sanchez, Northern Pueblo Indian Agent, August 22, 1883.

<sup>200</sup> Letter from Allen, Carter, Oak and Sum to Wm Clark, November 6, 1884. RG 75\_Records of the BIA\_Consolidated Ute Agency\_Decimal Files 1879-1852\_BOx 159\_Folder 11\_Correspondence pupils in ABD Indian School 1883-1912, pg 76. NARA Denver.

<sup>201</sup> Letter from Indian Agent Wm. Clark to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, October 28, 1884. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 1\_Journal 4.

himself to look after their welfare, and on a subsequent trip was accompanied to the Albuquerque school by Chiefs Severo and Buckskin Charlie, both of whom had children in attendance at the school.<sup>202</sup> They found some illness, including William Oak, age 26, who was brought back to Colorado. The other students remained, with the Southern Ute Indian agent claiming that he and the two chiefs “...found all the Ute children well and in good spirits....” Ultimately that year a tuberculosis epidemic spread through the Albuquerque school, and half the Ute students who were sent to New Mexico succumbed to illness, failing to return home. The Ute Tribe in Colorado fought to always have their children remain in Ignacio for school from that time forward.

### Ute Resistance to the Federal Education System

The condition of the original school building was not the only challenge the US Indian agent faced in getting Ute children to school. Ute resistance to an American-style education system started before students were ever enrolled in a federal Indian school, and persisted throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This seems to have been born out of both tragic experiences with off-reservation boarding schools and a deep suspicion of the US government in general, and experiences with the failure of the War Department, and later the Department of the Interior, to honor treaties and agreements.

The federal government attempted both courting and coercing Ute people to send their children to school. In 1880 several tribal leaders, including Ignacio, Buckskin Charlie, Severo, and Ajo Blanco, were taken on a junket to Washington, DC, and from there on a personal tour of the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania.<sup>203</sup> Upon their return, the leaders were given employment by the federal government as police officers for the reservation. While they did not send their children to Carlisle, these men all cautiously sent their children to other schools in the region. In 1893, Colorow was promised a position as a policeman if he sent his children to school. He did, and his nine-year-old son was stricken with blindness from trachoma.<sup>204</sup> However, he was never appointed to the position. The following year, in 1894, increased annuities in the amount of \$100 were requested for the Ute tribal leaders Buckskin Charlie, Severo, Ajo Blanco, and Quatro, who

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<sup>202</sup> Letter from William Clark to Henry Price, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 17, 1884.

<sup>203</sup> Letter from Henry Page to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 3, 1880.

<sup>204</sup> Letter from Henry Freeman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 27, 1893.

supported the education efforts, and an extra \$25 for every male with a child in school. Over the next decade Ute tribal leaders would receive money and gifts, threats of financial ruin, and even dismissal from positions, all in an attempt to have them enroll their children and influence others to enroll theirs in federal schools. By all federal accounts, Chief Mariano was the most adamantly opposed to both schooling and agriculture, and was often reported traveling into the mountains where he and his people were out of reach of the federal government. After years of conflict with the Indian agents, in 1896 he was stripped of his position as policeman for failing to provide students to Fort Lewis.

Superintendents tried to recruit Ute students into the Teller Institute in Grand Junction as soon as it opened. The earliest such attempt was a letter from W.I. Davis in the fall of 1886, asking the Indian agent how many children ages six to eighteen might be available to attend school.<sup>205</sup> Later, Charles Bartholomew demurred, telling Davis that whatever children had been secured couldn't make the trip to Grand Junction due to heavy snow.<sup>206</sup> A verbose letter from Thomas Breen, who would later serve as the Fort Lewis school superintendent, indicated that his recruitment trip to the Southern Ute reservation was interrupted by a measles epidemic among the Southern Ute in the winter of 1887–88.<sup>207</sup> Later, Theodore Lemmon would send missives attempting to recruit Ute students for the Grand Junction school, even after the Fort Lewis school was in operation.

In 1892, one year after the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School opened, many Southwest tribes, including the Southern Ute, put up heavy resistance to boarding schools.<sup>208</sup> During this time different tactics were used, including coercion, threats to withhold rations and annuities, and, for some tribes, like the Shoshone-Bannock, military force to coerce children into federal schools. The US Indian agent for the Southern Ute also requested that troops be brought in, but Washington, DC, denied the request.

The Southern Utes were not alone in this nearly universal resistance to sending their children to federal schools. As late as 1901, Supervisor of Indian Schools A.O. Wright reported that,

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<sup>205</sup> Letter from W.I. Davis to C.F. Stollsteuven, October 28, 1886.

<sup>206</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to CIA, January 10 1890.

<sup>207</sup> Letter from Thomas Breen to C.F. Stollsteuven, January 11, 1888.

<sup>208</sup> Adams (1995), *Education for Extinction*, pg. 215.

The Jicarilla Apaches, the Southern Utes, and most of the Paiutes have had no schools, and the Northern Utes have fought the schools they have, so much so that with the exception of the Mescalero Apaches it may be said that there has not been much education yet for the wild indians of Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico. Of the four nonreservation schools, Grand Junction and Fort Lewis secure nearly all their pupils outside the district, mostly from Arizona, and Santa Fe and Albuquerque [sic] have till lately secured their pupils from Arizona or from Mexicans of doubtful Indian descent. In Colorado the Southern Utes are the only Indians left, and they have scarcely a child in school anywhere. In Utah the Northern Utes on the Uintah and Uncompahgre reservation send less than 100 children in all to their two schools and practically none to nonreservation schools, out of a school population of about 400....<sup>209</sup>

The culture of the Southwest and Great Basin tribes was largely resistant to this emerging federal boarding system. That resistance may have been abetted through the geographic remoteness of the western United States, as well as the rugged landscapes and the dispersed nature of relatively small tribes that were still only partially allotted. It is only after these tribes gained on-reservation day or boarding schools that they became fully embroiled in the federal education system.

#### Fort Lewis and the Ute Experience

The Fort Lewis military post was decommissioned in 1890 at the same time as the Southern Ute school was determined to be a “veritable deathtrap.”<sup>210</sup> Both the US Indian agent on the ground in Colorado, Charles Bartholomew, and authorities in Washington, DC, advocated for the use of the military base as a boarding school. From the beginning, Fort Lewis didn’t easily fit any established model. Technically the school was off-reservation, but federal officials advocated for using it more similarly to an on-reservation boarding school given its proximity to several bands of Ute—including the Capote, Mouache, and Weeminuche, whom they expected the school to serve. However, it was immediately clear that several Ute chiefs did not see the proximity of Fort

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<sup>209</sup> 1901 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 511.

<sup>210</sup> Southern Ute Indian Agency Annual Report, September 24 1890. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 2\_Journal 2\_1890\_pgs 120-450, pg. 33.

Lewis as being close enough to keep their children on the reservation, and there was resistance to having Ute children enroll. In addition, the Southern Ute Tribe at the time was in a bit of a liminal state. In 1880 they had negotiated an agreement that would move the tribe to Utah, but the move did not happen. Many families were reluctant to send their children to any off-reservation boarding school if there was the chance that they could be relocated at any time. And, finally, the many deaths of students enrolled at the Albuquerque Indian Boarding School just a decade earlier weighed heavily on many.

The federal government attempted again to coerce and cajole Southern Ute leaders to send children to the school. Washington tried on several occasions to withhold rations and annuities from families who failed to enroll their children in school, although it was never a tactic that succeeded with the Ute. Charles Bartholomew, US Indian agent from 1889 to 1893 and one of the individuals responsible for establishing the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, reported that withholding rations and annuities was an unsuccessful tactic with the Ute and appeared to quickly give up. This was echoed years later, in 1904, by Superintendent William Peterson, who claimed that it was no use cutting off rations as “the Utes did not care if they got paid at all.”<sup>211</sup>

Chief Ignacio was one of the strongest opponents of all off-reservation schools, including Fort Lewis, although later he did enroll some children there. At one point in time Bartholomew, the US Indian agent to the Southern Utes, was ordered to remove Ignacio from his position as head of police. Bartholomew was candid with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, warning DC that this decision would “decapitate the police force” as well as cause issues not only with Ute attendance but with Navajo attendance at Fort Lewis, as Ignacio also held influence with his neighbors.<sup>212</sup> Bartholomew cautioned DC that it was best to break down the resistance to school gradually, completely opposed to the tactics that some of his contemporaries were taking in the use of force. Chief Ignacio was reinstated to the police force within ten days, when the federal government realized they both needed Ignacio and that their heavy-handed tactics had no effect on him.

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<sup>211</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 28, 1904.

<sup>212</sup> Letter from Bartholomew to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 21, 1892.

Eventually Ignacio relented, allowing just sixteen children to attend the opening year of Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School in 1891.<sup>213</sup> He and other chiefs personally accompanied the children to the school, and visited often to ascertain the conditions the children were living in. Despite this, the first year was a disaster. As many as twenty-six children were in attendance in 1892. Trachoma, a common bacterial infection that plagued many reservations and Indian schools, swept through the school. Two Ute children died, while three succumbed to blindness including a son of Colorow and a daughter of Avarico. An additional child became both deaf and blind. All four children, ages 9 and 11, were sent to the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind in Colorado Springs in 1893, along with three Mexican children who may have also been attending Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School alongside the Native youth. After this incident the school was virtually emptied of Ute students, and the chiefs refused to allow more children to enroll. Instead, school enrollment was filled by Navajo children and other students—some, like the Tohono O’Odham, coming from as far away as Arizona.

During the 1890s, Ute children largely did not attend school. The Southern Ute school at Ignacio remained closed down despite the Ute continually requesting a school at the agency, and despite US Indian Agent Henry Freeman alerting DC in 1893 that not only did the Utes need a day school, but a school was needed for the Mexican children as well as the children of white employees.<sup>214</sup> Federal officials tried to no avail to convince Ute families to send their children to Fort Lewis, while officials from Grand Junction also tried to entice children to attend the Teller Institute. While the federal government was threatening Ute tribal leaders, they were also attempting to use the tribe for propaganda.

The Ute reluctance to send children to the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School was probably not just due to the tragedies of student illness and death. In 1903 *The Denver Post* wrote a scathing expose of Dr. Thomas Breen, the superintendent of the school, first appointed in 1894. The most damning accusations involved sexual abuse and violence against the girls and young women of the school, both staff and students. During the *Post* investigations, several former employees and community members came forward, telling of their own observations and even experiences. It is safe to assume that this was not unknown throughout the community. In

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<sup>213</sup> Letter from Henry Freeman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 17, 1893. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_entry 44010 Box 2\_Journal 3, pgs 80–93.

<sup>214</sup> Letter from H. Freeman to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 17, 1893.

addition, Breen had a long reputation for being “mercurial,” often losing his temper even with his superiors,<sup>215</sup> so it is also reasonable to assume that between their own experiences with Breen and his reputation, the Ute kept their children far from that school.

While relations with subsequent superintendents seemed to warm, there was never a groundswell of Southern Ute attendance at Fort Lewis. Soon after the second Southern Ute Indian Boarding School opened in 1904, Ignacio removed six children and brought them to be enrolled at Fort Lewis under Superintendent William Peterson.<sup>216</sup> Just a year and a half later, Peterson complained bitterly of being unable to recruit students: “[W]hen I conducted the most vigorous campaign for pupils, the parents removed most of them from the reservation, taking them over into Utah where they would be out of my reach.”<sup>217</sup>

### *Fort Lewis as Indian Agency*

The Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, even without enrolled children, still had a significant impact on Ute governance at the time. As early as 1888, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Oberly urged Congress to establish a process by which superintendents were placed in charge of all aspects of Indian education for their areas.<sup>218</sup> While Congress did not grant that authority, in practice the superintendent of Fort Lewis was given a large amount of responsibility over the tribe. By 1904 this became policy, with Commissioner William Jones bonding superintendents.<sup>219</sup> The primary agency remained at Ignacio, but as early as 1893 a sub-agency was being established at Navajo Springs. By 1895 it was clear that the Southern Ute would not be removed to Utah. US government officials decided instead to emphasize allotment, which quickly split the tribe between those who accepted allotments (primarily those within the Mouache and Capote Bands) and those who wanted to continue to hold property communally (primarily the Weeminuche Band). To accommodate these different governance styles, the oversight of the reservation was also split: The Southern Ute Agency, and later the superintendent of the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School, was given oversight over the Mouache and Capote in the western half of the reservation, while the superintendent of Fort

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<sup>215</sup> Letter from Thomas Breen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 11, 1895.

<sup>216</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 38, 1904.

<sup>217</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 31, 1906.

<sup>218</sup> Dejong (2020), *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, pgs 81–82.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, pg 96.

Lewis Indian Boarding School was given authority over the US Indian agent in matters having to do with the unallotted Utes, the Weeminuche. Curiously, the emphasis for school enrollment is also on the western, or allotted, Utes.

What the jurisdictional authority of the superintendent looked like on the ground is uncertain. The superintendents were deeply involved in all matters of governance to the Utes from this point on, including allotments, irrigation and water rights, and even the acquisition of Mesa Verde by the federal government. However, every time there was staff turnover, the conversation would have to be reinitiated regarding who was responsible for which portions of the reservations.

Unofficial allotments, or individual plots of land, had been taken up with encouragement from the Indian agent as early as 1890 despite the fact that the Ute were uncertain as to their final settlement. Even with official allotments in the late 1890s, an ongoing concern for the Southern Ute Agency, and later the split reservation, was the lack of water. Despite the emphasis on allotment and agricultural subsistence, the federal government and the State of Colorado failed to secure an adequate supply of water for the Utes.<sup>220</sup> The Navajo Springs Sub-Agency was officially established in 1895, but unofficially the practice had been for the agents to treat the Navajo Springs, or western portion of the Southern Ute Reservation, as a separate agency or group for at least five years prior. Again, after the sub-agency, and later the reservation, was established, the Navajo Springs sub-agency lacked water, with the exception of an inconsistent spring that often ran dry. The superintendents for Fort Lewis were deeply involved with allotment, water rights, and other matters of land sovereignty, such as negotiating for railroad rights-of-way and other intrusions on the reservation, that are immediately evident in the historical documents related to the boarding schools. It is important to understand that these issues should not be compartmentalized and separated. While this report has only touched on issues of allotments and water rights, future research endeavors must revisit this historic entanglement.

#### Independent Schools

While the Ute successfully kept their children from attending the federal schools throughout the 1890s, there may have been at least two local day schools for Ute children, run by white or non-

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<sup>220</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 14, 1904.

Native women near the reservation boundaries.<sup>221</sup> David Day, the US Indian agent in 1897, requested twenty-five dollars a month to compensate Mrs. Andrea Rodriques [*sic*] for a day school that she had opened on the reservation for Native children. Day reported to Washington that the parents were “anxious to have Mrs. Rodriques teach the children” and that he believed it was a step toward overcoming parental fears in regard to schooling. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs denied the request, and instead suggested that Rodriques take a “civil service exam” to be a superintendent of a federal institution.<sup>222</sup> In annual reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs between at least 1897 and 1903, there is no mention of Rodriques, but the US Indian agent did mention that a small school run by a Presbyterian missionary attached to the Presbytery Board of Home Missions, Reverend A.J. Rodriques, had a small attendance of ten to twelve children. Reportedly Rev. Rodriques had little success in evangelizing, but “he raises a fair garden every year, which is a source of more or less instruction to the [Ute].”<sup>223</sup> The federal government never contracted with the Rodriqueses but at least tolerated, if not encouraged, their presence on the reservation. In 1900 the Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs stated that thirty-seven students were enrolled at the Presbyterian Mission School, although that figure is anomalous with other reports, being three to four times higher than the number of students reported in adjacent years.<sup>224</sup>

A similar matter came up again in 1906 when Superintendent William Peterson of the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School complained to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that a woman named Floretta Shields was holding school classes for twenty-five Ute children—more than were enrolled in any government school and far more than the total number of Ute students who had enrolled in Fort Lewis. Peterson wanted DC officials to close the school. However, Shields was not violating any laws, and Native parents had the legal right to send their children to any school they wanted; it did not have to be a federally managed school. An Indian agent had noted the Shields school in 1900, so it may have been a long-term community fixture.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, January 31, 1906. RG 75\_Southern Ute Agency\_Entry 44010\_Box 4\_journal 2, pg 180.

<sup>222</sup> Letter from Commissioner of Indian Affairs to David Day, March 3, 1897, US Indian Agent. RG 75\_Records of the BIA, Consolidated Ute Agency\_Decimal Files\_1879-1952, Box 160, Folder 7\_Religious Education, pg 5.

<sup>223</sup> 1897 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 127; 1899 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 177.

<sup>224</sup> 1900 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 214.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

It's unclear how many small, local, American-style schools operated historically on the Southern Ute, and later the Ute Mountain Ute, reservations. Consistently US Indian agents, superintendents, and others in the federal service attached to the Utes reported the steadfastness with which the Utes refused to send their children to boarding school, even the ostensibly "on-reservation" school at Fort Lewis. The existence of these independent schools leads to many questions that may never be answered. They were no doubt day schools with children returning to their parents. But questions remain about how formal the education was, how the students and parents engaged with their teachers, and what the expectations were for learning American-style information. The agents often complained that the Utes did not universally know English, but even in the dismissive reports back to Washington one can see that the Utes were polyglots: "They converse readily in the language of the country, i.e. Mexican, besides their native tongue,"<sup>226</sup> and considering the proximity to other nations and the dynamic history of the Native Southwest it can be assumed that many Utes also knew the languages of their neighbors. These small schools were obviously serving the conflicting needs of a modern tribe.

#### The Southern Ute Boarding School

The Utes successfully resisted sending their children to off-reservation boarding schools, and ultimately their demands for an on-reservation school were met. The Southern Ute Indian Boarding School opened in 1903, an on-reservation boarding school that was specifically meant to serve the Southern Ute—with Navajo Springs, later Towaoc and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, served by a separate on-reservation boarding school. The capacity of the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School in the early years of the twentieth century was only fifty students, but the demand for the school meant that it ran well over capacity, housing and educating more than seventy Ute students for the first several years of its operation until additional dormitories could be built in the 1920s. Once additional dormitories were added, students from tribes outside of Colorado also attended the school, including Navajo, Pueblo, and Apache students.

The school at Ignacio was not a complete panacea, however. Within a year of its opening, Chief Ignacio removed six children and personally enrolled them in school at Fort Lewis, under the new superintendency of William Peterson. Ignacio did not feel the need to justify his decision

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<sup>226</sup> 1901 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, pg 201.

to Peterson, so whatever issues were being addressed are unknown.<sup>227</sup> As at all boarding schools, attendees to the Southern Ute Boarding School suffered from overcrowding and illness, and even deaths of students. The staffing was still provided by the federal government, and so was subject to all the issues of the federal Indian Service at that time.

It is probable that despite treaty promises, consistent resistance to off-reservation boarding schools by the Ute, and requests for an on-reservation school, the federal government failed to provide these facilities to the Southern Ute until enough money had been acquired from the selling of allotments. It also explains why it wasn't until 1910 that the Weeminuche Band also received an on-reservation school for their children.

The Navajo Springs Day School opened in 1910 near what is today Towaoc, followed in 1912 by the Allen Day School in Bayfield. Both schools were relatively small and served smaller, more rural and dispersed populations of children. On average the Allen Day School had fewer than ten children regularly attending, while the Navajo Springs Day School had a dozen regular students in its first decade of operation. Day schools operated similarly to the boarding schools, managed by the federal government and following the approved curriculum of a half day of academic instruction and a half day of vocational training, largely focused on agriculture. Even the day schools could become de facto boarding schools, and both would house overnight students who lived far away. Additionally, the Allen Day School assigned one night a week to larger students who were given the responsibility of helping tend the school garden during the summer break.<sup>228</sup> This may have been a common practice at federal Indian day schools across rural America.

### Ute Education into the Twentieth Century

It was this twentieth-century Southern Ute Indian Boarding School that embodied the self-determination of the Ute Tribe. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the Indian education policies of the federal government were changing rapidly, becoming increasingly bureaucratic, compulsory, and homogenized. The boarding schools, whether on or off reservation, were supposed to be reserved for older children over the age of twelve. To meet this

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<sup>227</sup> Letter from William Peterson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, November 28, 1904.

<sup>228</sup> Letter from Joseph Turner to Mr. Warren, July 30, 1911.

goal, day schools were encouraged for children six years of age and older, who after graduating from the day schools would “feed” into the boarding schools. This practice was not always followed, and children as young as six were enrolled in the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School in some years.<sup>229</sup> During this time the federal government was also encouraging students not to attend any federally managed schools, but instead to integrate into the local public school system. It appears that a handful of Ute children may have done so as early as 1905, but even a decade later Ute youth were facing discrimination from public school officials who did not want them integrated into the local school system.<sup>230</sup> Through the 1920s, then, the Southern Ute Indian Boarding School was an imperfect preference for many tribal families for their children’s education.

While current research is still being finalized on the school through 1920, its story does not end there. It was a dynamic part of the community through the 1920s, ’30s, and ’40s. Indeed, the school was an important institution of tribal perseverance and self-determination until it finally closed for good in 1981. Many of its stories are still waiting to be told.

The federal Indian schools were not the only school option available to the Utes. It was during this same time period that tribes were encouraged to move away from the federal education system and to enroll children into local public schools. Officials in Washington, DC, advocated for the integration of Native children into white schools to further the assimilation process. This had the added benefit of shifting the costs of education from the federal government to the local and state school systems. Many local schools were resistant, and the La Plata County school system was no exception. While local schools argued with the Bureau of Indian Affairs about who should bear the costs of educating Native youth, in practice Native students faced racism from local community members and school officials alike. In 1917, the school board and other officials in District No. 32 attempted to remove the Ute children in attendance at the public schools, citing everything from overcrowding of the school to the special needs of Native students to hygiene and health. The district instead wanted the children to attend the boarding school in Ignacio. The federal government, including the superintendent of the

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<sup>229</sup> RG 75\_Records of the BIA\_Consolidated Ute Agency\_Decimal Files 1879-1952\_Box 159\_Folder 14\_Southerun Ute Indian Boarding School 1888-1925.

<sup>230</sup> RG 75\_Records of the BIA\_Consolidated Ute Agency\_Decimal Files 1879-1952\_Box 159\_Folder 9\_pupils in public schools 1906-1926.

Southern Ute Indian Boarding School, E.E. McKean, pushed back on the school district. Internal correspondence with Washington, DC, shows that McKean was concerned that if District No. 32 successfully barred the Ute children from school, then other districts in La Plata County might follow. McKean's response to the district was impassioned, noting that many people in the area owed their very livelihoods to the Utes and their land and water. He also collected a number of letters and testimonials from the teachers of the students in question, who cited the Ute students' exemplary grades and progress within the school system.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> RG 75\_Records of the BIA\_Consolidated Ute Agency\_Decimal Files 1879-1952\_Box 159\_Folder 9\_pupils in public schools 1906-1926.

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Any omissions, mistakes, misinterpretations, or things the reader does not like are my responsibility and mine alone.

Dr. Holly Kathryn Norton  
Colorado State Archaeologist

## Appendix A: Reports from the Database

All students by individual school

All students by tribal affiliation

All deaths by individual school

Staff by individual school

**Please note: This data explicitly discusses children who did not return home, as well as other matters involving illness, bodily harm, and the end of life. Portions of this section may violate cultural practices regarding how children who did not return home are spoken of.**

## Appendix B: Additional Reports Generated by Third-Party Contractors

Briggs, Garret

2023 *AECOM Contracts with OAHP: Colorado's Compliance with the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative*. Prepared for the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation by AECOM. Manuscript on file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, History Colorado, Denver.

Charles, Mona

2023 *The Archaeology of Old Fort Lewis*. Prepared for the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation by Powderhorn Archaeology. Manuscript on file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, History Colorado, Denver. **\*REDACTED\***

McDermott, Patrick

2023 Letter Report on Archival Research related to the Old Fort Lewis Cemetery. Prepared for Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation by Statistical Research Inc. On file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, History Colorado, Denver.

Millward, Sarah

2023 Results of Research Regarding the Cemetery at Grand Junction Indian School. Prepared by Alpine Archaeological Consultants, Inc., for Colorado Department of Human Services. Manuscript on file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, History Colorado, Denver.

Millward, Sarah

2023 Results of Historical Research Concerning the History of the Grand Junction Indian School. Prepared by Alpine Archaeological Consultants, Inc., for Colorado Department of Human Services. Manuscript on file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, History Colorado, Denver.

Sturm, Jennie O., Maeve E. Herrick, and Bonnie K. Gibson

2023 Remote-Sensing Investigations at the Fort Lewis Indian Boarding School, Hesperus, Colorado. Prepared for the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation by Statistical Research Inc., Technical Report 23-41. Manuscript on file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, History Colorado, Denver. **\*REDACTED\***

**Please note: These reports explicitly discusses children who did not return home, as well as other matters involving illness, bodily harm, and the end of life. Portions of this section may violate cultural practices regarding how children who did not return home are spoken of. All technical archaeological and locational information that is subject to confidentiality policies has been redacted.**

