

Whirlwind School: A Case Study of Church-State Relationships in Native American Education

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Whirlwind School, which had been established as a government day school on Cheyenne-Arapaho land in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), was ordered closed in 1901 because a Cheyenne community camped around the school instead of living on their individual and allotments. The Episcopal Church reopened the day school in 1904, and its missionary teachers fought to keep the school operating despite Indian agents' attempts to close it in order to transfer the children to residential schools. The former Cheyenne warrior, then Episcopal deacon Oker-hater ("Making Medicine"), was at the school during its 20-year history but apparently was not involved in the conflicts between government agents and missionary teachers that resulted, finally, in the closing of the school in 1917. It is suggested that the official reasons for the government's closing of the school (teaching in Cheyenne, the Cheyenne living around the school instead of on their assigned parcels, increasing peyote use, inadequate industrial training) masked a more basic reason: it had failed to promote the views of the government.

From the beginning of European contact with Native Americans, invading Europeans and their descendants attempted to use education and Christian conversion to induce American Indians to reject their cultures and adopt European ways. The goal was dramatically stated by one of the chief architects of 19th century government Indian educational policy, Richard Henry Pratt, in his call to use education and Christian conversion to, "Kill the Indian ... and save the man" (Pratt, 1973).

From the time of the Spanish missions and John Eliot's Colonial New England *Praying Towns* to the federal programs of the 1950s that relocated rural and reservation American Indians for job training programs in cities, the dominant society viewed education and Christian conversion as keys to assimilation of Native American peoples. During most of American history, the separation of church and state was little considered and mission schools played important roles in attempts to assimilate American Indians. John C. Calhoun speaking to Congress in 1822 explained that the role of missionaries was to "impress on the minds of the Indian the friendly and benevolent views of the Government ... A contrary course of conduct cannot fail to incur the displeasure of Government" (McLoughlin, 1990, p. 13).

Cooperation and mutual support between government agencies and personnel on the one hand and church organizations and personnel on the other waxed and waned as government policy and personnel changed. At St. Luke's Episcopal Mission School, better known as Whirlwind Mission, in Indian Territory, later Oklahoma, turmoil resulted both from the clash of Cheyenne culture with white

culture and from disputes between missionaries and federal government personnel. Gender and ethnic biases of the time were evident as for a significant portion of Whirlwind's existence the only representatives of the church at the mission were a white female missionary teacher and a Cheyenne deacon. Both of them were viewed by the Episcopal establishment as only temporarily, and unfortunately, in charge, awaiting a suitable white male to assume leadership of the mission.

The Southern Cheyenne were Plains Indians assigned to a reservation pursuant to the 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge (Kappler, 1972). This treaty included a provision for the establishment of reservation schools. In the following half-century, a number of schools, both government and missionary, were established on the Cheyenne-Arapaho lands in Indian Territory (western Oklahoma.)

Whirlwind School began in 1897 as a government day school on the land allotment of Whirlwind, a Cheyenne leader, to serve children living in the eastern portion of the reservation. Because Cheyenne lived in a camp next to the school instead of on their individual land allotments, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs ordered the school closed in 1901 (Cheyenne Arapaho Agency Records [CAA Records]. All letters cited in this article are from CAA Records). The children were sent to boarding school, and the site became a center for distribution of annuities promised by treaty (Whiteman, 1982, p. 136).

A flood destroyed an Episcopal mission elsewhere on the reservation and missionaries were sent from that site to Whirlwind. At the request of Episcopal Bishop Francis K. Brooke, the school reopened in 1904 as a mission day school for children whose health was too poor for them to go to boarding school. From the beginning there was opposition from the Cheyenne-Arapaho agent, George W.H. Stouch. Immediately after David A. Sanford reopened the school, Agent Stouch (Stouch to Ruckman, Sept. 3, 1904) wrote to the government employee charged with teaching Cheyenne how to farm,

Inform all parents or guardians ... that I am here, representing the United States Government, to give them good advice, look after their interests, guide them properly on the road to civilization ... that Mr. Sanford ... is giving them bad advice, and knows it, and they must bring their children ... to the agency and place them in said school ... I will send the Indian police for them ... inform them that they are citizens as far as voting is concerned and being answerable to the law for crimes committed, but in every other respect ... they are under the control of the Superintendent or Agent in charge of them.

It might be assumed that the agent's hostility was motivated by a belief that government schools were superior to mission schools or that the school encouraged Cheyenne to live off their allotments. While these motivations may have been present, a letter from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Stouch stated that Sanford accused employees of the Agency of keeping cattle on Indian land and selling the beef to the Indians (Jones to Stouch, Oct. 5, 1904).

From the time of the reopening of the school until Sanford was removed in October 1907, acrimonious letters were exchanged among Sanford, Stouch, his successor Charles E. Shell, Bishop Brooke, a number of local whites, and a few Cheyenne. In nearby white towns, petitions were signed and newspaper articles published. Correspondence with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs about the situation occurred frequently. In a chapter titled "Persecution of Missionaries to Indians" in Sanford's book published in 1911, he claimed government persecution of missionaries of several denominations by officials within the Indian Service resulting from the missionaries' protests against "graft, tyranny, fraud, im-

morality, or crime" (Sanford, 1911, p. 94). He claimed that "commercial greed," not the interests of the Indians, motivated white men in the Indian Service, comparing the monopoly that the service had to that of the Standard Oil Company where it had no competition. He compared his situation to that of St. Paul at Ephesus when the craftsmen called for his expulsion because he was harming their business (pp. 82-84).

Sanford (1911) wrote,

Turn the Indian loose. Let Indians manage their own affairs. Let them take care of their own land, and farm it if they will ... Let the Indian schools be turned over to the respective States, for the education of Indians and whites together. Let Indians live in tents if they choose; ... freedom is what the Indian now needs, from control by an Indian Bureau. No longer is there any need for an Indian reservation, or an Indian agent. (p. 97).

While Sanford was at the school, he used his pen, and those of others, in an attempt to keep his school open. He frequently asserted that government boarding schools were detrimental to children's health. Tuberculosis was the great killer of Indians at the time, and his school had a much better record than the boarding schools as regards this scourge (pp. 63-70). He reported children returning from the government school with tuberculosis and "scrofulous sores" (Sanford to Shell, Sept. 10, 1906). He saw many deaths from tuberculosis and yet not one child enrolled at Whirlwind died of any cause during the four years he was there (Sanford, 1911, p. 78).

In September 1906, Agent Shell requested that the Commissioner of Indian Affairs give him permission to take children forcibly from the school to the government school at Darlington (Leupp to Shell, Sept. 6, 1906). The Commissioner replied that Shell should honor parents' "reasonable requests" that their children remain at Whirlwind, but that if the children had been enrolled earlier at the government school, he could see that they were returned there. He said,

Sanford and his school have, for some time, been a subject of considerable annoyance to the Indian Office. They have been investigated by at least three inspecting officials ... I wrote to Rev. F.K. Brooke ... foreshadowed to him certain then pending changes ... I had expected that Bishop Brooke would change the missionary and teacher as requested.

Letters exchanged between Brooke and Shell became increasingly pointed and accusatory. Such letters were supplemented by those of others. Several local white citizens complained that the Indian agent was a drunkard. One said, "some call it under the influence of intoxicating liquor ... I call it hog drunk" (Knoll to Leupp, Nov. 25, 1906).

Stacy Riggs, Whirlwind's son-in-law, whose children were students at the school, also wrote accusing Shell of drunkenness (Stacy-Riggs to Leupp, Nov. 1906).

A newspaper in a nearby town praised the school and its students, quoting a banker, a white farmer living near the school, and teachers and administrators of nearby white schools. Specimens of the schoolwork of the children were put on display in the county superintendent's office ("Whirlwind Indian Mission School", 1907). Sanford had taken the entire student body of Whirlwind School to visit the public school at Fay where the two sets of students participated in "exercises" together (Sanford, 1911, pp. 78-79).

Bishop Brooke's letters defending Sanford expanded to as many as 10 pages. In one, written on the letterhead of an attorney, he stated, "I cannot in any way retract

my statement that you and Commissioner Leupp have refused rebutting testimony and turned down good evidence, and believed and acted on unsupported evidence from interested parties to the disadvantage of Mr. Sanford and myself" (Brooke to Shell, Aug. 8, 1907). He implied that government boarding schools were preferred to day schools because white workers found working conditions and surroundings more pleasant for themselves while day schools were better for the Indians as they allowed them to maintain family life (Botkin, 1958a, pp. 47-48). Sanford pled for day schools even more poignantly saying, "Living in this way, the Indian mothers can see their little children every day; they can take care of them and give them a mother's love, just as white mothers do; and they love their children just the same as other mothers do" (Sanford, 1911, p. 72)

The remark that the evidence is from *interested parties* may refer to a petition sent to Washington, signed by 34 whites who held leases on Indian lands. The petition said,

Prior to the coming of Mr. Sanford ... our relations with the Indian ... have been on the whole of a friendly and peaceable nature, where now, he seems to be teaching them to look upon all white people with suspicion and distrust. He advises the Indian to disregard the orders and instructions of the Superintendent and the Indian Office, with relation to the education of their children and the management of their allotted lands ... has made contracts between Indians and white men, who knew no better, for the use of Allotted land, which ... has worked a hardship on the white man. (Petition, Feb. 1, 1907, CAA Records)

A short time later, the Indian Service received a letter signed by 58 white citizens, including prominent businessmen of the area, commending Sanford and asking that Sanford and his daughter, who was teaching in the school, be retained as teachers (White et al. to Shell, Jul. 17, 1907).

In a parallel situation, a letter signed by seven Cheyenne asks Shell for a "differ" teacher because Sanford teaches the children in "Indian words," while they want their children to talk "like you people" (Big Nose et al. to Shell, Mar. 19, 1907). At the same time, several letters of support for Sanford by Cheyenne parents of children in the school were sent.

Brooke continued to support Sanford until the situation had progressed to the point that Shell withheld annuities from Cheyenne. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs ordered Shell to pay annuities due with the comment that Sanford would soon be leaving and that his being there a short time longer "won't kill anybody" (Leupp to Shell, Oct. 4, 1907).

Finally, Brooke removed Sanford from the school and expressed regret at having to do so, writing that "governmental officials had leased the most desirable land to Anglos in the area, obstructed the Cheyenne and Arapaho choice of schools where possible in their efforts to peak any form of community among the Indian people" (Meredith, 1974, pp. 301-302). Sanford left but did not forget the Cheyenne, continuing to correspond with them and to write about their plight for several years.

An able assistant to Sanford continued to work with his successors at Whirlwind. Oakerhater (Making Medicine) participated in the Battle of Adobe Walls and was one of the Plains Indians sent to prison at Ft. Marion, Florida, as punishment for allegedly taking part in various incidents following the Treaty of Medicine Lodge. One of the first Cheyenne to have experienced the white man's form of education, he was taught at the prison by women volunteers and then studied in New York for the Episcopal ministry. He took the name David

Pendleton in honor of a supporter of Carlisle Indian School. Ordained a deacon, he accompanied a white missionary to the Cheyenne-Arapaho agency at Darlington in 1881. In 1884, the missionary left, and for nine years Oakerhater was the only Episcopal cleric among the Cheyenne (Belknap, 1980, pp. 64-65). Assigned to work with Sanford, he remained at Whirlwind throughout its entire existence as a mission school. He served as translator and interpreter of Cheyenne ways to the white missionaries and of white ways to the Cheyenne and was highly regarded by all who served at Whirlwind. The controversy that surrounded Sanford and his successor Harriet Bedell did not seem to involve him. No negative references to him are found in government or Episcopal records. An Episcopal historian said of him,

He was never to be advanced to the priesthood, therefore never had the privilege of celebrating Holy Communion ... His destiny was to be a dweller among the campers, a servant of the Church whose efforts were for fifty years expended in an attempt to improve the living conditions and moral habits of his friends ... David Sanford and Harriet Bedell stated that the Indian deacon quietly and patiently obeyed and cooperated with them. All the time of course they were utterly dependent upon him for such duties as translation, gaining Indian cooperation, and providing information which would permit mutual understanding. The success of the mission and mission school was due above all to the work of the resident Indian minister, David Pendleton. (Botkin, 1958b, p. 46)

With the final closing of the school, he officially retired but ministered and preached in the area until his death in 1934 at about the age of 84. In 1985 the Episcopal Church named him to its calendar of saints, the first Native American to be so honored.

After Sanford left Whirlwind, Bishop Brooke never again found white male missionaries who would stay long at the mission. In his Annual Convocation Address in 1914, he spoke of the need for a married priest, willing to live in isolation and do "country" work, neither too young or too old, healthy and strong, with a "tactful" wife who was interested in the Indians. He admitted he had never been able to find such a person (Extracats, 1914, p. 6).

When Harriet M. Bedell, a missionary teacher from Buffalo, New York, arrived in 1907, James J.H. Reedy, Priest-in-Charge, did not actually live at the mission. David Pendleton Oakerhater was the only representative of the church there, and the two of them were the only stable presences at the school.

As had Sanford, Bedell used the written word as a weapon to keep the school open. However, where Sanford openly defied government authority and exposed what he saw as mistreatment of the Cheyenne by government agents, Bedell attempted to publicize widely the good work at the mission and to give the appearance of always complying with the wishes of the Indian Agents, even resorting to flattery and protestations of admiration for their work and the advice they gave her. For example, she wrote to Shell, "We wish to work in harmony with the government officials and shall always be pleased to have you visit us. I shall report any irregularity" (Bedell to Shell, Aug. 24, 1908); "It is our desire to work in harmony with the Indian Service. We shall gladly consider any suggestion you may wish to make" (Bedell to Shell, Aug 27, 1908).

Bedell published a number of articles, many appearing in the national Episcopal magazine *Spirit of Missions*. By the time she left Whirlwind, she would be referred to in the magazine as the nation's outstanding Episcopal authority on

Indian life (Botkin, 1958a, p. 67). She also wrote frequently to philanthropists and church groups who sent boxes of supplies and some cash donations.

In addition to building support through her letters, she developed a program that matched, as best she could, the curriculum recommended by the Indian Service, stressing the teaching of English and as much manual training or industrial work as time allowed (Reedy, *School Report*, 1908, CAA Records). The latter proved difficult as there were no facilities or equipment to teach the vocational skills commonly taught at boarding schools. She enlisted the aid of the agency farmer to teach the boys such skills as the repair of windmills and farm machinery. She took the girls into her home, two at a time, to learn white housewife skills such as cooking with stoves. She believed that her system was superior to the boarding school system in that what she taught could actually be used by the students in their own homes. She wrote,

I am often asked why, that on leaving boarding school, the Educated Indian soon falls back into the old ways ... The girl in boarding school learns ... with beautiful equipments—cooking by electricity, using stationary tubs and mangles in a well furnished laundry. She returns to her home. How different everything is! A hole in the ground instead of a stove ... We begin with conditions as we find them ... working up. (Bedell, 1910, p. 452)

Bedell soon won over Shell, and he became supportive. He wrote, “[Students] are better off in your school ... it is not so much a matter where the children should go to school as it is that they shall go to some good school” (Shell to Bedell, Sept. 2, 1909). She replied, “The more familiar and the more we work in harmony with the government the more we can help the Indian” (Bedell to Shell, Sept. 18, 1909).

In January 1910, Shell was replaced as Agent by William B. Freer. Bedell wrote long letters to him describing her work and desire to cooperate with government policy, and soon he and his wife and son were visiting her frequently. His support extended to an offer to loan her maps and equipment from the government school, but when he wrote to Washington requesting to do so he was told under no circumstances to loan or give her anything (Hawke to Freer, April 16, 1910).

The period of mutual support between the agency and the mission was short. In 1912 Freer was replaced by F.E. Farrell whose attitude toward the school was decidedly hostile. He spoke of “making his displeasure felt in a way that will not be pleasing” (Farrell to Shields, Nov. 14, 1912), and accused Bedell of laxity in making children come to school when the priest wrote to him requesting that a five-year-old child not be required to begin school until spring to spare the child a three mile walk in winter weather (Farrell to Wooden, Feb. 20, 1913).

Farrell was replaced by W.W. Scott in 1914, and the Office of Indian Affairs in Washington sent an inspector to determine conditions in the Whirlwind vicinity. The inspector recommended closing the school to prevent the Cheyenne from camping around it. Scott took up the cause with Bishop Brooke. The use of peyote had become popular in the vicinity and provided added impetus for removing opportunities for them to gather in groups. The public schools of Oklahoma were accepting Indian students, and Scott insisted that students would be better assimilated by attending those schools.

Dissension among employees at Whirlwind School was another factor brought to Brooke’s attention as cause for closing the school. C.E. Beach, a missionary newly assigned to the school, wrote to Scott complaining that Bedell received correspondence from the Indian Department that should come to him. He had

changed the letterhead stationery so that his name appeared above hers (CAA Records, 1914). As Scott put it, "your present employees do not work together harmoniously ... Miss Bedell is of such a temperament that she cannot take a subordinate place; and no matter whom you may have nominally in charge, will dominate" (Scott to Brook, June 14, 1915).

In June 1916, Bedell went to New York for a visit and while there received word from Bishop Brooke that the school was to be closed and she reassigned. Scott's letter to Beach regarding the closing stated,

[Bedell] would no doubt be greatly surprised to know ... she has done much to retard the progress of the people whom she has tried so hard to benefit ... *There is no right kind of an Indian camp.* The camp is a detriment wherever and for whatever purpose maintained. The Baptists are arranging to have an immense camp meeting ... every Indian family ... is drawing from every possible resource ... when it is over they will be broke ... I just now have the Sheriff after an Indian who stole two horses and sold them in order to get money for this camp ... You speak of organizing a boarding school—don't think of it ... all Indian children within reach of public schools [should] be placed in such schools "immediately" ... Segregation ... has held ... the Indians back. (Scott to Beach, July 12, 1916)

Scott also wrote to Bedell suggesting that she find other work (Scott to Bedell, Aug. 8, 1916). She did not, remaining in Episcopal Indian mission service almost to her death at the age of 93.

It was true that peyote use had increased. Brooke had spoken out forcefully against the practice. In his address at Lake Mohonk in 1915, he called upon the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to take steps to restrict its use (Moses, 1978, pp. 130-131). He was hospitalized in New York during the final efforts of the Indian Service to close the school, but later wrote of "Indian Department interference and mistaken regulation" (Brooke, 1918, p. 240), which contributed to the failure of Episcopal mission work among the Cheyenne.

Whirlwind School was closed in 1917 and the students sent to government boarding schools or nearby public schools, with Bedell expressing the fear that they would be discriminated against and looked down upon in the public schools (Hartley & Hartley, 1963, p. 117).

For some time Cheyenne requested the school be reopened. In 1921 Stacy Riggs wrote to Brooke's successor, Bishop Thurston, that he had corresponded with Sanford and that they were hoping for reopening of the school (Sanford to Thurston, Jan. 12, 1922; Riggs to Thurston, July 13, 1922; Whirlwind File). In 1922 and 1927 Episcopal Indian Convocations were held at the site. In 1924 a Philadelphia foundation offered a \$15,000 grant to reestablish the school but this was not accepted (Botkin, 1958a, p. 94).

Government criticism of the school and its final closure at the insistence of the Indian Service are not adequately explained by the reasons given—failure to provide adequate industrial education, providing an excuse for Cheyenne to live off their allotments, teaching in the Indian language, providing conditions conducive to peyote use. It appears more likely that the school was closed for failure to do what John Calhoun saw as the purpose of mission schools. It did not impress upon the minds of the Cheyenne "friendly and benevolent views of the government."

Note

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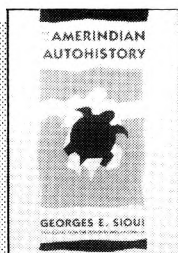
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