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## Climbing Learners' Hill: Benedictines at White Earth, 1878-1945

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CLIMBING LEARNERS' HILL: BENEDICTINES  
AT WHITE EARTH, 1878-1945

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Sister Carol Berg, O.S.B.

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

June, 1981

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## PREFACE

Several months before beginning this dissertation, I chanced upon an article about missionaries to the Indians in the post-civil war era. The author saw the role of missionaries to be that of "cultural revolutionaries"--overthrowers of native culture, working hand-in-glove with the government. The term "cultural revolutionaries" struck me and caused me to question the role of my own Order, the Benedictines, at the Indian missions of White Earth and Red Lake. I began to wonder what functional linkages the Church had with the Indian culture in Minnesota; what mutual modifications, if any, were made--or whether there was a unilateral change and only on the part of the Indians. Were the Benedictines cultural revolutionaries all of the time? some of the time? How were these missionaries influenced by national beliefs and legislation? White Earth, the older of the two missions, makes a good case study for such questions, with my focus on the period from 1878-1945 and, specifically, on the boarding school as an instrument of cultural change/exchange.

In November of 1878, exactly ten years after White Earth became a reservation, Father Aloysius Hermanutz, Sister Lioba Braun, and Sister Philomene Ketten arrived at White Earth, remaining there for a total of almost fifty years each. Since their time, 137 Benedictine sisters and 14 priests have served the White Earth Indian mission. They labored with varying degrees of success, many giving

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decade of service to the mission. Unfortunately, most, if not  
possessed little or no knowledge and understanding of Indian  
a.

In her 1967 dissertation, Attitudes of Missionary Sisters  
Toward American Indian Acculturation, Sister Francis Mary Riggs  
asserts that a holistic view is essential for work among any peoples.  
She defines holistic as an ability or enabling to see elements of  
culture in their total context and in relation to one another in the  
world. Too often, such a holistic view was missing at Indian  
missions, White Earth not excluded.

Almost all the contact between the Benedictine missionaries  
and the Ojibwa came through the church and the school at White Earth.  
In the pre-Vatican II years, up to 1963, almost the entire span of  
the mission, this contact was a rather constricted one. The sisters  
and even the priests had almost no contact with Indian culture beyond  
the church and school doors. Missing from both, however, was the  
holistic view that Sister Francis Mary describes. She writes,

A sister with a holistic viewpoint would value such  
things as a knowledge of the economic problems of  
Indians, satisfactory contacts with tribal or village  
government, frequent contacts with graduates, job-  
training for students, and attendance at Indian  
ceremonies and social gatherings.<sup>1</sup>

Not until the late 1930s and for many, well into the 1940s, did the  
former restrictions on sisters' external apostolates change

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Francis Mary Riggs, Attitudes of Missionary Sisters  
Toward American Indian Acculturation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic  
University of America, 1967), p. 20.

sufficiently to allow them to even begin cultivating such knowledge and contacts. Full lifting of such restrictions came only in the post-Vatican II period, the mid and late-1960s.

Long before Vatican II brought about changes in approach to structure of religious life and therefore in approach to religious apostolates, some adaptations were made by the missionaries at White Earth. Tracing their history, one can see that most early adaptations concerned schedules rather than the content of religious life, but even these small adaptations made mission work and life there more viable and humane.

Between its founding in 1878 and its closing in 1945, the mission boarding school was home to between two and three thousand students, many orphan girls. They were influenced by, and in turn influenced, the missionaries in ways not always measurable. Through years of experience working among the Ojibway, the missionaries came gradually to acquire what the Meriam Report of 1928 saw as a primary need for those working among the Indians:

an awareness of the existence of cultural differences, of the need to take them into account in designing programs and of the frequent failure to use the strengths of Indian cultures as a foundation for progress.<sup>2</sup>

Tracing the mission school's history from 1878 to 1945, the year the boarding school closed, I attempt to show the priests, sisters, and Indians interacting with one another, setting their

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<sup>2</sup>Lewis Meriam, et al., The Problem of Indian Administration (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928; reprint, 1971), p. x.

history into the national scene whenever appropriate. Chronological divisions are somewhat arbitrary--certainly the choice of the span 1878-1910 is a case--but the separate treatment of 1910-1945 fits well into the swing from naive attempts at enforcing assimilation to respect and preservation of native culture which occurred during those years.

To return to my original question: were the Benedictines at White Earth cultural revolutionaries? Completing this paper, I find the answer to be both yes and no--with qualifications. There were times when the missionaries did act like cultural revolutionaries. This occurred primarily in the early decades of the mission: the late 19th and early 20th centuries and particularly in the area of religion. On the other hand, the missionaries did not act as cultural revolutionaries from at least the 1920s on, reflecting the gradual change from ignorance and toleration to an appreciation of Indian culture.

The 1930s and early 1940s with their New Deal for the Indians were to affect strongly a resurgence of interest in and encouragement of native culture. While the Church and other institutions did not exactly achieve what Sister Jose Hobday, a Seneca, calls a "pow wow mentality," nevertheless there did emerge a greater respect for Indian culture on the part of missionaries and other white people. In this paper, steady progression towards a greater respect for the Ojibway culture by the missionaries at White Earth is traced alongside the evolution within Catholic and, for Benedictines, monastic structures

which helped such a progression happen.

As a Benedictine, I thrill to the tales of the many missionaries who served at White Earth, especially those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, admiring their courage, persistence, and devotion they brought to their task. Accounts of the mission boarding school sound familiar to me in many aspects since I attended a Benedictine boarding high-school in the early 1950s, from where, after graduation, I entered the novitiate of St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota. I experienced first hand what generations of Ojibwa students did: the supervision of dedicated sisters, who, maintaining strict discipline, nevertheless trained the whole person in an atmosphere of loving care and concern. Following the novitiate and a year in college, I went directly into teaching. That progression and my German ancestry are like those of most of the sisters whose story I tell in this paper.

I am conscious, of course, that at White Earth two cultures met, sometimes clashing but often compromising. Each culture had its own integrity and is worthy of respect for that reason alone. Due to my personal background, this paper highlights the white, Catholic, Benedictine culture more than the Ojibwa implying, however, no disrespect to the latter.

Although I was born and reared in Minnesota, I had known little about the Ojibwa and Dakota within its borders. As a child, I read stories--mostly fiction--about Indians but never delved deeply into their varied cultures. Minnesota ranks in the top ten states having

the largest Indian population, yet I first met an Indian during my high school years and then lost whatever interest I once had in Indians until my second year of graduate study. Two seminars in American History--one focusing on the Jacksonian Era and the other on 19th and 20th-century America--rekindled the interest and stirred me to study the Ojibwa of White Earth. On the whole, it has been a pleasant task.

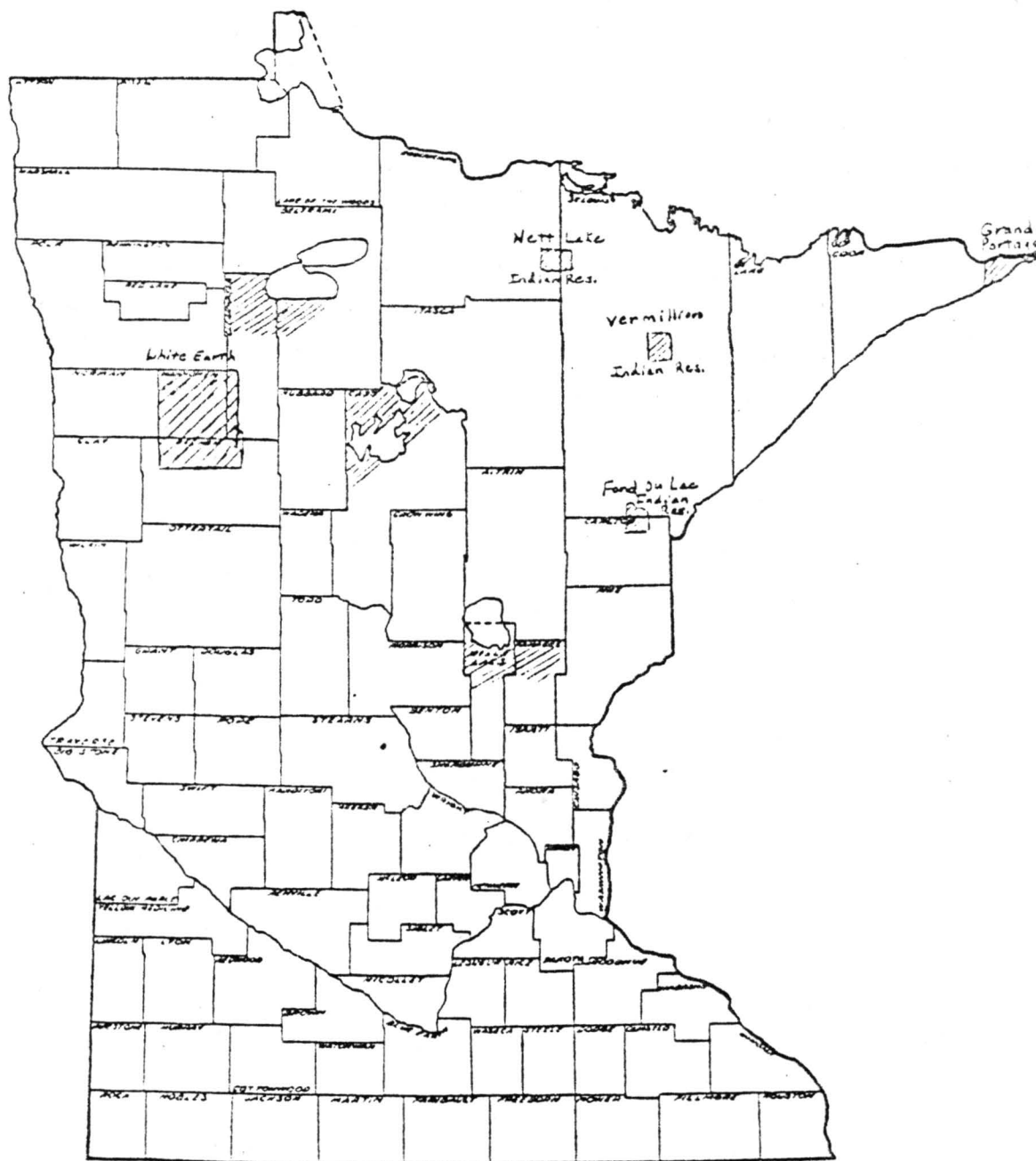
My thanks go to many persons who gave invaluable aid during the research and writing of this paper. In particular I mention Sisters Thea Grieman, Mary Degel, Debora Herda, Delice Bialke, Johnette Kohorst and Rosaria Zenner, who shared personal experiences of their years at White Earth; Fathers Benno Watrin, Constantine and Valerian Thelen, and Brother Gregory Eibensteiner, all veterans of White Earth, who gave information freely; the Indian women--at and away from White Earth--who proved to be friendly and helpful during interviews: Ida Blue, Alice Clark, Nora Clukey, Maggie Hanks, Melba Hodges, Emma Johnson, Inez Reynolds, Tumack Warren, and Rose Barstow.

In addition, I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Father Vincent Tegeder of St. John's Abbey Archives; Sister Imogene Blatz of St. Benedict's Archives; Philip Bantin of the Marquette University Archives and Sister Moira Wild, Treasurer of St. Benedict's Convent. These people, in their respective official capacities, gave me much help in locating source material. I thank also Sister Idamarie Primus of St. Benedict's Convent, who served twice as driver to White Earth and as assistant interviewer, affable in both roles; Sister Debora

Herda, who not only drove me to St. John's Abbey several times but also aided in the interviews; and Sister Linnea Welter, Professor of English at the College of St. Benedict, proofreader and editor extraordinaire. Special thanks go to Professor Gerald Vizenor of the American Studies Program at the University of Minnesota, himself from White Earth, who taught me much about human relations. He gave generously of time and suggestions.

Above all, I thank Professor Clarke A. Chambers of the University of Minnesota History Department, my advisor throughout my graduate work at the University and an unflagging support in the step-by-step process of bringing this project to completion. His suggestions, encouragement, and patience saw me through the task.

There are many other people who have helped me in some way or other and whom I have not the space to list. Members of my religious community gave help merely by their interest in this paper and by their expressions of concern and support. I thank them all.



LOCATION OF OJIBWA RESERVATIONS

- St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota

## Chapter I

### BACKGROUND

#### Benedictine Monks in Minnesota

In 1835, Father Francis Pierz, a native of Carniola in the eastern Alps, came to America to labor among the Indians in the Midwest. By the early 1850s, from headquarters in Crow Wing, Pierz was ministering along the upper waters of the Mississippi, chiefly at Mille Lacs, Leech Lake, Red Lake, Long Prairie, and Belle Prairie. This was also the time when white settlers were becoming attracted to Minnesota in large numbers as a result of treaties with both Dakota and Ojibwa which opened land for settlement.

Father Pierz was an old hand in the mission field, having spent almost twenty years among Michigan's Ottawa Indians. His countryman, Father--later Bishop--Frederick Baraga, Vicar-Apostolic of Northern Michigan, had invited Pierz to join him in his work and the young, zealous priest responded generously. He was aged sixty-seven when he left Michigan to assume mission work in Minnesota.

A public relations man of no little influence for his adopted territory, Father Pierz's glowing descriptions of Minnesota farmland reached many immigrants. In one brochure Pierz wrote,

The summer in Minnesota is more favorable for human health and for the growth of farm and garden produce than in any other country in the world. Rains are not frequent and rainfall seldom continues for more

than a day, and yet we are not troubled by drouth . . . though the sowing is late, Minnesota's crops ripen in good time and we have finer and more abundant harvests than any other region.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not they were enticed by such a description, over fifty Catholic German families settled in Minnesota along the Mississippi and Sauk Rivers by 1855 and Pierz's Ordinary, Bishop Cretin of St. Paul, gave his blessings to the colonization effort. Appeals went to Europe and to the eastern United States for priests to minister to the Minnesota white settlers as well as to work among the Indians.

The Benedictine Abbey of St. Vincent's in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, was the first to respond to these appeals. In the spring of 1856, five of its members came to Minnesota, settling in St. Cloud. The Abbot of St. Vincent's, Abbot Boniface Wimmer, visited the Minnesota foundation in the fall of 1856 and laid plans for a permanent monastery in the locality. He looked at land four miles out of the village of St. Joseph--itself eight miles out of St. Cloud--and found it suitable for a monastery since it contained much wood and pasture land. Father Colman Barry, the official historian of St. John's University, notes this:

Wimmer, practical and far-seeing as always, determined then and there that this land must be obtained. Eight claims were to be made, four in the names of the new brothers from St. Vincent and the other four in the names of Father Alexius, Frater Paul, Brother Benno and Brother Patrick [original members in Minnesota]. Father Bruno also had claimed another 240 acres near St. Joseph, 160 acres of prairie and 80 acres of forest, which he

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Colman Barry, Worship and Work, p. 22. From William P. Furlan, In Charity Unfeigned (Paterson, N.J., 1952), pp. 250-251. English translation by Father Tennelly of the BCIM.

felt would be ideal for a convent of Benedictine Sisters when they would arrive in Minnesota.<sup>2</sup>

Prior Demetrius di Marogna, the appointed head of the Minnesota foundation, obtained a charter for a monastic school in 1857. With the aid of John R. Wilson, a St. Cloud Representative to the Minnesota Territorial Legislature, he drew up a bill to incorporate the Order of St. Benedict in Minnesota and to obtain a charter for St. John's Seminary. The bill passed the Legislature on February 27, 1857.

In the spring of 1864, the Benedictine monks and their students moved from St. Cloud to a location near the present Collegeville station, there being too many legal problems to allow the expansion of either a monastery or a school. By 1866, the monks were settled on the shores of Lake Sagatagan.

In August of 1866, the monastery was raised to Abbey status by Pope Pius IX and that December an Abbot, with life tenure, was elected: Rupert Seidenbusch, who was to prove a staunch advocate for the Indians. Under his leadership, the monastery increased in buildings and members--monks and students. The Ludwig Missionsverein of Bavaria gave a yearly stipend of 2000 florins (\$860) as support.<sup>3</sup>

Abbot Seidenbusch concentrated on getting St. John's Abbey and college on a solid footing during his tenure, 1866 to 1875. But he did not neglect to minister to the needs of the growing parishes around the area. Nor could he fail to note the needs of the Indian

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

population as the indomitable Father Pierz was still on the move, begging for more priests to help him in this work.

In 1864, Father Pierz went to Carniola, preaching about the Indians and asking for help. A group of priests and seminarians, sixteen in all, responded favorably, returning with him to America. How was Pierz able to get such a remarkable response? Lacking any substantive evidence, one can only conjecture. Most of the volunteers were young men--in their early twenties--perhaps eager for the adventures of life in frontier America. However romantic their view, they were probably also convinced that they were needed for a noble work.

Among the volunteers was Father Joseph Buh, who would work with Father Pierz in central Minnesota from 1864-1888 and in north-eastern Minnesota from 1889 until his death in 1922. Father Ignatius Tomazin, also in this group of sixteen, became Pierz's assistant at Crow Wing. He would later serve as Pastor of White Earth from 1873-1878 and at Red Lake from 1879-1883.

Like Pierz, Fathers Buh and Tomazin became fluent in the Ojibwa language, learning it from the Indians themselves and from study of Father Baraga's dictionary, compiled during Baraga's long years in the mission field. Like Pierz, they rode a large circuit, ministering to white people and Indians, chiefly the latter, in northern Minnesota. Father Buh, anticipating struggles with the government over Church and State alliance, wrote to a friend in June of 1866:

The government ought to provide money for the missionary because of its treaties. Much money

has actually been given to Protestant teachers and ministers. I have spoken to the Indian Agent three times regarding this matter, but nothing has been accomplished.<sup>4</sup>

Several years later, his colleague, Father Tomazin, would get embroiled in quarrels with the agent at White Earth over this very issue--a situation which resulted in the ouster of both men.

In the spring of 1870, Father Buh returned to Europe, attending Vatican I Council and then going on a preaching tour seeking more priests for Minnesota. He returned to America in the fall of 1870 with seven candidates for mission work. Among them was Aloysius Hermanutz, not yet ordained, who would serve the Ojibwa of White Earth for over fifty years. He first stopped at St. Vincent's for further training and from there went to St. John's Abbey where he was ordained and taught philosophy in the college.

In 1875 Abbot Seidenbusch was named Vicar-Apostolic of the newly-created Vicariate of Northern Minnesota. His successor was Abbot Alexius Edelbrock. Under his guidance, St. John's expanded lands, buildings, monastic and student body as well as its mission reach.

As Vicar-Apostolic, the now-Bishop Seidenbusch was very conscious of the large Indian population, barely reached by the efforts, albeit heroic, of such priests as Father Pierz, Father Buh, and Father Tomazin. The total Catholic population of this area included 14,000 whites and 25,000 Indians.<sup>5</sup> Seidenbusch called upon the new Abbot

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<sup>4</sup>Sister Bernard Coleman, Masinaigans: The Little Book (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1972), p. 64.

<sup>5</sup>Barry, Worship and Work, p. 128.

to furnish priests for work among the Indians in northern Minnesota. A growing number of priests and religious were already at work in northern Minnesota, predominant among them the Benedictines, the Franciscans and the Sisters of Charity. At this stage they served 42 churches and 40 missions.<sup>6</sup>

Abbot Edelbrock was open to the Bishop's appeal for mission help and asked his Chapter for approval. Although the Chapter granted approval, there was much discussion then and later over what some monks termed "excessive activism." Abbot Wimmer had already faced this same charge at St. Vincent's when he branched out in apostolic work in both Pennsylvania and Minnesota. Some monks, at St. Vincent's and St. John's, felt that too much missionary work would weaken the Benedictine spirit and that the contemplative part of Benedictine life would be submerged into the active life.

To these fears, Abbot Wimmer and Abbot Edelbrock responded by reminding their monks that missionary work was never foreign to Benedictinism. Abbot Edelbrock noted that St. Benedict himself had sent men out on missions and that the long history of the Benedictine Order attests to a missionary impulse in response to the needs and call of the Church. The Abbot did, however, regret the scattering of forces and the necessity of priests sometimes living apart from community for long periods of time.<sup>7</sup>

Abbot Edelbrock was supported staunchly by Abbot Wimmer. Both

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<sup>6</sup>Coleman, Masinaigans: The Little Book, p. 88.

<sup>7</sup>Quotation from Abbot Edelbrock's notes of 7 May, 1889. Barry, Worship and Work, pp. 165-166.

men knew that, in any century, monasticism takes its identity and modes of expression from the cultural, political, and religious milieu by which it is surrounded. When Benedictine monasticism moved to America from its European origins, it necessarily underwent change; vast spaces of territory and length and slowness of travel were only two of the forces for change. Still, the visions of early American Benedictine founders were generally transplanted versions of European monastic practices.

By the 1850s and 1860s, American Benedictines evidenced a greater openness and willingness than previously to adapt to the American scene. However, debate still raged over the propriety of monks and nuns taking on external apostolates and yet remaining faithful to the Benedictine Rule. As Father Joel Rippinger, a leading historian of Benedictine monasticism, puts it:

. . . such qualities as horseback riding and a hard stomach carried greater weight than adherence to the community horarium and faithful fulfillment of choral prayer obligations.<sup>8</sup>

Oftener than not, the demands of a new land and an immigrant people made monastic custom and tradition take second place.

#### Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota

The Benedictine Sisters who came to Minnesota in June of 1857 would find themselves caught up in the same arguments as the monks, over active versus contemplative life. Mother Benedicta Riepp,

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<sup>8</sup>Joel Rippinger, "Some Historical Determinants of American Benedictine Monasticism, 1846-1900," The American Benedictine Review 27 (March 1976), p. 74.

superioress of the convent in St. Marys, Pennsylvania, sent the first group of Benedictine Sisters to Minnesota. They settled in St. Cloud for six years, teaching elementary school children.

In 1862, the Sisters began a parish school in nearby St. Joseph, and in 1863 they moved their convent there from St. Cloud which, due to the burden of financing a parochial school, had become increasingly hostile to them. The St. Cloud experience convinced the Sisters that some of their old world customs and rules would have to be dropped or adapted to a pioneer setting. Strict enclosure, for example, was impossible while teaching in a frontier school. As Sister Grace McDonald, the official historian for St. Benedict's Convent in the 1950s, describes the problem: "Playground supervision from the window or doorway was understandably a failure. Neither was proper prefecting of the pupils possible during religious services."<sup>9</sup> Enclosure was but one of many rules established for European convents over the centuries which were then carried to the new world. Inevitably, a clash came between European and American values regarding the role of the nun in American society.

In The Role of the Nun in 19th-Century America, Sister Mary Ewens traces roles and role-conflicts as they developed in the Church's Canon Law as well as in several Orders' constitutions. She cites the Papal Bull of 1298 and its reiteration in the 16th century Council of Trent as hindering the adaptation required of missionary sisters by the American milieu. The Papal Bull called for cloister and enclosure

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<sup>9</sup>Sister Grace McDonald, With Lamps Burning (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1957), p. 43.

for religious women, with few exceptions. This rule proved to be a major, perhaps the major, obstacle to apostolic work by nuns. Sister Mary Ewens writes that European rules for religious women

. . . were unsuited to American conditions and had to be changed if their apostolic work was to succeed. When adaptations were made, there were always fears that changes in details of the rules would lead to general dissipation and a falling away from the original fervor and ideals of the community.<sup>10</sup>

Bishops in missionary territories encouraged only non-cloistered sisters to come, wanting them to be able to staff schools.

The Benedictine Sisters in Minnesota found to be true what Sister Mary Ewens states,

Unfortunately . . . cloistral rules sometimes kept them from giving that public witness to the values of Christianity which would have broadened their sphere of influence, and from serving their neighbor in all his needs.<sup>11</sup>

The American frontier did not lend itself to the European principle of enclosure. The spirit of neighborliness was highly valued and the sisters' attempts at living enclosure was bound to alienate many of the parishioners.

Less than a decade after arrival in Minnesota, the sisters mitigated a number of old world rules. Breakfast was allowed, midnight recitation of the Divine Office was changed to four in the morning, and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin was substituted for the longer Divine Office on non-festive days. The hardships of

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<sup>10</sup>Sister Mary Ewens, The Role of the Nun in 19th-Century America (New York: Arno Press, 1971), p. 69.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

frontier life required that the sisters have more food and sleep. The Minnesota Benedictine Sisters were becoming as active in missionary work as the Benedictine monks.

By 1863 the St. Cloud convent numbered fourteen sisters--too many to find employment in the school. An offer to move to St. Joseph, eight miles northwest of St. Cloud, was accepted as was an invitation from Atchison, Kansas, to help run a school. Half the Sisters accepted the Kansas mission while the others moved to the village of St. Joseph in November of 1863.

The 1870s saw St. Benedict's Convent slowly but steadily growing in numbers and expanding in holdings of land and buildings. This made possible a greater outreach to neighboring and even distant parishes. In 1871, the Sisters took on school work in Rich Prairie (now Pierz) at Father Pierz's invitation. Under the leadership of Mother Aloysia Bath, prioress from 1877-1880, the small community supplied teachers to schools in Breckenridge, Moorhead, Minneapolis, New Munich, Bismarck, and White Earth. This outreach stretched the convent's personnel to the limits since, between 1857 and 1880, the professed Sisters numbered only 57 at their maximum. The handful of candidates for religious life generally did not go out from the Motherhouse.

From the 1860s to the 1880s, the majority of the Sisters of St. Benedict's Convent were of German stock, having come to America from Bavaria, Austria, and Prussia in the 1850s or earlier. One major criticism of them by the people of St. Cloud was their poor English, barely satisfying the state government's demands for certified school

teachers. This problem lessened by the 1880s and '90s as more and more English-speaking American girls entered St. Benedict's.

In age, these first Sisters in St. Joseph averaged 23 years, with one or two in their thirties and the oldest in her forties. The superior in 1877 was Mother Aloysia Bath, aged 28. Their youth and zeal stood them in good stead since very hard work was needed to support the growing ministries both in and away from St. Joseph.

Under the administration of Mother Antonia Herman, prioress from 1872 to 1877, 18 new members joined the community. The increase was a boon to a proposed academy or finishing school--in the planning stage by the early 1870s. An article in Der Nordstern, a St. Cloud German weekly, dated February 8, 1877, describes the opening of the Academy and its aims. The Sisters would instruct the students in both the English and German languages, drawing, embroidery, and give music lessons on piano, melodeon, zither, and guitar. Music tuition was fifty-cents per beginner per month and one-dollar for those more advanced. The article ends by informing those who wanted further information to write to Mother Aloysia Bath, Letter Box 34, St. Cloud.<sup>12</sup>

The teaching staff of the Academy was a very capable group. With Lamps Burning describes their academic background as being equal to that of respected faculties in most academies on the Atlantic seaboard. She lists the two music teachers, Sister Willibalda Scherbauer and Sister Bede Linneman, as having received their training in Bavaria and Milwaukee while other faculty had attended schools in

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<sup>12</sup>Translation of article in Der Nordstern, February 8, 1877, by Sister Grace McDonald. St. Benedict's Convent Archives.

England, Germany, and the eastern United States.<sup>13</sup>

Although almost all Sisters engaged in manual labor for many hours each day, the daily schedule was quite stringent--not much changed from what it had been in the 1850s in Pennsylvania. According to The Chronicle, written around 1915 by Father Henry Borgerding, the convent chaplain who was first appointed in 1890, the schedule during the 1870s and 1880s included the following community prayer gatherings:<sup>14</sup>

4:30 a.m.	Matins, Little Hours Meditation
6:00 a.m.	Mass
5:00 p.m.	Spiritual Reading
8:00 p.m.	Vespers, Compline

In between, the Sisters did their work, in and out of the convent proper, with teaching and farm chores occupying most of their time. But there were periods of recreation, too. In the time between supper and night prayers, there were walks, singing, card games, and fancy work for relaxation.

When the Sisters first arrived in St. Joseph, they lived in a small frame house (30 x 56) which, according to Sister Grace's description, eventually was combined with the already standing old church and school, forming a complex of rather dilapidated buildings. A new convent was begun in 1879--undertaken only after the Academy was functioning successfully. Funds came primarily from the Sisters' savings, and donations from parishioners and other friends. The combination convent-school, a three and a half story brick building,

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<sup>13</sup>McDonald, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup>Father Henry Borgerding, The Chronicle, ca. 1915, St. Benedict's Convent Archives, St. Joseph, Minnesota, p. 24.

was blessed June 29, 1882, although the Sisters and students had moved in on May 6, 1882.

In contrast with their rather precarious existence in St. Cloud from 1857-63, the Sisters sank deep roots in St. Joseph from 1863 on and were now in a position to extend their outreach. The late 1870s and especially the 1880s saw the Sisters staffing over a dozen parochial schools in Minnesota and Dakota as well as two hospitals, an orphanage, and two Indian missions--among the latter, White Earth.

When Bishop Seidenbusch requested personnel from St. John's to work among the Indians at White Earth Reservation, the Abbot in turn asked Mother Aloysia to supply Sisters for the mission. This she did, and in November of 1878 a trio--Father Aloysius Hermanutz, Sister Philomene Ketten, and Sister Lioba Braun--began what would be fifty years of work at White Earth.

#### The White Earth Reservation and Ojibwa Culture

It may be well before describing the White Earth Reservation and the Ojibwa culture, to digress briefly, and to consider the various names by which the woodlands Indians of Minnesota have been called. Gerald Vizenor, himself an Ojibwa, explains the origins of these names in the Preface to Wordarrows. He cites the name Anishinaabe, singular, and Anishinaabeg, plural, as being the one used by the woodland tribes in reference to themselves. White people gave them the names Chippewa and Ojibwa.<sup>15</sup> In this study, the name Ojibwa will be used consistently,

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<sup>15</sup>Gerald Vizenor, Wordarrows (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), p. x.

unless a direct quotation dictates the use of one or the other name.

The White Earth Reservation itself was only a decade old in 1878, having been established by treaty between the U. S. Government and various Ojibwa bands in 1867 with the first band of Indians moving onto it in November of 1868. An exact count of Indians in Minnesota by the 1860s is not available though William Warren, himself Ojibwa and author of History of the Ojibway Nation, first published in 1855, reports 5,000 Ojibwa in Minnesota during the 1850s.<sup>16</sup> By the 1890s, a census shows slightly more than 3,000 living on the White Earth Reservation. The promise of monetary support by the federal government and the promise of protection from the pressures of white settlers migrating to Minnesota made the move to White Earth more attractive.

White immigration to Minnesota was peaking by the 1870s, though most of the whites were still in the southern half of the state. Farmers shunned the northern half because of its inferior soil, severe climate, inaccessibility to markets and uncharted forests.<sup>17</sup> In 1862 the Governor of Minnesota, Henry H. Sibley, referred to the Red River Valley district as "fit only for the Indians and the Devil."<sup>18</sup> The Indians, by the treaty of 1867, received 1,985,120 acres of land in northern Minnesota--located in Mahnomen, Becker, and Clearwater counties, north of Detroit Lakes and east of the Red River Valley. Much of the

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<sup>16</sup>William Warren, History of the Ojibway Nation (Minneapolis: Ross and Hains, Inc.; reprinted 1970), p. 38.

<sup>17</sup>Dewey Newcombe, An Appraisal of Chippewa Tracts in the State of MN: 1855-65-67 (New York: Clearwater Publishing Company, 1956), p. 167.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

reservation consists of forests and swamps, though later descriptions praise it as being choice land.

A description of White Earth Reservation by United States Attorney, Marsden C. Bursch, testifying before a House of Representatives Committee in 1911, is effusive in its praise:

I have traveled over it only in part. . . . I have never seen a more beautiful stretch of territory than that embraced in the present White Earth Reservation. It contained lakes, and streams, prairies and forests, timber enough of white pine originally there to build all the elegant buildings that mighty have been needed for centuries to come . . . there were marshes and lakes wherein they could fish and wherein they could hunt and gather wild rice for their sustenance; and the riches of prairie lands imaginable, high, rolling, healthy--everything that could be desired for the last stand of a great race.<sup>19</sup>

Bursch's description of White Earth's beauty seems an instance of "romanticism." Descriptions by nineteenth-century observers--white people and Indians--agree there were magnificent woods and plentiful water but they also note that the soil was poor for agriculture. The land now, as it was then, is hilly and rocky in many parts with a powdery soil in some areas. Bursch may have been exaggerating the beauty of the reservation the better to condemn the stripping of the forests by timber companies against whom he was testifying.

In the post-Civil War period, the federal government forced Indian tribes onto reservations to protect the Indians from depredations of white people and--more importantly--to open up vast tracts of former Indian land to white settlers. By the 1870s, almost all

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<sup>19</sup>House Hearings, No. 1, July 25, 1911 on House Resolution No. 103.

Indians were on reservations.

Under President U. S. Grant, a Peace Policy was set up which fostered the civilization and Christianizing--often seen as synonymous--of the Indians. Father Francis P. Prucha, a Jesuit priest-historian and an acknowledged authority on Indian history, especially on Indian-white relations, describes the aims and purposes of the Peace Policy as follows:

- place the Indians on reservations where they could be untainted by frontier settlements and taught the arts of agriculture and other pursuits of civilization;
- punish outrages, teaching that the native habits and practices must be abolished;
- procure competent, upright, faithful, moral, and religious agents;
- provide Churches and schools to lead the Indians to understand and appreciate Christian civilization and be prepared to take on rights and duties of citizenship.<sup>20</sup>

The Quakers were the first religious society to accept charge of a reservation under Grant's Peace Policy. They were followed by others--principal among them the Catholics and Episcopalians. By 1872, there were thirteen denominations in charge of 73 agencies and almost 240,000 Indians. Henry Fritz, historian and author of a 1963 study on Indian assimilation history, states that "under the Peace Policy, the government approached the Indians of mountain and plain with a Sharp's

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<sup>20</sup>Francis P. Prucha, American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indians, 1865-1900 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), pp. 31-32.

rifle in one hand and a Bible in the other."<sup>21</sup>

At the White Earth Reservation, competition between Catholics and Episcopalians for control of the Agency was fierce. The Episcopalians received formal control of the Agency from the federal government in 1870 and, under the leadership of Bishop Henry Whipple, selected civil service and Church employees for the reservation. The Bishop, who called for a nationwide end to political patronage in the placing of Indian agents, citing the need for generous, god-fearing men, could not have expected the furor that would break out between an Episcopal agent and a Catholic priest at White Earth.

Father Ignatius Tomazin, arriving at White Earth in 1873, clashed repeatedly over the years with government Agent Lewis Stowe, an Episcopalian, accusing him of prejudice against Catholic Indians. The quarrel reached a high pitch by 1877. Father Tomazin wrote to Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior, complaining about Stowe and noting ". . . he commenced a systematic attempt to proselyte [sic] these people. . . . The agent--instead of representing the government--became the agent of Bishop Whipple."<sup>22</sup> Father Tomazin went on to say that he understood the Indians and never had any trouble until Agent Stowe came to White Earth.

Agent Stowe was no laggard at criticism himself. In a letter to J. Q. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, he wrote:

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<sup>21</sup>Henry E. Fritz, The Movement for Indian Assimilation, 1860-1890 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), p. 83.

<sup>22</sup>Letter of Father I. Tomazin to Carl Schurz, dated October 15, 1877. University of Marquette Archives.

The said Ignatius Tomazin defies the officers of the government and has and does refuse to admit me to enter his house . . . he preaches to the people who are naturally superstitious that their children will surely go to hell if they attend the [government] school. . . . His purpose seems to be to keep up an excitement among the Indians all the time.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the merits of each man's case, the discord on the reservation was becoming too great to be ignored either at the federal level and its Bureau of Indian Affairs or at the Catholic counterpart, the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (henceforth referred to as BCIM) in Washington, D.C. Both men were removed by their superiors--though Bishop Seidenbusch fretted at having to find a replacement for Tomazin who spoke Ojibwa fluently and of whose innocence to all charges he remained convinced to the end. Father Joseph Buh visited White Earth intermittently until the Benedictines arrived in response to Bishop Seidenbusch's pleas.

The trio of Benedictine missionaries--Father Aloysius, Sister Lioba and Sister Philomene--knew little or nothing of Indian life in general and Ojibwa culture in particular. Yet the Ojibwa were in the Great Lakes region and in northern Minnesota long before the white people arrived and had a proud history. In his book The Chippewa of Lake Superior, Edmund Danziger traces the coming of the tribe into Minnesota. He recounts their ouster of the Dakota (Sioux) by the 1740s from the Lac Court Oreilles and Lac du Flambeau districts and tells of a series of Dakota removals--from Mille Lacs, and then from Sandy, Cass, Winnibigoshish, Leech and Red Lakes.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Letter of Lewis Stone to Hon. J. Q. Smith, dated March 8, 1877. Marquette Archives.

<sup>24</sup>Edmund J. Danziger, The Chippewas of Lake Superior (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 37.

The Ojibwa tribe had begun intensive trade with the French by the 1760s, adopting their tools and weapons as well as liquor. Yet, to a large extent the traditional ways of life were preserved. Danziger singles out three major characteristics of this tradition: a semi-nomadic life, tribal self-sufficiency, and the practice of common ownership of land. All three would be challenged by the encroachments of white culture in the 19th century.

The mobility required by their primary occupations of hunting and fishing made for a rather loose political organization among the Ojibwa. Generally, a village--averaging three to fifteen families, usually related--existed only in spring and summer when the families gathered together from scattered hunting grounds. Each village was an independent unit from all others though marriage and/or blood relationships could bring about an alliance among them.

Within a village, position or status was usually based on kinship connections. People of importance and prestige achieved high position through their abilities as warriors, civil leaders, and shamans. In peacetime, the Ojibwa were loosely governed by civil chiefs and councils, but warriors who proved themselves by valor and leadership often gained followings of their own and played influential roles in times of danger.<sup>25</sup>

Within the Ojibwa families, there were clearly defined roles. The husband would provide food and protection while the wife did the day-to-day work--caring for the children, cutting firewood, making

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<sup>25</sup>Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 15, 1980.

clothes. The children, in turn, learned to perform, according to their sex, the tasks they would assume as adults: the boys to become warriors and successful woodsmen and the girls, the preparing of food, bearing of children, sewing and other of the myriad jobs of the home.<sup>26</sup>

Anthropologist Ruth Landes, author of The Ojibwa Woman, points out that Ojibwa women were much more free than the men in the variety of occupations open to them. She observes that a man would "betray" his masculinity if he ventured out of the bounds of accepted masculine skills--hunting, warfare, fishing, ricing--but that a woman's occupations could encompass all skills, making her more versatile than men.<sup>27</sup>

White people have rarely understood or appreciated Indian religious beliefs and practices. Among the Ojibwa, there has always been a veneration of a ruling Creator, one Great Spirit pervading all of life, albeit accompanied by a multiplicity of lesser spirits. William Warren, quoted earlier as author of A History of the Ojibwa Nation, refers to this Great Spirit as Ke-che-man-e-do and he describes the great respect and veneration accorded him by the Indians:

They seldom even ever mention his name unless in their Me-da-we and other religious rites, and in their sacrificial feasts . . . an address to him, however trivial, is always accompanied with a sacrifice of tobacco or some other article deemed precious by the Indian. They never use his name in vain, and there is no word in their language

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<sup>26</sup>Ruth Landes, The Ojibwa Woman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938; reprint in 1969), p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

expressive of a profane oath, or equivalent to the many words used in profane swearing by their more enlightened white brethren.<sup>28</sup>

Along with their belief in and reverence towards a Creator and intermediary divinities, the Ojibwa had an elaborate cosmology. This gave them a sense of sacred space rather than merely physical, human dimensions. Chronological time gave way to cosmic time wherein time is not clock-time but set by periods of important events such as the time of a hunt.<sup>29</sup> This concept of time was a source of much irritation to white people--missionaries included.

The onset of puberty was an event of cosmic time, vital to one's whole life and vision-seeking was, in turn, the central act at this time. In contrast to the primacy of vision-seeking by the Ojibwa boy, the Ojibwa girl reaching puberty gave this pursuit secondary attention. Nor did the community as a whole give as much significance to it for the girl as for the boy. Landes states that vision-pursuit was neglected in favor of the greater portent of menstruation. She writes,

Unquestionably, her puberty ceremony has a different import from that of the boy's. His is a hopeful striving for broader horizons, hers is a conscientious withdrawal of her malignant self. While obsessed and saddened with this terror of herself, she is supposed to seek a vision. That many girls do not secure any at this time is not surprising. . . .<sup>30</sup>

At the approach of puberty, the individual male would seek a

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<sup>28</sup>Warren, History of the Ojibwa Nation, p. 64.

<sup>29</sup>Carl F. Starkloff, The People of the Center (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), p. 102.

<sup>30</sup>Landes, Ojibwa Woman, p. 5.

vision to assure him of the guardianship of a good spirit. By means of an extended fast--sometimes of four to five days' duration--the boy would prepare himself for this vision. Anthropologist and specialist in Indian culture, Ruth Underhill, in a 1967 article "Religion Among American Indians" underlines the importance of this vision or dream. She writes,

We can hardly overestimate the value of this vision experience at a time when a boy's character was being formed. The lack of it in boarding schools seems to me to have been one cause of Indian demoralization.<sup>31</sup>

This experience was not the only important one denied to an Indian who was torn from his family as a child or an adolescent. As important was learning the tribe's and the clan's legends and history.

Through stories which were real in a mythic sense of tribal being, the Ojibwa expressed social and religious beliefs, teaching the oneness of life and the importance of goodness--not necessarily exclusive of mischief, such as in the tales of Nanabozho, a great manidoo<sup>32</sup> for the Ojibwa who combined in himself mortality and divinity. Grandparents were the usual transmitters of such tales, which, en masse, give a view of the world as seen by the Ojibwa.

Anyone wishing to understand Ojibwa culture needs to investigate their world view. Not knowing this view, missionaries--even the tolerant ones such as Father Aloysius--failed to perceive the depth

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<sup>31</sup>Ruth Underhill, "Religion Among American Indians," in The North American Indians, ed. Roger Cowen (N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967), p. 102.

<sup>32</sup>Manidoo or Manitou--a spirit of good or evil which is an object of religious awe or reverence.

of spirituality in Ojibwa beliefs. Anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, renowned for his research in North American Indian culture, did extensive studies of the Ojibwa world view and describes this world view and its effects on the everyday life of the people.

In summation, the Ojibwa world view sees all of creation as a whole, holding no natural or supernatural dichotomy. The concept of "person" transcends the naturalistic sense and human appearance. There is belief in metamorphosis: the change of outward appearance which, in turn, colors attitudes toward people. The Ojibwa thus caution against judging mainly by appearances. Hallowell writes, "It makes them cautious and suspicious in interpersonal relations of all kinds."<sup>33</sup>

Since all creation is one, the Ojibwa try to communicate with all of life. The main entry to this communication is through dreams. The ability to dream was cultivated from earliest childhood. Parents admonished children to "try to dream and remember what you dream." This helped prepare the child for dreams or vision-pursuit at puberty. Ruth Landes explains that

Ojibwa tradition created its intensest religious expression through this pursuit of a private guardian spirit who revealed (or yielded) himself in 'dreams' or visions. . . . In the 1930s, the visionary guardian was still sought and made to manifest himself among the Ojibwa I knew, against the heavy pressures of Christian society and civilization.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa World View," in The North American Indians, ed. Roger Cowen (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967), p. 227.

<sup>34</sup>Ruth Landes, Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1969; reprint of 1938 edition), p. 8.

In dreams, revelations are received which are of assistance in the daily round of life. Ruth Underhill refers to "visions" which will bring luck through "spirit power." Whether dreams or visions, they are means of direct communication with powerful "persons" of the other-than-human class. Spirits, good or evil, must be placated.

Shamans and medicine men are empowered to aid in achieving contact with these other-than-human persons. Little wonder that the traditional religious rituals remained strong well into the turn of this century. Hallowell explains the need for Shamanism:

The central goal of life for the Ojibwa is expressed by the term *pina-daziwin*, life in the fullest sense, life in the sense of longevity, health, and freedom from misfortune. This goal cannot be achieved without the effective help and cooperation of both human and other-than-human persons as well as by one's own personal efforts.<sup>35</sup>

The Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Lodge--which will be explained in more detail later--existed as a control mechanism for achievement of this central goal. It thereby also became a controlling force over tribal social organization.

Sickness of any kind was feared by the Ojibwa since, when it did not cause death, it threatened survival by debilitating the afflicted persons; therefore, the causes of sickness had to be sought in order to be freed from it. In "The Ojibwa World View and Disease," Hallowell states that

The absence of any reliable knowledge of the nature of disease, of any conceptualization of 'natural' or impersonal causes of events, made an interpretation of sickness a penalty for disapproved conduct

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

plausible as an explanation. It could be integrated with the functioning of interpersonal relations of various kinds . . . a workable psychological means was provided for reinforcing conformity with approved values, through the generation of fear, anxiety, and guilt.<sup>36</sup>

In a sense, disease is a sanction which enforces the Ojibwa social organization, discouraging individual deviations in behavior patterns.

The shaman and medicine man could exorcise sickness or even prevent it through their possession of powerful medicine: knowledge of remedies for illness, powers of prediction, and abilities to penetrate into past events--the latter generally by "confession" of the sick person. These powers caused others to have great respect for and fear of shamans and medicine men.

Shamans, persons having a variety of specialties such as divination and curing, were feared as sorcerers but were also sought for their skills. These skills were acquired by vision and/or purchase. Shamans practiced their skills outside the Midewiwin as well as through membership in it. Landes explains that

no Ojibwa was a Mide shaman solely. This societal aspect was only one of several other aspects comprising his complex shaman's whole, and his mide stature actually rested on his private, prior visionary accomplishments. . . . For the standard Ojibwa was trained to solitary mysticism, creative and impassioned.

Still, the Midewiwin was the collective power of individual shamans, an academy of shamans and, as such, membership was highly prized.

The whole of Ojibwa religion is much more than any of its parts, yet the Midewiwin must be given a primacy of sorts for its

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<sup>36</sup>A. Irving Hallowell, Contributions to Anthropology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 397.

pervasive reach. This paper highlights the Mide since, for white people at least, it was perhaps the most salient feature of Ojibwa religion. It was certainly so for the missionaries at White Earth.<sup>37</sup>

Anthropologist W. J. Hoffman personally investigated the Midewiwin during the years 1887 to 1889 at Red Lake and White Earth. He refers to the possible possession of poisons by some Mide, when he writes,

The Catholic missionary at White Earth [Father Aloysius] with whom conversation was held upon this subject, feels impressed that some of the so-called 'bad Mide' have a knowledge of some substance, possibly procured from the whites, which they attempt to employ in the destruction of enemies, rivals, or others. . . .<sup>38</sup>

Possession of one's own medicine became very important, since one could then receive protection from evil spells that would cause sickness or even insanity.

Frances Densmore, an avid student of Ojibwa customs at the turn of this century, refers positively to the Midewiwin when she writes: "The ethics of the Midewiwin are simple but sound. They teach that rectitude of conduct produces length of life and that evil inevitably reacts on the offender."<sup>39</sup> Personal responsibility for virtue is thus assumed as being key to a long and healthy life.

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<sup>37</sup>Landes, Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin, p. 72.

<sup>38</sup>W. J. Hoffman, "The Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society of the Ojibway," Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology (1885-1886), p. 227.

<sup>39</sup>Frances Densmore, Chippewa Customs (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1929; reprint edition, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1979), p. 87.

Hoffman lists four degrees or ranks open to those joining the Midewiwin. Other sources list eight degrees; there were variations among the woodland tribes. In general, the higher the degree, the greater, it was felt, the power attained. Hoffman notes the rarity of obtaining the highest degrees and the opposition to the Mide by certain categories of white people. He writes that

The third and fourth degrees are very rarely conferred, chiefly because the necessary presents and fees are beyond the reach of those who so desire advancement, and partly also because the missionaries, and in many instances the Indian Agents, have done their utmost to suppress the ceremonies, because they were a direct opposition and hindrance to progress in Christianizing influences.<sup>40</sup>

In this latter instance, Hoffman need only have observed the actions of Father Aloysius at White Earth to make his point.

Missionaries were most vehement opponents of the Midewiwin. The Jesuit Relations and much later accounts refer to it as "devilish." At White Earth, Father Aloysius and succeeding missionaries spoke out often against the Midewiwin. To them the Indian rites and corresponding dances were pagan and had to be stopped. In his memoirs, Father Aloysius tells of requiring baptismal candidates to turn over their medicine bags to him and of one time burning almost a wagonful of such "heathen" items. Converts who went back to these Indian dances and/or to the medicine man were refused the sacraments.

The federal government frowned on the Midewiwin but took no formal action to suppress it until the 1920s. At the prodding of

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<sup>40</sup>Hoffman, "The Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society of the Ojibway," p. 202.

missionaries and of the Indian Rights Association of Philadelphia in the early 1920s, Charles H. Burke, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1921-1929, instructed his superintendents to "limit the duration of Indian dances" and to put a halt to certain "degrading ceremonies." In a 1923 order, Burke "forbade persons under the age of 50 to attend these dances."<sup>41</sup>

Little of Indian culture was understood or tolerated by white people of the United States. The situation at White Earth was no different. It took many years of living among the Ojibwa before missionaries grew to know and respect much of their culture. Part of the problem for missionaries was a lack of any orientation as preparation for their work with the Indians.

In her dissertation in 1967 entitled "Attitudes of Missionaries Toward American Indian Acculturation," Sister Francis Mary Riggs lists what she sees as essential for orientation to missionary work among the Indians:

- 1) awareness of or acquaintance with Indian mission situations, particularly Indian cultures and the role of religion in each of these cultures,
- 2) a sense of the missionaries' positions as agents of cultural change,
- 3) adjustment to the idea of missionary adaptation to Indian culture as well as to the ideals and aims of Indian mission work.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Lawrence C. Kelly, "Charles H. Burke, 1921-1929," in The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977, ed. Robert M. Krasnicka and H. J. Viola (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 259.

<sup>42</sup>Sister Francis Mary Riggs, "Attitudes of Missionary Sisters Toward American Indian Acculturation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1967), p. 25.

It seems a safe generalization to state that few, if any, missionaries--Catholic or non-Catholic, male or female--possessed the above qualifications, even well into the twentieth century. This is true of the missionaries who worked at the White Earth Reservation from at least the 1870s to the 1930s, at which time a change in attitudes and in understanding of Indian culture begins to be evident. The Benedictine trio, Father Aloysius, Sister Philomene and Sister Lioba, had much good will and zeal but little background for their long years of service there. Like so many missionaries after them, they would learn much simply by living among the Indians. Through managing such institutions as church and school, these missionaries would learn which Indian behavioral patterns were amenable to change and adaptation, and which were not.

## Chapter II

### THE WHITE EARTH MISSION: 1878-1945

#### The First Missionaries and Their Experiences, 1878-1910

Accompanied by their respective superiors--Abbot Alexius Edelbrock and Mother Aloysia Bath--the three missionaries, Father Aloysius Hermanutz, Sister Lioba Braun, and Sister Philomene Ketten, arrived in White Earth on November 5, 1878. Of the three, Sister Philomene and Father Aloysius were volunteers; Sister Lioba not only had not volunteered but had expressed fear of the Indians, a fear which left her gradually during her first year there.

The sight which greeted the missionaries on that November afternoon must have been enough to daunt even a hardened missionary.

Sister Grace McDonald describes the scene:

. . . the party came in sight of the mission and started making the long climb up the road leading to the summit of the hill on which the mission buildings stood. . . . On the very summit of that hill was the graveyard; down from it on the sloping side was the log church. Near the church were the house, school, barn, and garden and down still farther in the valley was the spring. Even Father Buh, the veteran missionary accustomed to hard times, was aghast at the poverty of the place.<sup>1</sup>

Sister Grace goes on to describe the church as being unplastered and

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Grace McDonald, With Lamps Burning (St. Paul: North Central Publishing Co., 1957), p. 232.

without a ceiling while the house, also a log structure, was bare of any furniture except two rusty stoves. One room was given to Father Aloysius for office and living space, a second as a general living room and the third room for use as a chapel. The sisters' bedroom was the garret.

There were few necessary articles provided at the mission: ax, spade, hammer and furniture had to be made or bought. With the total sum of \$10 the missionaries had to provide food and utensils for themselves, having brought along only straw ticks as mattresses.

It was fortunate that the three missionaries were young and strong for that first winter tested all the mettle of their being.

Sister Grace describes some of the problems:

Before the winter had set in they had attempted to patch up openings and put in doors, but lumber was precious and had to be carried from the agency store two miles away. The openings between the logs and in the joints they filled with mud or cement of a sort, and they covered the inside walls with newspapers. Nevertheless, the wind blew through the cracks, leaving little heaps of snow in patches on the floor and table. . . . Sister Philomene became ill with pleurisy and Sister Lioba was weakened by a siege of the grippe.<sup>2</sup>

The sisters recovered and there is no further reference to illness suffered by any of the missionary trio from that time on, until Father Aloysius suffered a stroke in 1925. The three would remain at White Earth for almost fifty years.

Father Aloysius Hermanutz was born in Wuerttemberg, Germany, on June 10, 1853. He made simple vows December 29, 1871, and solemn

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-235.

vows January 6, 1875. His ordination took place on April 15, 1876. A passport description of him, dated July 24, 1896, describes him in this manner: "5 feet, 10 inches; a high forehead, gray eyes, straight nose, medium mouth, normal chin, dark hair, dark complexion--a 'regular face.'"<sup>3</sup>

Sister Mary (Hilaire) Degel who served at White Earth during Father Aloysius' last three or four years adds to the above description. She recalls that Father's eyes were weak, the result of a childhood accident, leaving him near-blind. In old age, Father was unable to read at all and had to say Mass from memory, using the Mass of the Blessed Virgin for all occasions, no matter what the feast.

Sister Mary describes Father Aloysius' character as follows:

I never met a more kind and generous person--always had something good to say about people, especially his Indians. He was highly respected by government officials as well as by the poor on the reservation. . . . He had a fine sense of humor and could laugh at his own limitations.<sup>4</sup>

Besides having these qualities, Father Aloysius was an accomplished musician, and he spent many evenings playing classical and folk music at the organ in the parish house. He occasionally played a mouth organ, too.

Sister Philomene Ketten was born in Luxembourg (Europe) on February 25, 1855, the family moving to America in 1857. She made perpetual vows in 1874 and was sent to Rich Prairie (now Pierz) where

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<sup>3</sup>Passport No. 15675, dated July 24, 1896, signed by Richard Olney, Secretary of State. (SJU Archives)

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Sister Mary Degel to Sister Carol Berg, dated April 26, 1980.



she worked with Father Pierz for three years. From there, Sister Philomene went to Minneapolis and then to Shakopee as a teacher from where she left for White Earth.

Sister Philomene was called the "Baby Sister" by the Indians, a reference to her height of five feet two inches and weight of 120-125 pounds. Sister had a round, cherubic face with dark skin and, as described by Sister Mary Degel, "dancing black eyes." A simple, childlike person, Sister Philomene was probably the most courageous of the three. Sister Mary writes about her:

In the early days of their mission, Sister Lioba was often ready to give up, looking for excuses to leave the place. Even Father couldn't see his way through the early hardships. At such times, little Philomene found a solution--a way of overcoming difficulties and held the three together. I doubt if the mission would have survived without her.<sup>5</sup>

When fire destroyed the school on New Year's Day, 1879, Sister Philomene suggested the barn be fitted for a school, although Sister Lioba was ready to return to St. Benedict's Convent.

Sister Lioba Braun was born in Wilmore, Pennsylvania, on August 2, 1853. She was professed on February 10, 1873. Between 1875-1878 Sister Lioba taught in St. Cloud from where she moved to White Earth. In contrast to Sister Philomene, she was called the "Tall Sister" by the Indians. Sister Lioba was five feet four and a half inches and weighed about 135 pounds.

Sister Philomene was vivacious and quick, in contrast to Sister Lioba, who was more reserved, having a dignified manner at all

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<sup>5</sup>Letter from Sister Mary Degel to Sister Carol Berg, dated April 26, 1980.

times. Sister Mary Degel and Sister Thea Grieman, who knew her in the 1920s, agree that

her manner was dignified, rather quiet--more on the serious side but by no means gloomy. When we young Sisters planned fun and mischief, she either closed her eyes or went along with it.<sup>6</sup>

Sister Lioba was a superb business manager and took charge of the mission funds. Because of his poor sight, Father Aloysius relied heavily on her for all business transactions. Her courage was every bit as notable. Sister Mary describes an incident:

She was fearless in the face of danger. I saw her standing with unflinching eyes before an Indian almost twice her size and who had raised his arm to strike her. She said nothing but stared at him until he lowered his arm and walked away without getting what he wanted.<sup>7</sup>

Sister Lioba's value to the mission is highlighted in correspondence dated November, 1898. Father Aloysius wrote to Father Stephan, Director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, asking his support against a proposed removal of Sister Lioba--who was principal of the school. His desperation at the thought of losing Sister Lioba shows itself in that he also sent a letter to Bishop John Ireland in St. Paul, asking his assistance as well. Father Aloysius blamed his assistant priests of being jealous of Sister Lioba and of wanting more control over the school.

Father Stephan's letter replying to Father Aloysius, dated November 11, 1898, says in part:

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

You have my hearty sympathy in the matter and my full approval of your stand in opposition to the proposed action. The change, if made, would be an act of rank injustice to the Sister and work to the serious injury of the school, and hence should not be permitted to take place, if it be possible to prevent it. I have written to Mother Aloysia to that effect and urged upon her to resist all efforts to depose Sister Lioba, and to insist upon her retention at all hazards at White Earth.<sup>8</sup>

In his letter to Mother Aloysia, also dated November 11, 1898, Father Stephan justifies Sister Lioba's continuance at White Earth. He writes persuasively:

Sister Lioba has been tried for many years and not found wanting. She has been one of the potent factors in bringing the St. Benedict's School to its present high state of efficiency, and making it, admittedly, one of the best schools in the Indian Service. To take her away now would, in my judgment, be disastrous to the best interests of the school and a rank injustice to the Sister.<sup>9</sup>

Mother Aloysia evidently agreed with Father Stephan as nothing came of the proposed removal.

In their long years of service at White Earth, the pioneer missionaries devoted most of their time and energy to the building and upkeep of a school. Within four days of arrival on the reservation, they opened a day school with an enrollment of twelve girls and three boys. A week later, the students numbered 40. Sister Grace gives some specifics:

Of the original 40 pupils, 17 were boys ranging in age from 6-17 years. Among the girls were children

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<sup>8</sup>Letter from J. A. Stephan, Director of BCIM, to Father Aloysius Hermanutz, dated November 11, 1898. University of Marquette Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Letter of Father Stephan to Mother Aloysia Bath, dated November 11, 1898. University of Marquette Archives.

of the Parker, Howard, Jourdan, Morrison, and Fairbanks families as well as the daughters of Chief Hole-in-the-Day.<sup>10</sup>

The school was originally a day school but the sisters also cared for several orphan girls who lived with them between 1878 and 1881.

The Benedictines, however, were not the first to open a school at White Earth. That honor goes to Julia Spears, previously a government day school teacher at Crow Wing in 1867-68. She gives an account of events in White Earth from 1870 on in "History of White Earth."

Julia Spears moved to White Earth in the fall of 1870 and opened the first school on the reservation, enrolling forty students. In 1871 an industrial boarding school was established by the government which enrolled 50 pupils, half girls and half boys. In 1873, an industrial hall was built, Miss Spears writes,

where the Indian women were taught housework, including cooking, sewing, knitting, carpet-weaving, etc. . . . Miss Hattie Cook, niece of E. P. Smith, the Agent, was the matron in charge.<sup>11</sup>

The domestic arts listed above would be a major focus in the curriculum of the later mission school as well.

By 1880, conditions at the mission were such as to discourage Father Aloysius. From the start, he had to share living quarters with the sisters and felt keenly the lack of space for himself and for the mission in general. In a letter to Father Brouillet, Director of the

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<sup>10</sup>McDonald, With Lamps Burning, p. 236.

<sup>11</sup>Julia Spears, "History of White Earth" in Escorts to White Earth, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Minneapolis: Free Winds Corp., 1968), p. 150.

BCIM, he complains gently about his situation:

I have a hard position here. I cannot understand why Rev. Edelbrock does not commence anything for me or the sisters. I am up now two years and nothing is done. I am forbidden to collect. I am not willing to stay all [sic] time in the same house with the sisters.<sup>12</sup>

But several months later, January of 1881, Father Aloysius received a surprise visit from the Abbot, at which time the Abbot promised help in building a new church and convent-school.

On July 11, 1881, the Abbot returned to White Earth and laid the cornerstone of the church, a building 40 by 80 feet with a basement. Less than a year later, on June 11, 1882, the church was dedicated by Bishop Seidenbusch, who also confirmed 250 Indians at that time. The bulk of the payment for these buildings--church and school--came from St. John's Abbey with a small donation from the Ludwig Missionsverein of Munich, Bavaria.<sup>13</sup>

The new convent-school building could accommodate 20 orphans. Classrooms, for both day students and boarders, were located in the church basement. However, the expanded space was insufficient for all the children whose parents wished to send them to the mission school.

In the fall of 1882, Sister Philomene took on an additional job: teaching at the village of Buffalo River, eight miles from the White Earth mission. For several months, she made the 16-mile round

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<sup>12</sup>Letter from Father Aloysius to Father Brouillet, dated April 20, 1880. St. John's Abbey Archives.

<sup>13</sup>A separate section deals with the financial affairs of the White Earth mission.

trip daily, riding the mission pony. In winter, due to deep prairie snows, the school closed. But while good weather permitted it, Sister Philomene discharged her duties at both White Earth and Buffalo River. At White Earth she was housekeeper and, as Sister Grace points out,

while teaching in the new school, Sister Philomene had continued her duties as cook. To get through her daily charges before starting at Buffalo River, she had to rise at three o'clock. She fed the half-dozen chickens and the horse, prepared the breakfast and part of the noon lunch, prayed the Office and attended Mass.<sup>14</sup>

After two years, the school at Buffalo River was discontinued. Sister Philomene then devoted herself full-time to housework and farm chores.

By 1885 the mission school, now called St. Benedict's Orphan School, numbered 27 children, of whom 25 were under government contract. This was almost capacity enrollment, although, according to Father Aloysius in a letter describing the situation to the BCIM in 1887, up to five more children could have been squeezed in.

The Office of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior set all regulations for the contract schools. Negotiations between the Office and the individual Catholic mission schools were mediated through the BCIM Office in Washington, D.C. The mission pastor and/or principal would send an application for aid to the Director of the BCIM, who, in turn, would secure the proper forms from and file the aid request with the federal office.

Contract school regulations required that the school provide lodging, subsistence, care, medicine, and all necessary facilities

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<sup>14</sup>McDonald, With Lamps Burning, p. 238.

and appliances for the Indian children covered by the contract. A further regulation, which caused a strain on the White Earth attempts to be generously inclusive, stipulated that no children having less than one-fourth Indian blood and no child under the age of 6 or over the age of 21 could be included under contract without special permission from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Depending on the individual Commissioner and the political milieu of the times, this permission was usually not easy to get. The White Earth mission school managed to support several under- and over-age children chiefly with the aid of donations from friends and from contributions by those Indian families able to give a little towards the upkeep of their children.

Appreciation of the missionaries' work was not lacking among the Indians of White Earth. There is extant a letter from the Head Chief Waba-na-quat--and signed by over 100 Indians--to Abbot Edelbrock in which he praises the Benedictines. He specifically mentions the sisters and their work in school:

That the good Benedictine Sisters did and are doing noble work in the line of education and otherwise is frankly admitted by all and there is a general sad feeling not only among the Indians and Half-breeds but also among the white people, no matter of what creed, to know that no compensation or encouragement whatever is thus far given by the Government to the Benedictine Sisters.<sup>15</sup>

The letter ends with a complaint against the government school, singling out its lack of discipline. The chief requests the Abbot

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<sup>15</sup>Letter from Head Chief Waba-na-quat to Abbot Alexis Edelbrock, dated September 1, 1883. St. John's Abbey Archives.

to forward a petition to the "Great Father in Washington" to give the sisters a fair salary.

Not only were the Benedictines educating Indian children at White Earth but in 1884 two industrial schools for Indians were opened--one at St. John's and one at St. Benedict's. About 50 boys were enrolled in the former and 50 girls in the latter. A government allowance of \$167 was allotted for each student in attendance. Many of these students came from White Earth while some were brought from other reservations in Minnesota and Wisconsin. About 100 students attended the St. John's Industrial School between 1890 and 1896. An equal number of girls attended St. Benedict's Industrial School.

The Indian Bureau had sponsored a program of such off-reservation schools with the specific goal of intensified training for the Indian children. Elementary academic subjects were to be taught along with a trade. Classes generally took half of the day while the other half was given to learning a trade. The boys were apprenticed to the shoemaking and carpenter shops and worked in the gardens, kitchen, and barns. The girls spent most of their time acquiring skills in the household arts.

It was through Minnesota Congressman Knute Nelson that St. John's and St. Benedict's had obtained funds for their industrial schools. But in 1896 both schools closed, lacking funds to carry on. The government gave notice to contract schools that appropriations would be cut or completely ended. From 1896 on, debate grew more intense over the legality of contract schools. But even had the funds been available, it is doubtful that either St. John's or St.

Benedict's would have been able to keep the industrial schools going; neither place had adequate space nor personnel.

With a government contract allowing \$108 per student--and only for those having at least one-fourth Indian blood--the mission school at White Earth was hard put to supply its needs. Quarterly reports list quantities of food supplies used by the pupils during each quarter.<sup>16</sup> The report of March 31, 1886, lists

440 lbs. fresh beef	60 lbs. lard
100 lbs. pork	50 lbs. rice
12 sacks flour	1/2 box soap
25 lbs. dry apples	52 lbs. peas
1/4 barrel sugar	5 gallons syrup.
25 lbs. butter	

The Quarterly Report of September 30, 1889, lists

300 lbs. beef	1/3 barrel sugar
100 lbs. bacon	75 lbs. lard
15 sacks flour	20 lbs. rice
1/2 bu. beans	2 gallons syrup.
20 bu. potatoes	

The Quarterly Report of March 31, 1890, lists

34 sacks flour	80 lbs. dried apples
2 bu. beans	1/4 barrel sugar
47 bu. potatoes	317 lbs. lard
24 lbs. coffee	675 lbs. fresh beef
10 lbs. tea	205 lbs. salt beef
42 lbs. rice	32 lbs. butter.
1/4 box soap	

These quarterly reports were signed by the school principal and countersigned by the United States Indian Agent at White Earth. There were few luxuries possible under the tight budget, though candy was occasionally listed.

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<sup>16</sup>Quarterly Reports of St. Benedict's Orphan School. St. Benedict's Convent Archives.

By the late 1880s, the White Earth Mission was pinched for funds and space. All attempts at penny-pinching and at squeezing students into smaller and smaller space could not alleviate the problems. Help came from an unexpected source: the Philadelphia heiress, Katherine Drexel, daughter of the millionaire banker, Anthony B. Drexel.

From childhood, Katherine Drexel had an interest in the fate of the Indians. A biographer quotes from an interview Miss Drexel gave to a reporter in 1932, attesting to this interest:

. . . she said that as a child she loved to read about the Indians in the early days of American History and that even then she had come to her own conclusions: the real reason Columbus had discovered America was to save the souls of the Indians.<sup>17</sup>

An invitation from Father Stephan of the BCIM brought the Drexel Sisters--Katherine, Louise, and Elizabeth--on a tour of the Indian missions; leaving Philadelphia September of 1887, they visited Rosebud Agency Holy Rosary Mission and Immaculate Conception Mission in South Dakota and Turtle Mountain in North Dakota. A second trip in the fall of 1888 brought the Drexels to White Earth and Red Lake on their way back to Philadelphia. Impressed with the work being done at White Earth, Katherine Drexel promised funds for a new and larger school building and also funds for Red Lake if a resident pastor and sisters would be placed there.

Construction of the new mission school began at White Earth

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<sup>17</sup>Sister Consuela Marie Duffy, Katherine Drexel (Cornwell Heights, Pa.: Mother Drexel Guild, 1965), p. 79.

in 1889 and by early 1891 was almost completed. In a letter to the now-Mother Katherine--head of her own religious order: Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Colored and for Indians--Father Aloysius tells her that the sisters and pupils will move into the new school on February 10. He adds:

What the sisters are in need of are school furnitures, especially desks--also some house furniture as benches for the dining tables and others. . . . Receive my and the venerable sisters' thanks for all the good you have bestowed upon our Mission. It is our sincere wish and earnest prayer that God might bless all your undertakings for the immortal souls in this poor world. Sister Philomene, the mission farmer, sends you special regards.<sup>18</sup>

The new school building could house, if necessary, 150 children. A three-story brick building, the school now boasted a staff of seven sisters, and Father Aloysius received an assistant as well--his brother, Father Corbinian Hermanutz, who arrived in 1892 but left in 1896 due to illness.

With the increased capacity afforded by the new school, the sisters could take in and touch the lives of almost twice as many students as before, though from the 1890s on, only girls were accepted as boarders. Many of these girls were classified as orphans--the term in some cases being used in its broadest sense. Many of the girls had one living and one dead parent but the surviving parent was unable or unwilling to provide a home. For others, both parents were dead or the children were rejected. State social workers often brought

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<sup>18</sup>Letter from Father Aloysius to Mother Katherine Drexel, dated February 6, 1891. St. John's Abbey Archives.

abandoned children to the mission--some as young as four and five years old. Typically, the age range for the entire student body extended from 6 to 17.

By agreement with the United States Government, the White Earth St. Benedict School became a contract school in 1892, being subsidized for each student in attendance. The per-capita payment averaged \$108 between 1891 and 1900--dropping drastically after 1896 as the contract system was being phased out.

The school became the heart of the missionary endeavors. Throughout the country, not just in Minnesota, there was a strong belief in the use of education as the tool for assimilation of the Indian into mainstream culture. This education was to be conducted in the English language and the curriculum was to be similar to that in white schools across the nation. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price, referring to language and labor, wrote in 1881:

If the Indians are to be civilized and become a happy and prosperous people, which is certainly the object and intention of our government, they must learn our language and adopt our mode of life. . . . The Indian must be made to understand that if he expects to live and prosper in this country, he must learn the English language and learn to work.<sup>19</sup>

There are no records in mission letters and other correspondence of the 1880s and 1890s that indicate a drive at White Earth to eradicate the native language. Of the Benedictine trio who started the mission, Father Aloysius learned to speak Ojibwa well enough to use it in

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<sup>19</sup>Francis P. Prucha, American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indians, 1865-1900 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 156.

sermons at Mass and in giving the sacraments. Sisters Lioba and Philomene knew the language on a rudimentary level.

A study of the long list of sisters who taught at the mission school from its start in 1878 to its close in 1969 shows a predominance of German background. Of the dozen sisters who served from 1878 to 1900, for example, ten were of German parentage and two were Irish. For the German sisters, as for their pupils, English was a second language. For many of these sisters, writing and speaking good English was a sufficient struggle without the additional burden of coping with the Ojibwa language.

Outside his schoolwork, for years Father Aloysius maintained a regular circuit of travel to outlying areas on the reservation: Pembina, 20 miles north of White Earth; Leech Lake, 60 miles away; and Red Lake, 70 miles. By 1900, and after, daughter parishes, founded directly from White Earth, included St. Joseph's, Beaulieu; St. Michael's, Mahnomen; Immaculate Conception, Red Lake; St. Theodore, Ponsford; St. Ann's, Naytahwaush; St. Ann's, Waubun; Assumption, Callaway; Most Holy Redeemer, Ogema; and Sacred Heart, Leech Lake. The days of Father Aloysius' lengthy trips away from the White Earth mission ended as more priests were assigned to these neighboring villages.

Father Aloysius' notes recall the hard times and the successes and failures of the mission activities during these early years. He writes,

We made no wholesale conversions among the Indians,  
such as we read of being made in Asia and elsewhere.

Soul after soul had to be gained by hard fight, patience, and prayer, and many of these were converted from their heathen views and practices only after years of hard work. The largest number of baptized by me on one day was 70 and this after a preparation of one week with the help of four catechists.<sup>20</sup>

As mentioned previously (section 1), Father Aloysius viewed the still-strong Midewiwin as a major obstacle to conversion of the Indians. Yet, conversion to Christianity was steady during the 1880s and '90s. A census of 1892 in the Duluth diocese put the total number of Ojibwa Indians there as 7,416, of which 3,755 were listed as Catholic, 315 Protestants, and 3,346 as Pagans.<sup>21</sup> For the White Earth Mission, the Director of the BCIM gave the following statistics for 1908:<sup>22</sup>

Number of Catholics in tribe: 1500  
 Indian catechists: 2  
 Baptisms: 9 adults, 69 children  
 Communion: 3662  
 First Communion: 49 (20 male, 22 female)  
 Christian Marriages: 18  
 Christian Burials: 30

There are no records or references of any kind to the number of Indians who "fell away" from Christianity after a time, though Father Aloysius hints that there were some who later returned to the Midewiwin.

Besides his priestly duties, Father Aloysius found himself

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<sup>20</sup>Xeroxed history of White Earth Mission by Father Aloysius Hermanutz, Summer, 1924.

<sup>21</sup>Sister Bernard Coleman, Masinaigans: The Little Book, p. 201.

<sup>22</sup>Report of the Director of BCIM (Washington, D.C.: Byron S. Adams Press, 1908), pp. 16-17.

caught up in some political squabbles in the late 1890s. In a letter to Father Stephan, he refers to two issues causing unrest among the Indians: land fraud and the full-bloods versus mixed-bloods' struggle over control of tribal land. He writes,

The future of our Chippewa Indians is at present dark and unfortunate on account of the unjust and outrageous steal of their property, their pine timber and timber lands. White civilization comes nearer to them, but not with anything good. . . . The Leech Lake Indians are determined to defend their rights with the last drop of blood. . . . The break between the Indians and half-breeds becomes greater and greater every day on account of the halfbreeds operating with the pine pirates.<sup>23</sup>

Father Aloysius was correct in his predictions of an escalation of trouble over the Indian pine land.

In the fall of 1898, the Pillager Band of Indians at Bear Island in Leech Lake, feeling cheated by the federal government and by white loggers who were removing large amounts of live pine instead of dead timber and giving less than a dollar per 1,000 feet, held a war council. Father Aloysius intervened, fearing a spillover of the uprising into Red Lake and White Earth.

An article in a Philadelphia newspaper chronicles Father Aloysius' part in helping to end the conflict. Part of his letter to Cardinal Gibbons--October 13, 1898--is reprinted:

I accompanied Indian Commissioner W. A. Jones to the Indian camp. In reality, I and the Commissioner are the only ones to assist the Indians and defend them against the Marshals, who insist upon arresting them. Our work proceeds slowly but progressively.

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<sup>23</sup>Letter from Father Aloysius Hermanutz to Father Stephan, n.d. (possibly 1896 or 1897). SJU Archives.

If the government would take the Marshals and soldiers away the trouble would be at an end and the Indians would be friendly again.<sup>24</sup>

The Indians accepted Father Aloysius' mediation and the affair ended soon after, with the government dropping all charges against them. But the causes of the threatened uprising were not addressed. The same problems--land fraud and quarrels between full and mixed-bloods--would reach a high point at White Earth, too, between 1910 and 1920.

Of more immediate concern to all the missionaries at White Earth between 1896 and 1900 was the federal government's plan to abolish contract schools. From 1891 to 1896 the St. Benedict Mission School at White Earth was only one of hundreds of contract schools which received subsidies from the federal government for each Indian student in attendance. Many schools had been receiving such aid since the 1870s. But heated debate broke out by 1890 as to the constitutionality of Church-State partnership on the reservations.

The 1890 Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, located in Washington, D.C., was one of many reports dealing with the issue of Church-State alliance. The report noted that three-fifths of appropriations for contract schools went to Roman Catholic facilities. At the 1890 Board of Indian Commissioners' meeting in D.C., two anti-Catholic Protestant ministers, the Reverend Addison P. Foster and the Reverend J. M. King, were quoted in full as calling for an end to contract funding and were seconded by others who wanted

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<sup>24</sup>"A Priest Defends Pillager Indians," The Catholic Standard Times, 12 Oct. 1898.

either a reduction of funds to the Catholics or abolishment of all sectarian funding as a violation of the Constitution. The Reverend Foster cited the danger of Indians falling under the control of those "under the subjection to one who sits upon the throne of the Vatican." He wrote,

It is a fact that, if they follow the teachings of their ecclesiastical leaders, they can not be loyal citizens of this Republic and in sympathy with some of its vital institutions. Is it consistent for us to allow to be taught in the Indian schools, at the expense of the government, doctrines that militate against the interests of the U. S.?<sup>25</sup>

The Reverend Foster's address reflected APA sentiments. The America Protective Association, begun in 1887, regularly attacked the Catholic Church as being the tool of a foreign power and therefore, un-American. Under the leadership of Father Joseph A. Stephan, Director of the BCIM, the Church fought back in court and through the press to defend federal support of denominational schools. But a succession of Commissioners of Indian Affairs ruled against such aid and were upheld by Congress in 1896. Direct funding of Church schools was forbidden, although the plan of Secretary of the Interior Hoke Smith called for the gradual phasing out of the contract schools. There would be yearly reductions of appropriations, with all appropriations ending in 1900.

In a letter to the incorporators of the BCIM--Cardinal Gibbons, Bishops Ryan and Corrigan--Father Stephan observed,

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<sup>25</sup>Address by Reverend Addison P. Foster, D.D. of Boston, 22nd Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1890, p. 99.

While the APA as an organization is virtually dead, the spirit that animated that institution still lives, and many of our public men in Congress and the Executive Departments are permeated with it. We meet it on every hand, and it is the main barrier to our getting justice in our efforts to Christianize and civilize the Red Man.<sup>26</sup>

Mother Katherine Drexel's "compensation" funds were the mainstay of dozens of Indian missions after 1896, taking up the slack where government and/or tribal funds were insufficient.

The White Earth School was flourishing in the 1900s. Enrollment remained at about 100, although sometimes reaching as high as 125. A letter in 1910 from the sisters to Father Ketcham, new Director of the BCIM, states,

We have our crowd of ninety-four and expect about ten more this week so when all come in we will be well-crowded. We have not many full-bloods but our children are nearly all orphans who otherwise have no one to look out for them and we feel obliged to give them a home also.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of these orphans generally spent their entire childhood years at the mission, not having homes to return to even during Christmas vacations or the summer months. The sisters, surrogate mothers and fathers, found themselves imparting knowledge and honing skills, for which, normally, parents and/or grandparents would have been responsible.

In her study, Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background,

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<sup>26</sup>Letter from Father Stephan to incorporators of the BCIM, dated Oct. 6, 1898. BCIM Records, Marquette University Archives.

<sup>27</sup>Letter from the Sisters of St. Benedict, White Earth, to Father Ketcham, dated September 24, 1910. BCIM Records, Marquette University Archives.

anthropologist Sister Inez Hilger writes about the training of Ojibwa children. They received no formal training at home but rather imbibed their knowledge from listening in, observing, and imitating. Grandparents as well as parents were primary teachers, handing on such knowledge as the value of plants, the making of wigwams, making of syrup, and the telling of tribal myths and legends. Nor was moral training lacking. Such values as kindness, respect for elders and sharing were paramount. Sister Inez writes,

Children learn one of the main customs of the Indians, namely that of feeding each other, from their parents. If a family had much meat because of a successful hunt, everybody was invited to come and get some, and the children saw this.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, the value of honesty was stressed. Sister Inez continues,

If a child took something from a neighbor, it was told to carry it back. If it refused to do so, the mother marched it back with the article. The child had to carry the article and hand it to the owner.<sup>29</sup>

These values were taught at the mission, too, albeit in a different environment than the children would have had at home. Other values stressed were self-discipline, self-reliance, cooperation, moderation, hospitality, and patience. All these virtues or values were fostered at the mission because the sisters and priests were Benedictines, formed by the Rule of St. Benedict--a rule which incorporates them solidly in theory and in practice.

Other points of compatibility between Indian values and

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<sup>28</sup>Sister Inez Hilger, Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institute, 1951), p. 98.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

Benedictine ones are an emphasis on immaterialism and on silence. Charles Eastman, a Minnesota Sioux, in The Soul of the Indian, has a section on these values. About immaterialism--or spirit of poverty as Benedictines call it--he notes,

The love of possessions is a weakness to be overcome. Its appeal is to the material part and, if allowed its way, it will in time disturb the spiritual balance of the man.<sup>30</sup>

Benedictines also view love of possessions as a weakness to be overcome. For Benedictines, poverty--defined as detachment from material goods--is a freedom, liberating the practitioner from obstacles preventing attainment of higher goals. In the monastic life, the highest goal of all is that of seeking God and material possessions are seen as good in moderation only--and need, not want, dictates their usage.

Eastman describes the value of silence, observing that the Indian

. . . believes profoundly in silence--the sign of a perfect equilibrium. Silence is the absolute poise or balance of body, mind, and spirit . . . its fruits are self-control, true courage, or endurance, patience, dignity, and reverence. Silence is the corner-stone of character. . . . Guard your tongue in youth and in old age you may mature a thought that will be of service to your people.<sup>31</sup>

The Benedictine Rule too gives high value to silence--or rather, to temperance in speaking. Through such temperance, an attitude of calm

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<sup>30</sup>Charles Eastman, The Soul of the Indian (N.Y.: Fenwyn Press Books, 1970; reprint ed., 1911), pp. 99-100.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-91.

reflection is fostered which, in turn, enables one to acquire a degree of self-control, patience, and reverence. One would think that Eastman had read and absorbed deeply the teachings of St. Benedict, a sixth-century monk--or that Benedict shared some visions of the Indian tribes.

The mission school was not untouched by the theories and actions of the federal government as the government pushed steadily the goal of assimilation for the Indian. This drive was very strong between the 1880s and 1930s, propelled by the thinking of such men as Captain Richard H. Pratt of the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania and Thomas J. Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1889-1893. Their aim was the detribalization, individualization, and Americanization of the American Indian.

Captain Pratt's school at Carlisle, which opened in 1879, revolutionized public opinion. The adaptability of the Indian race was demonstrated and assimilation was seen as both desirable and possible. An 1892 Manual of Rules for Indian schools summarized the purpose of Indian education:

The general purpose of the government is the preparation of Indian youth for assimilation into the national life by such a course of training as will prepare them for the duties and privileges of American citizenship. This involves the training of the hand in useful industries; the development of the mind in independent and self-directing power of thought; the impartation of useful practical knowledge; the culture of the moral nature, and the formation of character. Still, intelligence, industry, morality, manhood, and womanhood are the ends arrived at.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Rules for Indian Schools--A Manual (Washington, D.C., U. S. Department of Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, Superintendent of Indian Schools, 1892), p. 3.

In the name of assimilation, the Indian tribes were to be broken up, allowing the individual Indian, it was said, to develop freely as an independent and solid citizen like his white neighbor. Not all white people agreed with this line of reasoning. To many missionaries, such as Father Aloysius, disintegration of the tribe meant an invitation to some white people to take advantage of the Indian, cheating him out of land--more easily done since the passage of the Dawes Act of 1887, dividing tribal-owned lands into individual plots.

At White Earth, the Beaulieu family, Catholic mixed-bloods, were highly critical of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Congress for their Indian policies. In their newspaper, The Progress, first published on March 25, 1886, Augustus Beaulieu, publisher, and Theodore Beaulieu, editor, attacked the BIA for its arbitrary authority on reservations and the Congress for passing legislation favoring division of tribal lands. Federal agents seized the press and the two men were ordered removed from the reservation. But, several months later, a federal court decided in favor of the Beaulieus and they resumed publication of The Progress--which became The Tomahawk in 1889. This paper continued for years to be critical of the federal government's Indian policies.<sup>33</sup>

Captain Pratt attacked the missionaries in general for wanting to "isolate" the Indians. He wrote,

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<sup>33</sup>Gerald Vizenor, Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies (Minneapolis: The Nodin Press, 1976), p. 160.

In all my experience of 25 years I have known scarcely a single missionary to heartily aid or advocate the disintegration of the tribes and the giving of individual Indians rights and opportunities among civilized people.<sup>34</sup>

• Captain Pratt feared that the Indian would remain "savage" if kept away from association with "English-speaking and civilized people." He was not in favor of boarding schools--especially those on reservations, thinking they turned the Indians back upon themselves. In this attitude, he was seconded by, among many others, Commissioner T. J. Morgan who declared,

Education should seek the disintegration of the tribes, and not their segregation. They should be educated, not as Indians, but as Americans. In short, public schools should do for them what they are successfully doing for all other races in this country, assimilate them.<sup>35</sup>

Morgan was succeeded as Commissioner of Indian Affairs by William A. Jones (1897-1904), who agreed wholeheartedly with his predecessor's thinking on assimilation and favored government and public schools--day or boarding--over contract schools.

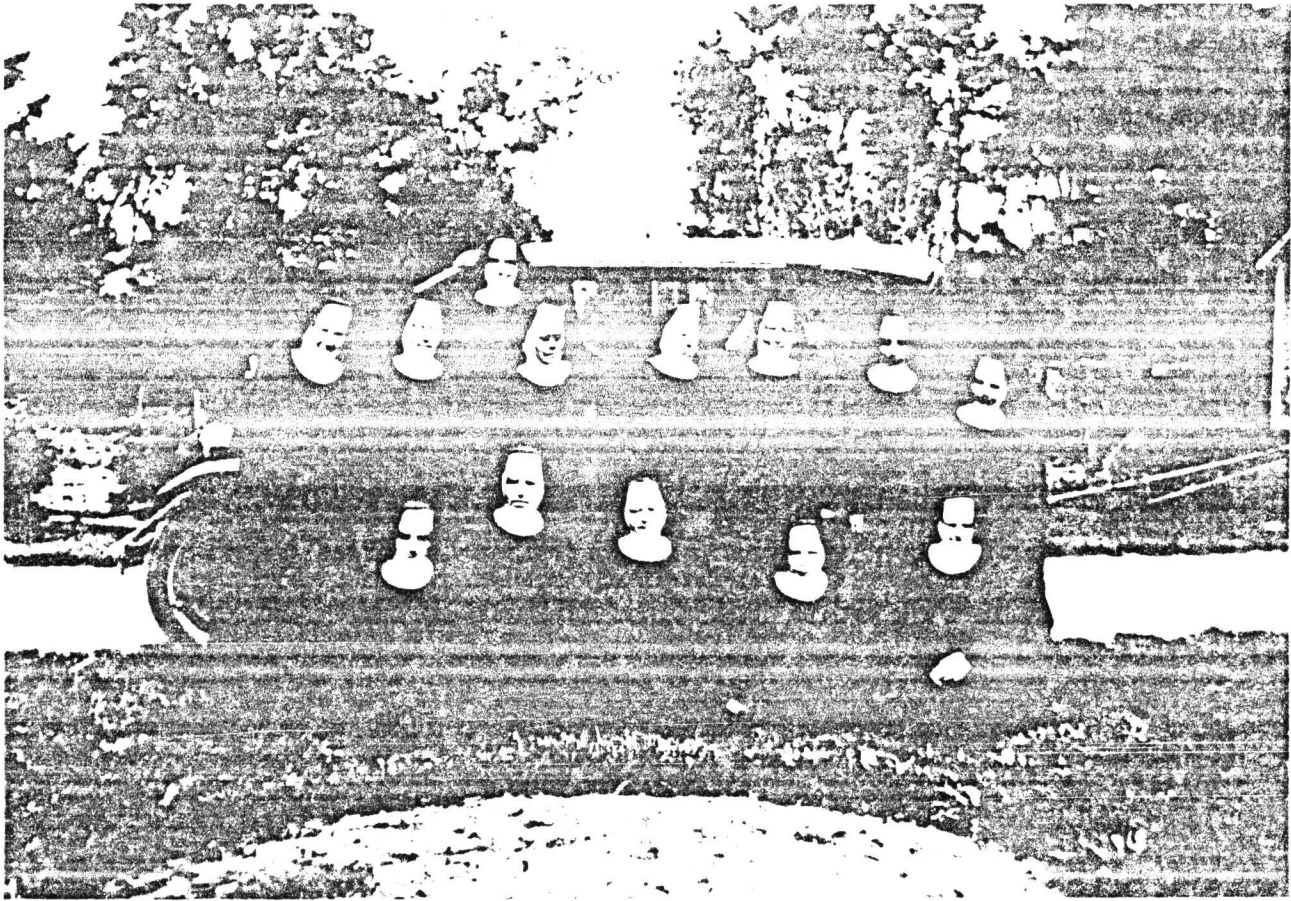
By 1919, a major attack on contract schools, and on boarding schools in particular, was underway. White Earth mission school, like so many of its counterparts, struggled to keep all its former services available to as many Indian children as possible. But the battle would be lost by the 1940s.

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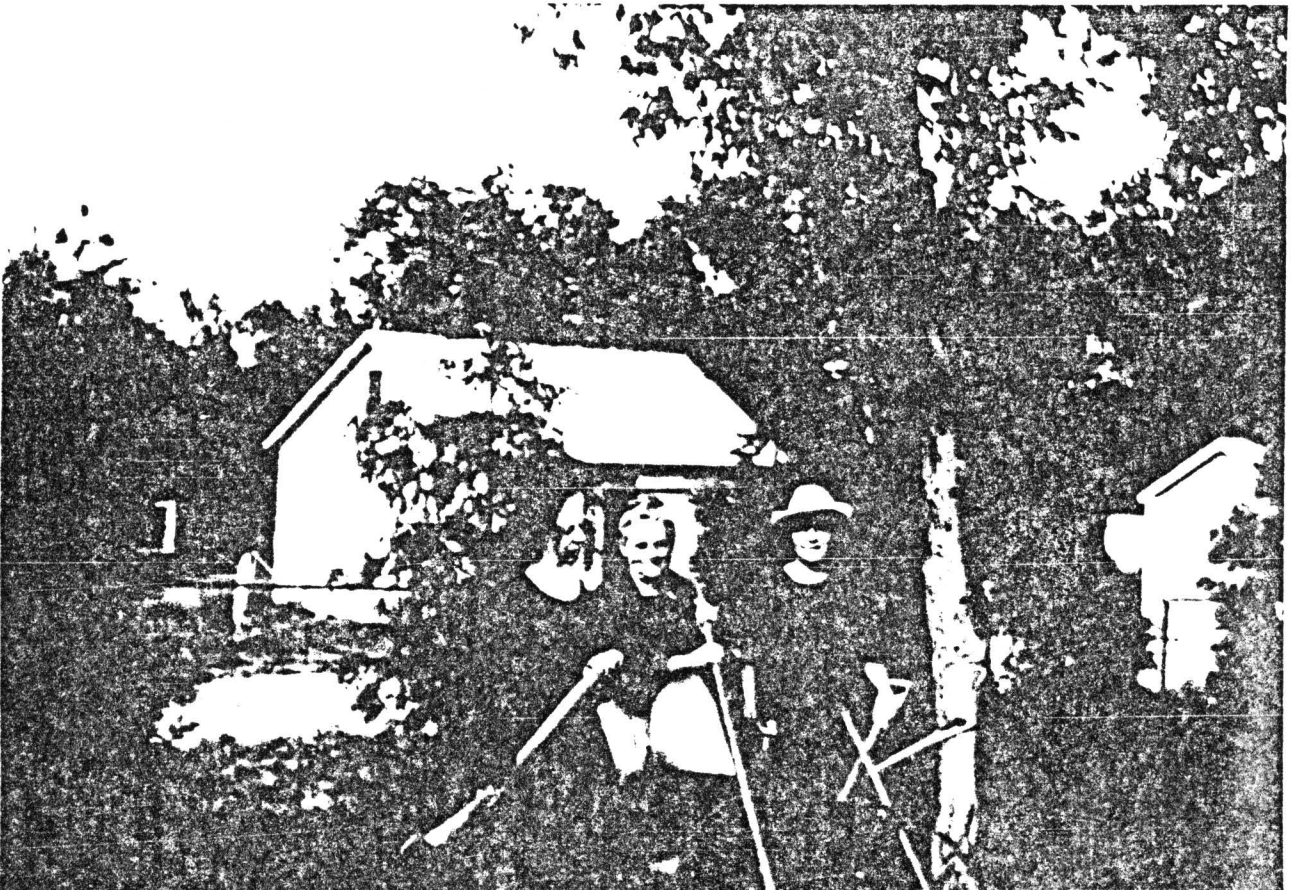
<sup>34</sup>Francis P. Prucha, Americanizing the American Indian, 1880-1900 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 263.

<sup>35</sup>Francis P. Prucha, "T. J. Morgan, 1889-1893," in The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977, ed. Robert Kvasnicka and H. Viola (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 108.

Sisters at White Earth, 1928



Sister Philomene, her mother, and a friend



Last Years of the Boarding School, 1910-1945

Today the term halfbreed is one of derision. This was not necessarily true of its usage in the 19th and early 20th centuries. For both white people and Indians of those times, a halfbreed was more Indian than not and in general ranked above the mixed-bloods who were less than one-half Indian. There is, of course, no scientific or racial accuracy to either term and there is more than a hint of racism implicit in them. Today the term mixed-blood--or better, metis--is accepted. In this paper, however, the terms halfbreed and mixed-blood will be used since they were in use at the time and by the people being described and/or quoted.

The number of mixed-bloods at White Earth was large enough in the late 19th century and early 20th century to cause a great deal of tension between them and the full-bloods. This tension is mirrored in House Hearings conducted in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1911. As the hearings brought out, much of the ill-feeling resulted from disagreement over handling of tribal lands. The testimony of John Howard, Superintendent of the White Earth Indian Agency, on Monday, July 31, 1911, sums up the problem:

MR. BURCH: Now, there is some degree of jealousy between the full-bloods and mixed-bloods, is there not?

MR. HOWARD: A great deal of friction.

MR. BURCH: What about?

MR. HOWARD: Well, the full-bloods claim that their ills and woes are the result of the actions of the mixed-bloods or a few of them, that they have been swindled and beaten by the mixed bloods. They claim that at the time the

land was allotted that they did not get their share of the valuable lands. This is one grievance.<sup>36</sup>

The land grievance was probably the main grievance among Indians at White Earth between 1910 and 1915. The Lake Mohonk Conference of 1912, a New York gathering of friends of the Indians, took cognizance of the difficulties there in their 30th conference report. The report printed an address given by the Honorable Warren K. Morehead entitled "The Lesson of White Earth." Morehead, a Minnesota Congressman, described his stay at White Earth in the summer of 1909 and his study of the negative effects of the 1907 Clapp Amendment. The Clapp Amendment empowered mixed-bloods to sell or mortgage land but kept the full-bloods as wards of the government, unable to transact any such business. Morehead described the situation:

The passage of the Clapp Act threw open the doors of White Earth to the hundreds of unscrupulous land sharks, timber men and others . . . in the course of a few months, about half the Indians had lost their property. . . . Reverend Father Felix Nelles and Reverend Father Allosius [sic] say that they notified the Indian Office, long before I went to White Earth, of the wholesale frauds practiced there.<sup>37</sup>

Morehead blamed the problem on a lack of strong, honest inspectors. Of 5,300 Indians at White Earth, Morehead counted only 501 full-bloods and viewed them as victims of an alliance between the mixed-bloods and white timber interests.

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<sup>36</sup>United States Congress, House Hearings on House Resolution Number 103, July 31, 1911.

<sup>37</sup>Report of the 30th Annual Lake Mohonk Conference (Washington, D.C., 1912), p. 55.

On Friday, February 9, 1912, Father Aloysius was interrogated by the House Subcommittee in Washington, D.C. regarding his knowledge of events and conditions at White Earth. Like Congressman Morehead, Father Aloysius thought the Clapp Act was disastrous for the Indians. He referred to the sale of lands on the reservation, permitted under the act, as the "storm" time. Father was asked the ratio of full to mixed-bloods:

Q. There are nearly all mixed-loods upon the White Earth Reservation--largely in the majority?

A. They are in the majority now.

Q. When you came there, the other class was in the majority?

A. When I came there, the Indians were ahead of the mixed-bloods. Then about 1887 I saw my baptism register, and I saw the Indians greatly declined, getting always less, the mixed-bloods increasing in regard to the families of children.<sup>38</sup>

Father Aloysius replied to a question on the classification of mixed versus full-bloods by saying:

I think it ought to be done, not only on account of the full-blood Indians, but there are lots of mixed-blood Indians that need the protection just as much as the full-bloods, because there are quite a number of them yet. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Further testimony brought out Father's belief that after the Clapp Act, the Indians had ready money and would spend it on liquor. He also noted the coming of the railroad as giving rise to towns inside the

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<sup>38</sup>United States Congress, House Hearings on House Resolution Number 103, February 9, 1912, p. 1257.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 1267.

reservation and, as a result, allowing the Indians easier access to liquor.

A defender of the full-bloods and accuser of the mixed-bloods was Honore Willsie, a journalist for Colliers, who attended a June celebration at White Earth in 1912. Miss Willsie was covering the 44th anniversary celebration of the founding of White Earth Reservation and in her article she pinpoints those she blames for the plight in which she sees the Indians. She alludes to "white scum" who have fathered the mixed-bloods. Willsie writes: "It is the mixed-bloods who have played Judas to the tribe, who have been the tools of the whites and the traitors of the fullbloods."<sup>40</sup> Willsie lays additional blame on the "brains" of the country as well:

Minnesota Congressmen put through the legislation that took the White Earth lands. Minnesota lumbermen have built their palaces with pines stolen from the White Earth Indians who still live in hovels.<sup>41</sup>

From an interview with Chief Little Cloud, head of the White Earth Ojibwa, Willsie quotes the chief's plea that the full-bloods be protected from the mixed-bloods. The chief points out the "Great Spirit's" displeasure with greedy whites:

In many ways the Great Spirit warns the white not to destroy the Indians. He warns him through fire and floods, through winds and lightnings. When the Galveston flood came, when your great city burned, and this spring when your great ship went down, that

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<sup>40</sup>Honore Willsie, "As You Do Unto These," Colliers XLIX (Aug. 1912):11.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

was the Great Spirit warning the white regarding the Indian. But the white will not heed.<sup>42</sup>

Willsie's article ends asking for justice for all Indians, at White Earth and nationwide.

In further public testimony about mixed versus full-bloods at White Earth, Chief May-Zhuc-e-ge-shig--a signer of the 1867 treaty establishing White Earth Reservation--was asked about the presence of so many mixed-bloods on the reservation:

POWELL: Why at the treaty time didn't the Indians tell Mr. Rice they didn't want mixed-bloods on the reservation?

CHIEF: Nobody would have said that to him, because Rice was a mixed-blood's friend and helped them along. . . . The government made a great use of this man Rice. . . . Mr. Rice was a fine speaker; he knew how to talk, and no one could get away from any agreement that he wanted to put through for the government.<sup>43</sup>

It was, however, only after the Dawes Act of 1887, which permitted Indians to hold title land individually, that the ratio of full to mixed-bloods became a major issue.

There was much confusion--on the part of white people--over the definition of what constituted full and mixed-bloods. The testimony of Edward B. Linnen, Chief Inspector for the United States BIA, on December 5, 1914, underlines the issue. He reports on the land fraud at White Earth and gives as an aim of his investigation to determine who were the full-bloods and minors able to part title and to sell

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>43</sup>Ransom Judd Powell Papers, April 1914, Ransom J. Powell Papers P725, Minnesota Historical Society, p. 754.

lands. Numerous Indians were questioned as to those factors which denoted degree of Indianness. Factors such as color of complexion and hair, type of clothing worn, and lifestyle were mentioned most often.

The evidence points heavily to the fact that less than one-third of the Indians at White Earth were full-bloods after 1900. This was important to both government and the Indians because only mixed-bloods could sell land and the government subsidies to White Earth were parcelled out according to degree of Indianness.

On the White Earth Quarterly school records, there was a column which had to be filled in each time, giving the number of students in attendance and their degree of Indian blood. For example, a report for Fall 1923 shows the following:<sup>44</sup>

REPORT OF ATTENDANCE, QUARTER ENDING SEPT. 30, 1923  
Total of Students: 115

Full-bloods	17
Three-quarters	15
One-half	42
One-eighth	9
Less than one-eighth	2

Out of 115 students, only 32 were more than half-Indian. Regulations for contract schools allowed government aid only for those at least one-fourth Indian. In 1910 the first official roll was made, giving blood status of each Indian--and subsequent rolls were the object of much fighting on and off the reservation.

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<sup>44</sup>"Report of Attendance at St. Benedict's School in White Earth, Minnesota," Quarter Ending September 30, 1923. (Typewritten) St. Benedict's Convent Archives.

Long before the missionaries came to the reservation, the Ojibwa had intermarried with whites, mainly French fur-traders. At least six generations of intermarriage had occurred by 1900. Whites soon discovered they could turn mixed and full-bloods against one another, breaking up tribal solidarity. In reality, the mixed-bloods complained most against white ways but the full-bloods viewed them as allies of the whites and not to be trusted. The Dawes Act exacerbated this already troublesome state of affairs.

By terms of the Dawes Act, male heads of families received 160 acres of land while single adult males, women, and children received anywhere from 140 down to 40 acres. Full-bloods could lease but not sell their allotments. Careful records were kept of the number of mixed and full-bloods on the reservation, the government standing to gain more from mixed than from full-bloods.

Mission records at White Earth show that through all the years of its existence the school enrolled many more mixed-bloods than full-bloods. There is no evidence that this fact made any difference in the day-to-day treatment of the students. The missionaries make no mention of having positive or negative attitudes towards either group. One would be hard put to find any negative remarks about the White Earth Indians by the missionaries, certainly not by the pioneer trio.

During the 1920s, the mission school was usually staffed by 17 sisters, the largest number ever committed to the school. A few sisters were holdovers from the World War I years and before but most were new to the mission. Father Aloysius, Sister Lioba, and Sister Philomene were still active--though slowing down considerably at this

time. By 1928, all three were retired.

Although there had been rumblings by the government since the late 19th century against reservation boarding schools, most of the schools for Indians throughout the United States were still boarding schools, though the public day schools were gaining in number. Missionaries favored boarding schools above day schools mainly for the extended control they afforded over the Indian children. It was believed that immersing the children in the mission and white-milieu 24 hours out of every 24 would insure the taking on of Christian and civilized ways. Returning home each day could, on the other hand, undo what was being taught. On this basis there were few vacation times allowed--sometimes Christmas vacation had to be spent at the mission even by non-orphans.

Father Aloysius explained his concept of the boarding school in a letter to a patron, Miss Elizabeth Gurney, Chairwoman of the Committee on Indian Welfare, part of the Minnesota State Federation of Women's Clubs. He stated,

In my 44 years of life among the Indians, I find that the boarding school is the best way and we obtain better results in educating the Indian child. They not only receive mental training, but are taught habits of cleanliness, health, and whatever is necessary to make of them good citizens.<sup>45</sup>

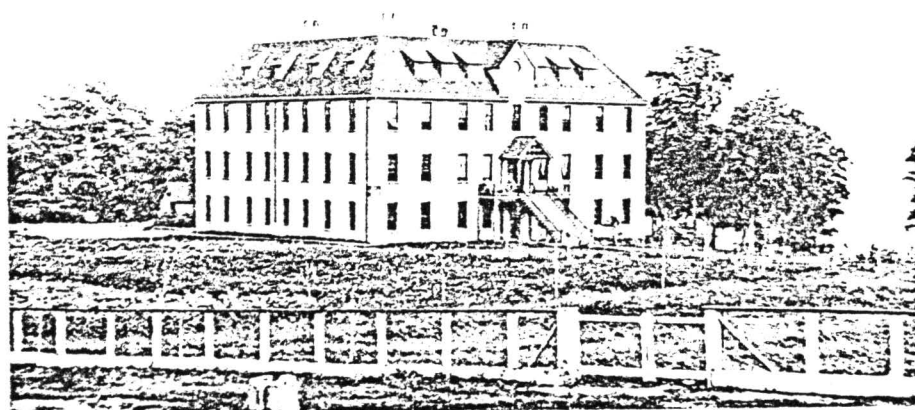
There are few indications that any of the mission children ran away but some did and, of those who did not, surely many experienced homesickness. Sister Ladislaus Twardowski, who taught at White Earth

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<sup>45</sup>Letter from Father Aloysius Hermanutz to Miss Elizabeth Gurney, 1922. SBCA.



Father Aloysius Hermanutz with friends at White Earth, MN, 1928



St. Benedict's Mission School, White Earth, MN, 1892.

for 31 years--from 1910-1940 and again from 1944-1945--observed:

Parents have a great love for their children and the little ones are very fond of their parents. This is very evident when the children start school. It is heartbreaking for them to leave their homes even though it might be a poor hut. Many tears are shed the first days of school because of homesickness. . . . After they are in school awhile, they learn to love it and enjoy the companionship of other children who may have at first been complete strangers.<sup>46</sup>

Since Sister Ladislaus did not date her statement, it is not clear whether or not she is referring only to boarders or to day students as well. But it is not hard to believe that the sentiments are descriptive of all or most of the Indian children.

There was little time given for such feelings as homesickness. An article in the Indian Sentinel, a BCIM publication of August, 1911, gives the schedule of a typical day at the White Earth mission school:

6:00 a.m.	Rise
6:30 a.m.	Mass, Breakfast
7:30	Work detail
8:30	Classes
10:15	Recess
12:00	Lunch
1:15	Classes
2:15	Recess for lower grades
3:30	End of school, recreation begins
4:30	Needlework and chores
6:00	Supper, recreation
7:30	Bed for younger children, study for older children
8:30	Bed for older children

With slight variations, this schedule was followed for over 40 years.

Much more than the three R's was taught at the school. Good homemaking skills were a major goal. The older girls were taught to

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<sup>46</sup>Written statement by Sister Ladislaus Twardowski, n.d.  
SBCA.

prepare meals, to can food, to wash and iron clothes, and even to butcher hogs. Sister Mary Degel describes the latter:

Butchering was always a great time. We killed as many as 40 hogs at one time. There were tubs of sausage meat ground and ready for the casings by evening. . . . After the work was done, the cook fried pans of sausage--all everyone could eat and what fun we had.<sup>47</sup>

By the late 1930s, a home economics cottage was built on the mission grounds where the older students could rotate weeks in learning the various jobs of running a home. Interestingly, the cottage was built on the unpretentious scale of a typical government-built Indian home of the 1930s and '40s: three rooms and no running water. The students were to cope with problems facing any Indian woman on the reservation. After 1946 this cottage was used as a home for the pastor and his assistant, fire having destroyed the rectory.

Vocational training for Indians had received heavy stress from at least 1900 on--so much so that, by the 1920s, a government study took alarm at what seemed an over-emphasis on manual labor. Charles Lusk, Secretary of the BCIM, warned Father Aloysius in a letter, dated June of 1923, that the government was critical of a Catholic boarding school in South Dakota for putting too much emphasis on industrial labor rather than on academic work.<sup>48</sup> He wanted Father Aloysius to see that a balance was kept between the two branches of learning. Father Aloysius replied, agreeing that the Indian students

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<sup>47</sup>Letter from Sister Mary Degel to Sister Carol Berg, dated April 10, 1980.

<sup>48</sup>Letter from Charles Lusk to Father Aloysius Hermanutz, dated June 5, 1923. St. John's Abbey Archives.

should attend classes most of the day; manual labor must not take precedence over academics.

A succession of Commissioners of Indian Affairs issued periodic instructions to Indian agents and school superintendents throughout the United States concerning the type and quantity of coursework in public schools. An outline of Courses of Study was sent out, suggesting subject matter and time assignments for each, divided differently for day schools and boarding schools. The following is a sample from the 1915 course outline for the fifth and sixth grades in boarding schools:<sup>49</sup>

#### FIFTH GRADE:

General Exercises.....	Assembly once each week
(25 minutes)	Current events once each week
	Music once each week
	Civics once each week
	Conversational and oral exercises
	(five 20-minute lessons per week)
	Reading--five 20-minute lessons
	per week
English.....	
(60 minutes)	Language--two 20-minute lessons
	per week
	Spelling--three 20-minute lessons
	per week
Arithmetic.....	
(30 minutes)	
Geography.....	3 lessons per week
Physiology and Hygiene	2 lessons per week
Writing and Drawing	
(25 minutes)	
Breathing Exercises	
(10 minutes)	

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<sup>49</sup>Tentative Course of Study, for United States Indian Schools, 1915. Superintendent of Indian Schools, Washington, D.C., pp. 20-21.

Industrial Work.....	Instruction, 30 minutes
(240 minutes)	Production, 210 minutes
Physical Training....	Military and gymnastic drill,
(60 minutes)	two or three times per week

## SIXTH GRADE:

	Assembly once each week
General Exercises.....	Current events once each week
(25 minutes)	Music, once each week
	Civics, once each week
	Conversational and oral exercises
	(five 20-minute lessons per week)
	Reading--five 20-minute lessons
	per week
English.....	
(60 minutes)	Language--two 20-minute lessons
	per week
	Spelling--three 20-minute lessons
	per week
Arithmetic.....	
(30 minutes)	
Geography.....	3 lessons per week
Physiology and Hygiene	2 lessons per week
History.....	3 lessons per week

The rest of the program is the same as for the 5th grade. The addition of History in the sixth grade is the only difference in the two programs. It can readily be seen that English, Geography, and History are given priority as subject-matter, certainly if amount of time is considered.

Under History, the major emphasis was given to inculcating patriotism. Commissioner T. J. Morgan, already in the 1890s, had enjoined:

. . . the 'stars and stripes' should be a familiar object and students should be taught to reverence the flag as a symbol of their nation's power and protection. . . . Patriotic songs should be taught to the pupils. . . . National holidays--Washington's Birthday, Declaration Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas--should be observed with appropriate

exercises in all Indian schools.<sup>50</sup>

To Morgan and to most Commissioners who followed him, the Indians were to be Americans first and Indians second, destined for absorption into the national life.

Sister Mary Degel describes how the Catholic school at White Earth met the task of teaching patriotism:

Every classroom had a flag displayed in the front of the room . . . every morning after prayers the Pledge of Allegiance was recited. National holidays--especially Washington's and Lincoln's--were celebrated with patriotic programs given by the students. . . . Love of country and loyalty to it were stressed in history classes. On Decoration Day, the entire group walked in procession to the cemetery--nearly a mile away--praying along the way for those who died for our country. They decorated the soldiers' graves.<sup>51</sup>

Skimming through issues of the school paper from the 1930s and 1940s, one can reasonably generalize that patriotism was a major topic. Essays on American Presidents and other heroes are in great abundance and reached a peak in the war years of the 1940s. The 4-H Club, in particular, emphasized doing one's patriotic duty: saving coupons, making bandages, and doing sundry other acts appropriate to children in a nation at war.

The emphasis on patriotism was meant to divest Indians of their own habits and customs and convert them into 100% Americans on the Anglo-Saxon model. From the 1890s on, Commissioners of Indian

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<sup>50</sup>Francis P. Prucha, Americanizing the American Indian (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 258.

<sup>51</sup>Letter from Sister Mary Degel to Sister Carol Berg, dated April 10, 1980.

Affairs had insisted on weaning the Indian from his tribal history and beliefs. But the 1930s saw a change of direction on the part of the BIA in its attitude towards the treatment of Indians.

A new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier, in office from 1933-1945, championed the concept of cultural pluralism over that of assimilation. He favored allowing the Indians to keep whatever of their customs and traditions did not hinder them from improving their status economically, politically, or socially. Even before the 1930s, Collier had been a student and admirer of Indian culture.

In 1923, the American Indian Defense Association was formed for the purpose of lobbying to improve the administration of federal Indian policy. John Collier served as executive secretary of the Association, and, along with all its membership, was pleased and encouraged when the Meriam Report came out.

Secretary of the Interior, Hubert Work, had commissioned a study in 1926 to determine conditions among the Indian people and the effectiveness of federal administration. The committee report, named after its chairman, Lewis Meriam, was completed in 1928, and gives detailed descriptions and analyses of specific programs in the major areas of life. In its conclusions, the Meriam Report listed two principal reasons for the "Indian problem": poverty, resulting from destruction of the traditional economy; and ineffective administration, resulting from inadequately trained personnel. Section XIV of the report deals exclusively with missionary activities among the Indians and parts of it are pertinent to this paper.

The report chides the missionaries for non-utilization of Indian religion and ethics. It states,

Knowing little of Indian religion or life, many missionaries begin on the erroneous theory that it is first of all necessary to destroy what the Indian has, rather than to use what he has as a starting point for something else.<sup>52</sup>

This rebuke could serve as an indictment for decades of American government and non-government treatment of the Indians. On the other hand, the report salutes the missionary activities, notwithstanding mistakes, when it notes that mission activities "represent by far the largest and most important privately supported humanitarian effort made by the white race in behalf of the Indians."<sup>53</sup>

In this same vein, the report's outlook for the Catholic Indian missions is quite positive. In comparison with Protestant and the purely government-run Indian agencies, the report sees Catholic missions as having an optimism born of a long-range view, being less isolated, more highly organized, and more tolerant of things Indian. A last mild criticism, however, involves the "failure to regard the work of the able missionary as a profession rather than as a mere vocation."<sup>54</sup>

A Public Works Appropriation in 1934 added funds to the operating budget of the Indian Bureau which aided in construction of

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<sup>52</sup>Lewis Meriam and Staff, The Problem of Indian Administration (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), p. 398.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 826.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 839.

schools, roads, and sewage systems on many reservations. A separate Civilian Conservation Corps (the Indian Emergency Conservation Corps) aimed at training Indians to be carpenters, engineers, and mechanics. As Margaret Szaz puts it,

Although the economic conditions of the Depression were scarcely new to the Indians, the fact that they affected the mainstream society finally moved the federal government to action. The Indians benefited not because their plight was unique but because they were part of a national plight.<sup>55</sup>

Further government action in the 1930s favorable to the Indians were the Johnson O'Malley Act of 1934--which gave states more control over funds for and administration of tribes within their boundaries--and the creation of an Indian Arts and Crafts Board in 1935. This latter board was one of Collier's pet projects.

The Indian Arts and Crafts Board encouraged the revival of native arts, both on and off the reservation. The board worked with craft guilds on the reservations which served as training centers for local artists and craftsmen. It then provided a direct market outlet for the finished products. Funds were made available for expansion of art courses in the regular schools and special schools were set up for advancement of the most promising and skilled native craftsmen.

At White Earth, Sister Hermina Fleschhacker was in charge of the St. Benedict Indian School from 1939 to 1944. Under her leadership, the sisters began to study and practice Indian crafts in earnest. Earlier, a few sisters had shown appreciation for such crafts

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<sup>55</sup>Margaret Szaz, Education and the American Indian: 1928-1973 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), p. 42.

and had attempted to study them but now there was a concerted effort to do so. Mrs. Critt, an Ojibwa, came once a week to teach beadwork to the sisters who, in turn, taught it to their pupils. Sister Mary Degel was one of a few school personnel who also learned to tap the maple trees for syrup and then took pupils along to teach them.

By the 1940s, the sisters were offering weaving courses to both the school children and to those adult women who wanted to learn or re-learn this art. Some looms were bought store-made but at least one was built for the school by a brother at St. John's Abbey. A letter from Father Tennelly, Director of the BCIM, to Sister Hermina in 1943 alludes to this focus on native arts, especially the weaving. He writes,

You ask me what I think about your plan of trying to interest the Indian women in weaving. In my opinion this should be a very good thing to do. I believe that they will find a ready market for good work. This will bring them some income. What strikes me as being the greatest advantage is that it would create an interest in something worthwhile and keep them at home.<sup>56</sup>

Although hard-pressed for operating funds, Father Tennelly donated \$50.00 to the mission school towards the purchase of another loom.

Collier's appreciation of native culture and his prolific writing on the topic carried many schoolteachers and their curricula with him. They were largely in agreement with the statement in 1944 wherein Collier gave his philosophy towards the Indian:

We have tried to energize the individual Indian and

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<sup>56</sup>Letter from Father Tennelly to Sister Hermina Fleischhacker, dated July 16, 1943. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

the group, and to equip individual and group with knowledge and skills to enable them to go into the white world successfully if they want to or to hold their own and make their way where they are if they want to. . . . In brief, we have quit thinking about assimilation and segregation as opposite poles and as matters of 'all or nothing.'<sup>57</sup>

The 1930s saw not only increased respect for Indian culture but a major change in the ratio of on- and off-reservation boarding schools to on- and off-reservation public schools, chiefly to off-reservation day schools. Already in 1907, Commissioner Francis Leupp had labelled boarding schools as "educational almshouses" and saw them as undermining the Indian character. With minor differences, successive Commissioners held the same views.

Boarding school enrollment dropped from 22,000 in 1933 to 17,500 in 1934 as more and more Indian students were taken from the boarding schools and put into public day schools. The years 1930-1970 brought about the greatest increase in public school enrollment in the history of Indian education. Rulings by Commissioners of Indian Affairs made it mandatory that public schools be filled before private ones could accept students. According to Margaret Szaz, Superintendent of Indian Education in the 1950s,

. . . By 1970, public schooling had jumped over three times, from 38,000 in 1930 to 129,000 in 1970, which meant that 65% of all Indian children in school were attending public school.<sup>58</sup>

Along with this growth in public day school education came a swing

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<sup>57</sup>Richard Ellis, ed., The Western American Indian (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), p. 154.

<sup>58</sup>Szaz, Education and the American Indian: 1928-1973, p. 89.

back towards the assimilation theory.

By the early 1940s, the White Earth mission school was facing numerous problems. Enrollment was declining, funds were short, and teaching personnel were harder to get and to keep. Sister Hermina, in a letter to Father Tennelly in February of 1941, tells him that the pastor, Father Justin Luetmer, is worried about keeping the school open. She writes that

. . . the Indian Council is planning to withdraw all Indian funds for education in the future. . . . It is rather a depressing thought to have the mission schools closed after they had served the Indians for so many years. On a whole, the sentiment, even from non-Catholics, in the White Earth community at least is in favor of the mission school.<sup>59</sup>

Father Tennelly pinpoints the heart of the problem for all mission schools at this time in his letter to Father Valerian Thelen, the new pastor at White Earth, in a letter dated March of 1945:

The government schools at Wahpeton, Flandreau, and Pipestone are not much more than half-filled. That is where the trouble lies as far as government aid is concerned. Why should the government pay you to care for them [Indian children] when they could be accommodated in these schools with little, if any additional cost. . . . Congress is not willing to support duplicate facilities.<sup>60</sup>

In an effort to create more space for the students, Sister Hermina and Father Justin had agreed to renovate part of the old church for additional classrooms in the summer of 1941. Some renovation was done but by the spring of 1945, Father Valerian recognized

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<sup>59</sup>Letter from Sister Hermina to Father Tennelly, dated February 24, 1941. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

<sup>60</sup>Letter from Father Tennelly to Father Valerian Thelen, dated March 26, 1945. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

the necessity of changing the boarding school into a day school.

He writes to Father Tennelly:

I am determined, if I must continue to work in this community, to have this school turned into a grade day school, if it is possible. That way, it would be possible to do more effective work. . . . I will call a meeting of the parents of this parish, in order to ascertain as to the number of children that can be expected to attend. . . . Then I can also report this to public school, so that they will know how to line up for the coming year. . . . If all the Catholic children would attend our day school, then only 40-50 pupils would remain for the public school. . . . Just how I would defray the costs is another worry. I wonder if any help could be expected through the Indian Bureau?<sup>61</sup>

In the fall of 1945, the St. Benedict Mission School became a day school. Sister Rosaria Zenner, principal of the school at the time, recalls the change:

. . . the Government withdrew their help and we opened a day school for the children of the area. They were brought to the school by bus, furnished by the St. Benedict's Mission. One of the priests was the driver. We had a large enrollment. At least eight classrooms were occupied. The children adjusted well, seemed happy to come to our school.<sup>62</sup>

There was regret over the closing of the boarding school but there were also high hopes that the day school would flourish. It did for a little over two decades, closing after May of 1969.

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<sup>61</sup>Letter from Father Valerian to Father Tennelly, dated March 22, 1945. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

<sup>62</sup>Letter of Sister Rosaria Zenner to Sister Carol Berg, dated March 29, 1980.

### Chapter III

#### COMMUNITY LIFE AT WHITE EARTH: THE SISTERS, GOALS AND METHODS

Between 1878 and 1945, 93 sisters served the White Earth Indian mission, the majority as teachers and housekeepers. These sisters were almost all from rural, German backgrounds, and were also from large families, averaging ten children. The median age of the sisters was 26 when first sent to White Earth.

The list on the following page gives a selection of the sisters who were at White Earth between 1878 and 1900. Until well into the 1940s, 95% of the sisters of St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, Minnesota, who staffed the mission, were of German birth. It is not surprising, then, to note that only two sisters of Irish birth ever served at White Earth: Sister Cyprian Caffrey from 1893-1897 and Sister Basilia Cosgrove from 1893-1898. One wonders if it was entirely accidental that their years of service at White Earth coincided. A sensitive Prioress at the Motherhouse may have wanted them to have mutual support in the face of an overwhelmingly bi-lingual community at White Earth, where German was the first language and English second.

Unfortunately, there are no diaries or letters extant to give us insight into the community life led by these earliest sisters at White Earth. We can assume they tried to fulfill their religious

GROUP ONE: Arrival years between 1878 and 1900.

<u>SISTER</u>	<u>AGE WHEN SENT</u>	<u>YEARS OF SERVICE</u>	<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>RURAL/CITY BRED</u>	<u>NATION- ALITY</u>	<u>FAMILY/RANK</u>
Lioba Braun	25	1878-1928	teacher	rural	German	?
Philomene Ketten	23	1878-1927	housekeeper	rural	German	?
Nothburga Kramer	26	1892-1896	cook	rural	German	6; third
Cyprian Caffrey	24	1893-1897	teacher	rural	Irish	8; fourth
Basilial Cosgrove	26	1893-1898	teacher	rural	Irish	6; sixth
Corbinian Bukowski	24	1895-1898	housekeeper	rural	German	8; fifth
Silveria Zwisler	32	1895-1896	?	rural	German	7; third
Mary Michaela Wittmann	42	1893-1899	housekeeper	rural	German	?
Christine Selly	25	1897-1906	teacher	rural	Swiss	11; fifth
Martina Amberg	48	1899-1900	teacher	rural	German	3; second
Rosina Loecken	32	1900-1901	housekeeper	rural	German	6; fourth

Taken from lists in the Archives and Secretarial Office at St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, MN.

responsibilities regularly, especially the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. Such communal prayers were probably said before 6:00 A.M.--the time the children would rise--and after 8:00 p.m., when the children would be in bed. The myriad duties in a boarding school would have militated against any other prayer gatherings, other than daily Mass with the children, possibly around 6:30 or 7:00 a.m.

For religious services, Mass, Benediction, and at times during the Office, there was no lack of music. Sister Lioba Braun's mother had sent a portable organ to White Earth. There is no record of the organ's arrival date but, since Sister Lioba's mother drowned in the Johnstown flood of May, 1889, it is safe to assume that the organ arrived sometime in the 1880s. It was still in use in the 1920s and was returned to the St. Benedict's Motherhouse in 1928 when Sister Lioba retired.

What recreation there was must have been the kinds traditional to all sisters: reading, going for walks, card-playing, singing, and doing fancywork. There would have been little time for recreation--unless one counts the recess time with the children and the play time between supper and the children's bedtime (generally taken up with another prayer session or with chores).

There is little information on how well the sisters got along with one another and/or with their pastor, Father Aloysius and, later, with his assistants. It is a truism, however, that religious went where obedience dictated and they took for granted that they must subordinate individualism to the collective good. The Rule of St.

Benedict calls for a spirit of charity and concern for one another, a surrender of self-will. These early sisters, imbued with this training, would surely have practiced cooperation, submerging any or most feelings of dislike or resentment.

Since so many of the sisters came from rural areas, and from large families, one can generalize that there were similarities between their early training at home and that of the Indians whom they came to serve. Like the Ojibwa, the sisters must have had to work hard in harvest time to assure the family of plentiful food for the lean months. Also, with many mouths to feed and with little privacy, the latter usually endemic to large families, a spirit of sharing and cooperation would be essential for harmony. These same qualities--hard work, cooperation, and sharing--were equally essential to the smooth running of a boarding school.

A second listing of sisters assigned to White Earth covers the years 1901-1922. In this group, the median age is 28 and the family size, twelve children. This group had the largest number of sisters putting in the longest years of service at White Earth: Sister Ernestine Jansky, 47 years; Sister Hildegund Remberger, 39 years; Sister Ladislaus Twardowski, 31 years; Sister Thea Grieman, 23 years; and Sister Mary Degel, 22 years. Overall, in all the groupings, the average stay at White Earth between 1878 and 1945 was four to five years.

As in the first group, this second group of sisters were almost all from rural areas, with two exceptions: Sister Ernestine from St. Cloud and Sister Thea from St. Paul. It is interesting to

GROUP TWO: Arrival years between 1901 and 1922.

<u>SISTER</u>	<u>AGE WHEN SENT</u>	<u>YEARS OF SERVICE</u>	<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>RURAL/CITY BRED</u>	<u>NATION- ALITY</u>	<u>FAMILY/RANK</u>
Hildegund Remberger	23	1901-1940	teacher/ prefect	rural	German	15; fourth
Ethelbert Krenik	21	1902-1929	teacher	rural	Bohemian	8; seventh
Edwina Bromenshenkel	23	1904-1910	cook	rural	German	15; first
Ernestine Jansky	29	1909-1956	seamstress	city	Polish	11; first
Ladislaus Twardowski	20	1910-1940	prefect	rural	Polish	14; seventh
Othilda Scherer	32	1910-1914	cook	rural	German	12; first
Blanda Bosch	39	1917-1919	housekeeper	rural	German	adopted
Simplicia Lempke	39	1921-1927	cook	rural	Polish	9; eighth
Thea Grieman	20	1921-1944	teacher	city	German	12; eighth
Mary (Hilaire) Degel	21	1922-1938	teacher	rural	German	12; twelfth

Taken from lists in the Archives and Secretarial Office at St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, MN.

note that three of this second group were of Polish stock: Sister Ernestine, Sister Ladislaus, and Sister Simplicia. They were the only Polish sisters ever to serve at White Earth before 1945. As with the two Irish sisters earlier, perhaps a considerate prioress saw to it that these Polish-speaking sisters would give each other mutual support. This is not to imply that they could not speak or understand German. Yet, it would have been enjoyable, no doubt, to speak Polish at times.

This writer is greatly indebted to Sisters Mary Degel and Thea Grieman, who gave much information about life at White Earth during the 1920s and 1930s. With their help--written and oral--life in and out of school can be pieced together.

Apparently, the daily schedule for the sisters did not change much from what it had been before the 1900s. Communal prayers still had to be squeezed in around the school hours. Sister Mary recalls having to rise at 5:00 to say Lauds (Morning Praise) which was followed by meditation--also communal. For the latter, the reader had to recite by candlelight since electric lights were considered too expensive. In winter, the sisters had to wear capes and shawls in chapel since the heat came on only in time for Mass at 6:30 or 7:00.

As stated in part one of this paper, a mitigation of old world rules was begun by the sisters as early as the 1860s. Among these mitigations was the moving of midnight recitation of part of the Divine Office to the morning and a switch from the Divine Office itself to the shorter Office of the Blessed Virgin on non-feast days. Sister Mary recalls that Sister Lioba had always regretted the switch

and sought to have the Divine Office restored for all days. This restoration was actually achieved at White Earth before it once again became the rule at St. Benedict's. Vespers was said at 3:45 p.m. in chapel while the children were either playing or doing chores. A sister prefect would supervise the children while the rest of the community was at prayer.

For recreation, the sisters enjoyed such winter activities as sledding--on the hills around the mission--and skating on the nearby lake. As generations of sisters can attest, a daily walk was rarely postponed due to weather. In warm weather, the sisters would picnic in the woods, with or without the children, or would pick flowers, wild grapes, and plums. Nature hikes were a pleasure to both sisters and students. Interviewed for the community paper St. Benedict's Missions in the winter of 1972, Sister Mary recalled the pre-1945 years at White Earth and the need for home-made entertainment:

There was no TV in those days and the only radio was owned by the hired man. Cooped up in winter with 140 children could have become unbearable. But, we made our own entertainment. Little events became big ones and called for a play or program. On one occasion the girls had a kitchen orchestra with pots, pans, spoons and covers, blending harmoniously with the piano played by Sister Thea.<sup>1</sup>

For religious, a customary ritual of community life is the celebration of such events as a jubilee or a nameday. These celebra-

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Wibora Muehlenbein, "Forty-one Years of Work with the Indians," St. Benedict's Missions, December 1972, p. 2.

tions would require hours of practice and/or of decorating the premises. Sister Mary recalls that for most jubilees and namedays the sisters gave plays. It was easy to dress up since there were all kinds of second-hand clothes in the storeroom. Practice was held when the superior was out of the way--usually after ten at night.

The third grouping of sisters assigned to White Earth covers the years from 1925 to 1945 inclusive. In this group, there is a 100% rural background and the families are still large, averaging eleven children. In age, these sisters were the oldest in the mission of all who were there between 1878 and 1945, averaging 34 years at time of assignment. In the first two groupings, 1878 to 1922, only two sisters were over 40. In this last group, seven were over 40. This sharp rise in age could be a sign that fewer young sisters were willing or able to serve at White Earth, though this is pre-Vatican II and sisters were normally not allowed a choice of service.

A questionnaire sent out to 16 sisters who served at White Earth between 1921 and 1945 makes possible a number of generalizations about the sisters as individuals, about their relations with one another, with the students, and with the mission priests. For most of these sisters (9), White Earth was their first mission. In one way this was advantageous: not having experienced life at any other mission, they were unable to make unfavorable comparisons between White Earth and other missions. Most of the sisters (10) felt that their years at White Earth were just the right amount of time. Only two thought they were there too long while four would have liked to have spent more years there.

GROUP THREE: Arrival years between 1925 and 1945.

<u>SISTER</u>	<u>AGE WHEN SENT</u>	<u>YEARS OF SERVICE</u>	<u>OCCUPATION</u>	<u>RURAL/CITY BRED</u>	<u>NATION- ALITY</u>	<u>FAMILY/RANK</u>
Doretta Ettel	32	1925-1940	housekeeper	city	Austrian	8; fifth
Ferdinand Utsch	20	1926-1928	laundress	rural	German	12; twelfth
Magdalen (Ita) Kiefer	31	1928-1933	seamstress	rural	German	8; fifth
Alexandra Streitz	49	1930-1932	musician	rural	German	15; fourteenth
Corona Kratz	35	1930-1935	baker	rural	German	6; fourth
Gordian Miller	22	1933-1939	teacher	rural	German	11; first
Xavier Hens	41	1935-1938	seamstress	rural	German	11; third
Alena Becker	52	1938-1944	prefect	rural	German	7; second
Debora Herda	24	1940-1943	prefect	rural	Bohemian	13; first
Mavilla Fleischhacker	41	1940-1948	crafts	rural	Austrian	6; sixth
Clementine Kahl	42	1940-1946	housekeeper	rural	German	9; sixth
Johnette Kohorst	19	1941-1955	cook	rural	German	11; sixth
Rosaria Zenner	51	1944-1950	teacher	rural	German	11; sixth
Ansgar Willenbring	41	1944-1960	laundress	rural	German	12; seventh
Francella Janson	22	1944-1961	teacher	rural	German	4; third

Taken from lists in the Archives at St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, MN.

In the following pages, most of the questionnaire and responses are given. Sometimes sisters did not respond to a particular question and this is noted. The questionnaire can and should be viewed in the context of Vatican II and its effects on religious orders and their apostolic works. Vatican II Council was held from 1963 to 1965. It dealt with a variety of Church issues, paramount ones being Church Apostolates and Religious Life.

The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity--or apostolates--speaks to the vocation of missionaries. A significant section states the following:

Christ Himself searched the hearts of men, and led them to divine light through truly human conversation. So also, His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should know the peoples among whom they live, and should establish contact with them.<sup>2</sup>

Key phrases here are "know the people" and "establish contact with them." The Christianizing endeavor is not to be carried out from a distance or merely through the written word; it calls for a familiarity with the peoples among whom the missionary dwells. Participation in the community's cultural and social life is not only encouraged, it is prescribed.

The Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life likewise broadens the Church's and, therefore, religious missionaries' outlook and outreach. Here is a key passage:

Institutes should promote in their members adequate knowledge of the social conditions of the times they

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<sup>2</sup>Virginia Mary Heffernan, Outlines of the Sixteen Documents, Vatican II (New York: The America Press, 1965), p. 94.

live in and of the needs of the Church. . . . The manner of living, praying, and working should be adapted to the modern physical and psychological circumstances of the community members, and, to the necessities of apostolate, culture, and social and economic circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

Obsolete laws, the decree continues, are to be suppressed and adaptation to a variety of circumstances is to be the norm.

All of the sisters who responded to the questionnaire have lived most of their religious life in a pre-Vatican II milieu. Their responses indicate this, though not all "narrowness" of thought and action can be laid solely at the feet of a moribund Church or the structure of the religious order. The sisters were/are participants in and observers of an American national milieu which surely influenced their thinking and behavior towards the Indians. With these generalizations in mind, one can now comment on the sisters' responses and understand better the forces behind them.

1. WHAT GOALS DID YOU HAVE IN MIND WHILE AT WHITE EARTH?

To help the poor (5)

To gain experience teaching

To work for the Christianity of the people (2)

To grow spiritually

To make the pupils more aware of life outside the reservation

No response: 5

2. WHAT SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE, DIRECT OR INDIRECT, DID YOU HAVE ABOUT INDIANS BEFORE GOING TO WHITE EARTH?

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

None: 13

Only information by the grapevine, about the "shiftlessness" of  
the Indians

I knew they were very hard to teach.

I had worked with Indians--Sioux--in North Dakota.

3. DID YOU READ ANY BOOKS ON INDIANS OR ON INDIAN LIFE BEFORE YOU WENT TO WHITE EARTH AND/OR AFTER YOU WERE THERE? GIVE SOME TITLES AND AUTHORS IF YOU CAN.

None: 13

Got some books after I arrived.

Since I am not in education, I did not read up on any Indians.

I had only history book knowledge of Indians; I had no interest  
in Indians and made no attempts to read more about them.

I tried to read as many Indian stories as I could obtain; I read

Lydia Longley about a family attacked by Indians.

I read novels which romanticized the Indians, such as Cooper's.

4. WERE YOU ABLE TO LEARN ANY OF THE INDIAN LANGUAGE WHILE AT WHITE EARTH?

a smattering: 10      a good amount: 0      no words: 6

5. DID YOU VOLUNTEER FOR WHITE EARTH OR WERE YOU ASSIGNED?

volunteered: 1      assigned: 15

6. HOW DID YOU FIND ADJUSTMENT TO WHITE EARTH?

very difficult: 1      somewhat difficult: 4      very easy: 5

fairly easy: 6

The adjustment dealt more with religious life in general; it was not peculiar to the White Earth mission.

The distance was so far from St. Benedict's and my home and the work was very hard.

I loved the relaxed spirit; one never saw an Indian hurry.

The Indians love nature and so do I; they were poor--and so was our family at home.

They are simple, God-trusting people.

I was lonely, lost my appetite.

7. WHAT ASPECTS OF INDIAN CULTURE HAD MOST APPEAL TO YOU WHILE AT WHITE EARTH?

seeing God in nature and the respect for all creatures  
 liked the children's singing and drawing  
 their ways of self-support, of using and making things from what  
 they had in reach  
 absolutely none--a "colorless" life  
 their concern for one another  
 children's artistic ability  
 innate appreciation of nature (2)

No response: 8

8. DID YOU ATTEND INDIAN FEASTS OR CELEBRATIONS OF ANY KIND?

Yes: 5            No: 11

IF YES, HOW OFTEN--AND WHAT CELEBRATIONS? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

We were not allowed to associate with lay people in that day.

I attended three Indian Congresses, several Pow-wows and some Wakes.

I attended a tribal dance. (2)

It was not customary for sisters to mix much with outsiders at the  
time I was at White Earth.

I attended an Indian Congress, an Indian rodeo. (2)

9. WHAT ARE SOME ATTITUDES AND MANNER OF APPROACH WHICH ARE HELPFUL OR NECESSARY FOR WORKING WITH THE INDIANS?

Be yourself; do not put on airs; don't act superior.

patience (3) and kindness

belief in the Indians' dignity and in cultural values that differ  
from ours

like them and accept their culture

If you love the Indians, they will respond favorably as you try  
to be helpful.

Try to make them feel at home with you.

Compromise with them.

Notice all the good qualities each one has. (2)

Praise their work and abilities whenever possible.

Inquire about their interests and occupations.

Firmness and plenty of it.

No response: 1

10. IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU FEEL SUPPORT--OR THE LACK OF IT--BY THE MOTHERHOUSE AND THE SISTERS IN GENERAL WHILE YOU WERE AT WHITE EARTH?

There wasn't a lot of communication with the Motherhouse by any  
missions.

came home for Retreats and for summer school

We were on our own.

There was general community support for the White Earth apostolate.

The Motherhouse was very supportive.

We were "out in the woods" miles from civilization. Because we suffered much hardship, as a group, we worked, prayed, and endured together. We sisters were like a loving family, feeling for each other. I have not experienced this in any other group of sisters I worked with.

The sisters at White Earth knew we were all in the same boat.

Many sisters came to visit us. Our St. Cloud Mission House also sent us clothing.

I felt no lack of support, while at White Earth. I was happy to be of help to the poor and the Indians. It was my first chance to be poor and to help others.

No response: 8

11. WAS THE NATIVE LANGUAGE TOLERATED, ENCOURAGED, OR FORBIDDEN IN SCHOOL?

tolerated: 6                      encouraged: 0                      forbidden: 1

not forbidden, but not encouraged either (3)

There were very few Indians who still knew their language.

It seemed to me that it was simply ignored.

In the boarding school, many times the girls would speak to each other in their own language. Sometimes they would ask, "Do you know what we said?" We always felt safer not to ask for an explanation of their talk.

Whenever there was opportunity, I tried to learn the Ojibway by

asking students to teach me phrases, words, or sentences.

No response: 9

12. HOW OFTEN WERE HOME VISITS MADE?

I made one once.

We made very, very few. We had more work at the mission than we could handle.

Home visits were not practiced while I was there.

I made none. (4)

Not too often. As soon as anyone of the family saw us coming, seemingly all came out of the house and stood in front of the door. We visited outside. We did visit the sick children and others in the hospital in the town.

No response: 8

13. WHAT ASSUMPTIONS HAD YOU HELD ABOUT TEACHING INDIANS AND THE CALIBER OF STUDENTS THEY WOULD BE BEFORE YOU WENT TO WHITE EARTH? HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCE THERE AFFIRM OR NEGATE THOSE ASSUMPTIONS?

I had heard their students were lazy and did not care to learn.

My limited contact with them did not allow any true judgments on my part.

I went in absolutely cold--no assumptions--no training whatsoever.

I knew nothing about Indian 'character' and what type of students they would be.

I always had a great fear of teaching the Indians. Why? I don't know.

Before I went to White Earth, I pictured Indians wearing bands and feathers; I found out that the children were a great deal

on my part.

I went in absolutely cold--no assumptions--no training whatsoever. I knew nothing about Indian 'character' and what type of students they would be.

I always had a great fear of teaching the Indians. Why? I don't know.

Before I went to White Earth, I pictured Indians wearing bands and feathers; I found out that the children were a great deal like other children.

I did not have too good an opinion of their abilities before I went to White Earth. I found most Indians talented after I really worked with them.

No response: 11

14. BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION, HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE EDUCATION/TRAINING IN A BOARDING SCHOOL TODAY?

To my mind, I think it would be rather difficult to keep a group of Indians happy and interestingly occupied in a boarding school now.

Today I would like to see more teaching equipment, films, tapes, overheads, interesting books, more art materials, and more activities.

I would have no Indian boarding schools.

Have personnel study the nature of the Indians and know how to deal with them; try to have instructional materials that are suited to the Indian.

The boarding schools were good in their times--but too enclosed for

today.

No response: 11

Obviously, the non-teaching sisters at the mission did not feel capable of responding to many of the questions--even those that were not specifically geared to teaching per se. There is no doubt, judging from interviews I have had, that these non-teaching sisters had a great deal of contact with the students. Many of them were mentioned by the Indian women when I asked them to recall their days at the mission school. I conclude that the sister housekeepers and cooks felt incompetent to comment on issues and may perhaps have felt that theirs was an inferior position or status in the mission community. This, however, was not a problem peculiar to White Earth but rather one to be found on any mission of the day.

Question one asks about the sisters' goals while at White Earth. Clearly, the sisters give priority to serving the people with Christianization a second major goal. It is probable, however, that the two goals were seen as synonymous: one serves the people while/by Christianizing them.

Questions two, three, and thirteen all deal with the sisters' knowledge about Indian life before going to White Earth. Whatever their ages, the sisters had little or no background knowledge about Indians in general and the Ojibwa in particular. This is true whether one notes the pre- or post-World War II years. Those who did some reading before going to White Earth and even after arrival, refer to sources either extremely critical of Indians--such as captivity

narratives--or those which painted romantic images of them. Some responses indicate a slight negative feeling towards the Indians, perhaps more a fear of the unknown than basic racism.

Questions four and eleven refer to the native language: whether or not the sisters learned it and whether or not it was forbidden in school. Few of the sisters could speak or understand Ojibwa. Most of them claimed to have picked up some phrases or sentences. This failure to learn Ojibwa does not indicate a lack of tolerance or even of interest on the part of the sisters. Rather, it can be traced to such factors as lack of time to study, the reluctance of the students to speak it while at school, and official encouragement of English as the dominant and therefore the most practical language. The Ojibwa language was forbidden at the public and government schools but such a formal ban was not in effect at the St. Benedict's school. There was no need; the native language had no real champions.

Question five asks if the sisters volunteered or were assigned to White Earth. Overwhelmingly the sisters were assigned. In few, if any, religious orders was it customary to allow choice of work. Monastic orders such as the Benedictine were even less likely than the secular orders to allow such choice. Monastic obedience was seen as being a complete surrender of will and desires.<sup>4</sup> Post-Vatican II,

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<sup>4</sup>Chapter 68 in the Rule of St. Benedict gives the monk the option of pointing out that the job is beyond him--but then goes on to tell him that, if the superior persists, the monk is to obey, trusting in the help of God.

a collegial approach to decision-making has replaced this older tradition.

There is some correlation between questions five and six. Question six speaks to the adjustment of the sisters to White Earth. Religious went to missions in obedience to superiors' decisions. They did not expect to find all things congenial and were prepared--by religious training if not by nature--to make the best of any situation. It is gratifying to see that most of the respondents did not find their White Earth assignment very difficult.

Although only one respondent mentions it, one suspects that the distance from the Motherhouse was a hardship to most sisters. Within Minnesota, the White Earth and Red Lake missions have been the furthest removed from the Motherhouse, making it difficult for the sisters to attend Chapters, Retreats (except in summer) or cultural events open to the sisters living at or near St. Benedict's Convent. Unable--or unwilling--to attend Indian celebrations, the sisters must have hungered for more cultural activities: to see a play, to view an art show, to hear a concert. These things were out of the question before the post-1945 and especially before the post-Vatican II era.

In responding to question seven which asks what aspects of Indian culture had the most appeal to them while at White Earth, love of nature and artistic ability are cited most often by the sisters. Since the majority of the sisters came from rural areas, this may relate, in part, to the sisters' own closeness to nature.

Questions eight and twelve connect in dealing with attendance at Indian celebrations and the making of home visits. Aside from

Indian Congresses and wakes, both mainly religious ceremonies, it was rare for sisters to attend Indian festivities. This was not primarily because they were considered "pagan"--though that surely entered into consideration--but, generally, sisters of any order and, above all, of monastic orders, were semi-cloistered. Rules forbade sisters to travel singly or to be away from the convent for any extended period of time. Along with many other religious rules, these were dropped or changed after Vatican II.

Most sisters at White Earth--well into the 1960s--made no home visits, citing lack of time and no precedent as their reasons. The infrequent home visits which were made were usually for attendance at wakes. This infrequency of home visits seems to have suited the Indians since they rarely invited anyone other than fellow Indians into their homes. Visiting by the sisters, then, generally occurred on the porch or somewhere in the yard.

Question nine asks about attitudes and manner of approach helpful or necessary for working with the Indians. Patience and praise--noting good work and qualities--are mentioned most often. It is noteworthy that acceptance of Indian culture is mentioned twice--in spite of the fact that so little of that culture was known to the sisters.

Question ten deals with the feeling of support--or lack of it--by the Motherhouse and the sisters in general. The great distance of White Earth from the Motherhouse--approximately 200 miles--would have made the sisters almost totally dependent on one another for support and companionship, at least on a day-to-day basis. Cohesion, then,

was perhaps as much a by-product of geography as of mutual likes and religious charity. Retreats and school or workshops at the Motherhouse in the summer months were welcome breaks to routine.

Question fourteen received only five responses. It asks the sisters' opinions on the improvement of education/training in a boarding school today based on their past experiences. Three respondents see Indian boarding schools as being out of tune with the present times. The other two would "enrich" such schools, stressing better and varied audio-visual equipment and materials "suited to the Indian." Interestingly, one of the respondents, Sister Gordian Miller, has the distinction of being the only sister from St. Benedict's to begin and end her active ministry at an Indian mission. Sister Gordian served at White Earth from 1933 to 1939. In the fall of 1980, Sister began teaching at Red Cloud Indian School, Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. She is pleased to have come full-circle in her long teaching career.

The questionnaire did not ask about rapport among the sisters or between the sisters and their pastor(s). Information gathered in interviews will expand on this issue. There is no record of any major discord within the White Earth community of sisters though there are hints and even accusations by one pastor that there were tensions among the faculty which then spread to the whole house. Nothing is documented, however. Regarding rapport between the sisters, their pastor, and his assistants, there is only scattered information before the 1920s. That there were some problems between the priests and sisters as early as the 1890s is evident from scattered references in

letters. Father Ambrose Lethert, substitute pastor at White Earth, wrote to Abbot Peter Engel in February of 1896, thanking him for removing a "troublesome" assistant. He added appreciative words about Sister Philomene:

Nothing is too much for her and she is always happy and friendly. This sturdy type one learns to appreciate when in need, and because the greatest injustice was about to be inflicted upon the Sister, Your Grace will not be angry with me if I say that I have great esteem for that Sister and believe there are few like her.<sup>5</sup>

There seems little doubt that, on the whole, the sisters and Father Aloysius got along very well. Those who knew Father while he was in semi-retirement at White Earth in the mid-1920s refer to him as a kind, generous person with a good sense of humor, a man easy to get along with. In turn, Father made few complaints about any of the sisters who worked at the missions, and when he did have occasion to speak or write about them, he was invariably complimentary.

Problems begin to surface more frequently in sister-priest relations at White Earth in the late 1920s. From this point on, a series of letters--from pastor to prioress at St. Benedict's and back from her--reveal disagreements and disappointments over sisters being removed from or sent to White Earth. In a letter of July 29, 1929, Mother Louise Walz, prioress of St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, Minnesota, informs Father Valerian Thelen, pastor at White Earth, that she is going to remove Sister Ethelbert Krenik--who had served at White Earth from 1902-1929:

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<sup>5</sup>Letter from Father Ambrose Lethert to Abbot Peter Engel, dated February 10, 1896. St. John's Archives.

It is with a heavy heart I am removing her from White Earth since I realize how very much her presence will be missed. . . . In a few months from now, Sister Ethelbert will probably be forgotten and you will find that White Earth continues to exist without her.<sup>6</sup>

Father Valerian was not convinced. His reply in a letter on August 2, 1929, is somewhat cryptic and a little dramatic in tone:

I make no comments on the change for the reason that I have been maligned so much during the past few years, that I am undoubtedly considered to be a pessimist and a harsh, overexactng and merciless being and consequently a killer of those in my charge. I have received many and uncalled for blows during the years here, but they were easy to bear since they affected me only and those with me knew better; whereas this however puts the success of the place, of which I am responsible, in jeopardy unless reliable, cooperative and willing help is offered.<sup>7</sup>

There is more than a hint here of dissatisfaction on Father's part with the general caliber of sisters he has at White Earth. Surely, if he has been "maligned," it must be the sisters who are responsible. He does not give any names nor does he describe what are the "many and uncalled for blows" he has received during his years at White Earth. His last lines incline one to believe he found the sisters to be just the opposite of what was needed for the success of the place. What any of the sisters thought, said, or did about their pastor is not documented.

It is not surprising, however, that Father Valerian wanted to keep Sister Ethelbert at White Earth. She was known to be an extremely

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<sup>6</sup>Letter from Mother Louise Walz to Father Valerian Thelen, dated July 29, 1929. SBCA.

<sup>7</sup>Letter from Father Valerian Thelen to Mother Louise Walz, dated August 2, 1929. SBCA.

vigorous, hardworking person and had served for years as Father Aloysius' strong right arm. As his eyesight worsened even before the 1920s, Sister Ethelbert began writing Father's letters and took care of almost all his business correspondence. But Mother Louise was adamant; Sister Ethelbert was recalled and then appointed superior of the St. Cloud Hospital.

Father Valerian himself left White Earth in 1929 and was replaced by Father Justin Luetmer. Like his predecessor, Father Justin pleaded with a prioress in an effort to keep a sister whose help he valued highly. Mother Rosamond Pratschner planned to remove Sister Norbertine, who was then completing ten years' service at White Earth. In a letter dated July 14, 1939, Father Justin wrote to Mother Rosamond, giving his reasons for wanting to keep Sister Norbertine:

In view of the period of transition through which we are going just now, I feel it my duty to inform you that by all means we should not have a change this summer. The Indian Office at Washington is against boarding schools and we are observed very closely. Greatly due to the good work and management of Sister Norbertine, this school enjoys a good reputation with all social workers and officials in the Indian Service in Minnesota. . . . We did get quite a setback last year having Sister Hilaire taken away and getting a less competent Sister in her place.<sup>8</sup>

Father then adds a few lines blaming Sister Inez Hilger, an anthropologist doing research at White Earth, for working "in a very underhanded way" to get Sister Norbertine removed. He gives no proof for this accusation.

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<sup>8</sup>Letter from Father Justin Luetmer to Mother Rosamond Pratschner, dated July 14, 1939. SBGA.

Mother Rosamond replied to Father Justin on July 21, 1939, telling him that her plan to recall Sister Norbertine was in accordance with the community policy of changing superiors after a six-year term in office. This was not the first nor the last instance when a prioress and a pastor would disagree over placement of sisters. Often, pastors would appear at St. Benedict's in St. Joseph to argue for a certain course of action. The White Earth pastors seem to have confined themselves to letterwriting.

Occasionally, letters to and from White Earth disclose a clash and discontent between strong personalities, or rather, a strong personality and a weaker one. An up-and-doing principal like Sister Hermina Fleischhacker felt that the pastor, Father Justin, was dragging his feet on needed school renovation. She writes to Father Tennelly, Director of the BCIM, in the summer of 1941 about this issue and asks his help:

I thought that maybe a word of encouragement from you might induce him to act. I know he would have never built the practice cottage [homeec cottage] without your aid, both financially and otherwise. Now he is very proud of it. If some improvements are to be made, and they should be, it is high time to begin now so that the building would be ready in fall. . . . I only regret that White Earth hasn't an enthusiastic and ambitious man at the head of its school. It surely needs one, you know that better than I.<sup>9</sup>

An energetic person like Sister Hermina was bound to feel frustrated when dealing with a cautious and slow-moving pastor. In fairness to

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<sup>9</sup>Letter from Sister Hermina Fleischhacker to Father Joseph Tennelly, dated July 9, 1941. BCIM Records. Marquette Univ. Archives.

Father Justin, one must remember that he was worried that the school might have to close in a year or two. In the light of that probability, spending \$2,000--high for those times--would seem a wasted gesture.

Father Tennelly wrote to Father Justin, offering encouragement and some funds, and the new classrooms were ready by the fall of '41. Sister Hermina was still the school principal when Father Valerian returned to White Earth in 1942 for his second term as pastor. But Mother Rosamond planned to remove her that next year. Father Valerian wrote to Mother Rosamond in August of 1943 asking that she reconsider her decision:

Her removal at this time would create an unsurmountable hazard. I know this better than anyone else, since last year was my first year back, and I did spend a great deal of time in observing the general run of things. This I did to find out why the spirit is no longer so congenial here, as it was thirteen years ago. Sister Hermina was a great aid to me in all things and had good suggestions to offer . . . projects have been introduced under her leadership which would have to be dropped to the detriment of the school . . . whatever you do, do not remove Sister Hermina at this time. I will work with her to make life as congenial and fruitful as can be expected and then in the end we will be grateful.<sup>10</sup>

Father Valerian does not give any details on what he calls "an unsurmountable hazard" nor on "why the spirit is no longer so congenial here." Perhaps the unsurmountable hazard that would be created by Sister Hermina's departure refers to the increasing possibility that the White Earth mission school would be closed--especially if a change of leadership would make that more likely. The reference to the lack

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<sup>10</sup>Letter from Father Valerian to Mother Rosamond Pratschner, dated August 11, 1943. SBCA.

of a congenial spirit is not made clear but it does hint at some discord among the sisters, perhaps among the faculty primarily.

Sister Hermina remained at White Earth for one more year. A grateful Father Valerian wrote to Mother Rosamond on August 14, 1943, after hearing that Sister would remain, thanking her; but he remonstrates with Mother over the proposed return to White Earth of Sister Norbertine Wasche in the role of a prefect. In 1939 Father Justin, it will be recalled, had begged to retain Sister Norbertine. Father Valerian obviously did not have the same high regard for her. Apparently he blamed Sister Norbertine for the uncongenial spirit in the house:

The spirit inducted into the school here by her tactics is just the difficulty under which we are laboring now. This chalk-line discipline will never develop any real character. Then besides we need a person that works along with all the rest. . . . But Sister Norbertine is an "I" person. I did this and I did that. This will never fit in here. . . . So do not send her.<sup>11</sup>

Father adds that the mission will manage even if the prioress has no one else to send.

It is not clear from his letter whether or not Father Valerian faults Sister's "chalk line discipline" as not able to develop any real character for her or for the students. It seems more likely that he is scoring her for being too tough on the children and being egotistical as well. There is no response from either the prioress or from Sister Norbertine to such accusations.

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<sup>11</sup>Letter from Father Valerian to Mother Rosamond Pratschner, dated August 14, 1943. SBCA.

From my interviews with various sisters who served at White Earth when Father Valerian was pastor, it is clear that he was viewed by most of them as being very hard to please and to get along with. A number of the sisters alluded to his impatience, his short temper, and his often abrupt manners. The most charitable judgment of him by these sisters is that Father Valerian was "difficult." There surely was a difference between the priest and the sisters over expectations of one another--in and out of school.

It is quite likely that a "new breed" of sisters was at White Earth by the 1940s--who did not think and behave exactly like those who were there in and before the 1920s and '30s. There were still hardships but nothing equal to the hand-to-mouth existence of the first group of sisters, between 1878 and 1900--or even the hardships of those who served at the mission between 1900 and 1930. It may be that the sisters at White Earth in the 1940s were more questioning of the old ways of thinking and acting and were willing and able to challenge the traditional aspects of life there. This conjecture is built partially on the fact that Father Constantine Thelen, brother to Father Valerian, and who also served at White Earth between 1942 and 1963, refers to the pre-1945 and 1950s sisters as being "real workers" and intimates that the newer groups were less willing to do the hard work than the old-timers were.

It is rare in community life that a sister pours out her thinking about a mission experience or relations with a pastor. It was even more rare, apparently, in the pre-Vatican II days. Aside from an occasional gentle chiding of a pastor or another sister for

slowness to act--such as Sister Hermina's remarks to Father Tennelly about Father Justin Luetmer--there are no records extant of what the sisters who served at White Earth thought about those years and experiences. This is most unfortunate, especially in light of the fact that some pastors were not at all hesitant to judge the sisters harshly. One would like to have both sides of any disagreements.

It seems fair to assume, however, that on the whole the sisters at White Earth had harmonious community with one another and with their pastor(s). Being far from Motherhouse and Abbey and being, in one way, a self-contained unit, they would, of necessity if not by charity so inclined, have tried and have had to cooperate with one another. Add to this the dimension of being Benedictines, trained to thinking first of the community good rather than of self, and harmony was bound to be the rule rather than the exception.

## Chapter IV

### FINANCES

#### Overview

In 1793, the United States Congress authorized an expenditure of \$20,000 annually to purchase domestic animals and farm implements for all Indian tribes. However, there was no supervision of the use of these funds and too often the money was used by agents as bribes to tribal chiefs and to line their own pockets. Critics of this Indian policy felt these funds were a waste and that the Indians were incapable of being "civilized." Fortunately, enough persons in high places came to the defense of the Indians and lobbied for more funds and better supervision of them. Among this group was Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior from 1877-1881.

In an article in the North American Review for July, 1881, Schurz traces the history of United States government-Indian relations as "a record of broken treaties, of unjust wars, and of cruel spoliation." He then proposes a program by which the Indian can be civilized rather than exterminated, suggesting broadening their education, training them in vocational skills, and giving them individual possession of property. Schurz praises schools at Hampton and Carlisle as examples of how education can open new views of life to the Indian. He writes,

I see no reason why the government should not establish many more schools like those at Hampton and Carlisle. It is only a question of money. We are told that it costs little less than a million dollars to kill an Indian in war. It costs about \$150 a year to educate one at Hampton or Carlisle. If the education of Indian children saves the country only one small Indian war in the future, it will save money enough to sustain ten schools like Carlisle, with 300 pupils each, for ten years. To make a liberal appropriation, for such a program would, therefore, not only be a philanthropic act, but, also the truest and wisest economy.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, for most of the 19th century and even into the 20th century, government appropriations for the support and training of Indians remained almost token--and it was private groups, chiefly churches, that poured funds generously into the Indian missions.

Schurz does not refer to an earlier measure taken by the federal government to "civilize" the Indians but President Grant's Peace Policy, promulgated in 1870, had as its objectives the education, Christianization, assimilation, and citizenship of the Indians. A "social gospel" Christianity was partially responsible for this policy along with the reform thought that social progress was inevitable and no group was beyond "salvation." Quakers were the first religious group to give personnel and funds in large numbers for the twin goals of Christianizing and civilizing the Indians. Several other denominations followed their example.

Under the Peace Policy guidelines, agencies were to be assigned to the missionary groups already working among the Indians

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Schurz, "Present Aspects of the Indian Problem," North American Review CCXCVI (July 1881):17.

there. Competing groups on reservations challenged one another's right to be there or to have charge. At White Earth, for example, the Congregationalists were first given control but by an exchange agreement, they gave way to the Episcopalians. The Catholic Church, represented first by the fiery Ignatius Tomazin and after 1878 by the Benedictines, had worked with the Ojibwa as early as the 1830s and '40s but under the Peace Policy was locked for years in quarrels with the Episcopalians over rights and privileges on the reservation. It was only in 1881 that the government, petitioned by various church groups, decreed that reservations would be open to missionary activity by any and all groups. This decree freed the missionaries to expend all their energies helping the Indians rather than in inter-denominational fighting.

Dissatisfied with the administration of the Peace Policy in general, Catholics established a central agency in Washington, D.C. in 1879 to coordinate all Catholic Indian mission work in the United States. This Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions functioned through a director and a staff of two to three responsible, in turn, to a committee of Bishops--later called the Board of Incorporators.<sup>2</sup> The BCIM was, by the 1890s, the key force in lobbying Congress for funds, giving leadership for mission activities, and channeling government and other funds to the Catholic Indian missions. White Earth, along with other Indian missions, would depend heavily on the BCIM to remain

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<sup>2</sup>Francis P. Prucha, The Churches and the Indian Schools: 1888-1912 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 2.

solvent.

As stated in greater detail in chapter two, the Catholic Mission in White Earth was hamstrung by a constant struggle for funds during most of its existence. The first government aid came only in 1885 when the mission negotiated a contract with the federal government for subsidizing the school. From 1878-1885, mission funds came primarily from the sponsoring groups, St. John's Abbey and St. Benedict's Convent, with occasional monies from special church collections in the dioceses and from individual donors.

St. John's and St. Benedict's provided personnel and funds through all their years at White Earth but the funds were never sufficient to keep the mission going for an extended period of time or to expand mission activities. An organization called the Ludwig-Missionsverein gave much financial help during the late 19th century and into the early 20th. This society, of Bavarian origin, was named after its patron, Ludwig I, King of Bavaria from 1825-1848. He remained its chief patron after his abdication in 1848 until his death in 1868. The society's purpose was to distribute alms to foreign missions, principally to those in Asia and North America. In the latter, German-Americans were the favored recipients of this aid. While the Ludwig-Missionsverein sums were never as large as the government's, they were a significant contribution to the Indian missions and White Earth shared in this charity.

The federal government was the major source of funds for White Earth as for all other Indian missions in the United States. Until the late 1870s, there had been no extensive funding of Indian education

by the federal government but with the proven success of schools like Carlisle, funding rose steadily year by year. Between 1884 and 1889, federal appropriations to Catholic schools rose from \$65,220 to \$347,672.<sup>3</sup> At White Earth, contracts allotted \$108 per pupil per year, and this sum seems to have been the median for all or most contract schools. By the late 1880s, 75% of all federal funds to denominational missions went to Catholic schools, a fact not missed by those Protestants who would challenge the constitutionality of contract schools in general by the 1890s.

From 1884 to 1901, Father Joseph A. Stephan served as Director of the BCIM and was a lively battler in his efforts to get federal funds for all Catholic missions. He clashed often with Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas J. Morgan, a Baptist, who assumed office in 1889. Morgan was openly opposed to contract schools and Stephan accused him--sometimes in the press--of religious bigotry. Affairs were exacerbated when Morgan appointed Daniel Dorchester, a Methodist, as Commissioner of Indian Education. Like Morgan, Dorchester wanted a public school system to handle all Indian education.

Morgan and Dorchester's years in office--1889-1893--saw the peak of a successful drive to end the contract schools. Direct government funding for religious schools ended by an act of Congress in 1896. The new director of the BCIM, Father William H. Ketcham, in office from 1901-1920, sought non-government support to replace

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<sup>3</sup>Harry J. Sievers, "The Catholic Indian School Issue and the Presidential Election of 1892," The Catholic Historical Review 38 (July 1952):140.

these funds. The major source of new funding came from Katherine Drexel.

As stated in chapter two, Katharine Drexel and her two sisters visited White Earth and Red Lake in 1889 while on a tour of Indian missions in the West, promising funds to build schools in both places. The convent/school constructed at White Earth between 1890 and 1892 was paid for almost entirely with Drexel money. Father Stephan, and later Father Ketcham, turned to Katherine Drexel for continued aid to the Indian missions after the 1896 cut-off of new appropriations for the contract schools. The Drexel Fund, however, was intended to be "compensatory" only, making up the difference yearly between the pre-1896 appropriations and the new allotments. Later, even when tribal funds were available to the schools--after 1908--the Drexel funds were a needed supplement. The Drexel Fund contributed over \$100,000 annually during the years 1896-1900 as "compensation" for the cut-off federal funds.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the Drexel Fund and government aid, the BCIM relied on diocesan collections. In Minnesota, the dioceses of St. Cloud, St. Paul, and Crookston gave the most consistent aid after 1900, though the sums were not as large as either the bishops or the BCIM directors could wish. Perhaps the white people saw more romantic figures in the far-off Asians--especially Chinese--than in their own familiar Indians. Whatever the reasons, diocesan collections for

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<sup>4</sup>Quoted from BCIM Report, 1903-1904, in Prucha, The Churches and the Indian Schools, p. 52.

Indian missions were generally disappointing. Of greater help were the tribal funds.

The BCIM petitioned President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904, appealing for the use of tribal funds in lieu of direct government appropriations. Roosevelt, influenced by Attorney General Knox, gave approval for issuing contracts but stipulated "that there be requests from the Indians concerned for such application of their funds."<sup>5</sup> Trust and treaty funds were to be tapped and, under the guidelines of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Francis Leupp, a petition was to be signed by the Indians on each reservation asking for the use of these funds and a certificate of validation would then be signed by the agent in charge, attesting to the legality of the proceedings.

A number of court battles were fought between 1904 and 1908 over the constitutionality of using trust funds for contract schools, but the Supreme Court settled the issue in May of 1908. The decision in favor of allowing the use of tribal funds for sectarian schools emphasized the free exercise of religion: the Indians could not be denied the right to use their own money and educate their children in any religious schools of their choice.<sup>6</sup> This was a notable victory for the Catholic and other churches which could not have sustained their Indian missions without access to tribal funds. From 1918 on, tribal funds provided a major part of the White Earth school's financial girding.

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<sup>5</sup>Prucha, The Churches and the Indian Schools, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

Viewed as a whole, the financial status of White Earth and other Indian missions can be described as quite shaky most of the time and especially so in the years between 1896 and 1908--from Congressional cut-off of appropriations until permission to use tribal funds. At White Earth, the Catholic mission was dependent in varying degrees on funds from its Benedictine monastic sponsors, the federal government, the Drexel Fund, the Ludwig-Missionsverein, the BCIM, diocesan collections, and tribal funds. The specific contributions of each source will be examined in more detail.

#### Aid from St. John's Abbey and St. Benedict's Convent

Through self-sacrifice, hard work, and careful management, the missionaries kept the White Earth Catholic church and school viable over eight decades. Neither St. John's Abbey nor St. Benedict's Convent was able to give large or even constant sums of money to White Earth during most of their sponsorship of the mission. Yet, both monastic centers gave generously of personnel over the years, personnel who received little or no salary in the first two decades of the mission and very little well into the 1940s. In a letter to Bishop Timothy Corbett of Crookston in January of 1919, Sister Lioba Braun tells him that for the first twelve years at White Earth the sisters received no salary. She reports that after a visitation to the mission by Archbishop Ireland, an agreement was made wherein each sister would get a salary. From 1891, they received \$150 per sister per year.<sup>7</sup> This remained the salary until the late 1920s when there

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<sup>7</sup>Letter from Sister Lioba Braun to Bishop T. Corbett, dated January 22, 1919. SBGA.

was a slight raise.

With little or no salary for either priest(s) or sisters during the first two decades of the White Earth mission, a great deal of self-reliance was necessary. The maintenance of gardens and a farm took much time and effort on the part of mission staff and students over the years. The large productive gardens were a major source of food for the mission complex. Food bills were kept down somewhat since most vegetables were home-grown. Picking potatoes, canning carrots, beans, cucumbers, beets, and corn was a major job each summer and fall for both sisters and students. There was always a steady supply of milk, too, from the mission dairy herd which numbered 20 cows in an average year. And most of the mission supply of eggs came from its own chickens.

Father Alexius Hoffman, chronicler and archivist for St. John's until his death in 1940, describes the physical plant at the White Earth mission as it looked in the 1920s:

Behind the house is a slightly sloping lawn about 300 feet in length, planted with six rows of tall spruce trees and a few bass and oak. . . . There are two vegetable gardens, one south and one east of the residence, with a great variety of things, including apples, plums, and several kinds of berries. . . . At the eastern end of the lawn stands the mission school built by Kate Drexel. It is a white brick building about 80 feet square. . . . East of the school is the laundry, with modern machinery; also a refrigerator and a garage. Besides, there is a small house for smoking meat, a pump-house, a small carpenter and blacksmith shop; a granary, a pigsty (the track for running swill barrels down to it is called the Sow Line). Particularly fine is the new barn with an arched roof. It is 120 feet long. . . . There were eight well-fed horses in it when I saw it. . . . Opposite the new barn and within the mission enclosure

is a frame house, which serves as a lodging place for the workmen, i.e. hired men, six or eight in number and all well-behaved. . . . One of them is Joseph Ketten, a brother of Sister Philomene; he came up from St. Joseph over a dozen years ago and devotes himself faithfully to the service of the mission, asking for no remuneration but his board.<sup>8</sup>

Much of Father Alexius Hoffman's detail was dictated to him by Father Aloysius himself in the summer of 1926; Father Aloysius was 73 years old at that time and he was nearing the end of his service at White Earth.

An article in the August 10, 1923 Indian Sentinel, a publication put out by the BCIM, credits the work of the sisters for many general improvements in the mission's physical plant. The anonymous author writes,

After 32 years of hard labor and economy we are blessed with a most wonderful heating plant and water system. How did the sisters ever save the amount? By hard labor. Instead of hiring help during the summer, the sisters do all the work in their own garden which provides their vegetables. It was nothing unusual to see seven sisters in the grain fields pulling out wild mustard and other noxious weeds, hoeing, and cleaning 12 acres of potatoes and even helping to shock the grain.<sup>9</sup>

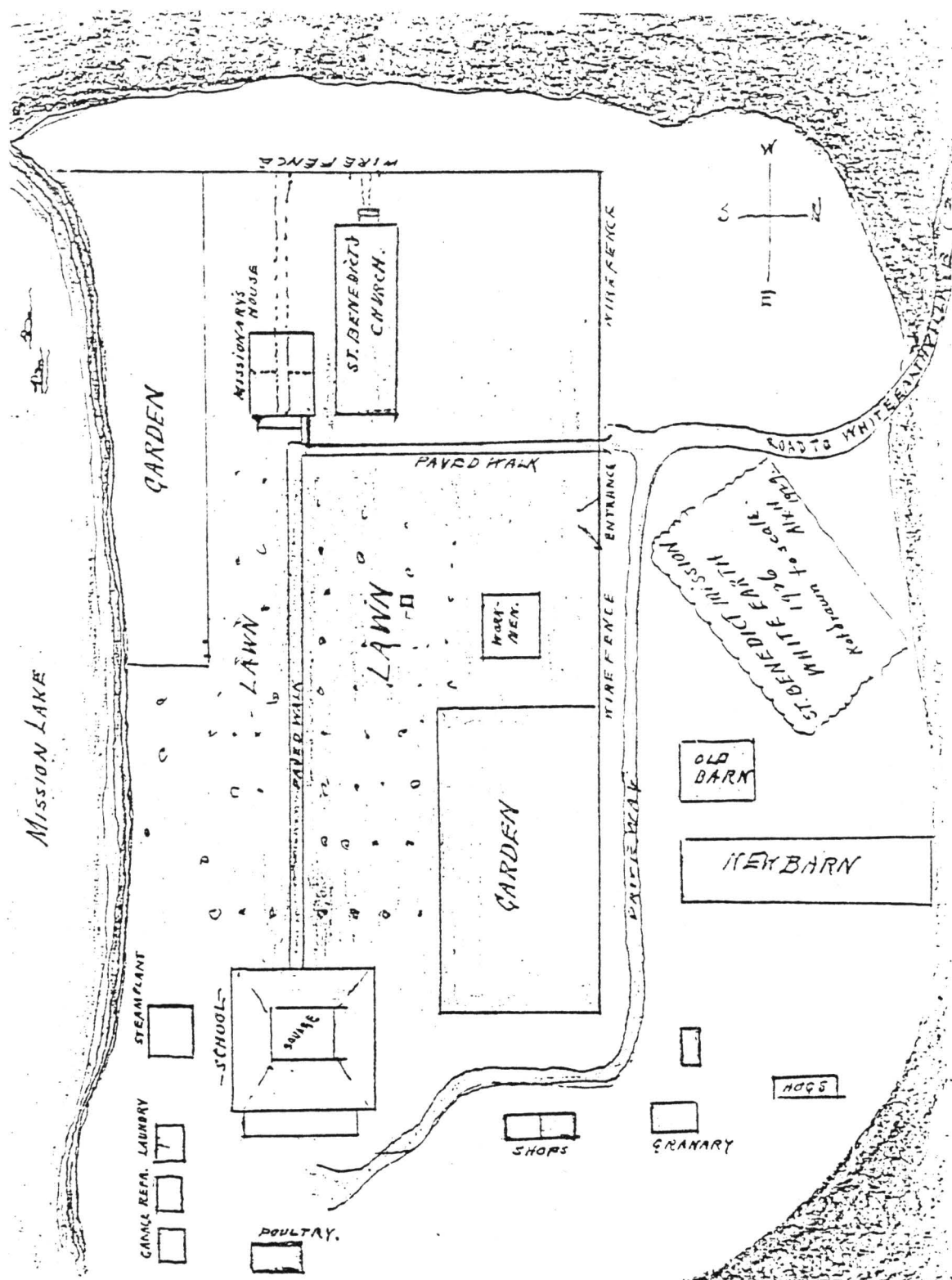
Summer and fall months were the busiest at the mission, for outdoor work at least. Few sisters could get away during those months with the exception of several days for the required retreat.

Ledgers kept at White Earth from 1891 to 1945 are complicated

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<sup>8</sup>Xeroxed history of the White Earth Mission by Father Alexius Hoffman, 1926. St. John's Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Indian Sentinel (Washington, D.C.: BCIM Office, August 10, 1923), p. 11.



to follow since the mission income and expenses were not always broken down clearly into separate components for convent, school, and rectory. This confusion is especially noticeable regarding salaries: the expenditure columns will list sisters' salaries along with salaries for the hired help--who worked chiefly on the farm.

Examining the income over the decades, one finds that the sisters earned goodly sums of money through sales of fancywork, giving music lessons, and running a gift shop, later a second-hand store, selling mainly clothes. The ledgers for the fiscal years between 1891 and 1938 show that, aside from salaries, the largest source of income came from the store, music lessons, and needlework. In a six-month period, July to October of 1926, store income alone reached \$376. Music lessons brought in from \$100 to \$250 yearly, with the sale of music books counted separately, averaging \$10 to \$12 annually. The usual cost for music lessons was \$15 a year--and the Indian students paid either in a lump sum in the fall or paid \$5 at the start of each quarter. In a very good year, the sisters could make extra money--even counting only music lessons and fancywork--amounting to about \$1,000. The money was normally put into a general fund for the school.

A sample of income over selected months and years between 1893 and 1940 follows, but no income below \$50 is included even though the mission ledgers account for some sums as low as \$2.

SAMPLE OF INCOME AT WHITE EARTH BETWEEN 1893 AND 1940<sup>10</sup>

## JULY 1893--July 1894

Cash on hand	\$ 4496.39
Gov't checks	9720.00

## JULY 1, 1895--July 1, 1896

Cash on hand	\$ 8643.96
Gov't checks	9720.00
Music, Needlework	100.00

## JULY 1899--July 1900

Cash on hand	\$ 6942.56
BCIM	4968.00
Gov't checks	2592.00
Interest	423.82
Music, Store	435.00

## JULY 1900--July 1901

Cash on hand	\$ 7942.35
BCIM	2302.00
K. Drexel Fund	4881.35
Music, Store	339.69

## JANUARY to July, 1910

Cash on hand	\$15,624.77
K. Drexel Fund	1,242.00
BCIM	1,944.00

## JANUARY to July, 1918

Cash on hand	\$16,421.74
Drexel Fund	1,181.90
BCIM	648.00
Gov't checks	9,286.00

## JANUARY 1925--January 1926

Cash on hand	\$ 3,101.50
Gov't checks	13,886.77
Store	400.00

## JULY 1935--July 1936

Teachers' salaries	\$ 2,610.00
Music lessons	266.88
Needlework	58.25
Donations	101.65

## JULY 31, 1939--July 31, 1940

Teachers' salaries	\$ 2,610.00
Music lessons	105.25

Government checks covered all students having at least one-fourth Indian blood, each student being allotted \$108 per quarter. While the sum of \$9,720 annually as given between July 1, 1893 and July 1, 1896 looks generous, that amount covered only 90 pupils each year. Any number over 90--and often the enrollment reached 100 and more--had to be covered by other funds (or by extremely judicious

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<sup>10</sup>Ledger, White Earth Mission Convent/School Records, 1891-1940. SBGA.

management of the actual funds on hand). By 1900, government funding ceased and, until 1918, White Earth received no government aid. After 1918, government checks resumed again, this time as payment from the tribal trust; pupils were then allotted \$120 each per quarter.

BCIM checks were few and generally averaged \$1000--when the BCIM Office could afford to give anything at all. An all-time high for BCIM funds to White Earth was from July 1899-July 1900: \$4986; it never came close to that sum again. From diocesan collections and from individual persons and charity groups around the nation, the BCIM Office would designate monies to those missions needing special help since it knew conditions at each place. For White Earth, the BCIM aid is over \$1,500 annually between 1900 and 1918 since those were the years federal monies were cut off and the BCIM compensated accordingly.

Teachers' salaries--only sisters at White Earth--show up in the ledgers as a separate category only in the 1930s. The first salary payments were made in 1891 but are not listed as income. The reason may be due to the fact that most, if not all, of that salary money was given to the Motherhouse and what was kept at the mission was subsumed under other categories. It had been customary--in fact, was customary until the early 1970s--for sisters on missions to retain a portion of their total salaries for living expenses, i.e. food, clothing. Anything over was sent, in cash, to the Motherhouse.

In the listings under expenditures, monthly and yearly sums show a few items as consistently high-cost, i.e. food and clothing. Occasionally, the ledgers show a capital budget expense: a windmill built in October of 1894, costing \$187.60; in 1919, the erection of a

boiler house costing \$860. But the recurring expenditures generally list such items as dry goods, hardware, freight, shoes, salaries for hired help, salaries to sisters, and groceries.

The following is a sample of recurring expenditures for high-cost items over selected months and years between 1891 and 1945:<sup>11</sup>

## JULY 1891--July 1892

Sisters' salaries	\$1,000.00
Groceries	1,306.00
Dry goods	933.65
Hardware	525.03
Hired help	518.50
Shoes	261.69
Oats	219.95
Freight, Express	114.99

## JULY 1899--July 1900

Sisters' salaries	\$1,050.00
Laundry	1,113.52
Groceries	925.93
Dry goods	415.19
Shoes	209.65

## JANUARY to July, 1910

Sisters' salaries	\$ 600.00
Hired help	330.00
Dry goods	205.76
Groceries	103.40

## JANUARY to July, 1918

Sisters' salaries	\$1,050.00
Dry goods	416.79
Hired help	413.00
Groceries	375.79
Gas, Kerosene, Coal, Wood	232.32
Shoes	101.76

## JANUARY 1925--January 1926

Sisters' salaries	\$1,300.00
Hired help	2,178.25
Groceries	1,274.62
Gas, Kerosene	587.99
Dry goods	355.70
Shoes	330.45
Freight, Express	145.00

## AUGUST 1, 1937--August 1, 1938

Sisters' salaries	\$2,610.00
Clothing, Bedding	81.80
Medicine, Dentists, Doctors	66.71

## AUGUST 1, 1940--August 1, 1941

Sisters' salaries	\$2,127.18
Clothes, Bedding	103.90
Medicine	128.68
Travel	133.82

## AUGUST 1, 1944--August 1, 1945

Sisters' salaries	\$2,000.00
Clothing, Bedding	222.83
Medicine, Dentists, Doctors	347.68
Travel	186.33

<sup>11</sup>Ledger, White Earth Mission Convent/School Records, 1891-1940. SBCA.

Some generalizations along with some specific data may be helpful here. By the late 1930s, medical and clothing costs were rising considerably higher than in earlier decades. Prior to the 1930s, the sums for either category rarely went above \$15 to \$20. Salary for hired help remained high until after the 1930s. The number of hired men--rarely were there any women--averaged 3-6 over the years. Most of the men worked outdoors all the time--in the barn, in the pasture. If a woman is included in the hired help, she was probably an assistant to the cook or housekeeper. Occasionally a woman's name is listed but not her occupation. Salaries for the hired help are not broken down, by and large--though occasionally a man is listed with his quarterly check--never more than \$50 to \$60. Compared with the salaries to lay workers at the nearby government boarding school in the village of White Earth, the White Earth lay workers received minimum wages, indeed.

Government records show high salaries--for the times--to government school employees, salaries considerably higher than those paid by White Earth mission. For example, John Heisler, a white, married farm laborer at the government boarding school, received a salary of \$500 annually. Peter O. Hafton, white and single, received \$800 yearly as the school engineer.<sup>12</sup> None of the Catholic school workers received salaries that high but they did usually receive room and board. Government records do not state whether or not their lay

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<sup>12</sup>Ledger of Record of Employees at the White Earth Boarding School, 1908-1910. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

workers had to pay for room and board out of their salaries. If they did have to pay for this, the salaries would then be more commensurate with those at the Catholic mission.

Gradually, the mission farm was reduced in size and the sisters and students did more and more of the outside work, allowing a cut-back in the number of men needed. Much of the remaining heavy farmwork was then done by one or two Indian youths who received room and board in payment and were supervised by one or two hired men.

Unlike the almost quarterly reports on payment to St. Benedict's Convent from the sisters' salaries, there are few notations about payment to St. John's Abbey; in June of 1893, the sum of \$300 is listed and in August of 1894, the sum is \$200. There is a letter from Father Stephan to Katherine Drexel dated August 20, 1888, in which he berates Abbot Edelbrock for his monetary demands on the missionaries. Father Stephan writes that

their work is highly seasoned by a great deal of suffering, as the money monarch, Abbot Edelbrock, whose religion is money, made Rev. Aloysius and the poor sisters pay out of the contract for 25 orphan girls, at \$108 each, \$1000 annually to him, thus starving the Father, the sisters, and the children. The sisters had to plough and I found them making and stacking hay. It is a burning shame for our holy religion to have such a Judas creature placed over a community of religious people.<sup>13</sup>

Father Stephan does not say where he gets his information but nowhere in the ledger is such a sum as \$1000 listed under expenditures to St. John's Abbey. Perhaps since the ledger only begins with the 1890s,

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<sup>13</sup>Letter from Father J. A. Stephan to Katherine Drexel, dated August 20, 1888. St. John's Archives.

the practice, if it existed, of sending such a large sum to the Abbey ended by that time.

In 1923, Father Aloysius writes to Father Hughes, Director of the BCIM, about his worries that the Abbot will siphon off needed funds from White Earth. Abbot Alcuin Deutsch had sent a circular to all his mission priests, requiring that they sign the circular giving him power of attorney to collect or draw out by check any and all money deposits from the missions. Father Aloysius informs Father Hughes:

I have two kinds of money in banks. One my own personal money (Mass stipends or donations). This I know he can draw but I have school money deposited which we saved, more or less each year from our contract, music, fancy-work and etc. This money we use for improvements on school and farm. . . . The Catholic Indian Bureau has provided our contracts and the sisters and myself have always been able to come up strictly to the contract, as our reports during the past thirty years show.<sup>14</sup>

In his indignation, Father Aloysius states that St. John's has "never given us any help neither for school nor mission." He is mistaken, as records show large contributions from St. John's between 1881 and 1883, mainly for the building of a convent/school.

The pastor(s)' salary generally came from the Sunday collections at the mission church--and from special collections taken in neighboring churches. In the first decades of the mission, these collections seldom amounted to more than \$10 monthly. But the room and board was provided, at first in the convent/school building and later in a

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<sup>14</sup>Letter from Father A. Hermanutz to Father W. Hughes, dated Dec. 31, 1923. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

separate rectory. Sisters' salaries were negotiated between the mission pastor and the Motherhouse prioress on a yearly basis after 1890.

Correspondence between Father Valerian Thelen, pastor at White Earth, and Mother Louise Walz, prioress at St. Benedict's, gives some details on agreement of remuneration for the sisters. In a letter to Mother Louise dated July 17, 1928, Father Valerian writes,

I will set aside \$1500 cash remuneration for the sisters at White Earth. During the course of the year, I have paid \$600 to them. . . . Besides this cash remuneration, I had agreed to furnish all the ordinary clothing like aprons, stockings, shoes, etc. and the board naturally is given them.<sup>15</sup>

In later years, from the 1940s on, the sisters' clothing was provided by the Motherhouse.

Mother Louise Walz replies to Father Valerian in a letter of August 20, 1928. She informs him:

We will be satisfied for the present if every sister of the 12 now employed on the mission receives a remuneration of \$15 per month plus board and clothing (not including habits and other religious garments). This would make a lump salary of \$180 per month.<sup>16</sup>

That salary--\$15 per sister per month--remained standard well into the 1940s.

In the same letter, Mother Louise raises the issue of the mission garden:

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<sup>15</sup>Letter from Father Valerian Thelen to Mother Louise Walz, dated July 17, 1928. SBGA.

<sup>16</sup>Letter from Mother Louise Walz to Father Valerian Thelen, dated August 20, 1928. SBGA.

I am convinced that this work is too difficult and too hard for the sisters and am therefore asking you to employ a man for that work. The soil in White Earth is too hard for a woman to work and I will, therefore, order the sisters to discontinue that particular work.<sup>17</sup>

Her words imply there is no room for bargaining over the issue. One can only surmise that some sisters told Mother Louise of the hard labor required to keep up the garden.

The garden, however, remained a key supplier of foodstuffs for the mission. Sisters at White Earth from the 1940s on attest to having worked long hours in it during summers and early fall. Another source of foodstuffs were gifts from charitable organizations such as the Women's Club in Minneapolis, which sent fruit and candy baskets, chiefly at Christmas and Easter. Occasionally, Indians donated such items as venison, maple sugar, and wild rice.

In summation, St. John's Abbey and St. Benedict's Convent contributed much support to the White Earth mission--though not always in the form of money. Over the years, selfless, hardworking, low-paid personnel were the major contribution through which the monastic centers, in effect, subsidized the mission. There is no doubt that the drain on the Abbey and the Convent was heavy much of the time, but the Indian apostolate was given high priority, evident in the efforts both centers made to keep the mission going.

#### Aid from the Ludwig-Missionsverein

Between 1844 and 1916, the total amount of alms donated by

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

the Ludwig-Missionsverein to America was approximately one million dollars.<sup>18</sup> The bulk of the aid went to German Catholics and was distributed through parish priests and, in the case of reservations, through missionary priests and sisters stationed there. Benedictines were not the only religious and clergy to receive the society's generosity but they were among the first to do so. Following is a listing of Ludwig-Missionsverein donations to the United States for selected years between 1853 and 1904.<sup>19</sup>

YEAR	DONATIONS TO THE UNITED STATES	
1853	61,300 gulden	(\$24,520 U.S.)
1858	58,310 gulden	(\$23,324 U.S.)
1863	31,340 gulden	(\$12,536 U.S.)
1868	26,471.50 gulden	(\$10,588.80 U.S.)
1873	27,848.20 gulden	(\$11,139.28 U.S.)
1878	43,224.50 marks	(\$17,289.80 U.S.)
1883	46,070 marks	(\$11,056.80 U.S.)
1888	39,550 marks	(\$ 9,492.00 U.S.)
1893	42,781 marks	(\$10,267.44 U.S.)
1898	42,850 marks	(\$10,284.00 U.S.)
1903	26,160 marks	(\$ 6,278.40 U.S.)

After 1905, there is a rapid dropping-off in the society's donations to the United States. By 1914, with the opening of World War I, the donations reached only 8,800 marks. That fell to 2,200 marks in 1915 and to 200 marks in 1916. The donations ceased after 1918.

Using the above list, one can easily see that the Benedictine missionaries, first in Pennsylvania and later in Minnesota, received significant aid from the Ludwig-Missionsverein. Abbot Wimmer and his

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<sup>18</sup>Rev. Theodore Roemer, "The Ludwig-Missionsverein and the Church in the United States: 1838-1918 (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1933), p. 138.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

Abbey of St. Vincent in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, were major beneficiaries, receiving 144,133.36 gulden (\$57,646.34 U.S.) between the years 1846 and 1868.<sup>20</sup> There is much correspondence between Abbot Wimmer and the society headquarters in Bavaria concerning sums received and requests sent for even more aid. The society never refused the Abbot's pleas for funds.

Father Francis Pierz was also successful in getting the Ludwig-Missionsverein to support his work among the Indians; between 1853 and 1872, he received 10,000 gulden (\$4,040. U.S.) Reverend Ignatius Tomazin, his successor in Northern Minnesota, received 2,000 gulden (\$800 U.S.) and 2,206.59 marks (\$530 U.S.).<sup>21</sup> After the 1880s the largest amount of money for White Earth and later Red Lake mission came from the federal government and from the Drexel Fund, but the Ludwig-Missionsverein continued to give periodic assistance for the Indians well into the twentieth century. Most of it went directly to the BCIM which, in turn, distributed it to the Indian missions. The BCIM received 16,000 marks (\$3,840. U.S.) from the society from 1879-1904.<sup>22</sup> The contributions between 1900 and 1904 were especially gratifying since federal funds were cut off and the use of tribal funds was still being debated in the courts.

#### The BCIM's Aid

As stated earlier in this chapter, the BCIM, founded in 1879,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 112. The Reich mark replaced the gulden in 1876.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

became the major channel for funding of Catholic Indian missions throughout the United States. It served chiefly as a conduit for funds from the federal government and from charitable organizations or individuals--such as Katherine Drexel. In sum, the BCIM was a clearing-house for transactions of funds and for the preparation and execution of court appeals when necessary.

However, relations between the BCIM and the very missions it tried to help were not always friendly. There were misunderstandings regarding the amount of payments, the handling of records, and the upkeep of the bureau itself. As early as 1886, St. John's Abbey and the BCIM disputed over the latter issue.

Between 1881 and 1890, St. John's Abbey contributed almost all the funds received by the White Earth mission. The construction of a new church and school in 1881-82, for example, cost \$20,000. Of this total, St. John's paid \$18,245 and the rest came from the Ludwig-Missionsverein, from Bishop Grace in St. Paul, and from various collections in the Twin Cities. Much of the labor for the new buildings was also furnished by St. John's in the person of several lay brothers who supervised and worked with native laborers.

Because, hard-pressed to keep the central office going, Father Stephan had called for contributions from the missions, Abbot Alexius Edelbrock sent a rather testy letter to Father Stephen at the BCIM in February of 1886. Conscious of his abbey's support of the mission, the Abbot was quite displeased, as the following passages from his letter demonstrate:

When mission houses were to be erected in White Earth,

the Bureau did not furnish us the pecuniary means necessary. . . . And now after we allowed the Bureau to manage during the brief period of only a few months our affairs, we are taxed or in equal words are called upon politely, yet forcibly, to pile in contributions. . . . We object to this whole proceeding and enter our protest. If the late Plenary Council is not or willing not to keep that Bureau alive, let it disappear. . . . Our Order--the Benedictine--has spent over \$20,000 of its own money in converting and civilizing the Indian, and after bringing all these personal and pecuniary sacrifices, we are called upon to contribute towards maintaining a Bureau in Washington, a Bureau, too, which up to the present did us very little, if any good. . . .<sup>23</sup>

The Abbot goes on to state that the eight to ten million Catholics in the United States have done little or nothing for the Indians and he thinks they should "come to the front and put their hands in their pockets." He is especially annoyed, however, that the Bureau is levying a "tax" without consulting the missions and missionaries who must pay it. Neither the Abbot nor the Bureau could know in 1886 how valuable the Bureau would prove to be in the large number of court cases over funding and land which arose by the 1890s, lasting well into the twentieth century. The Abbot, grudgingly, sent a check for \$100, representing \$50 from St. John's and \$50 from St. Benedict's Convent.

In actuality, the BCIM kept its expenses to a minimum. The estimate of total funds needed for support of the bureau for the years 1898 and 1917 is exactly the same: \$4,700. Between those years, the Director's salary remained at \$2,000 annually while the Secretary's

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<sup>23</sup>Letter from Abbot A. Edelbrock to Father Joseph A. Stephan, Director, BCIM, dated February 24, 1886. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

salary rose from \$1,200 to \$1,700. Office rent rose from \$420 to \$660. Costs for heat, light, stationery, printing, and postage stayed at \$150. Traveling and contingency costs rose from \$270 to \$310.<sup>24</sup> By any standards, the Bureau's expenses were kept remarkably low.

The BCIM was keeping records of all the mission boarding and day schools from the 1880s on and its records from June 1884 to June 1893 show the great increase in such schools:<sup>25</sup>

FISCAL YEAR	SCHOOLS		PUPILS		GOV'T ALLOTMENT
	Boarding	Day	Boarding	Day	
Ended June 30, 1884	13	0	365	0	\$ 65,520.00
Ended June 30, 1885	17	1	950	40	94,883.33
Ended June 30, 1886	27	4	1378	160	118,343.00
Ended June 30, 1887	29	14	1745	680	194,655.00
Ended June 30, 1888	35	15	2107	740	221,169.00
Ended June 30, 1889	38	16	2787	650	347,672.00
Ended June 30, 1890	43	17	3157	640	356,957.00
Ended June 30, 1891	38	15	3091	405	363,349.00
Ended June 30, 1892	36	15	3267	372	394,756.00
Ended June 30, 1893	39	13	3265	292	369,535.00

The report also lists five Industrial Schools supported entirely by the BCIM.

In the same report, Father Stephan notes that he is trying to secure surveys of land tracts in order to perfect the titles for the missions. Completing the paper work for the contract schools as well as working toward legislation granting fee simple titles made the

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<sup>24</sup>Estimates of funds needed for support of the BCIM for the year beginning November 1, 1898 and for the year beginning November 1, 1917. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

<sup>25</sup>Contract lists from June 30, 1884 to June 30, 1893, p. 4. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

Bureau's job a hard and complicated one.

Negotiations with the federal government's Office of Indian Affairs for contracts and funding was a time-consuming task for the Bureau each spring. There were hundreds of forms to collect and fill in, and, often, a corroborating trip was needed to check the status of a mission which was being challenged by the government. As were his successors, Father Stephan was a tireless traveler, crisscrossing the nation on behalf of the Indian missions. He may have contended often with government officials over federal policy he considered unfavorable to his missions, but he was not slow to express gratitude for the federal funds which came steadily for close to three decades. White Earth, however, received direct government aid for only fifteen years--1885 to 1900.

#### Tribal Funds

The Act of 1889, signed between the federal government and bands of Ojibwa Indians of Minnesota, set up a trust fund for the Indians from the sale of land and timber. Section Seven of the Act of 1889 provided for the use of one-fourth of the interest on tribal funds for the establishment and maintenance of a system of free schools. After the complete cut-off of direct government appropriations for contract schools by 1900, scores of these schools applied for and received support from the tribes among whom they served. No available letters or records reveal why, prodded by the BCIM, Father Aloysius did not seek such aid long before he did. In a letter to Father Aloysius dated September of 1917, Charles Lusk, Secretary of the

BCIM, writes,

The Bureau has felt that where Indians have moneys of their own that can be used for educational purposes, no effort should be spared to make them see that it is their duty to support the Mission schools among them, and that if those in charge of such schools fail to make the required effort, and depend upon contributions from white people, they are open to severe criticism.<sup>26</sup>

The Secretary goes on to state that the Catholic Indians of Red Lake are using their money to educate their children and that the Bureau sees no reason why the White Earth Catholic Ojibwa should not be willing to do the same.

At White Earth, the pastor or his assistant would write up a petition and, with the help of principal men of the tribe, would send it or take it around the area to get signatures. A letter to the secretary of the BCIM from Sister Lioba Braun in August of 1920 reports that 1,159 signatures had been gathered at White Earth and that this would enable the school to take 100 pupils. A letter from E. B. Meritt, Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to Father (now Monsignor) Ketcham of the BCIM, dated September, 1920, informs him that White Earth has a contract for the care and education of 100 Ojibwa Indian children at \$125 per capita, per annum, amounting to \$12,500.<sup>27</sup> From 1920 to 1945, the sums rarely changed.

Father Benno Watrin, quoted in an earlier chapter as being an

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<sup>26</sup>Letter from Secretary Lusk of the BCIM to Rev. Aloysius Hermanutz, dated September 27, 1917. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

<sup>27</sup>Letter from E. B. Meritt to Monsignor Ketcham, dated September 7, 1920. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

assistant to Father Aloysius briefly in 1925, recalls that he and Theodore Gorney, a laborer at the mission, went from house to house seeking signatures for the petition that year. They were accompanied by "Coffee" Beaulieu, an Ojibwa, who helped open many doors to them. Father says they approached non-Catholic Indians as well as Catholics and did not get many refusals. But opposition to the use of tribal funds for the Catholic school did grow by the 1930s and early 1940s.

One of the leaders of the opposition at White Earth was Webster Ballanger, a lawyer by profession. A letter was written to him by two girls--Sophia Smith and Julia Beaulieu--from the mission school in late December of 1921 disagreeing with his criticism of the mission school and especially with his accusations that the school did not adequately prepare the students to enter society at large. Ballanger's reply is dated January 7, 1922. He writes,

I ask you nice little girls whether you think it right to use the school funds of your tribe in defraying the expenses of other nice little girls and boys in the mission school who have public school facilities at their home and thereby deprive a like number of nice little girls and boys, who have no public school facilities at their home, and who cannot obtain admission to the mission school, of any chance of obtaining an education? The General Council wants the mission school to continue. It has done a great job. The Sisters in charge are entitled to the greatest praise. It should extend its assistance to those who need it, and not to the children who have opportunities at their home for obtaining an education.<sup>28</sup>

Ballanger wants the mission school to limit its enrollment to those students who have no alternatives but to attend there. There were

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<sup>28</sup>Letter of Webster Ballanger to Sophia Smith and Julia Beaulieu, dated January 7, 1922. St. John's Abbey Archives.

others at White Earth who felt the same, undoubtedly, but until the 1940s, the use of tribal funds continued and the signatures were always obtained without much trouble. Most of the White Earth Indians were Catholics and this surely alleviated any problem in regard to approval of the boarding school and the efforts of the missionaries to keep it open.

By 1941, however, opposition at White Earth seems to have grown stronger. A letter from Father Justin Luetmer, pastor, informs Father J. Tennelly, new director of the BCIM, that he has a petition circulating among the Indians and expects to get "at least 2,000 signers." But he concludes,

The executive board of the tribal council held a meeting last December and voted that no more tribal funds are to be used for educational purposes. The board says that Indians are taxpayers and are entitled to free education. That idea was put into their heads by the state board of education.<sup>29</sup>

The last check from White Earth tribal funds covered the mission school for the period ending May 31, 1945. The boarding school could not be continued without these funds and in the summer of 1945 it was converted to a day school.

#### The Drexel Fund

The White Earth pioneer missionaries--Father Aloysius, Sister Philomene and Sister Lioba--first met Katherine Drexel in the fall of 1888 when she stopped at the mission briefly, on her return home from

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<sup>29</sup>Letter from Father Justin Luetmer to Father J. Tennelly, dated February 25, 1941. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

a tour of the west. A direct outcome of this visit was Miss Drexel's promise to build a school at both White Earth and Red Lake. The promise was kept and quickly--with construction beginning in 1890. There is much correspondence between Father Aloysius and Katherine Drexel over the following years, at first focusing narrowly on monetary concerns. Occasionally, Father Aloysius shares a fear or a hope that he has--as in the following excerpt from a letter to Miss Drexel in October of 1891:

Indian missions are a great burden to a priest especially now when the government more or less takes a hostile position against God's holy cause in our missions, although I have full confidence in God that He will turn everything at the end to the best of our missions.<sup>30</sup>

Miss Drexel's letters, in return, assure Father that she will not fail to help his work and that he should keep her informed of his needs.

A letter from Charles Lusk, Secretary of the BCIM, to Mother Katherine Drexel, dated June 20, 1899, replies to her request for more information about the use of her funds. He reports that in total her fund has provided \$32,826 "compensation" to the missions for the year 1899 and that the sum will likely reach \$92,046 in 1900. A letter from Father Stephan to Father Dyer, Treasurer of the BCIM, also in 1899, reports that out of the \$32,826 the White Earth Mission received \$1,242 and Red Lake \$584.26.<sup>31</sup>

Following is a summation of the amounts the Drexel Fund

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<sup>30</sup>Letter from Father Aloysius to Katherine Drexel dated October 14, 1891. St. John's Archives.

<sup>31</sup>Drexel Fund. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

supplied to White Earth between 1900 and 1910, usually covering four quarters:<sup>32</sup>

1900--1901	\$4881.35	January to July 1908	\$1,242
1901--1902	3726.00	January to July 1909	3,726
1902--1903	4968.00	July 1909 to January 1910	1,242
1903--1904	4968.00	January 1910 to July 1910	2,484
1904--1905	3726.00		
1905--1906	2484.00		
1906--1907	2484.00		

If the enrollment dropped, the compensatory funds lessened accordingly.

Not all the correspondence between the BCIM and Mother Drexel was restricted to business matters, though nine out of ten letters do concern finances. Sometimes letters exchange information about mutual friends of Father Stephan and Mother Drexel. Among these friends, Father Aloysius and Sisters Philomene and Lioba ranked high in Mother Drexel's affection. As already mentioned, there are numerous letters extant from Father Aloysius to Mother Drexel and replies from her. Often, Father reports how the money is being used at White Earth and expresses his and the sisters' gratitude for Mother Drexel's help. In a letter to her dated December of 1910, Father Aloysius concludes,

The venerable sisters have a full attendance, 100 pupils and school runs in a good order as all sisters, seven of them, are taken up cheerfully with the work. The kindest and best regards from Sister Lioba and Sister Philomene to you. They are getting old now. We all three spent most [sic] 32 years on this reserve.<sup>33</sup>

The letters evidence a respect and affection which was mutual and

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Letter from Father Aloysius Hermanutz to Mother Katherine Drexel, dated December 7, 1910. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

lasted to the deaths of the three White Earth missionaries--all of which preceded Mother Drexel's. She outlived them by more than ten years, dying in 1955, at the age of 96.

From March 31, 1920 to March 31, 1945, the Drexel payments to White Earth totalled approximately \$73,000. The following quarterly payments give sums for selected fall and winter quarters:<sup>34</sup>

March 31, 1920	\$4030.81	December 31, 1933	\$5326.09
December 31, 1922	4893.11	December 31, 1937	5115.04
March 31, 1927	5222.69	December 31, 1940	4074.73
December 31, 1929	5220.56	March 31, 1945	3685.50

The Drexel Fund ceased to be a source of help to White Earth after 1945 when the mission boarding school reverted to a day school.

#### Diocesan Collections

As early as 1900, there was an annual Lenten collection in Catholic parishes for the Indian and Negro missions. But the total sums were meager, generally, and Father Stephan thought the solution might be to send Indian missionaries around to the parishes to solicit funds, missionaries who could give firsthand accounts of the needs of the Indians. A number of bishops responded favorably to the idea and themselves gave generous personal donations but, on the whole, there was little enthusiasm for the project and nothing came of it.

In the fall of 1901, Father Ketcham, Father Stephan's successor as director of the BCIM, established the Society for the Preservation of the Faith Among Indian Children--later called simply the Preservation

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<sup>34</sup>Drexel Fund. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

Society. Catholics were to pay membership dues of 25¢ yearly and if 400,000 members could be enrolled, annual fees would bring in \$100,000 for the mission schools.<sup>35</sup> Father Ketcham collected \$30,192.86 from the society by the end of 1902 and \$25,937.55 at the end of 1903.<sup>36</sup> The total declined year after year. A disappointed Father Ketcham said in 1906:

The tremendous burden that the 13 million Catholics of the U.S. impose constantly upon Mother Katherine Drexel cannot be other than a subject of amazement to any thinking person.<sup>37</sup>

In 1904, the Marquette League, composed of both clergy and laity, was founded in New York City. The organization appealed to wealthy Catholics for sizable donations to Indian missions. Annual membership fees were \$2. Unhappily, the League also was not a monetary success, collecting \$1,000-3,000 a year.<sup>38</sup>

A more permanent source of funds were annual diocesan collections explicitly set aside for the Indian missions and not dependent on the sporadic goodwill expressions of aid personified in the Preservation Society or the Marquette League. There are a multitude of letters to and from the BCIM wherein receipts are acknowledged/requested for money drafts from a diocese. In 1910, for example, the records show the amount contributed by the St. Cloud

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<sup>35</sup>Prucha, The Churches and the Indian Schools, p. 49.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>37</sup>BCIM Report, 1906, p. 29. Quoted in Prucha, The Churches and the Indian Schools, p. 52.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

Diocese totalled \$1,000. Bishop Trobec was pleased with the sum, citing it as \$175 more than in 1909.<sup>39</sup> The sum for 1911 also came out to \$1,000. By the war years, the sum dropped considerably and in the 1920s, such collections rarely went above \$200. During these years, the St. Paul diocesan collections were on a par with those of St. Cloud.

The Diocese of Crookston fared less well in its collections, rarely reaching over \$700 annually. But the Crookston Diocese was one-third composed of Indians, leaving a smaller pool of potential contributors than in the other two dioceses. Father Stephan and his successors spoke before charity groups and fraternal organizations in all three dioceses as frequently as possible. The diocesan collections, however, never became a major or reliable source of funds for the Indian missions. Collections for the foreign missions seemingly had more appeal than did the home missions. This angered and saddened the various Directors of the BCIM who felt that the claims of the American Indians should have been paramount among all American Catholics.

#### Government Funding

During the pre-1880s, the federal government spent much more money killing Indians than educating them. Of the funds which were appropriated to fulfill treaty obligations, most were paid out mainly

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<sup>39</sup>Letter from Bishop J. Trobec to Father Dyer, dated March 4, 1910. BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

as salaries for agency employees or for such projects as model farms--which seldom worked since poor soil and/or lack of attitudinal change on the part of the Indians doomed them from the start. The Government's assimilation drive in the last third of the nineteenth century, strong not only for the nation's "oldest minority," the Indians, but also for the flood of immigrants pouring into America during this time, centered on schools to do the job of making all these minorities into one hundred per cent Americans. By 1899, "over \$2,500,000 was being expended annually on 148 boarding schools and 225 day schools with almost 20,000 [Indian] children in attendance."<sup>40</sup>

Church and state became partners in the endeavor to educate the Indians, although it was an uneasy alliance at times. At White Earth, the first contract for federal aid to its school was in effect in 1885 and the contracts were renewed yearly up to 1900. The following sums show the extent of government subsidies to White Earth between 1889 and 1900, each sum covering four quarters annually:<sup>41</sup>

1889--1890	\$2,700	1895--1896	\$9,720
1890--1891	2,700	1896--1897	8,100
1891--1892	1,080	1897--1899	7,560
1892--1893	9,720	1898--1899	5,508
1893--1894	9,720	1899--1900	2,592
1894--1895	9,720		

The big jump between 1891-92 and 1892-93 is due to the almost doubled enrollment of the school after completion of the new convent/school building. Prior to 1891, the school could accommodate a maximum of

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<sup>40</sup>William T. Hagen, American Indians, p. 134.

<sup>41</sup>BCIM Records. Marquette University Archives.

25-30 students; after 1892, the enlarged facilities could handle over 100 students.

The per capita, per annum subsidy for the Indian students remained at \$108 until 1896--only those having at least one-fourth Indian blood being eligible for such aid. Between 1892 and 1896, federal funding peaked and then declined rapidly by 1897, a year after the Congressional vote to phase out contract schools. Although the enrollment at St. Benedict's school in White Earth remained at a steady 100-120 almost yearly, the government subsidies dwindled from a high of \$108 per student to \$25 per student by 1899. Only the availability of the Drexel Fund and its "compensation" monies kept White Earth--as so many other Catholic Indian missions--afloat. Government checks to the mission school resumed only in 1918, this time transferring tribal trust funds. The allotment of \$120 per student per annum was more generous than the pre-1900 allotments had been.

After 1900, nationwide the day school's popularity increased and it was seen as the route to go in educating everyone. Congress liked day schools because they seemed cheaper than boarding schools. Others argued that the day schools kept the children near their families, helping to create a nucleus of civilization for the tribe. The boarding schools declined steadily under pressure from critics but perhaps even more so because of their heavy drain on tribal funds.

John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote to Monsignor Hughes, Director of the BCIM, in July of 1934, calling attention to the government policy regarding boarding schools. He

states,

Most of us are agreed, I think, in insisting upon home responsibility for the rearing of the children, and the desirability of leaving children, especially young children, at home while they attend school. We believe that boarding schools, whether government or mission, should bear this principle in mind in the enrollment of pupils.<sup>42</sup>

Supporters of the boarding school concept were jarred further by a new section Collier added to the contracts for the year 1934-1935:

Article 1, Section 11. The party of the second part agrees to eliminate from its rolls as boarding pupils those pupils who are within a reasonable distance from public or day schools, except those pupils who are found to be institutional cases, and to limit its enrollment to such individual children as are approved for enrollment by the Superintendent of Indian Education. The party of the second part further agrees that when children are eliminated from Government boarding schools because of good home and school facilities nearby, such children shall not be permitted to enroll in a school maintained by the party of the first part.<sup>43</sup>

This government policy hampered boarding schools across the nation and, gradually, over the next ten years, enrollment dropped severely in most of them. White Earth's enrollment stayed fairly high--in the 80s and 90s--right into the 1940s but, by 1945, the General Council voted to end support of the mission school through tribal funds. Unable to continue without such help, the school reverted to a day school in the fall of 1945.

Reviewing the years from 1878 to 1945, one sees that the White Earth Indian mission--with the school as its heart--was rarely

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<sup>42</sup>U. S. Department of Interior. Office of Indian Affairs. Letter of John Collier to Monsignor W. Hughes, dated July 24, 1934.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

financially solid. There were periods of relative security, i.e., 1885-1896 but, generally, the mission had to rely heavily on its own labor--farm and gardens especially--becoming as self-sufficient as possible while also appealing to diverse sources for monetary aid. The Ludwig-Missionsverein, the federal government, the Katherine Drexel Fund, diocesan collections, and tribal trust funds--whether applied concurrently or as supplements/substitutions for one another--were essential to the survival of the White Earth Catholic Indian mission. The loss of any one of these sources would have put a strain on the mission but the loss of all of them by 1945--with the exception of the diocesan collections which had always been small--spelled defeat.

## Chapter V

### INTERVIEWS

In the following pages are the results of interviews with people who either taught at the White Earth mission school or were students/graduates of it. The interviewees are divided into three groups: the sisters (4), the priests (3), and the students/graduates (9).

Criteria for selection of interviewees rested primarily on three things: the number of years spent at the mission, the variety of roles played by the participants, and their willingness to share memories. Secondary criteria included articulateness and geographic availability.

In the case of the four sisters, each served at White Earth not less than three years, three being there well over a dozen years. All live within ten miles of the interviewer--and of one another. Only three priests were interviewed because they are the only ones available who are near at hand--five miles distance--and are able and willing to recall their years at White Earth. One--Father Benno Watrin--spent a little less than a year at White Earth itself but that time was in 1925 and only one other priest is still living who goes back that far and had contact with the pioneer founders at the mission. In addition, because Father Benno spent over 30 years at other parishes

on the White Earth reservation, he seems especially qualified to give his views on life as a missionary among the Ojibwa. The second priest interviewed, Father Valerian Thelen, spent 26 years at White Earth: 1925-1930 and 1942-1963. In the latter period, he was assisted by his brother, Father Constantine Thelen, the third priest interviewed, who spent 21 years at the mission.

The nine Indian women interviewees are living either at White Earth (5) or in the Twin Cities (4). Most spent from 6-10 years at the mission school. Their names were given to me by sisters who have known them over many years, in and out of the mission setting.

All of those interviewed were gracious and generous with their time and answered questions patiently, often anticipating interests and offering opinions and items I had not the wit to think of.

### The Sisters

The majority of sisters who served at White Earth between 1878 and 1945 were teachers in the mission school. The others were housekeepers, cooks, and prefects. None seems to have kept a diary or journal of their experiences--especially regrettable for one trying to piece together decades of what was basically a "frontier" life. Through interviews with a half-dozen sisters who were at the mission between 1921 and 1945, it has been possible to get glimpses of what life was like there--though primarily within the confines of the convent/school building. As explained in an earlier chapter, the sisters, bound by pre-Vatican II rules, rarely left their convent/

school setting. Their contact with adult Indians, then, was necessarily minimal.

Two sisters who each served over twenty years at White Earth testify to a great love of the mission and look back with fondness at people and incidents they can still recall quite vividly. Sisters Thea Grieman and Mary Degel, now in their eighties, are happy to reminisce about White Earth with anyone who shows an interest. They are both soft-spoken, gentle women whose strength of mind, voice, and memory belie their years.

Sister Thea Grieman. Sister Thea Grieman is retired at St. Scholastica's, St. Cloud, Minnesota, since 1974. Aged eighty, Sister Thea shows little sign of slowing down: she is a sister-visitor to nursing homes in the area and plays organ in the St. Benedict Center nursing home every Sunday and once or twice a week as well. She was eager to recall her years at White Earth and spoke freely of both good and bad experiences.

White Earth was Sister Thea's first mission and she stayed 23 years: 1921-1944. Young and eager, as she describes herself, Sister Thea was sent to White Earth right after making first vows, to teach music and play the organ. An accident shortened her first year there. On the last day of September in 1921, Sister Thea fell out of a second-floor window while washing it. Sister Philomene nursed her that night; pain was shooting through Sister Thea's head but, though she was badly bruised, there seemed to be no broken bones. What saved her was the fact that she landed on the sidewalk with her hands down

flat, cushioning the fall. Her hands were swollen terribly and Sister Thea was barely able to move them for over a month. In the morning, accompanied by Sister Philomene, Sister Thea was put in a freight car at Detroit Lakes to make a trip to St. Cloud Hospital. She was away recuperating until November of 1921.

As the 1920s progressed, Sister Thea's tasks broadened and she soon became a classroom teacher, giving music lessons on Saturdays and after school. At one time or another, Sister Thea taught all the grades. She remembers that the students were "very stubborn" and "slow to learn"--like students anywhere. There were runaways at times. The worst times for running away, she remembers, were the first week of October when the newness of school had worn off and around the first of February, a mid-term slump.

I asked Sister Thea about the use or non-use of the Ojibwa language. She recalls that the little girls often knew more Ojibwa when they came than English. She adds that when the sisters wanted to keep something secret from the girls, they spoke German; when the girls wanted to keep a secret from the sisters, they talked Ojibwa.

When asked what she thought was a disadvantage to a boarding school, such as White Earth, Sister Thea mentioned the fact that it was just a one-sex school. The only time the girls could be in mixed company was if they had visitors or when they went to town--usually chaperoned. The girls went wild when they were near boys, says Sister Thea. "They didn't know how to act." Looking back from the vantage point of almost 40 years, Sister Thea now thinks the girls may not have been taught enough positive patterns regarding sex. It may not

be too far off the mark to say that the sisters at the mission school were, in moral standards at least, preservers of many customs and beliefs of the first and second generations of Indians on the reservation as much as defenders of Catholic teachings on sexual morality.

Both missionaries and Indians protected young girls especially at the time of puberty. The girl of marriageable age was kept under her mother's or some other older woman's eyes constantly. Adolescent girls were kept close to home; nor were adolescent boys and girls allowed even to walk together.

Girls brought up in strict Catholic environments--true whether describing Indian or white people--have traditionally been drilled on the evil of sex outside marriage and on the desirability of purity. The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for example, a sodality which stressed the virtues of modesty and purity, had been a special feature of Catholic schools over the pre-Vatican II decades.

The sisters staffing the White Earth mission school, until well into the 1960s, came out of a background which set its highest moral standards for females. Catholic girls were warned of the dangers of hellfire for sexual misbehavior--i.e., becoming unmarried mothers and/or having abortions. "Occasions of sin" were to be avoided; therefore, "good" girls did not see men privately. The sisters themselves were bound by rules, until into the 1950s and '60s, which forbade them to be alone in public even with their fathers and brothers.

In her 1938 study at White Earth, Sister Inez Hilger reports

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Conditions have changed radically since early days. One of the old men on the White Earth Reservation remarked that two things were being much talked about at the same time not many years ago. One was the airplane; the other the women who were disgracing the tribe.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1920s and 1930s, unmarried mothers were no rarity at White Earth. Sister Inez attributes this change to the breakdown of tribal authority and disciplinary control and the scarcity of proper leisure-time activities." She concludes that, for the third generation on the White Earth reservation--those born after 1905--"group sanctions, customs, and mores of the old culture have little value. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

To some extent, the sisters at the mission school were waging a rear-guard action to protect and guide the morals of their charges. While in the school, the girls conformed to rules governing strict moral behavior but, once out of the school, they passed beyond the sisters' control into a society which no longer held former views on sexual propriety.

Sister Thea shared her image of the three pioneer figures of the mission with whom she lived during their last five to six years at White Earth. Sister Philomene was "rough and ready"; Sister Lioba was "the lady"; and Father Aloysius was "a great man, kind with a sense of humor, and liked music."<sup>3</sup> The three went into retirement

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<sup>1</sup>Sister Inez Hilger, "A Social Study of 150 Chippewa Indian Families of the White Earth Reservation of Minnesota," Ph.D. dissertation (Catholic University of America, 1939), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Sister Thea Grieman, St. Scholastica's, St. Cloud, Minnesota, 12 August, 1980.

by 1928 but Sister Thea and several others who were also at White Earth in those early 1920s had lived with them long enough to get first-hand stories of the early years of the mission.

With two or three other sisters, Sister Thea started a club at White Earth called Handmaids of the Blessed Sacrament. Six to eight girls were members in any one year and were taught to play the organ, do sacristy work, and to wash church linen. They hoped that when these girls returned to their own homes, they could help their parish priests.

One of the club members was Ella Haug, who attended the mission school from the second through the eighth grades. Ella later joined the Franciscans at Little Falls, taking the name Sister Roswitha. She is still a Franciscan today, currently stationed in the Twin Cities. She and Sister Thea exchange letters on occasion, keeping alive a friendship that developed at the grade school and in a club at White Earth.

Sister Thea remembers that another former mission student-- Zola Saice--also went to the convent, joining the Crookston Benedictines as Sister Ethelbert. After 25 years as a religious, she left and Sister Thea has lost track of her. She does not recall any other religious vocations among the girls at the mission.

On the whole, Sister Thea enjoyed her years at White Earth. In the 1940s, however, she found the spirit among the sisters was not as good as in the earlier years. She recalls a sense of jealousy in some. Because of this, Sister Thea was ready and willing to leave White Earth in 1944, though her memories contain many more good and

happy times than sad ones.

Sister Mary Degel. A friend and companion of Sister Thea for most of her years at White Earth was Sister Mary (Hilaire) Degel. The two are together again, this time in retirement at St. Scholastica's. Sister Mary retired officially in 1978, though she uses her still-abundant energy working part time in the dietary department and in the sisters' dining room. Sister Mary is always ready to tell of her years at White Earth, a place she still misses after all these years.

Like Sister Thea, Sister Mary went to White Earth right after taking first vows. She recalls that Sister Lioba came to St. Benedict's looking for helpers. She came up to Sister Mary in the community room and thumped her on the chest, checking for symptoms of tuberculosis. Sister Mary seemed healthy enough and was chosen to go to White Earth where she remained from 1922-1938, returning for a second stint, 1939-1946 (with one year out--1943-44--for further schooling).

During her first ten years at the mission, Sister Mary taught first and second grades. Later, she had all the grades in turn. Recalling the curriculum in the primary grades, Sister Mary listed religion, arithmetic, phonics, reading, and penmanship before lunch and music, reading, spelling and art after lunch. The curriculum for the upper grades consisted of religion, reading, arithmetic, language, history, geography, science, spelling, penmanship, and music. Sister Mary found the students to be "diligent" for the most part--though, like students anywhere, anytime, needing to be motivated.

Sister Mary remembers being bothered at first by the fact that she was warned not to get too familiar with the girls. She was criticized for being too lenient with them. But there were many runaways, and Sister Mary thinks the schedule at White Earth was too rigid for the girls--especially for those who were delinquents brought there by social welfare workers as a last chance before being taken to a corrections institution. Several of the sisters who served at White Earth with Sister Mary or after her time corroborate her statement on this matter. Social welfare workers placed some girls at the mission school who were considered almost incorrigible. The number averaged 2-3 a year. It was hoped that the sisters would reform these girls. Unfortunately, most of these delinquents were already in their teens when brought to the mission, allowing a very short time for any enduring change of behavior. Sometimes the opposite effect occurred: the delinquents would defy and upset the house routines and rules. However, according to most of the sisters, the delinquents generally behaved themselves during their time at the mission.

With much animation, Sister Mary recalls her role in building up a home economics cottage at White Earth. The idea was to give the Indian girls experience in running an actual home. Only the seventh and eighth grade girls were involved. Three girls at a time--usually for a month--would live and work in the cottage with Sister Mary as supervisor. They planned meals, learned to budget, canned, did accounting, and baby-sat on weekends, borrowing a neighbor's child. Sister Mary expressed some residual resentment over the fact that the pastor, Father Valerian, took the cottage from the girls and gave it

to a married employee to use for a while. Father Constantine, however, recalls only that the cottage was used as housing for the priests after their own rectory burned down in 1947.

During the mid-30s, Sister Mary began a 4-H club at the mission school, enrolling on the average 50-60 girls at any one time. She wanted the girls to have contact with other clubs in the area--Detroit Lakes, especially--and to give the girls more social life. The members put on plays, gave readings, sewed, raised vegetables and flowers, and baked bread and pastries. There is more than a hint of pride in her voice as she tells of the large number of ribbons the girls won at fairs and other exhibits.

I asked Sister Mary about her impressions of the Indians' character traits. She says she found them affectionate, good-natured, and a happy people. She cited as basic for success in working with them an understanding of Indian background and being honest with them. Indians are quick to detect deceit, she notes. "They are suspicious due to hard raps, but if they trust you, they are very loyal."<sup>4</sup> Sister made many friends among the White Earth Indians and to this day keeps up correspondence with a fair number of them.

By the 1940s, when Sisters Thea and Mary were already 19- and 20-year veterans at the mission, two very "green" sisters were assigned there: Sisters Debora Herda and Johnette Kohorst. Both speak favorably, on the whole, of their years at White Earth, but they have more unhappy

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Sister Mary Degel, St. Scholastica's, St. Cloud, Minnesota, 22 July, 1980.

memories than do the two older sisters.

Sister Debora Herda. Sister Debora Herda served at White Earth from 1940-1943. Twenty-four at the start of her assignment, she recalls being lonesome and "craving to talk to someone my own age"; all but one of the sisters were over 40. Sister Debora remembers that the older sisters often spoke German and she felt left out, not knowing the language that well. She--and later, the even-younger Sister Johnette Kohorst--recalls that the only steady visitors to White Earth were government inspectors, sisters' parents, the pastor's relatives, and Ida Roy--a graduate of the mission school, who was a nurse at Anchor Hospital in St. Paul. Ida would bring a treat--fruit or candy--for the sisters during her visits.

Sister Debora was a prefect for the pre-schoolers and the girls from the first through the fifth grades. Besides this, she taught cooking for the girls from the fifth grade level up. For a prefect, the hours were always full. Sister was in charge of the girls outside classroom hours, getting them up in the morning, tucking them in at night, supervising the playroom and their manual labor. She and a fellow-prefect slept in the dormitory area all night, on hand should a child need help as well as to ensure order and quiet. Sister Debora regrets that she could rarely recreate with the other sisters and had to say her prayers privately as well. For a Benedictine, community gatherings are a central feature of religious life and this deprivation was keenly felt.

Typically, in a Benedictine house, there are three or four

common prayer gatherings, usually divided into early morning, noon, and evening. Besides these, the sisters gather for meals and recreation. Observing such common exercises, the sisters keep in touch with each others' experiences, share hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, and all else that goes to constitute true communal living. Through the common life, the sisters give mutual encouragement and example. Most important, a sense of solidarity is fostered. Absence from common exercises, then, is contrary to the Benedictine Rule. Apostolic work--such as that of running a boarding school--may require such absence but it is considered an unfortunate necessity, not a desirable feature.

Being young, and sometimes lonely, Sister Debora could empathize with the girls, especially the youngest ones. She remembers that a 3-1/2 year old was left at the mission during her years there and how bewildered the child seemed. Like young Sister Mary Degel, two decades earlier, Sister Debora was sometimes scolded for being "too close" to the girls.

On Saturdays and Sundays, Sister Debora usually took the entire student body out for walks and, in spring, to town for a ball-game. A lover of the outdoors herself, she knew the students were restless being indoors so much of the time. Enough trust grew up between Sister Debora and the girls so that, on some walks, she would allow them to scatter and roam in the woods near the mission; after a time, she would blow a whistle as a signal to come together for the return to the school. Sister Debora says she never lost a student on any of these outings.

Although she was a prefect, Sister Debora says she tried to avoid giving physical punishment, preferring to talk with offenders and to try to bring about good behavior that way. Of necessity, a boarding school has many rules; among those at White Earth were keeping silence during the night hours, being on time for classes, doing one's work detail, taking good care of personal and household objects. Infractions of the rules were punished according to the age of the children and the seriousness of the misbehavior. Sister Thea recalls that the most severe punishment--whipping--was for runaways. Lesser punishments consisted of depriving the child of recess time or free time after school. Sometimes the child had to write "I will not . . ." or "I will . . . ," specifying the behavior to be avoided or encouraged.

Among a number of amusing incidents Sister Debora can recall one that occurred when she was showing the girls how to play baseball, choosing up sides. During the course of the game, a girl ran up to her and complained, "Sister, Big Bear is hitting me." Sister Debora told her to stay a distance from the other girl and added, "But you really shouldn't call anyone a name." The first girl replied, "But, sister, that is her name."<sup>5</sup> Sister Debora had a hard time learning the family names of many of the students.

As a major part of her happy memories of life at the mission, Sister Debora credits the Indians with having taught her a lot: beadwork, dyeing, ricing, and tapping the maple trees. Overall, her years at White Earth were happy ones, says Sister Debora. She

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<sup>5</sup>Interview with Sister Debora Herda, St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 21 January 1981.

speaks with fondness of the Indian children and of those adult Indians whom she came to know. The more negative aspects of life at the mission tend to fall away as she relates events.

Sister Johnette Kohorst. The youngest sister ever assigned to White Earth, Sister Johnette Kohorst, served there as a cook from 1940-1954. Aged 18 when first sent, Sister Johnette was pleased to go to White Earth. For her, it was the closest thing to an orphanage, an apostolate to which she felt a strong attraction.

Like Sister Debora, only a few years older than herself, Sister Johnette empathized with the Indian girls and found they were attracted to her, wanting to talk with her frequently. Several of the girls were only a year or two younger than she.

The work at the mission was endless, says Sister Johnette, but it was taken for granted. In fact, as is true of many religious, Sister Johnette felt guilty if she was not busy every moment. Idle hands were about the one thing never to be found in a convent setting.

The girls she worked with were good workers, according to Sister Johnette. But she did not regret the closing of the boarding school in 1945: "We had some tough children."<sup>6</sup> There were several girls who were 17-18 years old and created trouble for the whole school.

Like Sister Debora, Sister Johnette has many kind thoughts and words for the Indians at White Earth. She remembers the generosity

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<sup>6</sup>Interview with Sister Johnette Kohorst, St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota, 9 January, 1981.

of Indians who brought gifts of food to the sisters: venison, rice, maple sugar. Things were hard, but there are "plenty of good memories, too."

### The Priests

Father Valerian Thelen. He uses two canes and/or a walker to get around now but Father Valerian Thelen, almost 90 at the time of this interview, does quite well. He needed very little prodding to recall his early years--first at St. John's and then at White Earth.

Father Valerian began high school at St. John's aged 20, having spent the years after the eighth grade farming. He entered the monastery after graduation, inspired by the much-loved and admired Abbot Peter Engel--"a real papa," he says. While a seminarian, Father Valerian was busy day and night, combining the duties of a teacher, prefect, and student. He taught physics and engineering at St. John's before being sent out on his first mission, White Earth.

Sent to White Earth in 1925, serving there until 1930, Father Valerian recalls the exact day and month of arrival: Wednesday, October 3, 1925, the day of a snowstorm. His skills in physics and engineering were a big help to the young priest in his mission where he, his brother, and his father did much building.

The three pioneers of White Earth, Father Aloysius, Sister Lioba, and Sister Philomene, were quite elderly when Father Valerian first went to White Earth. He became de facto pastor of White Earth in 1926, after a stroke incapacitated Father Aloysius. All three pioneers retired during his term there. Father Valerian says he

learned most of the early history of the mission from these three, especially from Father Aloysius.

In 1930, Father Valerian returned to St. John's where he became community procurator, in charge of all buying. Resigning from this position after a few years, he was sent to St. Mary's Parish, St. Cloud, as assistant pastor. Father Valerian was among the last Benedictines to serve that parish; Bishop Busch took over the church as his cathedral. From St. Cloud Father Valerian went to St. Joseph's parish in Mandan, working with Father Hildebrand Eickhoff for five years.

Returning to White Earth in 1942 after a twelve-year absence, Father Valerian says he found everything in a run-down condition. There was much building and repair work to do, and with the help of Father Constantine, he set about it. Father Valerian speaks with some pride of the 900 acres of farm land and the 30 head of dairy cattle which helped to make the mission somewhat self-sufficient. This was a necessity since tribal funding ended in 1945 and, except for a hot lunch program in school, the mission received no outside financial aid. Father regularly sold any excess grain and milk to businesses in Detroit Lakes, bringing in much-needed revenue.

Asked about his rapport with the Indians, Father Valerian asserted: "Indians knew who I was. They listened when I spoke. They liked me and I liked them. We got along."<sup>7</sup> Like most of the mission-

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<sup>7</sup>Interview with Father Valerian Thelen, St. John's Abbey, 6 February, 1981.

aries at White Earth, Father could not speak much of the native language but he understood it, picking up phrases here and there.

Father Valerian made home visits to Indian families. He tells how one night, driving from Buffalo River to White Earth--a distance of nine miles--he was on the road eight hours. The road was so bad he got bogged down just about every mile and had to get out and push.

Recalling his years at White Earth in the 1940s and early 1950s, Father Valerian singled out Sister Johnette Kohorst as an able, hard-working person. He says, "She came right out of the novitiate. We trained her." Other sisters' names were recalled but Father intimated that he had clashed with some of them and the less said the better.

Twice during the interview Father Valerian noted that, in all his years on mission, he never needed nor sent for a substitute. He was always there and on the job. Occasionally, though, at least in the early 1940s, Father Thomas Borgerding, already an "elder statesman" among Indian missionaries, would help hear confessions--in Ojibwa, at which he was fluent.

Father Valerian volunteered the opinion that he and White Earth would have done well much longer if he had been "let alone." He says superiors "threw a monkey-wrench into the doings." Clearly, he alludes to the abbot at St. John's and the prioress at St. Benedict's, being most critical of their decisions affecting White Earth during the fifties and sixties. Personnel were being pulled out from the school in large numbers by the 1960s and Father Valerian saw this as

weakening the mission--though at this time the enrollment was also dropping. More to the point, Father did not always agree with the prioress' choice of personnel assigned to White Earth.

More than a little proud of the varied skills--especially manual ones--that he had before and after his ordination, Father Valerian says of his early training: "You got fundamentals and you went out." He faults today's "specialists" for their narrowness; "they know only one thing in life and get a degree of asininity." In spite of his years, Father Valerian has lost none of his saltiness.

Father Valerian is grieved and angry that White Earth mission is closed. He thinks his years of hard work there have counted for little. But people who worked with Father Valerian remember his good relationship with the Indian children. He seems to have forgotten the notably friendly relations he had with them. Perhaps he would not be so depressed could he recall these times. Speaking of the almost deserted mission site, he says, "It would break your heart to see it." Overall, Father Valerian's happiest memories seem to center on the 1920s and the 1940s at White Earth where "we worked hard but we got along."

Father Benno Watrin. Sitting down, Father Benno Watrin seems a frail, tiny man. When he stands up, he is still frail-looking but not tiny, standing 5 feet 9 inches. He smiles frequently when he speaks and is very happy to talk about his years as a missionary at White Earth. Born in 1895, Father Benno is now 85 and retired in the health center at St. John's Abbey. Ordained in 1923, Father celebrated

his golden jubilee as a priest in 1973, almost all of those fifty years having been spent in work among the Indians.

Already in 1922, as a deacon, Father Benno was sent to Cloquet, in Indian country, where he studied the Ojibwa language for seven weeks and went out, gathering words from the Indians themselves. After ordination, he was assigned to St. Boniface parish in Minneapolis for one year, 1923-1924. In September of 1924, Father Benno was assigned to Ponsford--30 miles from the village of White Earth--where he would remain for 17 years, first as assistant pastor and then as pastor.

Father Benno cites the missions of Ponsford and nearby Ponemah as being "typical" Indian missions. When he was there, Ponsford had 70 Catholic families (in name at least) and all but five of them were Indian. Here he learned more Ojibwa words, often while listening to the children as they played ball.

In 1925, Father Benno was sent to White Earth where he spent nine months assisting Father Aloysius Hermanutz, the regular pastor, who was recovering from a stroke. From him, Father Benno heard many stories about early pioneer days. There he also met Sister Philomene and Sister Lioba, who along with Father Aloysius had founded the mission in 1878. Father Benno remembers that all the sisters "worked their heads off." He refers specifically to Sister Philomene who "hoed like a man." He says she was very strong and able to work long and hard at whatever she did.

I asked Father Benno what was his opinion of Indians before and during the time he was a missionary among them. He admitted that

he had not thought very much of the Indian culture, feeling it inferior to his own. "I was a simple farmer boy and I thought ours was the only way to live."<sup>8</sup> Yet, he tried to speak Ojibwa whenever possible, rather than insisting on having English for the services. Father Benno prepared five-minute sermons in Ojibwa for his parishioners, both at White Earth and later at Ponsford. He said the Indians told him he had a "white man's accent." I was impressed that he can still rattle off sentences in Ojibwa and knows the Our Father in its entirety in that language.

When asked what he found most difficult about his years among the Indians, Father Benno says he found it hardest not to be able to see progress clearly. For him, he acknowledges, progress meant taking on more and more of the white man's culture. He tried, for example, to get the Indians to grow gardens--but only a few persevered. Father Benno was most distressed over how few Indians came to church regularly. Ricing and berry-picking kept them away, he says.

Father Benno recalls making visits to Indian homes, and usually spending two or more hours daily on such visits. He felt this was very important in getting to know the Indians and having them get to know him. As a result, Father got used to a varied menu: porcupine, muskrat, rabbit (head and feet, too).

Like so many Americans, clergy and otherwise, Father Benno equated Christianity and civilization. Father Felix Nelles, the first pastor at Ponsford--and originally an assistant to Father Aloysius--

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<sup>8</sup>Interview with Father Benno Watrin, St. John's Abbey, 18 September, 1980.

warned him not to get too rigorous. Father Felix, like Father Aloysius, allowed Indian customs at wakes. Father Benno says that his practice, like that of his two mentors, was to overlook things but not to encourage the old customs.

Reflecting on his many years among the Ojibwa, Father Benno wishes now that he had been more knowledgeable about and appreciative of Indian culture. Yet, he was part of a milieu that was not open to such an attitude in the years when he first worked among the Indians. It is apparent from his voice and manner that Father Benno misses his work at White Earth and that he has no regrets over the many years he spent among the Indians.

Father Constantine Thelen. A confrere of Father Benno also from St. John's Abbey, Father Constantine Thelen spent 21 years at White Earth. Like Father Benno and his brother, Father Valerian, Father Constantine had no real background on Indian culture before being assigned to the mission. He said he saw his first Indians when he worked on his brother's farm at Beaulieu in 1916.

In 1919 Father Constantine started high school at St. John's and after graduation went on for further studies, entering the monastery in 1925. As a deacon, he visited his brother, Father Valerian, who was at White Earth in 1925-30. There he met Sister Philomene who was the last of the original pioneers of the mission. She made a deep impression on him and he refers to her as a "hustler," a very hard worker. After teaching shop work at St. John's, Father Constantine was sent to Cold Spring, his first and only mission before White Earth.

With little prompting, Father Constantine recalled his experiences at the mission. Among the hardships, he noted the lack of running water for years and the need to use wells, carrying water long distances. He referred to himself as a maintenance man, "more in overalls than a habit."<sup>9</sup> Father spent most of his time repairing machinery, welding, and doing carpentry work. From the fall of 1945, he was also the bus driver, making a round trip of 90 some miles daily, picking up pupils in the morning and returning them home in the late afternoon.

I asked Father Constantine if he knew the Ojibwa language. He said he understood it but could not speak it very well. He learned what he knows from studying a grammar book and from the Indians themselves. He credits Mrs. Big Bear with helping him in this regard.

Like Fathers Aloysius and Benno, Father Constantine gave much time to making visits to Indian homes, "getting fleas oftener than not." He said that sometimes you only discovered the homes--deep in the brush--by the smoke made from the burning of wood to warm the homes. On these visits, Father Constantine took census, collected bits of information in books, and tried to validate marriages.

I asked Father about the working relations between the priests and sisters at White Earth. He said that St. Benedict's gave the orders as to running the school. This is only partially correct, however. It is true that the principal was always a sister but the

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<sup>9</sup>Interview with Father Constantine Thelen, St. John's Abbey, 2 September, 1980.

fact remains that the pastor, Father Valerian in this case, was in overall charge of the mission and therefore had the final say on school affairs. The prioress at St. Benedict's could and did choose the sisters who were sent to White Earth but the pastor often intervened in these choices and more than once asked for and got the retention or dismissal of a sister.

Speaking about the 1940s and into the 1950s, Father Constantine said, "We worked like a family." He mentioned Sister Hiltrudis Becker, in particular, as a hard worker: she smoked meat, made butter, and ran the milk house. The work was hard, he says, "but there was time for fun."

Father Constantine believes that some sisters who came to White Earth in the late fifties and early sixties were "sent for punishment." He says he thinks they were not truly committed to the mission but resented having to be there and would not contribute as well as had sisters in earlier times. No examples were given, however. There was some friction between the Thelen brothers and the sisters by the 1960s, as interviews with sisters who served there at that time make clear.

Father Constantine's opinion of the Indians he knew at White Earth is high. He says the students had much pride and stubbornness but that they were faithful, loyal, quick, and had "memories like a sponge." When I remarked that Sister Inez Hilger, a Benedictine anthropologist, had done some research on the White Earth reservation, Father was vehement in his disapproval of her published work Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background (1951). He said he thought

she interviewed very few Indians--just one or two at Ponsford--and was overly critical in her analyses.<sup>10</sup>

There is little doubt that while life at the White Earth mission was hard in many ways, Father Constantine liked it there and found it hard to leave in 1963. I suspect he could talk day and night about the events of his twenty-one years at the mission.

#### Indian Women, Former Students/Graduates of the Mission School

Maggie Hanks. Although she is 92--at the time of this interview--Maggie Hanks speaks with firmness and sureness about her days as a child attending the White Earth mission school. Short and solid, Maggie is hard of hearing but waits patiently as questions are asked and re-asked.

Maggie attended the government school in White Earth until it burned and then, aged eight, switched to the mission school. She stayed there from 1895-1898, long enough to make her first communion. She was able to recall the names of several sisters who were stationed at the school, specifically Sisters Lioba, Philomene, and Nothburga.

Asked about events she remembers from the mission days, Maggie mentioned, with a smile, riding the hog cart down the railroad track to the pigsty. She says the girls always wanted to stand on the back of the cart and ride it down the hill. She also remembers learning to knit and crochet, nothing that she and her classmates did well

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<sup>10</sup>In her Preface, Sister Inez notes that 96 Chippewa men and women from nine reservations (including 3 in Wisconsin and 1 in Michigan) contributed information to her study.

enough to be able to have their work exhibited at fairs.<sup>11</sup>

Maggie's health is not good but it does not seem to have affected her thinking. She is a gracious person, willing to share her memories but her hearing difficulty eventually defeats further efforts to communicate at any length.<sup>12</sup>

Alice Clark. Ramrod straight, whether sitting or standing, Alice Clark, aged 82 the summer of 1980, is gracious and precise as she tells of her two years at the mission school--1909 through 1910--and gives some background of her own family. Alice's mother was the first female born on the White Earth reservation. Her grandfather was Peter Parker, an Episcopalian missionary, also on the reservation.

Alice is able to give the names of six sisters and their occupations during her years at the mission. She mentions Sister Ethelbert, teacher and choir director; Sister Philomene, master of all trades; Sister Lioba, head sister; Sister Ernestine, seamstress and nurse; Sister Ladislaus, baker; and Sister Othilda, cook. She recalls Father Aloysius as being gentle and sweet, often playing games with the children.

Sister Ethelbert figures large in Alice's memory. She says Sister Ethelbert ran a cookie and candy store where students could go twice a week and buy treats. As music teacher, Sister Ethelbert taught

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<sup>11</sup>Interview with Maggie Hanks, White Earth, 31 July, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>Since the interview, Maggie Hanks has been named senior citizen of the year by ballots of the students at the White Earth Elementary School. The Senior Citizen selection was sponsored by Youth Services and their community liaison.

the students a marching song. Alice was able to give all the lines:

We are climbing learners' hill,  
 March along, march along,  
 We are climbing learners' hill,  
 March along, march along.  
 We are climbing learners' hill and  
 we're climbing with a will,  
 We are climbing learners' hill,  
 March along, march along.<sup>13</sup>

The song was used while the students processed, two by two, in and out of school.

All of the girls had a daily job at the mission, and Alice remembers working in the bakery. She says the first month of school was spent by all harvesting, picking potatoes, picking beans, picking and husking corn, and making mattresses with the husks. Almost daily, in late fall and winter, each girl helped carry wood to the dormitory floors to heat the stoves. There was never a lack of work for anyone.

In the fall, when the girls first arrived at school, their hair was fine-combed with kerosene--twice a week at first. A lice outbreak was always feared at that time of year. Other events recalled by Alice include "riding the hog car"--mentioned by all of the women who were interviewed. Alice says that leftover bread slices from lunch were put back under the plates for supper. "Bread was sacred." There was daily Mass and evening prayers, too.

Alice smiles as she tells of spankings given for misbehavior: "They didn't do us any harm." Summing up her feelings about the mission school, Alice says, "We had a nice place to stay and lovely meals."

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<sup>13</sup>Interview with Alice Clark, White Earth, 30 July, 1980.

Ida Blue. Ida Blue--nee Fairbanks--now 80, attended the mission school a total of nine years, from 1911-1912, leaving to help out at home and returning from 1915-1922. As one of the oldest girls by 1920, Ida helped take care of the younger girls, i.e., bathing them and combing their hair.

A hearty-voiced, voluble woman, Ida seems to relish telling of life when she was young. She describes the town of White Earth as being big back in the 1910s: there were three general stores, two meat markets, a confectionery, police headquarters, a bank, two hotels, and an Indian Office. Ida's folks ran one of the general stores. The town "dried up" by the 1940s, she says.

Like Maggie and Alice, Ida was able to name sisters who were at the mission school in her time. She laughed as she described seeing Sister Philomene in her overlarge, flopping overshoes which she wore when working in the fields and barn. She remembers that the "sisters talked German a lot."<sup>14</sup>

Ida says that Sister Ernestine acted as nurse for any sick girls. Her mother told Ida that Father Aloysius himself acted as parish doctor at times, recommending herbs as medicine. Ida recalls that he sometimes prescribed cures--especially cod-liver oil--for the mission students.

Reminiscing about the regimen at school, Ida says the sisters were hard-working and expected everyone else to be the same. They were very strict, too, and she points out that they were particularly

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with Ida Blue, White Earth, 18 July, 1980.

strict about sex; the girls could not keep company with boys. Ida remembers being scolded for walking with a boy when she returned from town one day. Indirectly, she agrees with Sister Inez Hilger, the anthropologist who, researching at White Earth in the 1930s and '40s, commented that the girls at the mission school knew too little about the "facts of life."

All in all, Ida's memories are good ones and there is much fondness and laughter evident in her voice as she goes back in memory to her mission days.

Emma Johnson. Emma Johnson attended the mission school from 1912-22, staying on after graduation in 1917 to help with the younger children. Nearly 80 now, Emma says again and again that the sisters insisted on "perfection" in all the work. To that end, there was much discipline and love. Emma reflects that the discipline "gave an indication of care and concern." She adds, "You're not mean when strict."<sup>15</sup>

The mission students competed academically with the government day school students in town, occasionally, and, according to Emma, the mission students always won. Like Ida Blue, Emma describes the town of White Earth as thriving in the pre-1940s but lack of work, she says, turned it into a ghost town.

Emma remembers that World War I cast a pall on the mission. She tells that the sisters were more quiet, prayed more than usual,

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<sup>15</sup>Interview with Emma Johnson, White Earth, 27 September, 1980.

and that there was less laughter. It is interesting that Emma does not refer at all to any deprivations in material goods, such as food, but rather cites the atmosphere as having changed. Most of the sisters were of German nationality, some only second-generation German-Americans, and the War must have caused them much anguish.

There were common prayer times--aside from Mass--and Emma smiles as she tells how hard she found it to kneel on the floor during recitation of the Rosary. Religious services were attended by all students, unless one was sick.

Like all the other interviewees, Emma had no trouble recalling the names of sisters who were at the school in her time there, singling out Sister Ethelbert as being a fine singer. Emma concludes her reminiscences by saying: "I'll always give credit to my training there. I could never have gone to a better school. Being an orphan, and having no one, they were just wonderful to me there."

Nora Clukey. Nora Clukey, age 71, is small and slender, but wiry and vivacious. She attended the mission school from 1914-1923. Nora's whole family were graduates of the school: her parents, her sisters and her children all attended at one time or another.

Apparently, Nora was a mischievous youngster. She recounts having slid down the bannisters, getting caught, and being told to walk up and down the stairs "like a lady." Sometimes, Nora was made to sit still indoors as punishment for misbehavior. Father Aloysius, who often visited in school, would come along and let her go outside and play. Nora says Father had a very soft heart and that the sisters

had a hard time enforcing discipline when he was around.

Nora remembers a variety of jobs she did at the school: cleaning chapel, washing dishes, mangling sheets in the laundry. Nora says: "We were taught the value of work and responsibility."<sup>16</sup> She thinks, however, that such constant and hard work would not go over with today's children; "they wouldn't stand for it." Nora, though, has nothing but praise for the sisters and obviously has fond memories of them and the old mission school.

Tumack Warren. In her 60s now, Tumack Warren attended the mission school from 1922-1928 and refers to it as her "second home." She notes that she was disciplined at home and so she "didn't mind it at school."

Asked about mission personnel, Tumack recalls Father Aloysius as "down-to-earth"; Sister Simplicia as cook; and Sister Ernestine as nurse. She says the sisters got less strict as the years went on, though spankings remained a regular feature of the place. Tumack, expecting a spanking, put on four or five pairs of underwear one day. She did get the spanking and it still hurt.

Tumack recounted several school incidents, affording her no little amusement at the time and in memory. She says everybody was required occasionally to take some cod-liver oil but that she, hating the taste, would dump hers into the plants. In the fall, the older girls would fill mattresses with straw. When no sister was there,

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<sup>16</sup>Interview with Nora Clukey, White Earth, 31 July, 1980.

Tumack and her friends would slide down the straw stack for diversion. As "legitimate" recreation, Tumack remembers playing jacks, marbles, having dances, and taffy pulls. Riding the hog cart was the most fun, she says.

I asked Tumack if she ever got lonely at the school. She replied that the girls were kept too busy to be lonely or discontented. She added: "The sisters were dedicated."<sup>17</sup> Tumack thinks too many people are clock-watchers but that the sisters in her day were not like that. Like all the other interviewees, Tumack had much praise for the mission school and for what it accomplished.

Rose Barstow. Rose (Shingobe) Barstow, in her mid-60s, currently teaches a course on Indian culture at the University of Minnesota. She is very willing to talk about her years at the White Earth Catholic boarding school, 1923-1930, speaking with some sadness and regret but with no bitterness as she recalls them.

As early as the third grade, Rose decided to keep quiet in school, fearful of making mistakes and being laughed at by either students or teachers. She remembers another little girl making a mistake in her use of English and being ridiculed for it. For years, Rose said little; for one thing, the English language was difficult to learn, especially the letters l and b which are not found in the Ojibwa language. Rose often practiced her sounds while in bed or any other place where she could be alone.

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<sup>17</sup>Interview with Tumack Warren, White Earth, 28 September, 1980.

Towards the end of her second year in school, Rose acquired a history book--meant for older students--and was shocked at one of its illustrations. Indians were depicted as savages, brutally assaulting some white people. Rose says she studied that picture for a long time and recalls that Sister Lioba came along and said, "You know, you are an Indian." Rose denied this most vehemently at the time but Sister Lioba insisted it was true. Rose asked her grandfather if she were really Indian. She speaks with conviction of being her "own person."

Rose's grandfather was a major influence in her formative years. She says, "I learned to cope with two cultures and I learned to respect other denominations through my grandfather."<sup>18</sup> Rose credits her grandfather with having taught her a deep respect and toleration for diversity.

While an infant, Rose was baptized Catholic and, although the elders of her family--except for her mother--were not Catholic, she was raised one. Her mother, a convert, requested this before her death. Rose claims to have never been reluctant to accept Catholic teachings, finding parallels to them with the teachings at home. Rose and her grandparents practiced both the Ojibwa and Catholic religions, seeing no real conflict between them.

Asked to describe what the mission school did for her in the long run, Rose says the school aimed at giving a general education. The sisters taught basic skills and "did well." Rose recalls that the

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<sup>18</sup>Interview with Rose Barstow, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 24, 1981.

curriculum focused on reading, writing, arithmetic with a heavy concentration also on catechism and bible history. School work did not present much of a challenge to Rose. She had a quick mind and needed no real effort to learn. High school was "a snap," says Rose, crediting the solid background she brought to it from home and grade school.

Several missionaries' names came up as Rose reminisced about her school years at White Earth. She named Sister Hiltrudis as a "model of industriousness" and spoke with some fondness of Sisters Thea and Mary as well. In general, she says, the sisters were "second mothers." Father Aloysius--then nearing retirement--was "overall counselor" since he was fluent in Ojibwa. Rose remarks that "he always found time to talk to the girls . . . especially those who did not know English very well."<sup>19</sup>

Her amusement still evident, Rose told of a small deception played with the collaboration of Sisters Thea and Ethelbert. Rose's father regularly sent \$15 a quarter for piano lessons but Rose did not care to take them. She let another girl take the lessons in her place. A skill Rose did care for and excelled at was that of crocheting. For three and a half years she worked at crocheting an altar lace, 17 feet long, which was later used for the first time at a solemn High Mass. Since she was supposed to "preserve" her hands, Rose was not allowed to do the usual chores other students did at the time.

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<sup>19</sup>Interview with Rose Barstow, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 11, 1981.

Tiring of the constant work at the altar lace, Rose one day paid a girl to be able to peel potatoes in the girl's place. She also tried to bribe another girl to let her knead bread. It was a relief when the lace runner was finished.

There were some unpleasant times at the mission school. Rose shared two negative encounters with one of the sisters who was "different from the rest of the sisters." When she was in the sixth grade, Rose was accused by this sister of stealing a sugar cake and was whipped with a strap. Rose cried as she sat on the "punish bench." Father Valerian, the pastor, came and asked what was wrong. After further questioning, he got to the truth that another girl had done the stealing. Rose still sounds indignant that the sister never apologized for her false accusation.

The same sister ordered another girl to take a new towel from Rose's stand and use it for a scrub-rag. Rose, a seventh-grader at the time, confronted the sister, who denied giving such an order. Rose shouted at her, tore off her headgear (veil and coif) and socked her. Father Valerian was called and finally calmed Rose. In punishment, Rose was denied communion at Mass the next day.

Overall, Rose speaks highly of the mission sisters and priests, calling them "workers for God" and "excellent role models as were the elders at home." She smiles as she remembers that Father Valerian fell victim to her "analytical mind" when she was 12 or 13. She comments, "He learned to respect me and my theories. He may have thought me obnoxious at times." Rose occasionally played chess with Father Valerian and usually beat him.

In summary, Rose considers herself fortunate to have had teachers from two cultures and learned equal respect for both.

Melba Hodges. Currently living in Minneapolis, Melba (Buckanaga) Hodges attended the mission school from 1930-1936. She was the only girl in her family and had no special training when she arrived but she says she learned many things and gained many skills at the school.

Melba remembers all the teachers as being so patient, citing especially Sisters Mary (Hilaire), Thea, and Hildegund. She recalls seeing an angry girl chasing Sister Ladislaus down the hall with a mop but says such a display of temper was rare. Melba also remembers Father Valerian and his brother, Father Constantine. She says Father Valerian would come to the classroom once a week and ask questions from the Catechism and Bible History.

Handwriting was a favorite subject with Melba and she credits that class with helping her get into and succeeding in business college after graduation. The work she liked least was darning socks and doing cutwork. In and out of the classroom, says Melba, the girls had to "toe the line."<sup>20</sup>

Referring to language, Melba recalls that she spoke Ojibwa fluently at home but lost it in school. English and German were the only languages taught/talked at the mission.

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with Melba Hodges, Minneapolis, 18 November, 1980.

Inez Reynolds. Melba's good friend, Inez Reynolds (Mrs. Richard Bzdok) attended the mission school from 1941-1956, staying on to help after graduation, as did some other of the interviewees. Inez says the mission was "home."

The work was hard, Inez remembers. Older girls had to bake bread, occasionally rising at 4:00 a.m. to do so. There was weed-pulling, raking lawns, and laundry work. In spite of this, after 1945, 18 orphan girls--including Inez--stayed on at the mission, helping the sisters with the work.

Inez named several sisters from her mission days, citing Sister Ernestine as nurse and Sister Ansgar in crafts as standouts. She is pleased as she recalls that she won first prize for art when she was in the third grade.

Besides riding the hog cart, Inez points to the teeter-totters as a favorite recreation. She remembers that once a bull jumped the pasture fence and she had to run around the teeter-totters to avoid it, screaming all the while until some farmhands came to chase the animal back into the pasture.

On Sundays, Inez and the other girls walked two miles to attend Mass in the town church. To them, it was an adventure and not tiresome at all to make the four-mile roundtrip on foot--though on a cold winter day it wasn't pleasant.

Inez agrees with Melba that all the girls had to go to daily Mass and to confession once a month. Inez didn't like this frequent confession--she didn't feel she had much to say at such times. Daily Mass and frequent confessions were not unique to the White Earth

mission. They were a constant for generations of Catholic students in all Catholic schools.

Among her memories of good times at the mission, Inez lists taking piano lessons, learning German, having sleigh rides, and tapping the maple trees for syrup. It was evident that Inez saw the good times far outweighing the bad during her years at the mission.

#### Commentary

Boarding schools in general have had a bad press, historically, as places of cold, rigid discipline--no matter the time, the place, or the groups involved. However, compounding problems at boarding schools for Indian children was the clash of two cultures--the white man's and the Indian's. Different clothing, a new language, and amount and types of food were some major areas of change for these children. Regular study and confinement within a building must have been trying for children unaccustomed to either. Add to this a persistent--though sometimes unconscious--belittling of the native American culture and the Indian children were faced with transformation, not merely improvement. (One wonders whether, to an extent, improvement is not also transformation.)

Comparison of the White Earth mission boarding school with other Indian boarding schools, sectarian or government, between the 1880s and 1945 points up some similarities among them, apart from religious training. A woman who attended the famous Carlisle boarding school in Pennsylvania in 1880 wrote her recollections of the place many years later. She writes of the things that persisted in her

memory:

My first bath in a bathtub and being disciplined for sliding down those lovely bannisters. . . . After that, the routine--bells, whistles, rollcalls, and uniforms--for many years. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Generations of White Earth students could tell of similar experiences.

The memories of a Hopi woman who attended Keams Canyon boarding school in Arizona around 1906-07 are also similar to those of the White Earth students interviewed for this paper. Helen Sekaquaptewa describes experiences at her school:

Our native clothing was taken away from us and kept in boxes. . . . We were issued regular school clothes--two every-day dresses, two pairs of underwear, two pairs of stockings . . . certain bigger girls were detailed to comb and braid the hair of the little girls. . . .<sup>22</sup>

Helen goes on to describe the delousing treatment for hair--using kerosene--which occurred each fall when the girls returned to school after vacation. Several of the White Earth graduates alluded to the same treatment.

With the best of intentions, boarding schools across the nation, whether government-run or sectarian, stripped their Indian wards of their native identity. In the name of Christianization and civilization, Indian children were made to wear white people's clothing, speak the English language exclusively, and eat white people's food. The Indian children were caught between two ways of life--one lived

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<sup>21</sup>Elaine G. Eastman, Pratt, the Red Man's Moses (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), p. 209.

<sup>22</sup>Helen Sekaquaptewa, Me and Mine (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1969), pp. 93, 103.

within the walls of the boarding school and the other lived primarily in the out-of-doors of the Indian village, albeit only at vacation times. John Rogers--Chief Snow Cloud, a Minnesota Ojibwa now deceased, tells of being a "marginal" man, not belonging completely to either the white man's or the Indian's culture. Rogers attended boarding schools in Beaulieu, Cass Lake, and White Earth, among others, between the years 1896 and 1912. In his memoirs, Red World and White, Rogers describes himself as a young student torn between the "world of nature and the world of the book."<sup>23</sup> He learned, however, to appreciate both, seeing each as helpful to his integration as a person.

There were thousands of Indian students like Rogers scattered in boarding schools across America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, learning new ways of life while regretting the passing of the old. Surely the compassionate care and concern of some teachers and staffs of boarding schools helped mitigate the regimens. It can be theorized, however, that mission school personnel--almost all religious or church-oriented--were more likely to give greater amounts of love and concern for their Indian charges than were their more harried, red-tape-ridden counterparts. The lay personnel were, perhaps had to be, more concerned with levels of pay and advancement within the civil service than were the religious groups. For the latter, again only a generalization, the service itself was paramount and the rewards were secondary.

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<sup>23</sup>John Rogers, Red World and White (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954; reprint edition, 1974), p. xiv.

Government boarding schools, on and off the reservation, were plagued with such problems as poorly built, overcrowded buildings and with ill-prepared personnel sometimes poorly motivated for the Indian service. Quality facilities and quality teaching were rare, from the 19th well into the 20th century.

In his report of September 5, 1890, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, T. J. Morgan, who had visited many government schools, pinpointed as a major cause of dissatisfaction small, cheap, inconvenient, often inadequately furnished buildings, very deficient in ventilation, heating, and water supply. Morgan described many of them as grossly neglected and sadly out of repair. A year later, Morgan reported much the same conditions:

The want of suitable school buildings having needed light, ventilation, plumbing, and sewerage, and rooms sufficient in number and size and conveniently arranged, is a seriously weak point in the Indian-school service. This lowers the morale and injures the health as well as mars the comfort of the pupils.<sup>24</sup>

Morgan summarized his 1891 report with another pointed reference to what he called the "cheap, poorly built, poorly-planned, and patched-together" buildings.

Poor facilities were bad enough but the Indian children in government boarding schools had to contend with and suffered as much or more from the trauma of separation from family and estrangement from their own culture and traditions. Underpaid, understaffed, and ill-prepared personnel could or would not make the Indian schools

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<sup>24</sup>Wilcomb E. Washburn, gen. ed., The American Indian and the United States, Vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1973), p. 554.

inviting, much less beneficial.

In 1968 Senator Robert F. Kennedy's Special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education began hearings around the country, publicizing the lack of adequate educational training given to Indians. The final report summarizing these hearings, published in 1969, was a harsh indictment of the failings of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its schools. Forty years earlier, concentrating on the boarding schools, the Meriam Report had already criticized Indian education adversely. Both reports pointed to such negative features as overcrowded dormitories, lack of good medical service, excessive student labor, poorly trained teachers, and rigid, almost militaristic, discipline.

Critics of the government boarding schools--whether in 1928 or 1968--likened them to reform schools with the accent on strict discipline and hard manual labor, wherein academic studies were clearly secondary. In turn, Indians viewed the schools as alien. Low achievement, high absenteeism, negative self-image, and academic failure were the inevitable results of such a judgment.

The Meriam Report devoted the bulk of its findings to Indian school deficiencies. At one point, the report stated,

Almost without exception, Indian boarding schools are institutional to an extreme degree. . . . Much more attention should be given to boys and girls as individuals rather than in the mass.<sup>25</sup>

The Kennedy Report came to the same conclusion, quoting a BIA teacher at Tuba City Boarding School in Arizona:

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<sup>25</sup>Lewis Meriam, The Problem of Indian Administration, p. 406.

Because of the shortage of personnel, there is a tendency--a pronounced tendency--to 'herd' rather than guide. The boys and girls are yelled at, bossed around, chased here and there, told and untold, until it is almost impossible for them to attempt to do anything on their own initiative--except, of course, to run away.<sup>26</sup>

Between these 1928 and 1969 reports, little had changed in the running of government Indian schools.

Harsh discipline was a constant in the boarding schools over the decades. The Kennedy Report's findings do not differ much from those of the Meriam Report in this regard. The Kennedy Report summed up the problem:

School environment was sterile, impersonal, and rigid, with a major emphasis on discipline and punishment. . . . They [the students] find the schools highly unacceptable from the standpoint of emotional, personality, and leadership development.<sup>27</sup>

The Meriam Report put it more succinctly:

The discipline in the boarding schools is restrictive rather than developmental. Routine institutionalism is almost the invariable characteristic of the Indian boarding school.<sup>28</sup>

Both reports call for "less marching and less regimen" and more respect for the Indian's values and culture.

The suffocating, bureaucratic paternalism of the federal and state governments has always stood in the way of Indian management of

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<sup>26</sup>Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, Indian Education: A National Tragedy--A National Challenge. Senate Resolution 80. 91st Congress, 1st Sess., U. S. Government Printing Office, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>28</sup>Meriam, The Problem of Indian Administration, p. 14.

its schools. An occasional victory has been won. In 1966, for instance, the Rough Rock Demonstration School in Arizona began with an enrollment, 100% Indian; a faculty, 90% Indian; and a school board, 100% Indian. More schools like Rough Rock will correct past mistakes and lead the way to a brighter future for Indian education.

The White Earth boarding school was not without its deficiencies, but the more glaring faults of the government boarding schools seem to have been avoided--or overcome. Combining remarks from all the Indian women who were interviewed for this paper. I find a consistent expression of affection towards the White Earth mission school and towards the sisters in particular. Repeatedly, there is reference to the strict discipline with which the school was run but it is remembered as having been a discipline tempered by a loving care on the part of the sisters. As Emma Johnson put it, the discipline "gave an indication of care and concern."

Tumack Warren sums up her reminiscences of the mission school by saying, "The sisters were dedicated." Webster defines dedication as "self-sacrificing devotion." Sisters are eminently able to give much devotion, having chosen a life of service to others for love of God. Having given up marriage and a family of their own, the sisters are free to pour out love on those entrusted to their care. Statements by the nine Indian women I interviewed confirm that this indeed happened at White Earth.

## EPILOGUE

From fall of 1945 to spring of 1969, the White Earth mission school was run as a day school, grades 1-8. Most students were Indian but about one-third were white children. Sister Rosaria Zenner, principal in the first five years of the day school, says: "there was never any controversy between Indians and the white pupils in school."<sup>1</sup>

Correspondence with several sisters who taught in the day school elicited quite similar responses regarding the goals they had and their rapport with the students. Most of the respondents saw themselves helping the children to develop their talents and to grow and live as Christians--goals not different from those of the sisters who had taught in the boarding school. All of the respondents evinced a positive attitude towards the Indians, though, like their predecessors, their background knowledge of Indian culture was almost nil. Not all may have felt the need for such background, however, for, as one sister put it: "A positive attitude and one of reverence and respect is necessary in working with any group of people."

Father Constantine Thelen was assistant pastor at White Earth from 1942-1963 and in an interview he described the day school years

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Sister Rosaria Zenner to Sister Carol Berg, dated May 29, 1980.

as he remembers them. He says there were 180 students the first week the school opened, most of them there out of curiosity. The enrollment levelled off at 120-130 until the 1947 fire which destroyed some classrooms and cut down available space. From 1947 until the mid-1960s, the enrollment averaged 90-120.<sup>2</sup>

There was money for only one school bus and Father Constantine drove it 90 miles roundtrip daily, collecting the students in the morning and returning them in the late afternoon. Roads were very poor, says Father--gumbo in the spring and snowed in during most of the winter.

Father Constantine and his brother, Father Valerian, received no salaries--Mass stipends totalled about \$1 a day. As in the boarding school days, the mission was self-supporting to a high degree. There were still the vegetable gardens, the dairy herd, and the acres of farm land. There were few farmhands left, however, since there was little money with which to pay them and by 1960, the farm was rented out on a share basis. The renter furnished money, seed, and labor and got the first two bushels while the mission got every third.

More than during the boarding school years, the second-hand store was needed as a source of income. About once a month, Father Constantine would drive the mission truck to the Twin Cities, picking up items for the store: i.e., shirts, overcoats, mattresses, dishes,

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<sup>2</sup>Interview with Father Constantine Thelen, St. John's Abbey, 31 January, 1981.

dresses and shoes. These items would sell from 15¢ to \$2 or more-- and since the store was open to anybody, tourists as well as the Indians, the cumulative income was not inconsiderable.

During the 1940s and early '50s, the number of sisters at the mission school averaged 15-17 but by the end of the 1950s, the number dropped to 12; in 1963, there were only 10 sisters but the number of pupils was also dropping. One of the sisters at White Earth in the 1960s and 1970s recalled those years.

Sister Delice Bialke was assigned to White Earth from 1962 to 1969, returning as a volunteer from 1975 to 1980. Echoing those who served before her, Sister Delice had no background preparation for the mission and admits to having had stereotypes about the Indians before meeting them. She thought the Indian children would not be as intelligent as white children and would be somewhat "fierce."<sup>3</sup> She discovered they were not really all that different from white children, needing to be encouraged, prodded and sometimes scolded to perform well.

Outside her class work, Sister Delice worked in the mission store one evening a week and in the summers, too. After the sisters moved to Ogema in the 1970s, Sister Delice taught catechetics at both White Earth and Ogema and also worked in the mission store at Ogema. She added the task of making home visits during the years 1975 to 1980, enjoying this more than the other work. Sister Delice holds

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<sup>3</sup>Interview with Sister Delice Bialke, St. Benedict's Convent, 14 July, 1980.

that home visiting is important because it shows care on a one-to-one basis. In this, she agrees with Father Benno Watrin, who also expresses strong support for the benefits of home visits.

Sister Delice thought that the Indian parents in the 1960s and 1970s showed a high degree of support and interest in their children's work. In and out of the classroom, she got to know many Indian families in her twelve years at White Earth as her affection for them shows. She rattles off names of Indian people she knows, telling where each lives and what each does--all with great verve and much praise. There is little doubt that Sister Delice enjoyed her years at White Earth.

An interview with Brother Gregory Eibensteiner, who served at White Earth from August 1963 to June 1969, gives more details of the last years of the mission school's existence. Brother Gregory was a jack-of-all trades, doing repair work--mainly plumbing and carpentry. A second school bus had been purchased the summer of 1963 and Brother Gregory drove one of them daily during the school year, 90-95 miles roundtrip as had Father Constantine before him.

Asked about rapport with the Indians at this period, Brother Gregory says he found them to be very friendly people and that he always felt a real part of the White Earth community. Brother Gregory made home visits frequently, usually at the end of a bus run when he would be invited in, at the last house, for some refreshments.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Brother Gregory Eibensteiner, St. John's Abbey, 31 January, 1981.

Brother Gregory pays tribute to Sister Hiltrudis Becker, a 40-year veteran of White Earth by 1964. When Brother and the new pastor, Father Alban Fruth, arrived at White Earth in the summer of 1963, Fathers Constantine and Valerian were already gone and the two new men depended heavily upon Sister Hiltrudis to provide them with information about the workings of the mission. Brother Gregory recalls that Sister Hiltrudis--at White Earth from 1924 on--was greatly loved by the Indian people. People would come from all over to visit with her, asking advice or merely to remember old times and old friends together. Sister Hiltrudis was 77 in 1964 and retired to the Motherhouse that year.

In the fall of 1963, the mission school enrollment was 130 but by 1965 that had dropped considerably. Closing the school in 1969 was a sheer necessity, says Brother Gregory. The enrollment by 1968 was down to 50, total, for all eight grades. Brother Gregory attributes this drastic reduction in enrollment to two main factors: a drop in the birthrate among Catholic families and the movement of many young Indians to the Twin Cities. By the late 1960s, there was, on the average, one baptism annually; it wasn't that the children wouldn't come to the mission school: "They just weren't there." Mostly, older people were left on the reservation as the younger people moved off.

After 1969, four sisters remained at White Earth, two in CCD work and two in the second-hand store. In 1972, the sisters moved to Ogema and from there did the same work, commuting the five miles to White Earth. In the summer of 1980, the sisters withdrew from the White Earth apostolate, being replaced by the Crookston Benedictines.

A priest from St. John's, however, still resides at White Earth, serving Ogema as well.

For 90 years, the mission school stood as a constant among the Ojibwa at White Earth, a sign of the care and concern of the Benedictines for the Indian people. Some retired priests and sisters who served there for many years--and even younger missionaries who were there a much shorter time--express sorrow over the closing of the school. There is the feeling that a glorious era has ended, an era in which the White Earth Indians and the Benedictines from St. John's and St. Benedict's were partners in a great adventure.

## APPENDIX A

### KEY DATES AND EVENTS AFFECTING BENEDICTINE HISTORY IN MINNESOTA AND AT WHITE EARTH

- 1856      arrival of the Benedictine monks in Minnesota
- 1857      arrival of the Benedictine sisters in Minnesota
- 1858      statehood for Minnesota
- 1863      arrival of the Benedictine sisters in St. Joseph as a  
            permanent home
- 1868      creation of the White Earth Indian Reservation
- 1870      implementation of President Grant's Peace Policy
- 1873      arrival of Father Ignatius Tomazin, first resident Catholic  
            priest at White Earth
- 1875      creation of the Vicariate of Northern Minnesota; appointment  
            of Father Alexius Edelbrock as Abbot of St. John's Abbey
- 1877      appointment of Sister Aloysia Bath as Prioress of St.  
            Benedict's Convent, in St. Joseph
- 1878      arrival of Father Aloysius Hermanutz, Sister Lioba Braun,  
            and Sister Philomene Ketten at White Earth
- 1879      establishment of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions
- 1882      completion of new church and convent/school at White Earth
- 1884      opening of industrial schools for Indians at St. John's and  
            St. Benedict's
- 1885      signing of first contract between the White Earth mission  
            school and the federal government
- 1887      passage of Dawes Act, giving individual titles to Indian  
            tribal lands
- 1888      visit to White Earth and Red Lake by Katherine Drexel and her  
            two sisters

- 1892 completion of new convent/school building at White Earth
- 1896 Congressional veto of direct appropriations for Church schools
- 1909 passage of Clapp Amendment, allowing mixed bloods to sell or mortgage land
- 1928 publication of government-sponsored Meriam Report on the conditions among American Indians
- 1934 passage of Johnson O'Malley Act, giving states more control over funds for and administration of Indian tribes within their boundaries
- 1945 closing of the mission boarding school at White Earth; opening of the mission day school
- 1963 opening of Vatican II Council
- 1969 closing of the mission day school; publication of the Kennedy Report on Indian Education
- 1980 withdrawal of the Benedictine Sisters (St. Joseph, MN) from White Earth; replacement by Crookston Benedictine Sisters

APPENDIX B

PASTORS AT WHITE EARTH, MINNESOTA--ST. BENEDICT'S MISSION

Rev. Ignatius Tomazin 1873-1878

Rev. Aloysius Hermanutz, OSB 1878-1929

Rev. Valerian Thelen, OSB 1925-1930

Rev. Urban Weckwerth, OSB 1930-Jan. 1932

Rev. Virgil Michel, OSB Jan. 1932-Aug. 1932

Rev. Justin Luetmer, OSB Aug. 1932-Aug. 1942

Rev. Valerian Thelen, OSB Aug. 1942-summer 1963

Rev. Alban Fruth, OSB 1963-1972

Rev. Blaise Berres, OSB 1972-1975

Rev. Robert Wieber, OSB 1975-1979

Rev. Jonathan Fischer, OSB 1979-- 1983

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

From the 1960s on, spurred in large measure by the American Indian Movement, there has been a flood of books and articles by and about the native American. Among the works I read in total or in part for this paper, the following, broken into major topics, were the most helpful.

For analysis of Benedictine and other missionary philosophy and activities between the 1850s and the present, books by Father Colman Barry, Robert F. Berkhofer, and Sister Grace McDonald head the list. Father Barry's Worship and Work (1956) traces the coming of the Benedictine monks to Minnesota and their subsequent missionary outreach. While the book focuses on the monks at St. John's Abbey, there is much valuable material on frontier conditions and the growth of the Church in general. Berkhofer's Salvation and the Savage (1965) begins with the late eighteenth century and deals primarily with Protestant missionaries' attitude towards the Indians. He shows clearly what elements in both Indian and white man's cultures prevented each from respecting the other. In With Lamps Burning (1957) Sister Grace traces the relationship of the Benedictine sisters with a frontier country and then with the cultural and religious life of Minnesota and the Midwest in particular. She gives a chronological history of the various apostolates of the sisters from the late 1850s to the 1950s.

Other helpful works on missionary philosophy and behavior include Sister Francis Mary Rigg's dissertation (1967), "Attitudes of Missionary Sisters Toward American Indian Acculturation," and Sister Mary Ewens' study, The Role of the Nun in 19th-Century America: Variations on the International Theme (1971). Both authors show how and why convent rules and life enhance or hinder the missionary endeavors of women religious. In the same vein, though focused on monks, Father Joel Rippinger's article, "Some Historical Determinants of American Benedictine Monasticism, 1846-1900," in the American Benedictine Review (March 1976) is especially helpful as an in-depth study of the influence of European traditions on American Benedictine thinking and apostolates.

Two biographical works give further insight into the attitudes of American missionaries and their supporters. Sister Bernard Colman's Masinaigans: The Little Book (1972) tells the life of Joseph F. Buh, a Slovenian missionary, who worked with Father Francis Pierz in 19th-century Minnesota. She focuses on his missionary work among the Ojibwa and provides interesting detailed description of frontier Minnesota as well. Sister Consuelo Duffy narrates the life of Katherine Drexel (1956), foundress of the Order of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for the Indians and Colored People. After the cut-off of federal funding, Drexel's philanthropy kept the Catholic Board of Indian Missions solvent for many years. The book gives an overview of Catholic Indian missions serviced by the Blessed Sacrament Order in the western United States.

For background material on Minnesota as it was in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, three sources are quite good. J. W. McClung's Minnesota As It Is in 1870 (1870) describes the soil, climate, population, and agricultural potential. Many statistical tables are given, some of which compare Minnesota with older, more settled states. Dewey Newcombe's An Appraisal of Chippewa Tracts in the State of Minnesota: 1855-'64-'67 (1956) describes in detail the land tracts ceded by various Ojibwa bands to the government and is especially valuable for its account of the creation of the White Earth Indian Reservation. Several Congressional reports address the topic of despoliation of the reservation by predatory white people, i.e., lumbermen. Particularly helpful is the report of House Hearings Number 7 on House Resolution 103, January 8, 1912, in which testimony is given by government inspectors about the reservation's geographical, biological, and botanical assets before and after the lumber companies came on the scene.

Sources which concentrate on Indian culture and policies of the federal government toward the Indians in general are abundant. The following were invaluable for description and analysis of the assimilation process and the varied developments in government-Indian relations.

Loring B. Priest's Uncle Sam's Stepchildren, 1865-1887 (1969) and Henry E. Fritz's The Movement for Indian Assimilation: 1860-1890 (1963) trace the federal government's attitude toward and treatment of the native American, both men stressing the assimilation drive of the post-Civil War era. Fritz is the more critical of the two, seeing the government--and the churches as well--as less than idealistic in

intent and action.

Father Francis Paul Prucha, a Jesuit historian, has edited two books dealing with assimilation: Americanizing the American Indians, 1880-1900 (1973) and Documents of United States Indian Policy (1975). In the former, Prucha has collected the writings of prominent "Friends of the Indian"--47 in all--who each give rationales for the destruction of Indian culture and the superiority of the white man's culture. The collection offers an overview of the thinking of a majority of Americans in late nineteenth-century America. Arranged chronologically, the second collection brings together major federal legislation regulating Indian affairs.

A long line of Commissioners of Indian Affairs, most of them fervent assimilationists, are treated in The Commissioners of Indian Affairs, 1824-1977 (1979) edited by Robert M. Kvasnicka and Herman J. Viola. The brief accounts of each commissioner's career show a continuity of belief in the need to crush the Indian's tribal life in favor of the white man's ways.

A beginner in the study of the native American would find Indians and the Americans (1959; revised 1970) by Harold E. Fey and D'arcy McNickle an excellent source. The co-authors give a heavily documented survey of Indians and white people's contacts and conflicts. They highlight wrongs done by white society to the Indian and call for re-assessment of government policies. A similar work by Clark Wissler is Indians of the United States (1940; revised 1966). It is an introductory work rather than a detailed study but it does give a good look at Indian linguistic families with summary descriptions of their

subdivisions. The book gives a basic idea of what Indians were and are like.

John Terrell's American Indian Almanac (1971) gives accounts of pre-historic Indians in America, centering on their customs and migratory patterns. Of limited use, due mainly to its generalness and brevity, the book does have some good charts and maps. The American Indian and the United States (1973) by Wilcomb E. Washburn is more immediately useful. He has collected documents from five main sources: annual reports of Commissioners of Indian Affairs, Congressional debates, laws, treaties, and court decisions. A brief interpretation precedes each section. The interpretations are sometimes too brief; the book's chief value lies in the handiness of having so many varied documents all in one source.

Robert A. Trennert's Alternatives to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-1851 (1975) traces the roots of the reservation system. It is especially useful for the case studies of some Indian-white man relations which helped bring about acceptance of the reservation concept.

A short but very good source on the clash of Indian and white cultures is William T. Hagen's American Indians (1961; revised 1979). Hagen traces stages in the encounter between the Indians and a United States growing powerful domestically and overseas. He relates the treatment of the Indian to the United States treatment of other weak minorities, at home and abroad. More narrowly focused is D. S. Otis' The Dawes Act and the Allotment of Indian Lands (1973).

Otis brings out the negative impact of the General Allotment Act of 1887 and gives much detail on the resulting alienation of Indian lands. Heavy going, the book provides as much information as any reader could wish to have about the famous (or infamous) Dawes Act.

Two very useful books deal with the Catholic Church and the Indian missions. Peter J. Rahill's The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy, 1870-1884 (1953) is an account of the BCIM as it originated and operated under the Peace Policy. Rahill includes a case study of labors for and among the Sioux in Dakota Territory. Almost too detailed, the book is nevertheless interesting and several charts and maps add to its usefulness. The Churches and the Indian Schools, 1888-1912 (1979) by Francis P. Prucha continues Rahill's study, extending it to cover the controversy which arose over federal aid to sectarian schools. Many excerpts are given from correspondence between the Directors of the BCIM and missionaries on Indian missions across the United States as well as between the Directors and opponents of federal aid to mission schools.

Indian religion is treated extensively by Charles Eastman and Carl F. Starkloff in their respective books. Eastman, a Dakota Indian, wrote The Soul of the Indian (1911; reprint 1970) to acquaint white people with the value system of the Indian. He contrasts white people's materialism, greed, and selfishness with the simple life espoused by most Indians. Openly scornful of his values, Eastman suggests that the white man could learn much by observing and adopting those of the Indian. Writing almost 63 years later, Carl F. Starkloff, a Jesuit priest, agrees with Eastman. In The People of the Center

(1974) he explains basic tenets and rituals of Indian religion (using the Plains Indians as a focus). Starkloff relates parallels between Indian religion and Christianity. He finds much to admire in Indian religion and advises missionaries to approach it with respect and openmindedness.

Information on the financing of Indian missions is readily available from government documents. Catholic Indian mission finances, however, are most easily found in the headquarters of the sponsoring bodies. The Marquette University Archives has extensive holdings of annual reports by the various Directors of the BCIM. These give yearly and even bi-annual totals of funding for all Catholic Indian missions in the United States from the 1880s on. Ledgers kept by missionaries are usually stored at their respective monasteries and convents. A good source of information on the funding of Catholic Indian missions both in the United States and elsewhere is a dissertation by Reverend Theodore Roemer. Entitled The Ludwig-Missionsverein and the Church in the U.S.: 1838-1918 (1933), the study traces the financial help sent from an Austrian Catholic support organization to the Church in the United States (and in parts of Africa and Asia). There are many helpful tables of statistics, i.e., yearly sums contributed, and breakdowns of sums for various regions and missions.

For a study of twentieth-century Indian educational philosophy and practice, Margaret Szasz's Education and the American Indian, 1928-1973 (1974) is a detailed yet generally readable source. Her focus is on the administration of government schools, those run by the BIA. Szasz cites shifts in attitude toward the Indians affecting

education policies: assimilation, termination, and self-determination. Specific schools and programs are noted for each of these shifts.

Numerous government sources are available which show swings in official attitudes toward the Indians and the corresponding policies which grew out of these attitudes. Most valuable is the study prepared by Lewis Meriam and staff, The Problem of Indian Administration (1928; reprint 1971). This report chronicles the condition of Indians across the United States and offers suggestions for more effective government policies, primarily in the areas of health and education.

The annual reports of Commissioners of Indian Affairs offer much information on Indian agencies, schools and hospitals. They include maps, charts, and tables of statistics helpful for an overall view of Indian-government relationships. Most useful are the summary reports from individual Indian agents throughout the country.

As Secretary of the Interior from 1877 to 1881, Carl Schurz was directly responsible for conducting the government's Indian affairs. His views are, therefore, revealing of official attitudes toward the Indian. In his article, "Present Aspects of the Indian Problem," published in North American Review CCXCVI (July 1881), Schurz acknowledges some injustices in the treatment of the Indians but he believes firmly that the Indian must be assimilated. The bulk of his article is a plea for more and better education--the white man's curriculum, of course--as the chief tool for this re-shaping of an entire race.

The Senate Special Subcommittee Report on Indian Education

compiled its report Indian Education: A National Tragedy--A National Challenge in 1969. Although having a narrower scope, it is a fine supplement to the Meriam Report. Like its predecessor, it contains information about the status of native Americans, on and off the reservation. It, too, gives recommendations for reform in government administration of Indian affairs. Sections of the report are helpful in making a comparative study of how conditions changed or stayed the same for most native Americans between 1928 and 1969.

Although not official government publications, the Lake Mohonk Conference Reports have a semi-official stamp. The Mohonk Conference was composed of influential Americans whose views carried much weight in Congress and the White House. The reports, collections of addresses given by these men (and occasionally a woman), reveal continuity and change in thinking about the Indian--more often change. A good example is the Report of the 30th Annual Lake Mohonk Conference (1912), which has an opening address by Dr. Elmer Ellsworth Brown, Chancellor of New York University and also President of the Conference. Dr. Brown questions the current treatment of the Indian and calls for respect for minority cultures. He is seconded by a number of other conference members.

There are numerous excellent materials on Ojibwa culture and on White Earth in particular, among which are several works by Gerald Vizenor, an Ojibwa from White Earth. His Escorts to White Earth (1968), Anishinabe Adisokan (1970), The Everlasting Sky (1972), Tribal Scenes and Ceremonies (1976), and Wordarrows (1978) convey Ojibwa beliefs and values through the use of tribal legends and dialogues with reservation

and urban Ojibwa--many of whom Vizenor knows personally. Three works were especially helpful to my study: Escorts to White Earth provides background on the first years of life on the reservation in the 19th century; The Everlasting Sky and Wordarrows relate information about terminology, explaining the origins of the various names by which the woodlands Indians have been and are called.

In his autobiography, John Rogers, an Ojibwa, tells of being caught between two cultures. His Red World and White (1957; reprint 1974) relates his experiences in the white man's world, chiefly at school and in the Indian village, learning and re-learning Indian lore. Rogers concentrates on the latter experiences and gives a good feel of Ojibwa values, crafts, and occupations.

Sister Bernard Colman's Ojibwa Myths and Legends (1961) makes a good supplement to Vizenor's works--especially to Anishinabe Adisokan, also a retelling of many Ojibwa tales. Sister Bernard's collection is divided into regional tales--most from Leech Lake, Fond Du Lac, White Earth, Nett Lake, and Grand Portage. They are told in a sprightly manner with drawings to enhance them.

Amplly illustrated, Chippewa Customs (1929; reprint 1979) by Frances Densmore has sections on dwellings, clothing, food, health, life-cycle, games, decorative arts, and the medicine lodge. Although rather dry in style, the book provides much information on many aspects of Ojibwa culture and one can find nuggets on almost any page.

Ruth Landes' The Ojibwa Woman (1938; reprint 1969) is a field study of social behavior observed among Ojibwa. The book is an analytic account of cultural situations and of ways the women do or

do not meet them. Landes divides the book into five parts: Youth, Marriage, Occupations, Abnormalities, and Life Histories. It is this last part which makes the work especially attractive and useful.

Of a more general nature is Edmund Danziger's The Chippewas of Lake Superior (1978) consisting of observations on the economic and social status of the Ojibwa from the early seventeenth century to the mid-1970s. The book is heavily statistical with many fine illustrations. More important, it gives the history from an Indian perspective rather than from a white man's.

Read alongside the Danziger work, William Warren's History of the Ojibwa Nation (1858; reprint 1970) is very informative although it does not go beyond the mid-19th century. Warren, himself an Ojibwa, recounts the origins of the Ojibwa people and their gradual expansion into all parts of Minnesota. He tells many stories of individual Indian heroes and also gives a wealth of customs and beliefs.

Bishop Henry B. Whipple's autobiography, Lights and Shadows of a Long Episcopate (1899), although long-winded at times, is a goldmine of interesting anecdotes about Indians and white people whom Whipple knew in his long and active career. Some of the anecdotes concern persons Whipple knew at or from White Earth. Although Whipple is often condescending in his attitude towards the Indian, his book does give one a look at the thinking of a champion of Indian rights and a constant agitator for BIA reform.

The Ojibwa Grand Medicine Lodge (the Midewiwin) is treated by a number of authors, one of the most helpful being W. J. Hoffman in his report, "The Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society of the Ojibway,"

in the Seventh Annual Report of Bureau of Ethnology, 1885-1886 (1891). Hoffman explains the workings of the Midewiwin, its initiation rites and the various degrees of membership. He includes numerous drawings of religious artifacts as well as musical notations for Midewiwin songs. Ruth Landes' Ojibway Religion and the Midewiwin (1968) is a fine supplement to Hoffman's work. She expands the topic, placing the Midewiwin into the total picture of Ojibwa religion. A third source, supplemental to both Hoffman and Landes, is Selwyn Dewdney's The Sacred Scrolls of the Southern Ojibway (1975). It is a study of 150 birchbark scrolls containing pictographs of teachings and ceremonies of the Midewiwin Society. There are many reproductions, some in color, of charts, maps, and diagrams for which Dewdney provides helpful interpretation and commentary.

The problem of mixed-bloods versus full-bloods at White Earth is related graphically in two sources, one a government document and the other a popular journal. House Hearings on House Resolution Number 103 July 31, 1911 contains testimony by Father Aloysius Hermanutz, among others, about this issue. An article by Honore Willsie in Collier's XLIX (August 1912) entitled "As You Do Unto These" reports a conversation with the head chief at White Earth who bemoans the struggle between mixed and full-bloods and also the depoliation of the reservation by greedy white business interests. Although Miss Willsie is far from objective, her quotations from Chief Little Cloud alone make the article very worthwhile.

An in-depth analysis of Ojibwa beliefs and values is contributed by Irving A. Hallowell and Sister Inez Hilger, both anthropologists.

Hallowell's Contributions to Anthropology (1976) has a section entitled "Ojibwa World View and Disease" in which he describes the Ojibwa cosmic outlook and the social controls maintained by the Midewiwin, because of the lack of scientific knowledge by the tribe. More specialized, Sister Inez Hilger has two detailed works on the social structure of Ojibwa life. The first, A Social Study of 150 Chippewa Indian Families of the White Earth Reservation of Minnesota (1939), aims to discover whether there was any significant relationship between the social status of the families and their housing and living conditions. The author resided at White Earth from June to November of 1938, interviewing individual Indians and their families who provided some very interesting anecdotes. There is an especially valuable appendix, giving tabulations of housing and living conditions. Sister Inez' second book, Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background (1951), describes the customs and beliefs of the Ojibwa as shown in the development and training of the child. Her material was gathered on the Red Lake Reservation in the summers of 1932, 1933, and 1939 and at White Earth in 1938. There are many pictures taken at various Minnesota reservations, depicting Ojibwa dress and occupations.

Most of the manuscript and archival materials on White Earth were supplied by three places: Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota; and St. Benedict's Convent, St. Joseph, Minnesota. Other materials were from the National Archives, Washington, D.C., and the Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Marquette University's Dept. of Special Collections and

University Archives is the depository of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions records. For the years between the 1870s and 1945, there are over 40 boxes of items. These records consist mainly of correspondence between the Directors of the BCIM and missionaries at White Earth, chiefly the pastor. They give financial information primarily, although there are occasional human-interest letters. The archivists are still processing the collection, and the records, though boxed chronologically, need much sifting before one finds specific items.

St. John's Abbey has approximately a dozen boxes of materials on White Earth. Much of the material consists of correspondence between the missionaries--priests--and their abbots. Unfortunately, many of the letters are in the old German script and remain untranslated. There are several ledgers, dating from the 1880s, giving lists and costs of items used by the mission convent/school and rectory over the years. There are also many pictures of White Earth--mainly of priests, sisters, students, and buildings.

St. Benedict's Convent has very little correspondence dealing directly with White Earth but it does have extensive school records and financial reports. There are monthly reports of the St. Benedict's Orphan School covering January to July 1885. The quarterly school records date from 1889 to 1896 and from 1908 to 1927. They give the names and number of students, their blood-classification, and the types and cost of supplies for each quarter. The financial records include a journal (day book) covering July 1891 to July 1901; a journal (ledger accounts) for July 1889 to October 1926; and a notebook

of building records from March 1919 to 1924. There are financial statements for the years 1809-1900; 1912-1913; and 1928-1970. In total, these school reports and financial records occupy one linear foot of file space.

The National Archives has records on the government-run schools at White Earth. They consist mainly of reports from the Superintendents to the Secretary of the Interior and/or the Superintendent of Indian Education and letters between the Superintendent and Indian parents. There are numerous ledgers giving names of employees--whether teachers or staff--their positions and salaries and also the names and total of Indian students for each school year.

The Minnesota Historical Society has the original handwritten autobiography of Episcopal Bishop Henry B. Whipple and also numerous letters between the Bishop, his friends, and superiors. There are many official documents detailing treaties between Ojibwa bands and the federal government and documents of government inspection into suspected fraud on the reservation. The Ransom Judd Powell Papers, a private collection, give much primary material on White Earth in the late nineteenth century.

Two titles came to my attention only after I completed my paper and, upon reading them, I discovered they would have added much to my study. Mission Among the Blackfeet (1971) by Howard L. Harrod is volume 112 in the Civilization of the American Indian Series. It is a study aimed at explaining "the role of missionary institutions in representing the white world to the Blackfeet and the corresponding response." James Axtell's The Indian Peoples of Eastern America (1981)

is a collection of primary sources about Indian cultures from the Atlantic region to the Great Lakes. It includes eye-witness accounts of traders, missionaries, and government officials. Axtell's helpful short introductions to each section give the setting of the tribe being described as well as the background of the narrator.

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