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A Woman's Touch

Housekeepers in the Day Schools at Pine Ridge and Rosebud, 1880–1920

Historians' accounts of American Indian education at the turn of the twentieth century have focused on boarding schools and their role in the federal government's policy of cultural assimilation. Less attention has been paid to reservation day schools, which worked toward the same goal. In the isolated setting of the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations of South Dakota, the day-to-day task of implementing the government's educational directives fell to two key employees, the classroom teacher and the housekeeper. In accordance with the gendered division of labor typical of the times, housekeepers were almost exclusively female. They were expected to teach Indian girls to "manage a house . . . according to the customs of civilization."[1] Teachers and housekeepers faced numerous obstacles, including language barriers, physical and cultural isolation, and scarcity of supplies, to name only a few. Housekeepers in particular had to balance these professional burdens with private concerns, namely, the care of their own children and households. Surviving records from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations offer a glimpse into the challenging world these women inhabited.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Congress decided to solve the "Indian problem" by assimilating American Indians into main-

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1. W. B. Dew, "The Day School System of Pine Ridge," n.d. (ca. 1896–1898), Copies of Letters Sent by the Day School Inspector and Superintendent, with Related Records, 1894–1914, Pine Ridge Agency (hereafter cited Copies of Letters Sent) vol. 2, p. 151, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group (RG) 75, National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, Mo. (NARA–KC).

stream culture. The Dawes, or General Allotment, Act of 1887 was intended to make Indians into landowners by dividing communally held reservation lands into separate plots. Individual land ownership was to be a first step toward dissolving tribal ties.[2] Another step in the assimilation process was to teach Indian children "the knowledge, values, mores, and habits of Christian civilization."[3] They were to learn English, acquire the dominant society's view of individualism, become Christians, learn how to work in the ways that white people wanted, and receive training in citizenship. The ultimate goal of assimilation was the elimination of American Indian cultures. With Indian peoples confined to reservations by 1887, the federal Office of Indian Affairs (precursor to the present-day Bureau of Indian Affairs) worked to carry out the assimilation program.[4]

In order to achieve its educational goals for Indian children, the federal government established different kinds of schools. Off-reservation boarding schools, such as the United States Indian Industrial School at Carlisle, Pennsylvania (founded in 1879), were the apex of the federal Indian school system. In this environment, pupils were cut off from their families and tribal backgrounds by distance. About one-fourth of the children in the federal Indian education system attended off-reservation boarding schools by 1910.[5]

On-reservation boarding schools, such as the Oglala Boarding School at Pine Ridge (founded in 1884), had a curriculum similar to that offered at Carlisle. Boarding schools taught academic subjects for half the school day, and industrial training occupied the remaining hours. Boys would learn farming, blacksmithing, and similar skills, and girls received instruction in household tasks such as cooking and sewing. While their program of study was similar to that found in the off-reservation schools, institutions located on reservations allowed for greater con-

2. Robert W. Larson, *Red Cloud: Warrior-Statesman of the Lakota Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), pp. 251–52.

3. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 18.

4. Ibid., pp. 21–24; Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), p. 81.

5. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, p. 320.

This cover image from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* portrays an Oglala boarding-school student visiting her people at Pine Ridge in 1884.

tact between Indian students and their parents because pupils went home for vacations.[6]

Day schools on the reservations provided an introduction to the English language, arithmetic, and other basic subjects. Teachers and housekeepers were also to serve as examples of "civilized" people for the children to emulate. The educational philosophy espoused by the Indian Office envisioned an orderly progression from day schools to on-reservation boarding schools to off-reservation institutions such as Carlisle. Each succeeding stage was to provide a more advanced academic and industrial curriculum. However, reality rarely matched the underlying theory. Some students were sent to off-reservation institutions without adequate academic preparation, while others attended only on-reservation boarding schools, and still others received their entire education at day schools.[7] As historian David Wallace Adams points out, "the vast majority of Indian pupils" in federal schools at the turn of the twentieth century "never attained anything much above a primary education."[8]

While the federal government had intended to provide day schools for the western Sioux, or Lakotas, since at least 1868, construction of the first government schools on the Pine Ridge reservation did not begin until 1879. The delay was due in part to Lakota resistance, especially the Great Sioux War of 1876, as well as several relocations of the agencies that served the Oglala and Brulé bands.[9] The Lakota experience with reservation day schools in what became South Dakota bore the imprint of these unique circumstances. The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie spelled out the government's intent for day schools as follows:

> In order to insure the civilization of the Indians entering into this treaty, the necessity of education is admitted, especially of such of them as

6. Candy Moulton, *Valentine T. McGillycuddy: Army Surgeon, Agent to the Sioux* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2011), pp. 195, 202; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, pp. 30–36.

7. Michael C. Coleman, *American Indian Children at School, 1850–1930* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), pp. 44–45; Adams, *Education for Extinction*, pp. 28–30.

8. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, p. 63.

9. Moulton, *Valentine T. McGillycuddy*, pp. 195–96; James C. Olson, *Red Cloud and the Sioux Problem* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 139, 158, 254, 262.

> are or may be settled on said agricultural reservations, and they, therefore, pledge themselves to compel their children, male and female, between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school, and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that for every thirty children between said ages, who can be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an English education shall be furnished, who will reside among said Indians and faithfully discharge his or her duties as teacher.[10]

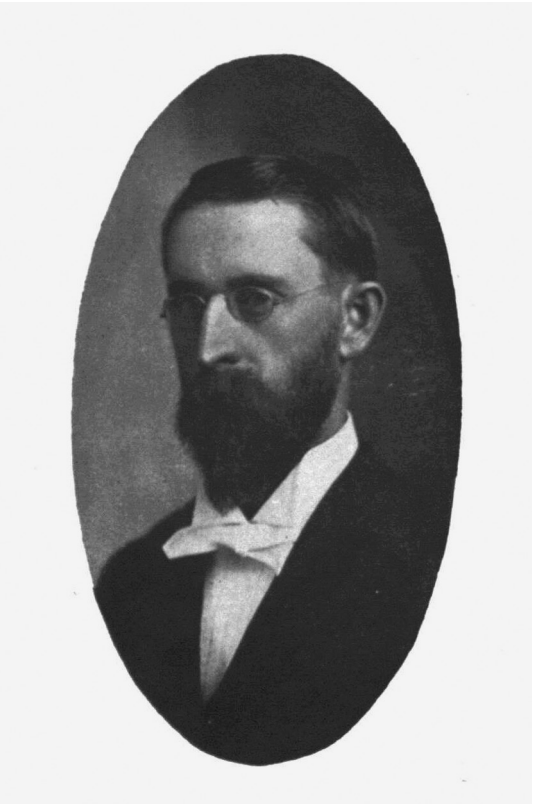
The majority of Oglala Lakota students in the federal system attended day schools on the Pine Ridge reservation as the twentieth century began. Comparatively few attended off-reservation boarding schools. In 1899, Day School Inspector W. B. Dew reported that of 1,706 school-age children on the reservation, 1,387 were attending various schools and 319 were excused for reasons such as serious illness, behavioral problems, or excessive distances between home and school. Only seventy-five students attended off-reservation schools. Eleven years later, Inspector James J. Duncan counted 1,745 children between the ages of eight and eighteen, with 1,308 of those enrolled in a school of some kind. Only 182 pupils attended off-reservation boarding schools in 1910. That number rose slightly to 201 in 1911.[11]

Similar patterns existed on the Rosebud reservation, where Inspector J. Franklin House reported total school enrollment of 1,022 students in 1899. Of these, 543 attended day schools, while 479 pupils were at one of three boarding schools on the reservation. House gave no figures for students attending off-reservation institutions.[12] However, Indian Agent Charles E. McChesney remarked in his 1899 annual report that

10. U.S., *Statutes at Large*, vol. 15, Treaty of Fort Laramie, pp. 637–38. For the full treaty text, *see* Charles J. Kappler, comp. and ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2:998–1007.

11. W. B. Dew, Annual Report, 18 July 1899, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 4, p. 69; James J. Duncan, Enrollment Report, n.d. (spring 1910), ibid., vol. 10, pp. 161–64; Duncan, Enrollment Report, 26 Jan. 1911, ibid., vol. 16, p. 181.

12. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1899: Indian Affairs, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), pp. 343–44.



James J. Duncan oversaw the day-school system on the Pine Ridge reservation from 1900 to 1916.

it was "very difficult to obtain the consent of parents to the transfer of their children to nonreservation schools." He reported the school-age population of the Rosebud Reservation as 1,381 children in all.[13]

While national statistics indicate that about one-fourth of all students in federal Indian schools attended off-reservation boarding schools by 1910, the proportion of Oglala and Brulé Lakota pupils from South Dakota attending such schools seems to have been much lower. The majority of Pine Ridge and Rosebud students received their education on their reservations in day schools, on-reservation boarding

13. Ibid., p. 341.

schools, or a combination of the two. This finding points to the importance of day-school teachers and housekeepers, who provided the only formal education some pupils received. Early efforts to establish day schools on the Pine Ridge reservation fell well short of the treaty obligation to supply a schoolhouse and teacher for every thirty children. In 1890, there were only eight day schools on the reservation with an average daily attendance of 221 students. By 1903, Pine Ridge had thirty-one federal day schools.[14]

Some students on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations attended religious schools operated by the Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches. The Episcopal schools were a legacy of President Ulysses S. Grant's "Peace Policy," which assigned many of the federal government's educational responsibilities on Indian reservations to selected religious denominations during the 1870s. Changes in federal policy in the 1880s allowed Catholic missionaries to found schools on the two reservations, as well. Religious schools continued to operate on reservations after the government ceased to rely on churches as a direct instrument of its Indian-education policy in the 1890s. In 1899, religious schools on the two reservations enrolled approximately 423 students.[15]

Both men and women could serve as classroom teachers in federal Indian day schools. However, an 1891 visit from Superintendent of Indian Schools Daniel Dorchester, who reported directly to the commissioner of Indian affairs, hinted at possible changes. He remarked, "whether single men . . . can do what is expected of teachers in any day schools, is a matter for the Office [of Indian Affairs] to decide. They are doing so well, that I do not feel at liberty to recommend their removal, unless the [Interior] Department thinks it better to put in a

14. U.S., Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, *Fifty-ninth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), pp. 53, 55, and *Report of the Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1903* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), p. 9.

15. Robert W. Galler, Jr., "A Triad of Alliances: The Roots of Holy Rosary Indian Mission," *South Dakota History* 28 (Fall 1998): 144–45, 157–58; Karla Lee Ekquist, "Federal Indian Policy at the St. Francis Mission School on Rosebud Reservation, South Dakota, 1886–1908" (Ph.D. diss., Iowa State University, 1999), pp. 98, 103; Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, pp. 112, 128; U.S., Department of the Interior, *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior* (1899), pp. 338, 343.

woman who can teach sewing, cooking, &c."[16] By the mid-1890s, officials in Washington, D.C., decided that unmarried teachers could not instruct the children adequately and moved to hire married couples for day schools in order to provide industrial training for both genders. The Indian Office hired married women as housekeepers and their husbands as teachers.[17]

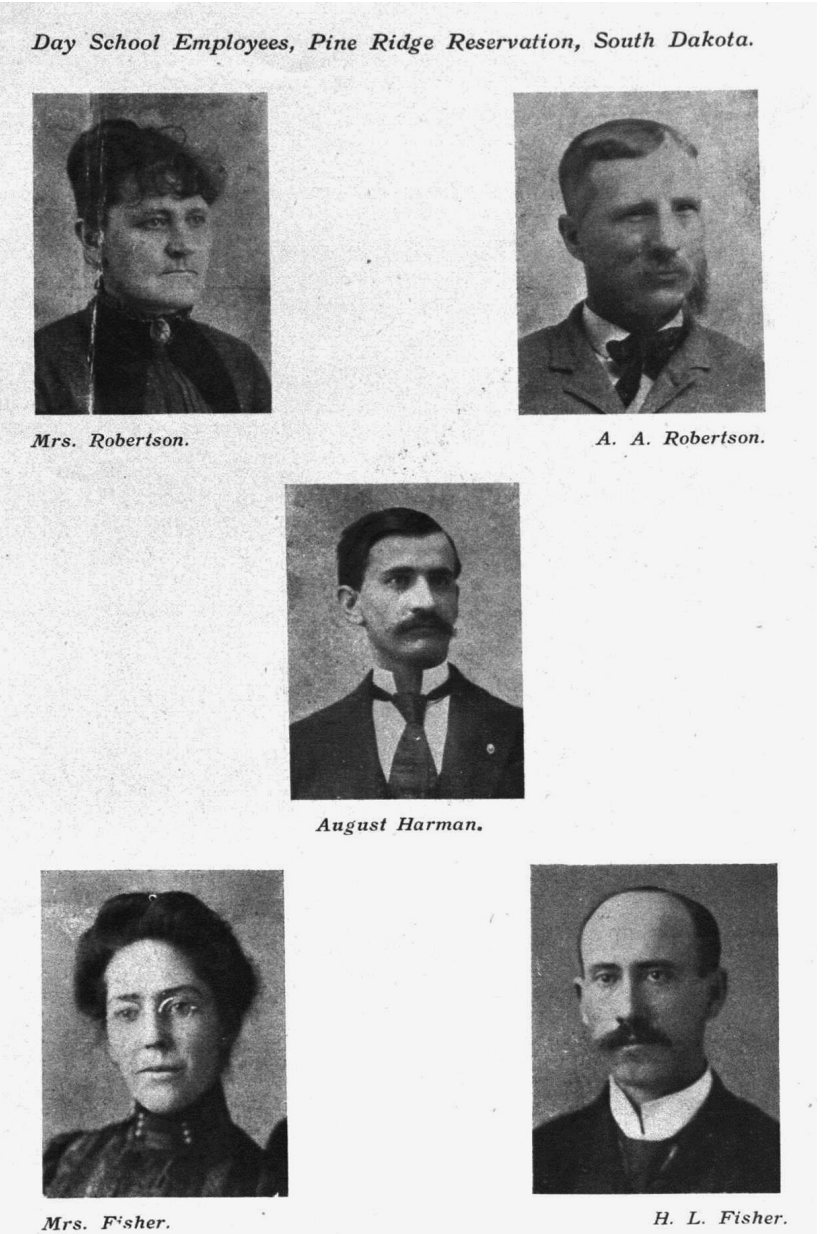
Teacher-housekeeper couples were often unprepared for the physical isolation they would experience, and many had never even encountered an American Indian before their arrival on the reservations. Such was the experience of Albert and Edith Kneale, who came to the Pine Ridge Reservation in 1899 to take up their appointments as teacher and housekeeper at No. 10 Day School about four miles down Wounded Knee Creek from Manderson. Originally from western New York, the Kneales were newlyweds when they accepted their positions at Pine Ridge sight unseen. Albert's salary was to be six hundred dollars a year as teacher, while Edith was to earn three hundred dollars annually as housekeeper. The couple was unaware of Edith's precise duties until after they arrived at their new home. They reached their post after traveling by railroad to Rushville, Nebraska, followed by a twenty-five-mile wagon trip from Rushville to Pine Ridge Agency, and, finally, a drive of thirty-five miles in a horse-drawn buggy to No. 10 School. The last stage of their journey took five hours in ideal weather conditions, for the road was little more than a pair of wagon ruts.[18]

The Kneales soon discovered the extent of Edith's responsibilities as a housekeeper. Albert later described them as follows: "The children attending the day schools came to the school from their homes each morning, returning at the end of the day's session . . . the government furnished them a midday meal at the school and it was the duty of the housekeeper, with the aid of the pupils, to prepare this meal from such supplies as were made available. It was also her duty to instruct

16. Daniel Dorchester, Report of Inspection of Government Schools, Pine Ridge Reservation, May 1891, p. 19, Administrative Records, Pine Ridge Agency, RG 75, NARA–KC.

17. Dew, "Day School System of Pine Ridge," p. 151.

18. Albert H. Kneale, *Indian Agent* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1950), pp. 18–20, 25–27, 30–33.



As these 1909 staff portraits show, the Office of Indian Affairs often hired married couples for positions in the Pine Ridge day schools.

the children in matters of cleanliness and hygiene; to teach the girls to sew—assisting and instructing them in making their own clothing and in keeping it clean and in repair."[19]

Housekeepers had to bathe and inspect their charges for vermin, feed them with monotonous and often inadequate government rations, and oversee the production of sufficient clothing for the children. They spent a significant amount of time every day instructing the girls in domestic work. Housekeepers were also expected to visit their students' homes and report their observations of the home environment. In particular, they were to evaluate the progress of Indian mothers toward "civilized" standards of housekeeping and child

19. Ibid., pp. 26–27.

Housekeeper Della R. Bratley supervises a sewing class at Lower Cut Meat Day School on the Rosebud reservation in 1897. Her husband Jesse H. Bratley, the school's teacher, took the photograph.

rearing. Furthermore, they had to attend to the needs of their own children and households. The workload was daunting, and the pay remained low. Although teachers' annual salaries rose from $600 to $720 between 1899 and 1910, housekeepers received no such increase.[20]

Housekeepers' qualifications for their work in day schools, like that of their husbands for teaching, were often uneven. Indian Office functionaries deemed them qualified simply because they kept house for their own families. In the official mindset, a white American woman who cared for a family was automatically knowledgeable about all aspects of family life. As historian Cathleen D. Cahill put it, "policy makers believed that 'any good woman could teach every good woman what all good women should know.'"[21]

Despite societal expectations, some housekeepers could not sew or cook decent meals with government rations. A few housekeepers could not even maintain an orderly or clean environment. For example, in November 1901, Inspector Duncan sharply rebuked J. H. and Frances M. Holland, the couple in charge of Pine Ridge Day School No. 13. He "regretted exceedingly" that the school was in "a filthy and untidy condition." Duncan emphasized "the necessity of straightening up things, and keeping your place clean and worthy of an example to the people among whom you live." If the couple failed to take corrective action, the inspector continued, "we will be under the necessity of reporting you and asking for your removal." Emphasizing the seriousness of his reprimand, Duncan had Indian Agent John R. Brennan, the official in charge of the reservation as a whole, countersign the letter.[22] In March 1906, the inspector also expressed "grave doubts" about the "personal neatness" of the Mullallys, who were in charge of Day School No. 2. Duncan assured Agent Brennan that he had "advised them that I will expect a change."[23]

20. Ibid., pp. 19, 26–27; Duncan to Edith Irene Atkin, 23 Sept. 1910, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 15, p. 434.

21. Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869–1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 90.

22. Duncan to J. H. and Frances M. Holland, 12 Nov. 1901, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 6, p. 295.

23. Duncan to Brennan, 13 Mar. 1906, ibid., vol. 9, p. 149.

Some housekeepers were more than qualified for their official positions. In 1906, Duncan encountered a couple in which the wife was a much better teacher than the husband. The inspector informed teacher Paph Julian that official visitors to No. 10 Day School had "spoken highly of Mrs. Julian as housekeeper, but not of your schoolroom work." Duncan continued, "As your wife has been a teacher, I am going to ask her to teach for you some, and if need be you can help with the housework, or detail one of the big girls to do the housework while you watch her results."[24] This reversal of gender roles must have been an exception, for men were not expected to be proficient or even engaged in housework at that time.

Occasionally, housekeepers seemed to neglect their duties willfully. In 1901, M. Blanche Davis kept older Lakota girls out of school to do her family's laundry and openly refused to perform many of her other duties. Inspector Duncan requested that she and her husband be transferred, describing the recalcitrant housekeeper as "arbitrary and unwilling to do things which are essential to the success of the school." Even worse, she had reportedly informed her fellow housekeepers "what she has not done, and what would not be done in the line of sewing." Mrs. Davis had also allegedly told a boarding school employee "what she had never done and never, never would do in regard to a certain matter of personal cleanliness of the pupils."[25]

Duncan's negative assessment of Mrs. Davis gives the impression that the inspector considered her to be lazy. It is possible, however, that as a male, he did not appreciate the multitude of tasks that housekeepers had to perform. Unfortunately, housekeepers received little mention in official correspondence unless there was a problem. It is difficult to know how much of Duncan's statement about Mrs. Davis reflected his own gendered expectations.

Regardless of Inspector Duncan's motivations for rebuking Mrs. Davis, he did not spare male teachers when he believed criticism was warranted. In August 1906, he recommended that Frank Gibbs, the teacher at No. 15 Day School, "read up on some of the more modern

24. Duncan to Paph Julian, 17 Oct. 1906, ibid., vol. 9, n.p.
25. Duncan to Brennan, 11 June 1901, ibid., vol. 6, pp. 76–77.

ways of teaching." The inspector's letter to Gibbs made it clear that he expected improvement, otherwise he would "have to make some change."[26] Four years later, he ordered Theodore J. Klaus at Day School No. 16 to "remove the [teacher's] pool table from the school premises," fearing that its presence would be a bad influence on local Indians.[27] Given the physical isolation of many day schools, it is perhaps not surprising that Klaus wanted to have a means of recreation close at hand.

Cultural isolation only added to the challenges of life in remote rural schools. Housekeepers, teachers, and their families were often the only non-Indians at their posts. Communication with Indian neighbors was difficult due to language and cultural barriers. Lakota remained in wide use at Pine Ridge well into the 1950s. Reservation physician Robert H. Ruby remarked in a 1953 letter to his sister that "there are only a few of the very young who do not understand Indian [Lakota]."[28]

26. Duncan to Gibbs, 8 Aug. 1906, ibid., vol. 9, p. 294.

27. Duncan to Klaus, 9 May 1910, ibid., vol. 10, p. 401.

28. Robert H. Ruby, *A Doctor among the Oglala Sioux Tribe: The Letters of Robert H. Ruby, 1953–1954*, ed. Cary C. Collins and Charles V. Matschler (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), p. 13.

Many day schools on the Pine Ridge reservation were situated in isolated locations.

Moreover, given that the purpose of federal Indian schools was to replace American Indian cultures with European American modes of living, it is unlikely that many white housekeepers and teachers learned to speak fluent Lakota.

The threat of diseases such as typhoid fever, whooping cough, influenza, and tuberculosis was another challenge residents of Pine Ridge faced. Tuberculosis, especially, ran rampant on the reservation, and children were particularly vulnerable to the infection. Physician and ethnographer James R. Walker found that between 1896 and 1906, "903 full-blood-degree Oglalas and 70 mixed-bloods out of a total reservation population of 5,000 had died of the disease."[29] The mortality rate from tuberculosis at Pine Ridge was several times greater than the average for the United States as a whole. Children who showed any sign of having contracted the malady were not permitted to attend school but continued to live in their homes around the day schools. When an infected person coughed or sneezed, the bacteria that caused the illness could be spread to a new host. Living in close quarters, often suffering from malnutrition due to poor rations, and lacking sanitation, Lakota people were terribly vulnerable to this scourge.[30] Housekeepers undoubtedly witnessed its effects closely, and it would be reasonable to surmise that some of them feared that their own families might fall victim to disease.

Although evidence is sparse in the official records, it appears to have been fairly common for housekeepers to bring their own children to the Pine Ridge reservation. Thirteen women applied for housekeeping positions at day schools there between 1911 and 1914. Eight of the applicants listed children who would accompany them, ranging in age from two months to nineteen years.[31] In 1909, the Simms family at No. 15 Day School mourned the loss of their only child. That same year, Inspector Duncan remarked that the Keith family, posted at a school near the site

29. Ibid., p. xl.

30. Don Southerton, "James R. Walker's Campaign against Tuberculosis on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation," *South Dakota History* 34 (Summer 2004): 111–12.

31. Personal Data Sheets of Regular Employees 1911–1914, Pine Ridge Agency, RG 75, NARA–KC.

Jesse Bratley took this photograph of children playing at Lower Cut Meat Day School between 1895 and 1899. The non-Indian youngster at center may have been the child of the teacher and his wife.

of the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre for over two decades, had raised nine children there.[32]

Along with isolation and the threat of disease, housekeepers often faced the challenge of insufficient supplies. Edith and Albert Kneale, for example, found it difficult to procure vegetables for their first year at Day School No. 10 near Manderson. Fortunately, a fellow teacher arranged for them to purchase potatoes and onions from a farmer across the state line in Nebraska.[33] In July 1899, Inspector Dew described the

32. Duncan, Report on the Day School Employees of the Pine Ridge Agency Day Schools, Nov. 1909, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 19, n.p.

33. Kneale, *Indian Agent*, pp. 50–51.

supplies the Pine Ridge schools received as "an improvement over former years, but still grossly inadequate." He reported shortages of needles, thread, and the necessary fabrics to make clothes for the Lakota children.[34]

Even with an incomplete supply of materials, the amount of sewing work to be done at Pine Ridge schools could be daunting. Dew recognized the problem, commenting in an 1898 report that "for one person to do all the sewing for fifteen or eighteen girls is almost an impossibility." During the 1898–1899 school year, the reservation's day-school housekeepers initially relied on older pupils for help, but this source of labor dried up when many of the more mature girls were transferred to boarding school. At least one housekeeper, recognizing the need for

34. *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior* (1899), p. 338.

In this scene, the Bratleys' students at Lower Cut Meat Day School bring in watermelons from the school garden.

clothing to see the children through the winter, collaborated with her students' mothers to make the necessary garments. As Dew related the story, "The garments were cut out at the school and sent home by the pupils; in most cases the [sewing] work was carefully and conscientiously done, and much work was saved the housekeeper."[35]

Although Inspector Dew acknowledged the Lakota mothers' sewing work, his report seems to be more interested in how the housekeeper accomplished her task than in praising the Indian mothers' mastery of sewing. The educational philosophy of the government Indian schools envisioned that housekeepers would teach girls the proper techniques of domestic work, and the children would, in turn, influence their mothers.[36] In this case, however, the housekeepers were actually dependent on Lakota women. Unfortunately, the official records do not indicate what the housekeepers themselves thought of the mothers' contributions.

Sewing remained an important task at the day schools for years to come. In 1905, Inspector Duncan reported the quantities of garments made at school and in homes in each of the thirty-one day-school districts at Pine Ridge. Productivity varied widely. For example, No. 2 Day School, with twenty students, produced 129 garments in school and none at home. At No. 10 Day School, the output was 342 garments made in school and one at home for thirty students, while No. 25 reported only seventy-five school-produced items of clothing and sixty-seven made at home for the same number of pupils. Two day schools reported more productivity at home than in school. Not all clothing that the children wore was actually made on the reservation, however. The federal government did issue some ready-made clothing, but officials considered sewing to be an important element in the assimilation process for Indian girls.[37]

As the partnership between housekeepers and Lakota mothers to accomplish the necessary sewing for 1898–1899 shows, day-school staff who could cultivate working relationships with their students' parents

35. Dew, Quarter Report, 31 Dec. 1898, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 3, p. 5.

36. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, p. 29.

37. Duncan to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 29 Aug. 1905, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 9, pp. 2–3; Duncan to George W. Bent, 14 May 1910, ibid., vol. 10, p. 433.

were more likely to be effective. Maggie G. Keith, longtime housekeeper at Day School No. 7, was apparently a model in this regard. Writing in 1909, Inspector Duncan remarked, "Mrs. Keith is a quarter blood Yankton Sioux, and a [former] pupil of Hampton [Institute]. She keeps her home in excellent condition, is an excellent sewer, and is one of the very best to visit the Indian women of her camp."[38]

While some housekeepers, such as Mrs. Keith, did the best they could under sometimes difficult circumstances, other school staff lacked sympathy for the Lakota people they worked with. In these cases, Lakota parents often withheld their cooperation or took other action to prevent abuse of their children. Teachers and housekeepers disliked what they considered to be insubordinate behavior on the part of Indian parents. One Pine Ridge teacher, R. G. Swift, complained to Day School Inspector William H. Blish about the habitual absence of several students in December 1916. Unable to force the pupils' parents to comply with his demand that the children attend school regularly, Swift pleaded, "Can you not see that these men are determined to do as they please?"[39] Some fourteen months later, housekeeper Katherine Swift reported that a Lakota father objected to his sons' cutting wood in the freezing cold. She complained to Inspector Blish that "the most galling thing was his saying we both got salary and also an increase at that, and it was our place to get in the wood." According to Mrs. Swift, the boys overheard the conversation and "ran away after they had their dinners."[40] The ethnocentric outrage of Mr. and Mrs. Swift comes through loud and clear.

Although day-school inspectors would not always side with Indian parents by any means, they were aware that Lakota families had learned to deal with the bureaucracy for their own purposes. In February 1913, Inspector Duncan advised teacher Charles E. Coverdill, who was experiencing some difficulties with the parents of his students,

38. Duncan, Report on the Day School Employees of the Pine Ridge Agency Day Schools, Nov. 1909, ibid., vol. 19, n.p.

39. Swift to Blish, 12 Dec. 1916, Folder 2, Day School No. 22, Day School Correspondence, Pine Ridge Agency, RG 75, NARA–KC.

40. Swift to Blish, 1 Feb. 1918, ibid.

that "there is no telling . . . where they [parents] might write."[41] However, Duncan sometimes recognized that parents had legitimate reasons to complain. In June 1901, he admonished teacher Horace G. Jennerson: "You must not work the children too much in removing fence for your private convenience. Such complaints come to my ears. Indian children and parents are entitled to the same consideration as other people."[42]

If complaints failed to have the desired effect, Lakota parents had other means to express their dissatisfaction with certain housekeepers and teachers. They could refuse to send their children to school at all, although this course of action sometimes triggered retaliation. In April 1900, for example, Inspector Dew instructed teacher E. M. Keith of Day School No. 7 to keep careful track of Grace Good Medicine's absences from school. Dew informed Keith that "the [Indian] Agent has directed the Farmer of your district to take up the rations of the whole family for as many days as the girl is absent."[43] With many families on the reservation experiencing hunger and malnutrition, the threat of rations being withheld was a serious matter.

Unhappy parents could also request that their children be transferred to other schools. In August 1905, Inspector Duncan notified teacher Ashworth Heys of Day School No. 14 about "applications for five children from your district to be transferred." More bad news was in store for Heys. The inspector continued, "It looks now very much as if the school would close for lack of pupils. There seemed to be a dissatisfaction somewhere last year, which seems to be still lingering, and which would require compulsion to keep the school together."[44] As Heys and other teachers learned, the federal government's assimilation program did not necessarily give teachers and housekeepers unquestioned authority. Lakota parents resisted certain school staff and got along well with others while protecting their children the best they could.

41. Duncan to Coverdill, 25 Feb. 1913, Copies of Letters Sent, vol. 18, p. 22.
42. Duncan to Jennerson, 11 June 1901, ibid., vol. 6, p. 73.
43. Dew to Keith, 16 Apr. 1900, ibid., vol. 5, p. 21.
44. Duncan to Heys, 15 Aug. 1905, ibid., vol. 9, p. 6.

As part of their duties, housekeepers and teachers in the Pine Ridge and Rosebud school systems were expected to visit their students' homes to measure and report on their charges' progress toward assimilation. Day-school inspectors, who forwarded the reports to Washington, were responsible for seeing that the visits were made. Some housekeepers apparently were unwilling to comply. Inspector Duncan reprimanded Emma Truman of Day School No. 29 for neglecting her home visits in 1909: "I am returning a copy of your Housekeeper's Report, as I notice you have not reported any visits during the year at any of the homes. This may have been an oversight of yours, and you can enter the visits, if an oversight. . . . I hardly know what excuse to make as there are only 8 homes to report upon, and the office would not think that much of a task I fear, but might interpret a lack of interest on your part in the mothers of the pupils of your school."[45]

Some housekeepers did the minimum and visited their students' families once a year, while others paid repeated visits. Male teachers reported on the condition of Lakota men, and female housekeepers did the same for the Indian women. Some survey information, such as data on church membership or years of schooling, applied to both genders. Housekeepers and teachers rated their interviewees as either "progressive" or "non-progressive." The criteria varied by gender. Women were evaluated on such factors as cleanliness, the number of windows in their homes, the furniture they owned, and whether they had a sewing machine. Men faced scrutiny of the legal status of their marriages, their knowledge of spoken English, their ability to read and to write, their ownership of cattle and horses, and whether they fenced their allotments.[46]

Housekeepers' reports often reveal the cultural stereotypes at the heart of the federal Indian-education program. For example, housekeeper Narra Cross's 1907 annual report documented her visits to Lakota mothers whose children attended Pine Creek Day School on the Rosebud reservation. She had visited each of the women only once. Interestingly, neatness alone does not seem to have determined wheth-

45. Duncan to Truman, 21 June 1909, ibid., vol. 13, p. 278.

46. For a discussion of the data collected in these home visits, *see Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior* (1906), pp. 354–55.

er Cross judged the women "progressive." Only three of twelve women listed received a rating of "good" in all four categories of hygiene —cleanliness of children, bedding, and houses as well as personal neatness—in the housekeeper's rubric. One woman received "poor" ratings in all categories of cleanliness; nevertheless, Cross judged her as "progressive," perhaps because she was the only one of the adult women who had attended school. All of the women attended church but none of them showed interest in the day school, according to Cross. Every child except one had vermin. Overall, the housekeeper labeled five of the twelve women as "progressive" and seven as "not progressive." Two factors appear to have been key to her ratings. None of the five "progressives" were known to attend traditional Lakota dances. All five had tables and chairs, sewing machines, and cupboards. The trappings of "civilization" carried the day.[47]

Mabel Eaton, housekeeper of White Thunder Day School on the Rosebud Reservation, visited eleven women according to her 1905 annual report. Three of the women had attended school. Nellie Little Day spent three years at Carlisle, Grace Shield six years at Carlisle, and Alice White Wash twelve years at White Thunder Day School. Eaton judged Little Day as "not progressive." Little Day did not attend traditional dances and had no interest in the school but her cleanliness was good and she attended a sewing circle. The housekeeper rated Shield as "progressive" even though she did go to dances. Shield reportedly showed interest in the school, received good marks on the cleanliness scale, and also attended a sewing circle. Even though White Wash had the most schooling and wore "citizen's" clothing, Eaton labeled her as "not progressive." She attended dances, reportedly had no interest in the day school, and was allegedly guilty of poor cleanliness. She also lived in a tent and did not own furniture.[48]

Surprisingly, Eaton rated five of the eight women who had not attended school as "progressive." All eight of the unschooled women

47. Narra Cross, Report of Visits to Homes of Patrons (Women) of Pine Creek Day School, 1907, Reports of Indian Homes Visited 1905–1909, Rosebud Agency, RG 75, NARA–KC.

48. Mabel Eaton, Report of Visits to Homes of Patrons (Women) of White Thunder Day School, 1905, ibid.

attended traditional dances. Four reportedly had an interest in the school and four did not. Four wore non-Indian clothes and four did not. Seven attended a sewing circle. One of the unschooled women on Eaton's list, Stand Alone White Wash, was likely either the mother or mother-in-law of Alice White Wash. Stand Alone wore traditional clothing, did not attend a sewing circle, had no interest in the school, attended "Indian" dances, and did not go to church. Eaton rated her cleanliness as "good." Remarkably, Eaton reported the elder White Wash as "progressive." It appears that Eaton's ratings could be rather subjective and arbitrary.[49]

Housekeepers remained an integral part of the cultural-assimilation program at federal day schools on Indian reservations in South Dakota from the establishment of these schools in the late 1870s until the 1920s, when federal authorities began to enroll Lakota children in regular public schools under the control of local and state officials. Apparently, Pine Ridge and Rosebud were slower to make this transition than most other reservations. In 1914, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells reported that the number of Indian children in public schools nationwide exceeded the enrollment in reservation day schools. He connected this trend to the implementation of the Dawes Act. As the process of assigning individual land allotments to Indian residents of reservations neared its completion, so-called surplus lands not distributed to Indians were made available to white settlers. Once enough settlers had arrived in a given area, they would demand the organization of local school districts to educate their children. At that point, Sells theorized, Indian children would join their white neighbors in the public schools, speeding the process of cultural assimilation. The Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations did not fulfill Sells' prediction immediately, however, as there were not yet enough public schools nearby. Day schools continued to serve these areas until the Interior Department began to implement the recommendations of a late-1920s study known as the Meriam Report, which gave a boost to the enrollment of Indian children in public schools.[50]

49. Ibid.

50. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (1914), pp. 5–7; Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, pp. 2, 224–25.

During the decades when day schools formed a key component of the federal government's assimilationist Indian-education policy, housekeepers were an essential part of the plan. Indeed, the official title "housekeeper" fell well short of describing the scope of the women's duties, as well as the professional and personal challenges they faced. Duncan, the longtime day-school inspector on the Pine Ridge Reservation, clearly considered the housekeepers' work crucial to the schools' mission of cultural transformation. In a 1905 letter he remarked, "I do not see how it would be possible to do good work among Indians without these housekeepers."[51] The record these women left behind provides valuable insight into assimilationist federal policy and the realities of life on Indian reservations in South Dakota at the turn of the twentieth century.

51. Duncan to A. C. Hill, 13 Sept. 1905, in folder accompanying vols. 5–8, Copies of Letters Sent.

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On the covers: In this issue, Seth Hinshaw reveals how the 1920 South Dakota primary was a turning point in that year's presidential campaign (front). Birgit Hans examines the role of housekeepers such as Della R. Bratley (lower back) in the federal day schools on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian reservations at the turn of the twentieth century.