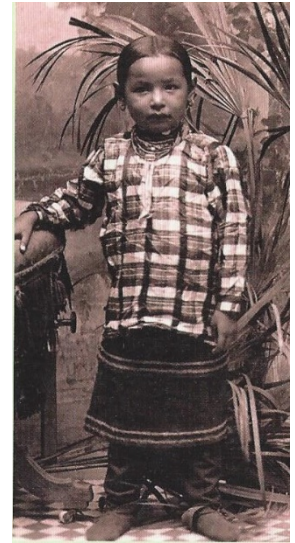


THE STORY OF OSAGE EDUCATION: HISTORY & IMPACT ON CULTURE - FACT SHEET

I. Early Osage Self-Education - Parents as Teachers: (early times - 1821)

“Children were the greatest of Wakonta’s blessings.” (Bailey 63) The Osage have always placed the highest value on children and their education. In early days, Osage children learned by playing and working alongside their parents. Adults explained the technologies and modeled the many skills children would need to succeed in life. However, after white settlement and the loss of ancestral lands, the Osage realized their children needed to learn about the white world in order to survive into the future. Efforts for formal education developed in these additional stages:



II. Early Protestant Missions (1821-1837)

Seven Protestant missions between the years of 1821 and 1837 were established at various locations in Kansas and Oklahoma. According to Osage historian Louis Burns, these missionaries cared more about converting the Osage to Christianity than they did about giving the Osage an education. The “self-righteous” ministers were of the wrong character to work among the Osages and engaged in “blunt tactless assaults” on Osage customs. The missions failed; nevertheless, “they accomplished a very difficult feat. They exposed the Osages to a part of Euro-American culture that had never before been seen by the Osages.” (218-223).

For ten years, the Osage had no mission or schools.

III. Osage Mission - Osage Manual Labor School - Jesuits, St. Paul, Kansas (1847-1872)

Then, in 1847, the Osage Mission was established at what is now St. Paul, Kansas. The Osage had been familiar with the Jesuits, whom they called Black Robes, from early days with the French since many of the marriages of French traders to Osage women were performed by Jesuits. The Osages decided they would like to have the Jesuits as their teachers, and made this request to the U.S. Superintendent. (Burns 228-9).

Accordingly, in 1847 the Jesuits opened the Osage Manual Labor School, or Osage Mission on the Osage reservation in Kansas, to educate Osage boys. Later that same year, the Sisters of Loretto established a school for Osage girls. Prior to the removal of the Osages [from Kansas] to Indian Territory [now Oklahoma] in 1872, several hundred Osages had attended these schools. (Bailey 142-3)

This was a terribly difficult period for the Osage. In the 1850’s and 60’s, they were devastated by epidemics, spill-over violence from the American Civil War, and the loss of their entire way of life. Historian Burns claims the Jesuits and Sisters of Osage Mission, probably more than any other factor, were responsible for the actual survival of the Osage people during this period.

Today, many Osage continue to belong to the Catholic Church. (Burns 228-9) For more about the Osage Mission at St. Paul, Kansas see: <http://www.osagenews.org/en/article/2018/04/23/participants-end-osage-heritage-sites-visit-osage-mission/>

IV. Osage Boarding School - Government-run - near agency (approx. late 1870's - 1921)

The Osage moved to their present reservation in Oklahoma in 1872. An Osage boarding school for both girls and boys staffed by Quakers was established near the Osage Agency in Pawhuska. There was also a government-run agency Osage Boarding School. Some Osage historians have written very critically of the role of this institution - **See LESSON & Reading - "Compulsory Attendance - Osage Government Boarding Schools."**

V. Off-reservation federal government-run Boarding Schools (1880's - 1920's)

Numerous Osage children were sent to off-reservation federal boarding school. The main ones were: Chilocco - the closest - near Ponca City, Oklahoma - [See related lesson: **Chilocco Boarding School - Song & Art**], Haskell in Lawrence, Kansas, and Carlisle in Pennsylvania [See related resources: [Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center](#)] (Bailey 144)

VI. On-reservation Catholic Boarding Schools 1887 - 1948

Two on-reservation Catholic boarding schools were established in the late 1880's. For many, there was a difference in attitudes towards the government-run boarding school and the two Catholic schools. The Osage had requested these Catholic schools, and land for them was donated by tribal members. Personal interviews with St. Louis Girl's School students indicated positive recollections of time at St. Louis. Many thought of the Sisters as family - strict, but nurturing. (Standley)

- **St John's School** (11 mi west of Hominy) - **1888 - 1913** The St. John's School for Osage boys was founded by the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions in 1888 on the banks of Hominy Creek. A four-story stone building was erected in 1893 to replace the original log school. This location was far from water supplies and transportation which may have led to its closing.
- **St. Louis School** (Pawhuska) - **1887 - 1948** [after 1942-St Louis Academy] This Osage girls school was founded in 1887 by Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, a Philadelphia heiress who entered a convent as a young woman and used her fortune to support educational institutions across the southern United States, and in the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. The school's original frame building burned in 1889 and was replaced by a four-story stone building. In 1942, the school became St. Louis Academy. Later, the buildings were razed and replaced with a low-income housing project. In 2000, Mother Katharine was named a saint by Pope John Paul II.

VII. Entering the White World: Moving to Public / Non-Indian Schools - 1920's

“In 1915 St. John, the Osage Catholic boys’ school, was closed, and in 1921 the government-operated Osage Boarding School followed suit. While some girls continued to attend St. Louis until it closed in 1948, most families had to find other schools for their children.

“Many attended local public schools, in which the vast majority of their classmates were white. In 1924, 154 full-blood Osages, or almost half of the total school-age full-blood population, were enrolled in private off-reservation boarding schools. These were not “Indian” schools, but in most cases, military schools. Missouri Military Academy had the largest Osage enrollment. As with the local public schools, the majority of students in these schools were white.” (Bailey 144)

VIII. Osage Schools Today - 2015 to present

Once again, starting in 2015, the Osage are conducting their own education programs by the founding of two schools: (1) to support early childhood education - Wah-Zha-Zhi Early Learning Academy, and (2) to reclaim their culture and language, the Osage Immersion School - [\[SEE LANGUAGE UNIT LESSON: “IMMERSION SCHOOL”\]](#)

EDUCATION & OSAGE ASSIMILATION: How did changes in education affect Osage culture?

- Early Resistance 1800's-1920

“After the mid-1880’s, virtually all school-age Osage children were attending one of these reservation boarding schools or an off-reservation [federal boarding] school, usually Chilocco [near Ponca City], Haskell [in Lawrence, Kansas], or Carlisle [in Pennsylvania]. By the first years of the twentieth century, almost all older Osages could speak English and most were literate. Thanks to the Jesuits, there was a least one full-blood who could read and write Latin.

“However, exposure to white culture through these schools had little overt effect on individual Osages or Osage lifestyle during the late nineteenth century. There is a widely known story concerning Pawnee-no-pashee, who was also known as Governor Joe. In the 1860s, he returned home from the Osage Mission school, with his hair short and neatly combed and dressed in his school clothes and shoes. To the assembled group that came to welcome him, he proclaimed, “It took Father Schoemaker fifteen years to make a white man out of me, and it will take just fifteen minutes to make an Osage out of myself.” He emerged from his parents’ longhouse soon after with his hair shaved into a roach and wearing a breechcloth, leggings, and moccasins.”

“Until the early years of the twentieth century, the majority of returning full-blood students followed Governor Joe’s example. Officials at the Osage Agency regularly complained about former students “putting on the blanket” when they came home.” (Bailey 142-3)

- **Later Assimilation & Loss of Language - 1910 - 1930**

“This pattern of overt conservatism changed for Osages coming of age during the late teens and 1920s. Younger Osages quickly adopted the material trappings of middle-class and even upper-middle-class white Americans...

“There were a number of reasons why the styles and behavior of younger Osage people changed so dramatically during the years between 1910 and 1930. One reason was simply their greatly increased exposure to white culture. Unlike their parents, they had not grown up socially isolated from non-Indian peoples. In their daily lives, they were constantly interacting with people of other cultures. Outside their homes, on the streets, and in the stores in Pawhuska, Hominy, Fairfax, and other local towns, they saw many more whites than Osages.

The boarding schools closed, so many Osages attended other public and non-Indian private schools.

“Service in the military during World War I also greatly increased exposure to the white world. When an Osage served in a white military unit, he was usually the only Osage, if not the only Indian, in the barracks...

“The single most important factor, however, was the general attitude of their parents and grandparents. Most older Osages encouraged their children and grandchildren to adapt to the white world. About the time of World War I, many bilingual couples simply stopped speaking Osage to their children and even actively discouraged their children’s attempts to learn the language...” (Bailey 142-3)

Sources: Bailey, Garrick Alan and Daniel C. Swan, John W. Nunley, and E. Sean Standing Bear. *Art of the Osage*. Seattle: St. Louis Art Museum in association with University of Washington Press, 2004. Burns, Louis F. *History of the Osage People*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004. Standley, Mindy, Interviews and correspondence, 5-21-18. Compiled 2018.