St. Labre Boarding Schools Investigation
Commission Report

June 05, 2024

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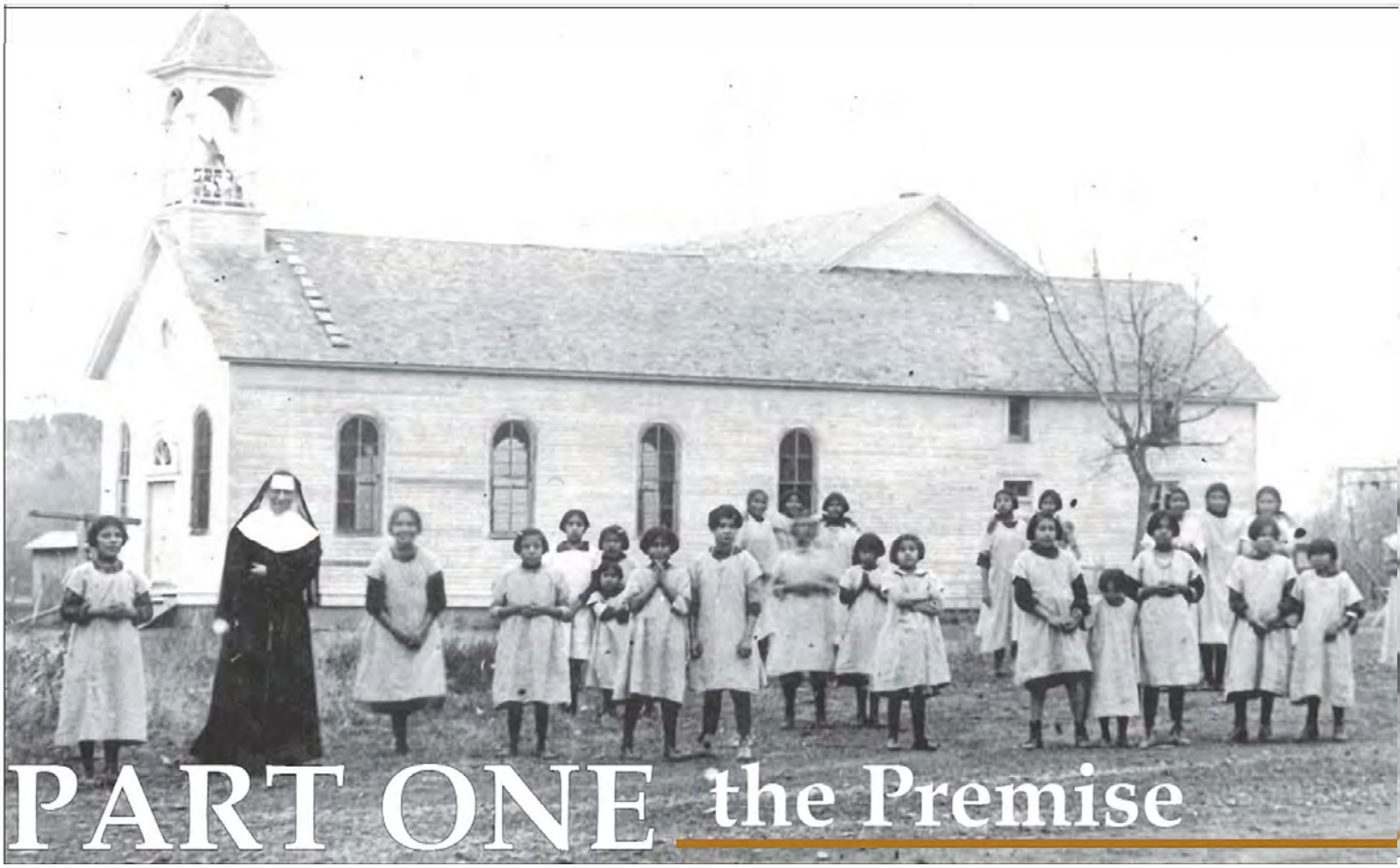

PART ONE the Premise

Students stand in front of the St. Labre Church with two of the Ursuline Sisters - 1920s, St. Labre Museum and Archives.

Foreword

The St. Labre Boarding School Investigation Commission has a diverse membership representing St. Labre Board members and independent members. From Montana's Tribal, ethnic and educational backgrounds, the Commission brought multiple and differing perspectives first to the investigative plan, then to the work of the study/research and listening sessions, and finally to the Commission Report to the Board. While their intent for serving on the Commission reflected each life/career and respective experience, the Commissioners held steadfast to the common purpose throughout the investigation: to come as close to the truth as possible about St. Labre Boarding Schools' student deaths and unmarked graves.[1] An immense debt of gratitude is owed to the expert assistance from St. Labre Indian School Educational Association Executive Director Curtis Yarlott and substantial resource support provided from the St. Labre Board of Directors during our investigation period from December 2022 to June 2024.

The detailed study of the St. Labre Boarding Schools' records was performed by Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA) and the esteemed research historian Mr. James Grant. The Commission has gained a deep appreciation for Mr. Grant's thorough, in-depth, and insightful expertise and painstaking study of the archival records of the various religious orders that served in the schools; the St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles parishes' and schools' records; and the Rosebud and Big Horn Counties vital statistics.

1 For the purposes of this report, "unmarked graves" is intended to mean graves that do not currently have an individual marker identifying the decedent. Given the archival evidence of common practice among the orders that operated the schools, the Commission believes these graves likely had markers originally, perhaps made of wood, metal, or stone, but due to environmental conditions and the passage of time, these markers are currently missing. The presence or absence of markers at the current time is not definitive of whether these burials were marked earlier.

"To ensure the investigation is thorough, reliable, and transparent, the St. Labre Boards created this independent Commission."

The Commission members extend sincere appreciation and respect to the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Indian Tribal communities for their cooperation and participation in the listening sessions series. The specific nature of this investigation has brought out highly sensitive narratives of times Tribal members and Tribal members' ancestors spent in the Boarding Schools, with experiences of pain, injury, and loss. Thanks are extended to each person who shared their experiences and to those who attended the listening sessions. The Commission wishes to recognize and commend the assistance of the Northern Cheyenne Mental Health Office of the Indian Health Service Clinic of Lame Deer, Montana.

The Commission members recognize and respect the contributions of each Commission member to this carefully negotiated Investigation Study and Report, and for the shared responsibility of attending all meetings, sessions, and in the Report writing. This is a working Commission whose commitment to the purpose is demonstrated throughout the seventeen-month endeavor. And, to the St. Labre Board of Directors, the Commission members individually and collectively express their heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity to serve in the Investigation process.

Finally, the St. Labre Boarding Schools Investigation Commission dedicates this Study and Investigation Report of the St. Labre Boarding Schools to the many Crow, Northern Cheyenne, and Cree students who attended the St. Labre Boarding Schools.

EDUCATION: the Solution to "the Indian Problem"

The House Committee on Indian Affairs urged Congress in 1818: "Put into the hand of their (Indian) children the primer and the hoe, and they will naturally, in time, take hold of the plough; and, as their minds become enlightened and expand, the Bible will be their book and they will grow up in habits of morality and industry, leave the chase to those whose minds are less cultivated and become useful members of society." A year later, Congress established the Civilization Fund, a yearly appropriation of $10,000, to be overseen by the superintendent of Indian affairs. By 1825, thirty-eight Indian schools were in operation, mainly run by missionary societies.

The Indian Boarding Schools were primarily local to each Indian reservation. The federal government organized and administered the three-tier school system: primary schools were boarding and day schools for grades 1 to 6; grammar schools were boarding schools at off-reservation locations for grades 1 to 6; and the off-reservation boarding schools were for grades 6 to 12, both academic and industrial. The schools were military in organization and were operated with strict discipline. The curriculum in all schools was a half-day at academics and a half-day at vocational training (mainly industrial skills for the boys and domestic arts for the girls). The students were assigned to cook, clean, raise gardens and tend livestock, sew clothing, and do laundry. By law, Indian children were mandated to attend these schools, and the Agent was authorized to withhold rations from the family if they resisted enrolling their children. The Indian Police rounded up children in the fall and went after any runaways to return them to the school (Fear-Segal and Rose 2016).

President Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy of 1869 had three prongs: agency/reservation personnel would be appointed by church boards of the various religious denominations; federal support for educational programs would be expanded; and a Board of Indian Commissioners would be appointed by the president to jointly review and administer Indian policy.

A key contributor to the Indian boarding schools' development was Captain Richard Henry Pratt, a former Civil War officer and veteran of the last Indian Wars in the southwest. Pratt spent three years at Fort Marion in Florida, from 1875–1878, guarding imprisoned leaders and warriors of the Cheyennes, Kiowas, Comanches, Apaches, and one Caddo. In a makeshift fortress, the men learned to read and write, leading Pratt to conclude that education was a solution to the "Indian Problem." He took twenty-two to Hampton Institute in Virginia, a school for the children of Freedmen. Then, he requested the commissioner of Indian affairs to start a separate school for Indians, at $1,200 per student for eight years of education, with the rationale that schooling cost far less than waging war against the Indians. The Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School was Pratt's educational initiative, in an abandoned Army facility in Pennsylvania. A slogan posted at Carlisle was "Kill the Indian, Save the Man" (Adams 1995).

A primary tenet of the Pratt's model was removing Native children as far as possible from their families and Tribal communities, to strip them of all aspects of their traditional cultures, and to instruct them in the language, religions, behavior, and skills of mainstream White society. Carlisle was the first off-reservation Indian boarding school in the federal Indian school system. Over the next ten years, twenty-four analogous military-style off-reservation boarding schools were built serving the many Tribes (Fear-Segal and Rose 2016).

The key theme in these congressional acts and federal policies was "civilization." Former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Carl Schurz, concluded in 1881 that Indians were confronted with "this stern alternative: extermination or civilization." A few years later, Secretary of the Interior Lucious Q. Lamar (1885–1887) stated: "the only alternative now presented to the American Indian race is speedy entrance into the pale of American civilization, or absolute extinction."

"Civilized education" had a set of aims. The first was academic education—the ability to read, write, and speak English and an introduction to the civilized branches of knowledge. Second, Indians needed to be individualized, to appreciate the

individual's worth by accumulating wealth. Third, education must reconstruct Indigenous conceptions of home and family, wherein girls were trained to play their role in the home, while boys were taught to be the wage earner, father and patriarch. The fourth aim was Christianization and its moral foundation, beliefs, and values. The fifth aim was citizenship, to assimilate the Indian person into the national life, to its duties and responsibilities. These educational aims meant a total transformation of the Indian child (Adams 1995).

Congress began in 1877 with an Indian education/schools appropriation of $20,000, gradually increasing, and in 1900, it totaled $2.9 million. In that same time span, the 1877 enrollment was 3,598 Indian students, and by 1900, the enrollment was 21,568 (Adams 1995).

The National Indian Boarding School Digital Archive with the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) launched a research project over the years 2021–2024, with information and locations on 523 Indian boarding schools in the United States. The new Archive lists 87 schools operated by 79 religious orders across 22 states. In a government study by the U.S. Department of the Interior (Report on Indian Boarding Schools), researchers identified 408 schools across 37 states or territories. Among these, about half were operated and staffed by Christian denominations, including the Catholic Church (Spears 2023). The Jesuits had twenty-two missions with an associated school for American Indians. Among these are St. Labre and St. Xavier (jesuits.org 2024).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Investigation Commission. The St. Labre Board of Directors established the independent St. Labre Boarding Schools Investigation Commission to obtain a thorough, fact-based and unbiased review of its schools' histories. The Commission was chartered to operate independently of the Board of Directors to determine and direct the investigation of St. Labre boarding school student deaths and unmarked graves. Five Commission members were selected for their qualifications and interest in a complete and honest investigation: two members from the Board of Directors, Anda Pretty On Top (Crow) and Matt Redinger; and three independent members, Richard Littlebear, (Northern Cheyenne), Walter Fleming (Kickapoo), and Janine Pease (Crow). Four of the five Commission members are Indigenous. A press conference in June 2023 provided public announcement of the Commission and the anticipated investigative activities.

Investigation Commission Meetings, Historic Research, Listening Sessions and LiDAR[1] Survey. The Investigation Commission convened on December 13, 2022, and met consistently from the initial meeting through May 2024. The investigation timeline was extended to accommodate time required to visit archival collections of all the orders who served the St. Labre boarding schools. HRA was retained, and Mr. James Grant conducted intensive archival research at numerous locations throughout the United States, inclusive of federal and Catholic Church affiliated archival collections, St. Labre schools and Catholic Parish records on the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Reservations and at Chief Dull Knife College and Little Big Horn College, Tribal colleges of the respective Tribal nations. The Commission planned and implemented a comprehensive series of twelve listening sessions to obtain Tribal and community-based narratives and memories of the boarding schools in the Northern Cheyenne community towns of Ashland, Lame Deer, and Busby, and the Crow Reservation towns of Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, St. Xavier, and Pryor, including the retirement centers of Awé Kúalawaache Care Center, the Shoulderblade Center, and the Heritage Living Center (the residents of which were housed, temporarily, in Livingston, Montana, because of repairs to their buildings at the Heritage Living Center located in Ashland, Montana). A concluding investigation was a LiDAR survey of the three boarding schools' grounds, conducted in late April 2024.

1 LiDAR: Light Detection and Ranging. LiDAR data and high-resolution aerial imagery was collected through a series of gridded drone flights that centered on three areas under investigation: the St. Labre and St. Xavier cemeteries, and the St. Charles school grounds (no cemetery present). LiDAR uses millions of laser readings incorporated into digital geographic mapping data to identify subtle topographic surface features such as discrete mounds or depressions that may indicate grave locations. This data was compared to extant cemetery records to identify the graves that LiDAR detects. See Part III for the LiDAR report.

The Historical Research Associates archival study and LiDAR survey were conducted from the date of contract through the end of May 2024. Historian James "Jimmy" Grant led the archival research, with intensive search and analysis of records at federal, state, and local records repositories; the many Catholic orders' archives; the Library/Archives collections at Little Big Horn College and Chief Dull Knife College; the Rosebud and Big Horn Counties' databases; and regional newspapers records.

The Commission Report and Findings. The Commission commenced the assembling of Investigation materials in February 2024 and convened weekly meetings during April and May 2024 toward the completion of the Report. Commission members accepted and completed writing and analysis assignments. The Report has the following sections: Introduction, Executive Summary, A Brief History of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes, HRA's Report on the St. Labre Boarding Schools, the LiDAR survey report, and the Commission's Findings

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1:
At least 113 documented student deaths, primarily from illness and disease, occurred during the study period 1884–1960, documented by name, date of death, Tribal membership, and school, inclusive of Tribal students and non-Indian students.

FINDING 2:
Research indicated ten recorded deaths were due to causes other than disease or illness, including accidents.

FINDING 3:
Attendees of listening sessions conveyed stories and memories of harsh and potentially abusive punishments of students.

FINDING 4:
Children attending the boarding schools included Cree students, in addition to Crow, Northern Cheyenne, and non-Native students.

FINDING 5:
The number of religious orders who served at St. Labre boarding schools was greater than expected: Capuchins, Ursulines, Jesuits, and diocesan priests were augmented by Edmundites and School Sisters of St. Francis.

FINDING 6:
The St. Charles Boarding School only operated as a Catholic boarding school for six years, from 1892 to 1898.

FINDING 7:
Students' families had fairly regular involvement with their children during their time at the boarding schools. Boarding students had relatively frequent contact with their families. Moreover, the student bodies at all three boarding schools included a combination of boarded students and day-school students in many of the years under investigation.

FINDING 8:
Federal funding of the boarding schools ceased around 1895. After the end of this federal funding, Tribal trust money and Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission resources replaced this lost federal funding.

FINDING 9:
While the general history of the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century includes regular references to the impact of disease on society, the St. Labre boarding schools, like the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes, suffered terrible losses due to disease and illness, causing 90 percent of the student deaths identified in this report.

St. Labre Boarding School
INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

Purpose for the Investigation Commission. Prompted by stories originating in Kamloops, British Columbia, on May 27, 2021, about the discovery of the probable presence of more than 200 unmarked graves on the grounds of a Canadian Indian residential school, St. Labre Indian School, through its Board of Directors, questioned whether such a thing could be possible at any of its three locations on the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Indian Reservations (From the PR Kit).

Establishment of the Commission. The St. Labre Board of Directors established the independent commission in order to obtain a thorough, fact-based, and unbiased review of its history to determine whether any undocumented deaths and burials occurred at any of its current locations (From the PR Kit).

The authorities and limitations of the commission. The Commission is chartered to operate independently of the (St. Labre) Board of Directors and to independently determine its methods of investigation. A majority of the five-member Commission were selected because of their independence from St. Labre and for their qualifications and interest in ensuring that the investigation is complete and honest, a key objective of the St. Labre Board of Directors.

From the Commission Charter:

The Investigation Commission Charter was created to investigate whether any St. Labre students died while attending St. Labre or in St. Labre's care. To ensure the investigation is ***thorough, reliable, and transparent,*** *the St. Labre Boards created this independent Commission.*

COMPILED AND SUBMITTED BY:

DR. JANINE PEASE

DR. RICHARD LITTLEBEAR

DR. MATTHEW REDINGER

ANDA PRETTY ON TOP

DR. WALTER FLEMING

St. Labre Mission Entrance gate. School building in the background. ca. 1935. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

A Brief History of The Crow Indians
1600 - 1891

The Crow, Apsáalooke, People were known to live in the area of Spirit Lake (Devil's Lake) in present-day North Dakota, c. 1600. The Crow were semi-agrarian combined with hunting small animals and birds. With increasing pressure from eastern Tribal nations, the Apsáalooke began moving west, which transformed them into buffalo-hunting people living primarily on the Great Plains.

They arrived at the Missouri River and took up residence with their cousin Tribe the Hidatsa, which was also Siouan-speaking. The Crow settled near the junction of the Knife and Missouri Rivers c. 1600. Based on a prophetic dream, No Intestines led his band of Crow on a multi-decade journey that took them north to Canada, south to the Canadian River, northwest to the Great Salt Lake, and then to the Bighorn Mountains (in Wyoming). When No Intestines located the Tobacco growing in the Bighorn Mountains, his people became the historic Crow, with their distinct identity; they arrived in south-central Montana c. 1700. (McCleary 1997:16–17; Wood 1980).

The Apsáalooke clan system, called ashamma-líaxxiia, is translated as the lodge where the wood intertwines on a riverbank, a reference to the mutual obligations and unity of a clan. The Apsáalooke identify ten clans, originally named by Isáahkawuattee, Old Man Coyote. The clans promote cooperation when larger numbers are needed or when population numbers are low. The clans are: Greasy Mouths *Uuwuutasshe* and Sore Lips *Ashíiooshe*; Whistling Waters *Bilikóoshe* and Bad War Deeds *Ashkápkawiia*; Ties in a Bundle (Knot) *Xúhkaalaxche* and Brings Home Game Without Shooting *Uússaawaachiia*; Big (Thick) Lodges *Ashshitchíte* and Newly Made Lodges *Ashhilaalío*; Treacherous Lodge *Ashbatshúa* or Blood (Piegan) Indian Lodge *Ashkaámne*; and Filth Eaters *Ashpeennuushé* (Frye 1987).

The Apsaalooke People have spiritual lifeways. **The Sacred Tobacco Dance Society** found its basis on the Sacred Tobacco Seed, *Ihchihchiaee*, that means "white unto itself". The Tobacco Seed brought the *Apsáalooke* to their Creator-given homeland, near the Bighorn Mountains. Their leader No Intestines' quest to find the place also brought him to find the mountain, Cloud Peak. It was there the Sacred Tobacco Society began, called *Baasshussuua* (McCleary and Old Horn 1998, 2004). **The Crow Sweat Lodge** ceremonies (commonly referred to as a "sweat") have considerable ritual, with prayers and wishes said in each round. The Crow women sweat separately. After the sweat, participants bathe in the river or creek or in heated water. **The Sun Dance Ceremony** was a multi-day fasting and prayer for group welfare. The traditional name for the Crow Sun Dance was *Baaiichkiisapiliolissuua*, "fringed ankle dance". **Vision Quests** were for guidance and strength from spirit "helpers" and their "medicine." **Crow Medicine Bundles** are called *xapáaliia*, the material aspect of *baaxpáa*, holy, sacred transcendent spiritual power. **Sacred Pipes** were used for ritual smoking done in prayer, and in testimony of truth. Eagle Bone Whistles were made from eagle wing bones, with feather plumes, and were used in individual prayers and ceremonies (McCleary and Old Horn 1998, 2004).

Crow Obtain Horses. Within the lifetime of one Crow leader, Young White Buffalo, the Crow obtained their first horses and European trade goods, in the early 1700s. They traded horses from the eastern/northern Shoshone and from the Nez Perce. They obtained European trade goods, including the gun, from the Hidatsa and Mandan. Due to their location between the southern Plains, northern Plains, Plateau, and Missouri River villages, the Crow held a central role in the horse trade (Taylor 1981:33–48).

With horses, the Crow People became mobile, increased their buffalo-hunting efficiency, and developed a highly militarized society in defense of their homelands and hunting territory. This led to continual armed skirmishes and sometimes full warfare with neighboring Tribal nations, the Cheyenne, Dakota/Lakota, and the Blackfeet.

The Crow People and Contact with Euro-Americans. Trader Francois Larocque in 1805 estimated the Crow population to be as high as 40,000 people. Lewis and Clark were told the Crow population was around 20,000 people, in 1803. By this time, the Crow had suffered

through a smallpox epidemic in 1781, and again their numbers were cut by about one-third by the smallpox epidemic of 1837–1838. The decimation of the Crow altered social organization and made them more vulnerable to enemies like the Blackfeet and Lakota (Bowers 1992:19–21; Hoxie 1995:41, 75; Sundstrom 1997:309–310).

In the summer of 1825, a United States Peace Commission was sent to meet with the Tribal nations of the northern plains. General Henry Atkinson convened the meetings. The Crow signed onto the **Friendship Treaty of 1825**, their first legal agreement with the United States (Svingen 1982:4).

Jesuit Missionaries. In 1840, Jesuit "Black Robe" Father Pierre De Smet accompanied the American Fur Company expedition to the last rendezvous on Horse Creek of the Green River. On his return to St. Louis, De Smet traveled down the Yellowstone Valley, where he encountered Crow camps between current-day Laurel and Billings, and at the Bighorn and Rosebud Rivers. He wrote: "The Crow chiefs received us with cordiality and gave us a great feast." He held Mass in a form he had developed to minister to the Salish.

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 established tracts of country for the Dakota Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Assiniboine, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Tribes as their respective territories, with the privilege of hunting, fishing, and passing over any of the country described in the treaty. The Crow Territory was 38 million acres. The Tribes agreed to peaceful relations and to abstain from all hostilities. In return, the United States agreed to protect the Indian nations against all intruders and deliver $50,000 per year for ten years, and provisions and equipment according to population. Principal Crow leaders who signed were Big Shadow / Big Robber (1800–1858) and Red Bear / Sits on the Edge of Fortification (1807–1862/1863) (Bernardis 1986:21).

The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty (May 7, 1868) was signed by eleven Mountain Crow chiefs that diminished Crow territory to 8 million acres and established an "agricultural reservation" as a permanent home. The Crow retained hunting rights while peace existed. The United States would provide an agent and physician; a warehouse; buildings for a carpenter, farmer, blacksmith, miller, and engineer; saw-mill, grist-mill and shingle-machine; and school or mission and teacher. Individuals who farmed could select a tract of 320 acres, recorded in a "Crow land book." The United States was to deliver supplies, including clothing and cloth, and rations of meat and flour each year for thirty years, until they could furnish their own. Signers were: Pretty Bull, Wolf Bow, Mountain Tail, Sits in the Middle of the Land, White Horse, Poor Elk, Shot in the Jaw, White Forehead (Iron Bull), Pounded Meat, Bird in the Neck, and The Swan (White Goose) (Hoxie 1995:70).

THE RESERVATION PERIOD

Following the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, the first Crow Agency, Fort Parker, was established on Mission Creek east of Livingston, Montana. The transition from nomadic to settled life began. The Crow People subsisted on hunting, government rations, and some farming. In 1875, the Crow Agency was moved from Fort Parker to Absarokee. This second Crow Agency was known as "Living within lines on the ground."

Between 1866 and 1868, the Bozeman Trail (Road) and Forts Reno, Phil Kearny, and C. F. Smith were established. The Sioux led the opposition and guided conflict known as the Red Cloud War, Powder River War, and Sioux War. Crow warriors began to work as scouts and couriers for the U.S. Army. At the Battle of the Rosebud on June 17, 1876, 135 Crow scouts joined General George R. Crook against the Sioux led by Crazy Horse, along with their Cheyenne and Arapaho allies. Eight days later, on June 25–26, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer attacked Sioux and Cheyenne camps along the Little Bighorn River. Four Crow scouts with Custer were dismissed from service prior to the battle. Custer and all of his immediate command were killed.

In 1884, the Crow Indian Agency was moved to a third location, near the confluence of the Little Bighorn and Bighorn Rivers, known as "where they

grind the wheat" based on the construction of a Tribal flour mill. By then, the buffalo were gone. Sixty percent of the Crow still received rations, supplemented by farming and ranching, both cattle and horses. An extensive irrigation system started on the Crow Reservation in 1884.

CROW POPULATION AND ILLNESS 1868 TO 1904

Population. The Crow population declined from 5,000 in 1866, to 2,456 in 1887, to 2,208 in 1891, to 2,126 in 1894, and to 1,875 in 1900. Crow Agency Agent Henry Williamson wrote to the commissioner of Indian affairs and described the summer 1887 census of the Crow: 2,456 Crows on the reservation, in 630 families. In 1890, there were 165 deaths; half of those lost were under the age of twenty. This data presents the tragic decimation of the youngest generation of the Tribe (Hoxie 1995:133–134).

The Buffalo Disappear. In winter 1883–1884, "the tail of the last buffalo disappeared from the prairies," and the northern buffalo herd was nearly extinct. Many Indians suffered from a diminished food supply, even starvation. Pretty Shield, medicine woman of the Crow, said: "We became hungry and sick and afraid, all in one." By the late 1880s, 60 percent of the Crow and other Montana Indians were on food rationing. Although ration provisions of the 1868 treaties ended during the 1890s, Indians remained on emergency rations.

After the move to the **Third Crow Agency** in 1884, the Crow farmed and ranched. During 1898–1904, district farms were broken up, and Crows moved to their own allotments. Crow homesteaders were mostly self-supporting by 1896, when the government withdrew all rations, except beef, from able-bodied Indians and completely cut off all rations in 1906.

With settled life during the 1880s and 1890s, Indians starved and suffered from more illnesses: malnutrition, gastrointestinal disorders, and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, influenza, scarlet fever, smallpox, measles, spinal meningitis, polio, and trachoma. Tuberculosis emerged as a major problem by the 1890s. Smallpox outbreaks occurred in 1900, 1901, and 1903.

Catholic Missionary Activity on the Crow Reservation. In 1881, Jesuit Father Peter Barcelo joined a Crow camp at the mouth of the Bighorn Canyon, near present day Fort Smith. He lived with Iron Bull's family in their cabin. In 1882, he baptized Iron Bull's seriously ill brother, and his recovery brought praise and attention for Catholicism.

In 1883, Father Barcelo and Father Peter Paul Prando went to the second Crow Agency in Absarokee, where an encampment of 400 lodges, arranged by bands, waited for the issue of rations. The Jesuits ministered especially to Iron Bull and his followers. At the Absarokee Agency, Prando also had persuaded Pretty Eagle and many of his followers to become involved with their activities. Prando studied the Crow language, wrote a word list, composed a hymn in Crow, and held mass in the Crow language. Trained in medicine, he treated many people for various illnesses. Prando and Barcelo baptized 255 Crow people, including Iron Bull and his wife.

St. Francis Xavier Boarding School on the Bighorn River. When the Crow Agency was relocated to the Little Bighorn River, Father Joseph Cataldo of the St. Ignatius Church (on the Salish/Kootenai Reservation) sent a request to the Crow Agent M. L. Blake for a school and church site. Agent Blake wrote to Father Cataldo: "What I can do for your Order and the Church will be done with the greatest pleasure and I will always be ready to serve you." In 1887, Father Prando, who previously ministered to Iron Bull's encampment, returned with Father Peter Bandini. They established a post up the Bighorn River Valley near Chief Pretty Eagle's cabin on Rotten Grass Creek, where the U.S. government granted them 160 acres. They went to work on a chapel and a school, and by October, they opened the school with room for 150 children.

St. Charles Boarding School in Pryor District. Chief Plenty Coups requested that Father Prando start a Catholic school for the Pryor district children; and in 1892, the St. Charles Mission and school opened. This kept Pryor children from having to

St. Xavier Mission School, St. Xavier, MT. ca 1930s. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

go to the Crow Agency Boarding School, 80 miles away from their families.

Concurrent to the Catholic Boarding Schools St. Xavier and St. Charles, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) established a Boarding School at the Crow Agency in 1886–1921 to serve 160 pupils, and a BIA Boarding School at Pryor in 1903–1919. The Unitarian Church operated the Montana Indian Industrial Boarding School near Custer, Montana, in 1887–1897 to serve 50 students grades 1 to 6. The American Baptists and Congregationalists opened day schools in Lodge Grass, Pryor, Wyola, Reno Creek, and Black Lodge between 1904 and 1921. St. Xavier Catholic School opened four day schools, 1910–1916. The BIA Agent's Journal noted over half the Crow Indian children attended day schools in 1910. Older Crow Indian students attended off-reservation boarding schools; 98 at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania 1883–1918; and 38 at Sherman Indian Institute in Riverside, California, 1904–1921. The Crow Act of 1920 granted lands to the State of Montana in lieu of taxes for the support of Crow Indian children in the public schools. Public school enrollment and the already majority day-school enrollment took the number of Crow students attending the St. Xavier Boarding School down to a minimum (Pease 2022).

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Sister with students. St. Xavier, MT. ca. 1890. Little Big Horn College Archives.

ABOVE: Ursuline sister and three girls. St. Xavier, Montana. ca. 1890. Left: Sister Angela. Back right: Julia Busy Wolf. Little Big Horn College Archives.

RIGHT: Sister Rose and two young girls. St. Xavier, MT. ca. 1890. Left to right: Ursula Dancing Woman Martinez, Sister Rose, and Rose Charges Strong. Little Big Horn College Archives.

A Brief History of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe
1600 to 1884

Over a three-century span, the Cheyenne People were in the Great Lakes region and later journeyed to the western reaches of the Great Lakes. In Cheyenne narratives and historical accounts, the Cheyenne were agrarians near the Great Lakes, then with considerable pressure from neighboring Tribal nations located to the east, the Cheyenne turned to buffalo hunting on a greater scale and then moved into a military society in defense of homeland and hunting territory. It was during the 1850s that the Cheyenne became two separate Tribes, the Northern and Southern Tribes, partly because one of the Bent brothers married a Cheyenne woman and partly because the railroads had separated the buffalo herd into a northern and southern herd. Finally, following full-scale warfare and armed resistance, the Northern Cheyenne were granted a reservation in southeastern Montana by presidential executive order. Their journey covers thousands of miles, monumental cultural innovations, and enormous economic and social changes.

The earliest-known homeland of the Cheyenne is north of Lake Superior in present-day Ontario. Their living came from fish and small game. They migrated to the Yellow Medicine River in Minnesota, where they came to have dogs to carry their possessions. Wigwams made of long willow poles, covered with bark sheets and reed mats and skins were the homes. Once they planted corn, beans, and squash, they built substantial earth lodges, up to seventy lodges of major size, patterned after neighboring Tribes (Weist 2003:10). With the larger food supply, the Cheyenne dried corn, big game meat, fruit, and roots for the winter months. Men used bows and arrows for hunting to kill larger animals, leading to the search for buffalo. In 1680, French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, listed in his journal that he met the Red Shield Society of the Tse tse tsehese stahase, "People Like Us" near present day Peoria, Illinois. And the French trader Pierre-Charles Le Sueur recorded meeting the Red Talkers The Dakota called them Sha hi ye na or Red Talkers, thus Cheyenne (Weist 2006: 14).

A second earth lodge village was built by the Cheyenne between Big Stone Lake and Lake Traverse. The Cheyenne entered into trading furs with the French and British for steel knives, tomahawks, iron pots, and beads, but most importantly, rifles, flint, powder, and balls. Neighboring Tribes who got guns earlier were the Chippewa, Cree, and Assiniboines. Due to warring Tribes, the Cheyenne were forced to leave their second village and move westward, most likely to the present-day Dakotas (Weist 2006:16).

Their westward move took them to the Sheyenne River in present-day North Dakota, where they built a strong earth lodge village surrounded by a log stockade. Inside were seventy earth lodges, many 40 feet in diameter. Here they raised corn, beans, and squash in gardens outside the village, and they hunted bison using a surround method. The Cheyenne lived here from 1700 to 1790 (Weist 2006:18).

Through trade, the Cheyenne acquired horses, an acquisition that brought major changes in their mobility, and efficiency with hunting the buffalo. The increased buffalo hunting brought an increase in buffalo hides for tipi covers, in meat for their food, and it gave women the freedom to stay in the village to tend the gardens; to dry meat, corn, roots and fruit in the fall; and to tan robes for clothing. Motivated by revenge for the loss of warriors to the Cheyenne, the Chippewa attacked and burned the village on the Sheyenne River. In yet another move, the Cheyenne People went to be in proximity with their trade partners the Arikara and Mandan. Near Fort Yates in North Dakota, the Cheyenne built a major earth lodge village of seventy lodges, some 60 feet in diameter. They planted corn fields and performed the corn ceremony; they used canoes to fish in the big river (Weist 1977: 21).

Now, this central location among Northern Plains Tribes positioned them among trading partners. Among the Northern Plains Tribes, they traded horses, meat, furs, and buffalo pelts for pumpkin, tobacco, trading goods, and guns. In yet a fourth move, the Cheyenne built an earth lodge village on the Grand River, without fortifications. Together with the Moiseyu they hunted buffalo north of the Missouri River (Pahr 1997: 18).
In this Missouri River region (present-day North

and South Dakota), there were the So'taaeo'o, the Arikara, and the Mandan. A prophet named Sweet Medicine came to the Cheyenne. Found as a baby, Sweet Medicine was adopted by a young woman and raised among the children. Sweet Medicine brought the Cheyenne People teachings in governance—the Council of Forty-Four, cultural and spiritual beliefs and life ways, and also gave them the Four Sacred Arrows. Another prophet, Erect Horns, also taught the Cheyenne, and those teachings centered on Ma'heo'o. Erect Horns brought the Sacred Buffalo Hat to the Cheyenne (Stands In Timber and Liberty 1967:27–41).

Around 1820, the Southern Cheyenne split away from the Northern Cheyenne (Leiker and Powers 2002:28).

CHEYENNE TREATIES WITH THE UNITED STATES

In the summer of 1825, a United States Peace Commission was sent to meet with the Tribal nations of the Northern Plains. General Henry Atkinson convened the meetings. The Cheyenne signed onto the Friendship Treaty of 1825, the first legal agreement signed by the people (Svingen 1982:4). Jesuit priest and explorer Father DeSmet met with the Cheyenne People near present-day Laramie, Wyoming, and there baptized 283 children in 1840 (Pahr 1997:33).

At Fort Laramie, the Cheyenne attended the gathering of ten thousand Tribal people from the Arapaho, Dakota, Crow, Assiniboine, Gros Ventre, Mandan, and Arikara. This enormous meeting was with U.S. Commissioners in 1851. The Cheyenne (inclusive of Northern and Southern Cheyenne) signed the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty for their territory, a region between the North Platte and Arkansas Rivers. However, the Northern Cheyenne remained in the area of the Powder River to the Black Hills (Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota), in close association with the Oglala Sioux (Svingen 1982:5–7).

In 1861, the Southern Cheyenne signed onto the Treaty of Fort Wise with the United States, without the Northern Cheyenne presence or approval. Then, in 1868, the Northern Cheyenne signed the second Fort Laramie Treaty, to live on the Powder River, although they continued to live in association with the Oglala Sioux. This treaty effort was in response to a two-year period of raids and ambushes along the Oregon and Bozeman trails by Plains Tribes. The Tribes were given exclusive right to assigned lands, and the U.S. agreed to furnish a physician, teachers, carpenter, miller, engineer, farmer, and blacksmiths with appropriations sufficient to employ such personnel (Pahr 1997:25).

ARMED CONFLICT IN PROTECTION OF HOMELANDS

Despite the Cheyenne staying within agreed-upon territory, armed conflicts over hunting territory and homelands occurred frequently with neighboring Tribes and homesteaders. In November 1864, a peaceful band of Cheyenne and Arapaho in a winter camp under Chief Black Kettle were attacked at Sand Creek by 600 Colorado Territory militia soldiers from Fort Lyon, resulting in the killing or wounding of 163 mostly women and children (American Battlefield Trust 2024; Leiker and Powers 2002:34).

In 1876, the secretary of the Interior declared all Indians not on reservations to be hostile, and asked the secretary of War to take appropriate action for their return (Pahr 1997:27). The Cheyenne were among the Tribal nations at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana in June 1876. They joined the main camp in the valley of the Little Bighorn River, guarded carefully by their military societies. In the battle, the Cheyenne were mainly focused on General Custer and his men; seven Cheyenne warriors were killed that day. Custer and all his men were killed, and the Sioux lost sixty-six men (Stands In Timber and Liberty 1976).

Following the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Cheyenne were pursued by the U.S. Army in Montana Territory; they paid a high price for their involvement. In 1877, on the Red Fork of the Powder River, in 40 degrees below zero weather, the Cheyenne were attacked by the U.S. Army; their camp with all their belongings was destroyed (Leiker and Powers 2002:34). In 1877,

1,100 Cheyenne were at the Red Cloud Agency in South Dakota Territory, and 937 were at Fort Keogh in Montana Territory (Pahr 1997:28).

The U.S. Congress passed an appropriations bill that prohibited the Cheyenne and Arapaho from receiving annuities until they moved to Indian Territory in Oklahoma (Leiker and Powers 2002:6). The U.S. Army was dispatched to take the Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, in August 1877. Once at Fort Reno in Oklahoma, the Northern Cheyenne were reunified with the Southern Cheyenne, but they suffered from poor conditions of hunger, disease, and even death (Pahr 1997:27–28). The Northern Cheyenne (for the most part) refused to affiliate with the Southern Cheyenne and fundamentally objected to farming and the food rations they were issued; for them, eating and hunting buffalo was a spiritual dialogue (Leiker and Powers 2002:36–41).

The Northern Cheyenne escaped their confinement in Oklahoma in the fall of 1878 (Malone and Roeder 1973:16). They separated into two groups: the first, under Dull Knife, headed north and was captured at Fort Robinson in Nebraska; the second, under Little Wolf, surrendered at Fort Keogh in Montana Territory. The Dull Knife group,of 149 broke out of Fort Robinson on January 9, 1879, and the barrage of Army gunfire killed half of the Cheyenne escapees, while seventy survivors were recaptured. Dull Knife, with some family members, escaped and went to the Sioux Reservation. After months of delay, those recaptured at Fort Robinson were released and allowed to go to Montana, to Fort Keogh, to join Little Wolf's band (Leiker and Powers 2002:13).

EXECUTIVE ORDER ESTABLISHES THE TONGUE RIVER RESERVATION

The commissioner of Indian affairs established a permanent reservation for the Northern Cheyenne in 1884. President Chester A. Arthur signed an Executive Order setting aside 371,200 acres of land for what was then called the Tongue River Indian Reservation (Pahr 1997:31). In March 1900, President William McKinley extended the reservation, and White ranchers along the Rosebud Valley were bought out to increase the size of the reservation to 444,157 acres (Kramen 1984:4). Assigned by the commissioner of Indian affairs, the Indian agent was the key administrator, responsible for implementing the federal Indian Civilization Program. The tools of civilization were land allotments, citizenship, and the Indian school system. The agent was authorized to organize the Indian Police and Court of Indian Offenses. With the Indian police and the Court, the agent was to stop "heathen dances," public intoxication, theft, property destruction, and misdemeanors. The punishments were fines and imprisonment. Among the police duties were to return truant children and stop cattle butchering (Pahr 1997: 85).

CATHOLIC MISSION TO THE NORTHERN CHEYENNE

General Nelson A. Miles at Fort Keogh obtained assistance from Corporal George P. Yoakam to help the Cheyenne People get settled on the land, by utilizing the Homestead Act of 1875 (Kramen 1984:4). Yoakam contacted the Reverend O'Connor in the Catholic Diocese of Helena stating the urgent need for a Catholic mission to Northern Cheyenne. In response, Father O'Connor sent Jesuit Father Barcelo, who unfortunately suffered from weak health, to the Tongue River area in 1882. Father O'Connor's request to the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, Ohio, brought Ursuline Sister Mother Amadeus to choose six sisters, three of whom joined Father Eyler to staff a three-room cabin—a temporary Catholic mission—that opened in April 1884. Montana's Bishop Jean-Baptiste Brondel dedicated the mission to St. Joseph Benedict Labre, also known as the "French beggar saint." The St. Labre Mission School began with fourteen Cheyenne children, both girls and boys; the students' families camped nearby (Pahr 1997:124–128).

For a detailed history of the St. Labre Boarding School and Mission go to the HRA Report later in the Commission Report.

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LEFT: The Indian Policeman, ca 1920-1930, Ashland, MT. RIGHT: The Bureau of Indian Affairs Office, Lame Deer, MT. Photos from St. Labre Museum and Archives.

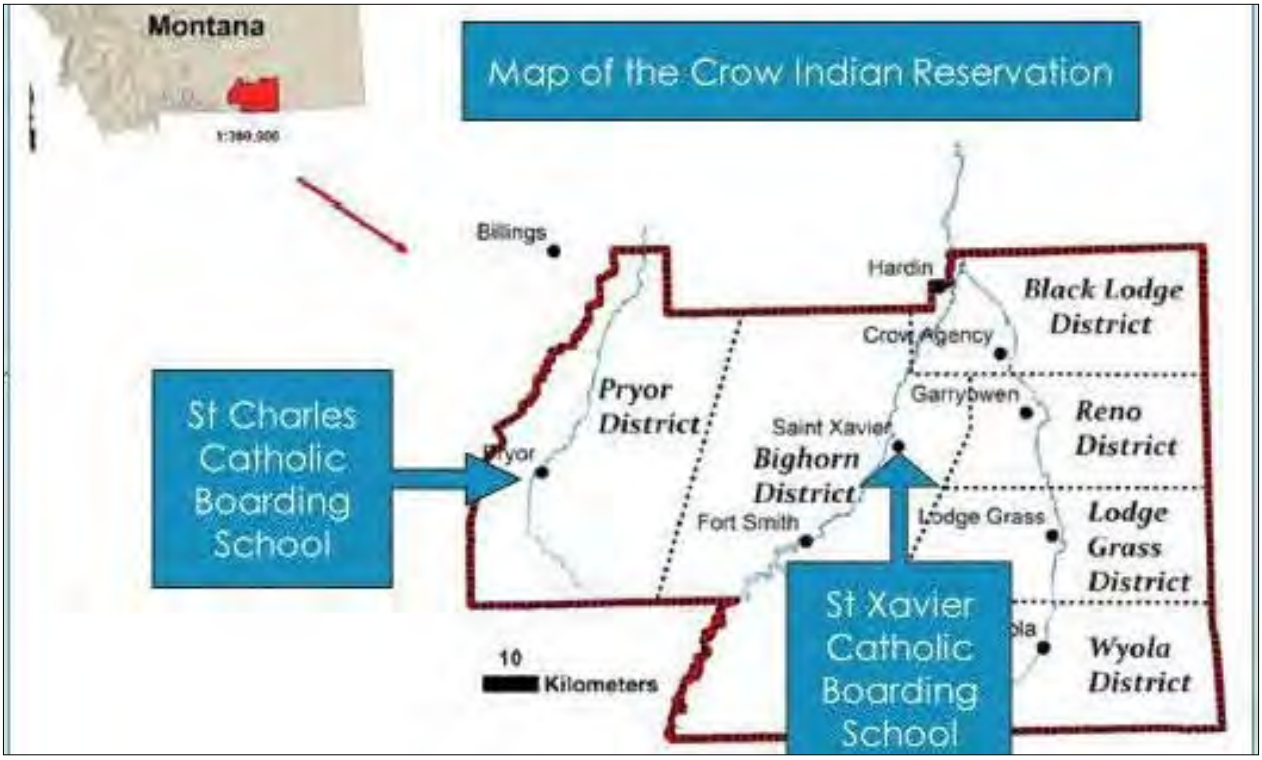
Present Day Catholic Schools Serving the Northern

Map of the state of Montana with the St. Labre Schools noted.

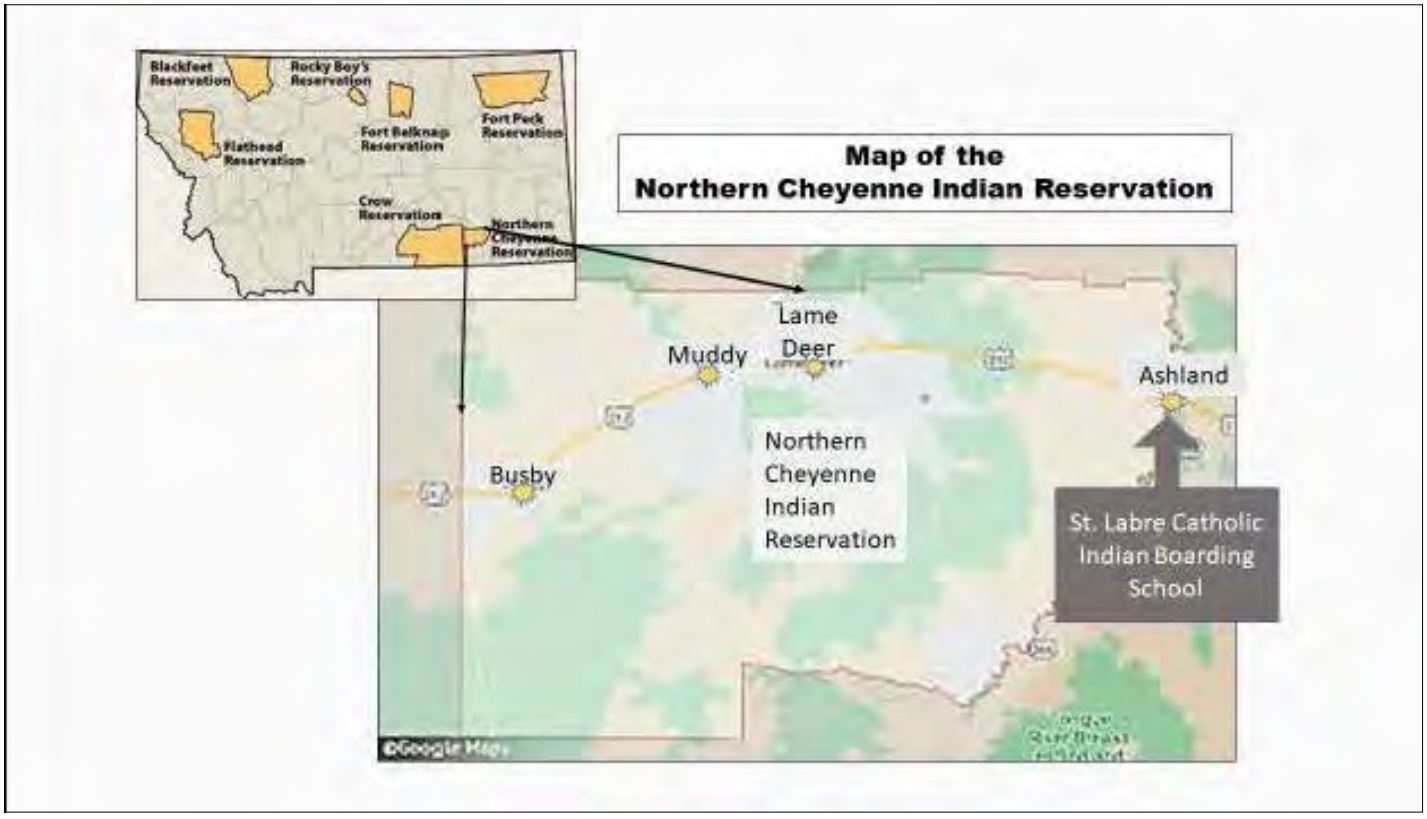
CAMPUS OVERVIEWS

St. Labre Indian School Educational Association operates schools on three campuses: St. Labre Indian School (est. 1884), a pre K-12 school in Ashland, Montana, adjoining the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation; Pretty Eagle Catholic Academy (previously St. Francis Xavier Mission School, est. 1888), a pre K-8 school located at St. Xavier, Montana, on the Crow Reservation; and St. Charles Mission School (est. 1892) located at Pryor, Montana, near the western edge of the Crow Indian Reservation. In addition, the Association operates a preschool at Lodge Grass, Montana, and St. Labre Youth & Family Services, which provides social/human services at the Ashland campus with some services extended to the Crow Reservation.

Cheyenne and Crow Tribal Nations



Map of the Crow Reservation with the locations of the St. Charles Mission and St. Xavier Mission noted.



Map of the Northern Cheyenne Reservation with the location of the St. Labre Catholic Indian Boarding School noted.

PART TWO the Process

Decoration Day 1920, St. Labre Cemetery, Ashland, MT. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

Once the St. Labre Board of Directors determined that an Investigation Commission would be the most appropriate way to determine whether any undocumented burials were located on any of the three St. Labre campuses, the Board identified two members of the Board of Directors, Mrs. Anda Pretty On Top and Dr. Matthew Redinger, to represent the Board as members of the Commission. Mrs. Pretty On Top was recognized for her extensive experience with the schools and her Native American heritage. Dr. Redinger was chosen because he lives in Montana (thus facilitating meetings of the Commission) and for his extensive experience in archival research. It is intentional that the Board members on the Commission constitute a minority of the members of the Commission—the Board was clear that it did not want the Board members to have a dominant voice on the Commission to avoid implications of undue influence over the process of the investigation. Having identified members of the Board to serve on the Commission, the Board issued a charter on October 28, 2021, to authorize the Commission to begin its work.

In constituting the Commission, the Board of Directors attempted to include professionals whose experience was determined to best position the Commission to be successful and comprehensive in its work. Since each of the members chosen to constitute the mission approached this task from different perspectives, each member was presented the opportunity to provide "statements of intent" for this work, which appear below each member's introductory information.

The Commission included:

Dr. Janine Pease, DEd, Commission Chair
Dr. Matthew Redinger, PhD, Commission Vice Chair
Dr. Richard Littlebear, EdD
Dr. Walter Fleming, PhD
Anda Pretty On Top, MS

In order to maximize the productivity of the Commission, the St. Labre Board of Directors appointed Curtis Yarlott, executive director of the St. Labre Indian School Educational Association, to provide administrative support to the Commission. Mr. Yarlott and staff were asked to identify additional resource people who would be of most help, including counselors and mental health professionals who participated in the listening sessions the Commission held in conjunction with its other investigative work. These additional personnel are identified below in the context of the listening sessions.

While not initially part of the planned process, several Commission members attended the 12th and final Road to Healing listening session on American Indian Boarding Schools, sponsored by the secretary of the Interior, after learning that it would be held at MSU-Bozeman on November 5, 2023.

DR. JANINE PEASE,

Independent Member and Commission Chair

Dr. Pease earned her Doctor of Education in Adult and Higher Education from Montana State University-Bozeman. She is the founding president of Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, Montana, and presently serves as adjunct faculty there. She is active in efforts to preserve and revitalize indigenous languages. Dr. Pease has a keen interest in history and has previously researched federal and private Indian boarding schools serving the Crow Indian children. She has earned many awards including a MacArthur Fellowship, was twice recognized as a Humanities Hero by Humanities Montana, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums. She is an enrolled member of the Crow Tribe.

From the time of my doctoral research on tribal colleges and universities, I have pursued historical data, narratives and photos on schools serving American Indian students and communities. This Commission membership provided my participation in a historic research process, to gain information and understanding of the Indian boarding school environment and conditions our Indian youth experienced. The process of investigation could give rise to definitive research on the St. Labre boarding schools', related Catholic orders' school materials and Crow and Northern Cheyenne students' descendants' narratives of the schools. This Commission research process is timely; and I believe it is critical for our Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribal communities to know the truth about the St. Labre, St. Xavier and St. Charles Boarding Schools, with regard to enrolled students' deaths and burials. From a more personal view, my grandparents were both students at the Crow Agency BIA Boarding School. My grandfather went to Sherman Indian Institute, an off-reservation BIA Boarding School in Riverside, California. My grandfather lived with us while I was growing up and he shared stories of his days at Sherman, how he ran away from school, his learning piano, clarinet and trumpet there, and his best friend, a Crow Indian named Shobe. On the darker side, though, my grandfather's little brother died while attending the Crow Agency BIA Boarding School. This little brother's death was a mystery, for the family did not have any explanation for his passing. Our family cleans and decorates the grave of "Little Benny" annually. It makes us sad to think of him, having lost his life at such a young age, and how tragic it was for his siblings, parents and grandparents.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

St. Labre Indian School Educational Association
Attn: Boarding School Investigation Commission Report,
112 St. Labre Campus Drive, P.O. Box 77, Ashland, MT 59003
Telephone: (406) 784-4500

St. Labre Museum and Archives (For access to historical photos and archives)
P.O. Box 77, Ashland, MT 59003
Telephone: (406) 784-4511

Diocese of Great Falls-Billings Victim Assistance Coordinator
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings P.O. Box 1399, Great Falls, MT 59403-1399
Email:victimassistancecoord@gmail.com
Telephone: (406) 727-6683

DR. MATTHEW REDINGER,

Commission Vice Chair & St. Labre Board Member

Dr. Redinger earned his PhD in History from the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. He is presently researching a book on modernity's confrontation with indigenous populations in the United States and Argentina. Dr. Redinger joined the St. Labre Board of Directors in 2021 and so has a still-fresh viewpoint of the organization. He currently serves as Provost for the University of Providence in Great Falls, Montana, and previously served as Vice-Provost of Academic Affairs and Professor of History at Montana State University-Billings. Dr. Redinger was born and raised in Montana.

I approached this task, presented to me as a member of the St. Labre Indian School Board of Directors, with great interest as well as a modicum of apprehension. I knew that the archival experience I had gained in my pursuit of a PhD in History would prove invaluable, so I was confident that my professional experience had prepared me for this task. I had spent the previous two decades as a Professor of History at Montana State University Billings, so I knew a great deal about the subject matter at the heart of the Commission's work. I was also confident that my background in the history of the Trans-Mississippi West would provide me with the content-area background that further contributed to my interest in the subject. Moreover, my focus on conflict between Native Americans and Anglo-Americans that constituted the majority of this historical exploration of the West would further equip me for effective service on this Commission. Therefore, my professional experience had prepared me well to participate and contribute effectively to the work of the Commission.

It was with not insignificant apprehension that I approached this work, however, because of my own demographic background. I recognized that I was the only non-Native member of the Commission. I had no concerns that my Anglo-European heritage would prevent me from effective service on the Commission, but I was concerned about whether a "white face" on the Commission might compromise the overall success of the investigation. I recognized early on that an essential element of this investigation would be to speak with the people involved at the heart of this work: the peoples of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations. From my own perspective, I knew where my head and my heart were, and was not concerned that my own preconceived notions might compromise the integrity of the investigation. I knew that I would be able to provide creditable service to the Commission's investigation. In fact, I participated in research at one of the more important archives for this effort: the Records of the Sisters of Saint Ursula (Ursulines) housed at The History Museum in Great Falls, Montana. But I was concerned that others' preconceived notions of my credibility or my ability to set aside any legacies of my own heritage might compromise their willingness to participate in very difficult discussions, particularly as part of the listening sessions where potentially extremely sensitive information would be shared. I took that apprehension with me to the listening sessions in which I participated, trusting in people's ability to look beyond my skin to accept me as a co-equal member of the investigation Commission. I have little doubt, however, that my presence at the listening sessions was of at least some concern to participants in the sessions, and can only trust their willingness to overlook any fears of partiality or prejudice and overcome any initial concerns about my presence as a Board member in the listening sessions.

DR. RICHARD LITTLEBEAR,

Independent Member

Dr. Littlebear recently retired as President of Chief Dull Knife College in Lame Deer, Montana. He earned a Doctor of Education from Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Littlebear is a tireless advocate for the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages, especially Cheyenne, his first language. He considers learning to read and write the Cheyenne language his greatest academic achievement. Dr. Littlebear has expressed criticism of the role played by the Catholic Church, St. Labre, and other religious denominations in efforts to eradicate Native languages and cultures. He is a highly sought-after consultant for indigenous language restoration efforts. Dr. Littlebear grew up in Busby, Mt. and attended, up until the 7th grade, what was then known as the Tongue River Boarding School. He had many friends, boys and girls, who attended St. Labre and they would come back on Friday evenings and sometimes they would tell stories that made him feel glad that he wasn't attending St. Labre. For instance, they told of having to kneel on a broom handle for up to an hour or having to stand tiptoe in a corner with their noses touching a mark on the wall for offenses perceived by nuns and priests. The Tongue River Boarding School did similar punishments for minor offenses. It is for these reasons that he thinks the Commission's charge is limited because these punishments inflicted life-long trauma on students and families. He knows that the infliction of these punishments is not what the Commission is charged to deal with yet many people are living today with trauma inflicted by personnel from the schools. Dr. Littlebear is a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe.

I noticed that there were no Cheyenne on the St. Labre Commission when I was asked to be on the Commission and that is what motivated me to become a member. Some of my motivation to join was spurred on by the possible reaction of other Cheyenne when they realized there were no Cheyenne on the Commission. St. Labre Mission, the center for St. Labre's donation solicitation, factors which often led to the uneasy relationship between the two tribes and between the Cheyenne and the Catholic Church. I tried to look beyond those factors and concentrate on the idea of searching for unmarked graves, a necessary endeavor for both the Crow and the Cheyenne.

ANDA PRETTY ON TOP,

St. Labre Board Member

Mrs. Pretty On Top is a retired educator having served the children of Northern Cheyenne and Crow tribal members during a career spanning more than 30 years. She earned her Master of Education degree from Montana State University-Billings. She is a member of the St. Labre Board of Directors, having joined in 2021. She is a fluent speaker of the Crow language and is actively involved in the cultural activities of her tribe.

My reflection on this commission is a process in which I accepted. Knowing that the investigation of unmarked and undocumented graves was a challenge. I thought very hard about the invitation and it took awhile, then accepted it. It has been a challenging year, all the meetings, plus the listening skills on both Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes. The issues at the listening sessions were extremely important. We as Commission members listened to all the factors. Social workers were at the listening sessions for any individual. My brother Raymond also graduated from St. Labre and my younger brother graduated from St. Lawerence Academy in Wisconsin. My maternal grandfather ran away from Fr. Shaw.

DR. WALTER FLEMING,
Independent Member

Dr. Walter Fleming is a member of the Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas but grew up on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. He earned his PhD in American Studies with a Museum Studies minor from the University of Kansas. Dr. Fleming was twice recognized as Educator of the Year by the Montana Indian Education Association and was a recipient of the Montana "Governor's Humanities Award". He presently serves as Department Head of Native American Studies and as a full Professor at Montana State University-Bozeman.

I am the son of Federal Boarding School survivors. My father went to Haskell Institute, Lawrence, Kansas in the 1920s and my mother attended Haskell in the late 1930s. My father's stories were a mixture of sad and happy occasions. He often spoke about seeing his baby sister, also at Haskell, only on Sundays, but they were never able to speak to one another. He also told of watching a 40-year-old Jim Thorpe kick field goals during an exhibition in Haskell's stadium.

My interest in the history of the boarding school systems and their stories is both personal and professional. I have taught Native American Studies at Montana State University for 45 years. I teach about the federal boarding schools and it is my sense that in order to understand the social ails in tribal communities today, one has to know the history of education that impacted two or three generations of Native people.

Thus, I consider it an honor to be a part of the Commission. The work of the Commission is noble and important and I commend St. Labre schools and the Board of Directors for taking the step of opening a door into its past. The staff of St. Labre has been amazingly helpful and transparent throughout the process. I am pleased to support the findings of the Commission.

Commission Responses to Concerns Brought up dur

LISTENING SESSIONS

Concern #1: The First Round of listening sessions attendance varied from site to site from no one attending to thirty attendees.

Response: The Commission sponsored a second round of listening sessions.

Concern #2: A Northern Cheyenne elected official stated the Tribal officials had not received an invitation to the Tribal officials.

Response: The Commission sponsored a second round of listening sessions with locations immediately accessible to the Tribal offices, with invitations to the Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and Tribal officials.

Concern #3: The oral histories held by individuals may not be shared in front of an audience.

Response: A written form was designed for the individuals to write their narratives down and submit to the Commission; and further, at each location, a private room was arranged for one-on-one interviews.

Concern #4: The conveyance of oral histories may elicit emotion and mental reactions from the individuals offering the narratives or attending the sessions.

Response: The assistance from and presence of the mental health professionals accompanied each of the listening sessions. The presence of cedar, sage, and sweetgrass smudge was available throughout each session.

Concern #5: The attendees provided narratives from their experiences or those of their ancestors that pertained to abusive treatment in the schools.

Response: The Commission determined to listen to all narratives provided during the listening sessions.

Concern #6: All five Commissioners could not attend all of the listening sessions.

Response: The Commission determined that at least two Commissioners would conduct each listening session.

Concern #7: The Commissioners recognized the focus of the listening sessions was a matter of sensitivity, even controversy.

Response: The location for the listening sessions was held at the schools' community rooms and on neutral ground in community buildings (Tribal buildings, college buildings, Boys and Girls Club). A light meal was provided to the attendees, breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, and dinner in the evening.

HISTORICAL RESEARCH

HR Concern #1: The archival records of the Ursuline Sisters were being moved from one location in Great Falls to another.

Response: The period for historical research was extended to adjust to the availability of records at the new location.

ring the process

Concern #2: The students in the three schools also included Cree students.

Response: Study will include all the students who attended the schools regardless of Tribal affiliation.

LiDAR SURVEYS

Concern #1: The listening sessions narratives suggested locations of unmarked graves, such as "near a tree by the river in Ashland," "near the graves of the two sisters buried on school grounds," and "cemetery down by the river."

Response: Despite no evidence/documentation of unmarked graves, the Commission requested support for a LiDAR survey by drone, that indicates subtle topographic surface features such as discrete mounds or depressions that may indicate grave locations, for all three schools.

Concern #2: The LiDAR survey may reveal an anomaly that requires further survey by ground-penetrating radar (GPR), excavation, exhuming remains, reburial, or repatriation.

Response: Contact the THPO and request their presence for the LiDAR survey, and to respond to the results, to conduct ceremonies according to Tribal protocols.

LEFT: St. Labre grounds from the west as people camp to attend the Golden Jubilee. ca 1935. RIGHT: Dr. Ethan Ryan conducts a LiDAR survey of St. Labre Cemetery. ca. 2024. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

The Commission first met on December 12, 2022. Our first item of business was to review the charge presented to the Commission by the St. Labre Board of Directors. In a presentation to the Commission, Mr. Yarlott summarized the purpose of the Commission thus:

The Investigation Commission Charter was created to investigate whether any St. Labre students died while attending St. Labre or in St. Labre's care. To ensure the investigation is thorough, reliable, and transparent, the St. Labre Boards created this independent Commission.

We were being tasked with investigating "whether there are unmarked graves on the St. Labre properties" and "whether any St. Labre students died while attending St. Labre, and if any died, the circumstances surrounding the death." And to present a comprehensive report of the findings, conclusions, and any recommendations to the Board of Directors at the conclusion of our work. The first meeting also included reviews of any conflicts of interest that may compromise Commission members' ability to carry out the charge, a review of the budget with which the Commission would do its work. At this important meeting, which was intended to provide guidelines for the rest of the Commission's efforts, Mr. Yarlott's responsibilities as "Commission Liaison" were reviewed as these:

- Ensure St. Labre staff cooperates with the Commission
- At the Commission's request, assist in facilitating the Investigation
- Provide a channel of communication between the Commission and the Boards
- Update the Boards
- Administer the Budget
- Perform other functions as provided in the Charter

Besides reviewing Commission ground rules for voting, terms, and communications protocols, the Commission committed to a schedule of meetings to be held monthly throughout 2023, either (face-to-face) in Montana or virtually. The original timeline would have the Commission completing its work in time to share its report with the St. Labre Board of Directors at its October 26, 2023, meeting, though an extension to the Board's spring meeting of 2024 was considered, if conditions required more time because of anticipated difficulties in getting the work done, chiefly because of the lingering impacts of COVID-19. At the first meeting, Dr. Janine Pease was elected to chair the Commission, and Dr. Redinger was elected vice-chair. Finally, the Commission was able to come to agreement on the scope of the investigation.

It was clear from the beginning that the Commission needed professional research assistance to ensure that the investigation was as rigorous as possible. To facilitate a search for the most appropriate research firm to support the significant archival work required of the charge from the Board of Directors, Mr. Yarlott engaged with the Crowley Fleck law firm to solicit bids from research firms. As part of the proposal process, Crowley Fleck requested scope of work proposals and cost estimates for the archival work, with additional estimates for more intrusive archaeological work that may be needed (LiDAR, GPR, forensic dogs, etc.). In order to identify the historical research firm most appropriate for an investigation of this size and scope, the Commission thoroughly reviewed the submitted scope of work proposals and cost estimates from a number of firms that specialize in archival and archeological research. The Commission ultimately assessed the relative strengths, experience, and costs of five firms: Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc, of Sheridan, Wyoming; Jean Kelley, MA, of Windover Historical Research & Genealogical Services of Washington, DC; John R. Welsh, Professor of Archeology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada; Stevens Historical Research Associates of Boise, Idaho; and Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), of Missoula, Montana. Based on a thorough assessment of the relative strengths and experience of the five firms, the Commission decided to accept the proposal from HRA at its second meeting on February 24, 2023.

LISTENING SESSIONS

Press Conference and Press Release

The listening sessions series was an ambitious entry into the Tribal communities. To begin the effort, the Commission planned and implemented a press conference. Held in Billings, Montana, on June 28, 2023, the event was attended by the Billings Gazette, KTVQ-2 Billings, and other journalists on contract. A press kit was designed and distributed. The kit became a handout at each listening session and to anyone who inquired about the investigation. The Commission determined that an essential element of their work would be to consider the oral histories and memories of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne people whose friends and relatives lived and studied at St. Labre boarding schools. Thus, the Commission scheduled a number of listening sessions to take place at various locations on the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Indian reservations. In an effort to make sure the listening sessions were as well attended as possible, flyers were posted in each post office and other locations stating the time and where the listening session would be held.

Initially, the Commission planned on holding seven listening sessions on a variety of dates and times to enable as many people as possible to attend and contribute their memories and family histories to assist the Commission in the task of assembling as comprehensive an investigation as possible. The original listening sessions were scheduled for the following dates and locations:

- July 10th, Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church, Lame Deer
- July 10th, Christ the King Catholic Church, Busby
- July 10th, St. Labre Auditorium, Ashland
- July 11th, St. Dennis Catholic Church, Crow Agency
- July 11th, Lodge Grass Catholic Church, Lodge Grass
- July 11th, Pretty Eagle Academy Cafeteria, St. Xavier
- July 12th, St. Charles Mission School Cafeteria, Pryor

Ultimately, the Commission realized that the schedule of listening sessions had to be expanded, and the number of locations for these sessions had to be broadened, to reach a number of people who found traveling to the listening sessions difficult. In particular, the Commission recognized that elderly people, who were most likely to have direct memories or accounts of life at the boarding schools, needed specific outreach.

In particular, listening sessions were conducted at:

- July 31, The Heritage Living Center/Caslen Living Center, Livingston
- August 7, Awé Kúalawaache Care Center, Crow Agency
- August 8, The Shoulderblade Complex in Lame Deer
- October 17, Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency
- October 17, Boys & Girls Club of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, Lame Deer

The members of the Commission demonstrated a great deal of care and concern for the sensitivity of the stories and family oral traditions that were shared at the listening sessions and included protective measures. In order to respect the privacy of individuals sharing what may be sensitive personal or family histories, the Commission established a number of conditions under which the listening sessions would be conducted. First, the Commission determined that no media would be allowed to attend the listening sessions. Moreover, audio or video recordings, other than an official recording for the Commission's use, were not permitted during the sessions. Also, the Commission asked the Crow and Northern Cheyenne attendees that if they had access to treasured family memories or stories of family members of boarding school attendees, that those stories be included in the listening sessions. Finally, since the Commission recognized that we would not be able to arrange a schedule that could possibly fit every potential attendee's schedule, the Commission prepared a "Mail-in Information Form" on which any interested party with information about their or a family member's experiences at the St. Labre boarding schools could write out their accounts on the form and mail it to the executive assistant for inclusion in the official listening session records. No

Mail-in Information Forms were received. Among the early decisions of the Commission regarding the listening sessions was that attendees sign in on an attendance sheet so the Commission would have contact information in case the Commission wanted to follow up on a specific account shared at the listening sessions.

Most other decisions surrounding the listening sessions revolved around effort to mitigate any potentially re-traumatizing impacts of sharing sensitive stories at the sessions. To mitigate this potential harm, the Commission included several elements into the process of the listening sessions. First, each session included a printed agenda, so attendees could take comfort in the fact that these sessions had been planned with great care and concern for the attendees and the Commission members in attendance. For those who could not be in attendance, staff prepared a mail-in form to be distributed to and by friends and family. Second, a conducive atmosphere was created through the provision of sweetgrass and cedar for smudging and fidget spinners and other stress-reducing manipulatives for those who would feel more comfortable with them. Third, listening sessions were typically accompanied by a meal—breakfast, or lunch, or anytime. It was clear that some needed a meal more than they had a desire to contribute to the session, and they were most welcome.

Finally, staff assured the participants that there were professional counselors available should the need arise. They invited mental health counselors to the listening sessions, in case their services were needed. These individuals and programs all made mental health services available in case anyone was troubled by the listening session. Finally, several staff members from the St. Labre Schools were recruited to serve as support staff for the listening sessions, to cover the reception desk and a healing room provided for each session to provide a place of respite if attendees needed it, and to serve as concierge for any food or handouts provided at the sessions.

St. Labre Girls Dormitory, Ashland, MT. ca 1920s. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

St. Dennis Parish Church, Crow Agency, MT

Attending the St. Dennis Parish Church Listening Session were Commissioners Anda Pretty On Top, Richard Littlebear, Walter Fleming, and Janine Pease. A Crow Indian woman and elder from Wyola Montana stated she was a product of St. Labre Indian School and the Catholic Church. Throughout her school enrollment at St. Labre, she was treated well.

Dr. Janine Pease: Tell us who you are.

Speaker 1: My name is [redacted] I am a member of the Apsáalooké Nation. I have lived most of my life in Wyola, Montana. I (Speaks in Crow). I am a member of the (Speaks in Crow) Clan (Continues in Crow) and... I lived on the reservation until I graduated from high school. I'm a product of Saint Labre Indian School and my experience being a Catholic, raised Catholic, going to catechism for two weeks every summer, going to Catholic colleges. I have never been mistreated by the church or any of the religious people. My grandmother was orphaned at an early age, and she was taken to Saint Charles Mission and Boarding School in Pryor and when she was about 12 years old, they moved her to Saint X. My grandma told me, and I believe in oral tradition because the stories she told me were passed on from grandma, to child, to grandchild. And she said that whatever she shared with me would not change. And so, I've gone by those guidelines. And when she was being transported to Saint Xavier, it was in the springtime, the Bighorn River was pretty high, and they traveled by wagon. And there was a young man that traveled with my grandma and Father Vrebosh, the priest. And while they were crossing, the wagon overturned, and the priest drowned. And she heard the priest say, "Save yourself, little girl!" when he'd come up. And this young man must have been about 15-16. He swam across the river. He saved himself, and he grabbed a branch. And he ran along the cliff. And he held it out to my grandma and he saved her life. There was no physical, sexual abuse that she had been exposed to. She did say that their hair was all cut real short when they went into the Catholic school and they were all dressed the same with the exception of one girl. My grandma said this girl was light, in her coloring, compared to the Crow girls; the nuns treated her differently. They didn't cut her hair and they dress her up real pretty and she had privileges and she said, "The rest of us were not treated that way." And one day, while they were all on the playground, the little girl fell. They were playing on the playground and the little girl fell, hit her head. And from then on, she was never the same. And my grandma said the little girl would just sit there and cry. And she said something was not right with her. You see other kids picked up on that. And then she died.

Speaker 1: "My grandma loved the church. And I believe that she saw the Catholic Church as her mother, because she never knew her mom. Her mom died when she was a little girl. And when we lived with her, we said prayers morning, noon and night. We knew the saints and what saints to pray to when we were in need of certain things. St. Anthony, we always call on when I lose something. And we were just taught the Catholic way. And then when all of the, uh, abuses came up, they never shook my faith because I had good experiences. Growing up Catholic, I was taught well... And my mom always said that, we were introduced to Jesus Christ. That's where we found out about him. And my grandma. Said that all churches do. We pray to the same God, and that I should not say that my belief, my faith, was better than the others. Same thing with tribes. She said we all pray to the same God. God gave us different ways to worship him respect those ways... And I learned a lot from my grandma and... The Wyola Catholic Church kind of died down years ago. And so, we had to go to Mass at Lodge Grass and... there were times I was... I could remember we were going to Lodge Grass to attend Mass over in Crow. And because I was a grandma's kid. I... You can.... You used to fast before communion. So, Saturday's was my last meal. I never got to eat until after the church. And so, the strictness, the routine, those were the things that the Church taught my grandma. And she passed that on to us. Prayer, especially, was very important... Respect. And while she was in the boarding schools, she learned to play five instruments and very clean. Uh, she was immaculate, and she passed that on to some of us. Some of the others aren't as clean and neat as she would have wanted them to be. But, you know, from her experience and my experience with the church, I was never mistreated. I learned

from them. And the church has been good to me. They were instrumental in my way of attending Catholic colleges. And, when I graduated. In the Master's Program from University of Utah in Social Work, I worked for Labre, and I felt that I had to give back to the church for all the things that were did for me. So, I gave St. Labre, probably more than 60 years of my professional life. And I am just grateful that my grandma wasn't abused and if she was, I'm sure she would have told us. And, um... I'm glad they're having these sessions because I think it's needed. I'm sure that some of the instances that we read about and hear about in the media have occurred, but I myself have not known of any to have occurred on our reservation. And I've got a meeting to go to. So...? (laughter)
Dr. Walter Fleming and Dr. Pease ask Speaker 1 about the priest's name and about the place of the non-Indian girl's death.

Speaker 1: (clarified the name of the priest was Vrebosch. And stated her understanding that the non-Indian girl died at the school. She stated that her paternal grandparents were taken to Carlisle.) I was told he attended Carlisle, but they never shared anything. My maternal grandfather was sent to Fort Shaw and he ran away from there. Him and his friend. I don't know any more than that.

Dr. Pease and Dr. Fleming: Thank you for coming today and sharing your knowledge with the Commission.

St. Xavier Mission, St. Xavier, MT

Commissioners introduced themselves, the invited those in attendance to make their introductions and share any narratives they may have about the school. The listening session started with a prayer, then Dr. Pease addressed the people who were there, explaining the purpose of the listening session, and if the people who had any knowledge of deaths while at the St. Xavier school. The people who came shared what was happening pertaining to the time during the school years. The listening session focused on the unmarked graves if any knowledge could be addressed. The people spoke but not to the specific topic of the issue.

Not everyone spoke but the ones talking were not related to the information the Commission was charged with investigating: Finding out if any unmarked graves were at the St. Xavier cemetery. The cemetery was originally a Catholic cemetery only, then local, non-Catholic residents started to use the cemetery. The cemetery is located just behind the school and along the Bighorn River.

Speaker 1: He was a student at St. Xavier mission school. He was at the mission the night of the explosion. He remembers there was a cemetery down by the creek with unmarked graves. Mr. [redacted]'s grandmother was raised at the mission at St. Xavier. During an attack by the enemy on the Crow camp, a stray arrow killed his great grandmother. Then, the father brought his daughter to the mission, since the mother was killed. He said he has not heard of any murders or killings, but there was corporal punishment at the school. "They disciplined the students pretty harsh; it was by the priest, the men." But the people back then never told anybody. Now, he said he can talk about it here at this session.

Speaker 2: grew up in St. Xavier; she stated she attended St. Xavier mission school from grades 1 to 8, then went on to St. Labre and graduated from there. She said she heard of mistreatment of kids by the nuns. "There should be an investigation of the mistreatment of the students. She said she was visiting with a friend recently who remembered hitting her head on a post on the playground, then the priest took her to the hospital."

Speaker 3: He introduced himself as a former lawyer and law professor, a Crow tribal member. He worked in the Department of the Interior. He described the Indian boarding school initiative, the Road to Healing. There is a Boarding School Healing Coalition.

St. Charles Mission School, Pryor, MT

The several speakers talked about the school years at St. Charles plus many historical events during the school days at Pryor, St. Charles. Talk a lot of the history in the family. Several ladies also elaborated on their years at St. Xavier, then on to Pryor St. Charles. The one lady specially stated an aunt died at the school but does not remember her name. Not sure how she died. She is buried in Pryor Cemetery.

A professor, lawyer stated issues on the law of Indian Boarding schools. All of the people in attendance were basically talking to issues in the Boarding school at Pryor. Other issues came up during this listening session. How the nuns were abusive and that staying in school was somewhat of a challenge. It was not by choice but of mandatory law on the reservation that the children be in school.

Speaker 1 is a Crow Indian woman in her fifties. She attended St. Xavier school for 3 months and then came to St. Charles for the rest of 4th grade. "My experience there was that I was lonesome, and I cried a lot." She recalled the teachers admonishing the students for speaking Crow; the nuns would slap your hands with a ruler really hard for punishment. Her grandmother's brother was taken out of school and when he returned he was blind, so the school would not let him go to the school. She also was told that account by a school official from Pryor, Rose Chesarek.

Speaker 2 said he knows a lot of oral history from his grandfather [redacted] from [redacted] and his father [redacted]. He stated he attended school here in a two-room school building; one room was for first to fourth grades and the other room was for the fifth to eighth grades. "My chores at the school included stoking the fire. At the time the nuns lived up in the second story of the building." He recalled Father Brown, a Blackfeet Indian. "My Grandmother [redacted] was a devout Catholic; she walked to church every day, "me and my brother had to walk with her to break open the trail for her in the winter snow." She and her sisters became Catholic when Chief Plenty Coups became Catholic.

Speaker 2 stated: "We were raised as warriors, it's our job to protect and provide, and I think I'm the last one with that mentality." He described the clan system of the Crow in the Pryor community as very tight (close). "My grandmother [redacted], her grandfather was a Cheyenne, [redacted] s siblings [redacted] and [redacted] were Cheyenne."

Speaker 2: "my grandmother [redacted] couldn't speak much English but had the best penmanship. She said she had to learn it, and if we made a mistake, she said, we were slapped or hit upside the head, and then rewrite again." He said she stayed at the school after she was 16, to cook, clean, help on the staff. (At the school) My great grandfathers changed their names to [redacted], [redacted], [redacted]. One was named Abraham Lincoln and one was Thomas Jefferson.

Speaker 2: "There was a Pryor Creek Indian School. The nuns taught and the priests taught. A doctor that came to Pryor was a professional baseball player, in the 1920's. He was the principal and had heartfelt feelings for the Natives." "My grandfather was brought in by the Crow Police who dragged kids to school and kept them here. My grandfather said there were students brought to the school from Wisconsin, Florida and other places. They would be there but then leave. There was a man name of Malcolm McDowell who wrote to the Board of Commissioners about the health of the Crow Indians."

Speaker 2: "I myself attended here 1966 o 1971. In those days you were frowned on if you spoke Crow . The nuns were Sisters Pauline and Adele, and Fathers Joachim, Coffee and Brown." "I was raised by them cause my mom passed away when I was a young boy and my father abused alcohol."

Speaker 2: For some reason I've adopted the gift of gab." He said he interpreted for his cousins. "We all descend from Plenty Coups." He would translate the homework for his cousins.

Speaker 2: "I remember Sister Pauline said " Stand up." She instructed him to "Stick your hands out, and I would regretfully stick out my hands, then she said "Turn them over" and the with a little pointer or a ruler she'd give us a couple of whacks." Sister Adele would get after my cousin, but he would not listen, and he would take off from her. Sometimes they would put a dunce cap on us if we were in trouble, we would sit in the corner. But my cousin would not do that. Sister Adele would try to spank him, but he would take off out the door, run around the swings and round back around the Sister, then from somewhere my cousin found a mop and was chasing Sister with it; then they came back and Sister Adele had a broom and was chasing my cousin.

Speaker 2: The Pryor Creek Boarding School was back here, and it was run by Oberlander's family. His family still lives in Silesia (town nearby).

Speaker 2: The kids would run up to a box canyon. They would go in there and it was so steep with jagged

rocks. They go in there and they can't find them, the Indian Police (name in Crow). I heard [redacted] went to school here; I heard he ran away and his best friend told him his name was [redacted], but they wrote it down [redacted] Our family name was an English name was [redacted]. If he didn't change it, my last name might be Irish. He ran away and took his Indian name back, [redacted]. That's the only person that I could track down that would talk about this place then.

Speaker 3: "I grew up here and I am a teacher here as well. I teach kindergarten, I have been teaching for 30 years now. My mother always talked about her aunts. It was my Great Grandfather's niece and she was orphaned. She went to school at St. Xavier. A year later she died at a young age. Nobody knows what she died of. There are photos of her from the school. I know we always put flowers at her grave on Memorial Day and I always ask what she died of. She says "'They don't talk about it." So, we never talk about it, but she was in her teenage years. Her name was [redacted]

Speaker 3: "She's in some of the photos. There was only one photo that we had of her when she was young, but those who were reviewing archives brought them from Marquette University; her pictures were included. She was in her teenage years, but she was with my grandmother, my great grandmother and they don't know what she died of, but I know where her grave is. It's my great grandmother. But they always wondered how she died. My mom said they never talked about it. It has to give you something we don't know how bad, but they just never talked about it."

Speaker 3: "My mom talked about when she went to school at St. Xavier, she was only there one day, a couple hours. She said she saw how rude the nuns were to the kids. She said she couldn't take it. She ran away. She was only there for a few hours." My mom said "I was only there a few hours. And I just didn't like how they were treating us." So, she took off, got in the wagon and came back to Pryor that same night. "I guess the next morning they were ready to go after her and there she was, she was already inside the house. Her grandparents raised her. They were glad that she came home. She went to school here (in Pryor). "She said they were so mean to her because she understood English. Also, she said there were some kids who died here, but we don't know what they died of. I think a lot of families took them to their own burial places. They took them themselves and they buried them at their own burial places. So, my grandma called me. I know where her grave is. Then, one of her older brothers, he was a [redacted]. They don't know what he died of either. So those are the two kids in our family that I know experienced (death)."

Dr. Pease: "A [redacted], they called him [redacted], but his name was?"

Speaker 3: "[redacted]".

Dr. Pease: "You think it was in the environment of the school where they passed away?"

Speaker 3: "I think so that's what my mom would kind of mention. She would just get really upset when we asked her so she didn't really go into detail about any of that. But she did attend here, but she only went one day there at St. Xavier."

Dr. Pease: "They were both attending St. Xavier, [redacted] and [redacted]?"

Speaker 3: "No [redacted] and [redacted] were here. But she went over there. She went over the St. Xavier. I think it was her and [redacted] and the late [redacted] and [redacted]. I think they all went over there. They eventually all came back here."

Dr. Pease: "We have a pretty strict Crow tradition of not talking about the worst things and people who passed away once that year is gone we just don't go back to it. Yeah. I have an auntie who passed away young. That would be [redacted] and [redacted]s mom. The family never talks about her. And it is still like that, you know, right up to the time when we could have said, what about this? What about that? And so that's why it's hard to get to this information, like you have to pursue it. And it's kind of rude behavior to ask questions."

Speaker 3: "Marquette University brought some information. That's a place that you guys need to look into. She's trying to bring more information to even the other (schools). We're planning on bringing some photos to, I think, Little Big Horn College. Our next step is to take those other pictures that were taken in that area. They were photos that we had here. We put it on the Facebook and advertised it. A lot of people that we thought would come. [redacted] was here and it was good. A lot of people that should have been here were not here. …She's willing to work with people. And who brought it was a Jesuit Volunteer that taught here and she was going after the masters degree and then in Marquette, she's going after her masters in for the very first time. These pictures were being revealed, she said, and she didn't know what school it was. And lo and behold, they pulled it out. And here was St. Charles. And she didn't know that they were going to pull out St. Charles. And that's when she contacted me. And then she said, "Can I bring these pictures?" And she and her professors brought it in May. So, there's even

thumbprints that are in those archives. She says, "You wouldn't believe what all in those archives. So, you guys really, really need to get a hold of her because she's the one that revealed those things. And she said, "we want to bring these things to the school, to these areas that belong to the schools." So, I have pictures, I still have the pictures and I have it set up at Plenty Coups Park right now and all those pictures are there. So, if you guys want to drop by, I have all those pictures there and we're still trying to identify certain ones there. Those pictures there that we have."

James Grant: "I'm scheduled to go there August 16th for several days, so I'll have a chance to reach out."

End of transcription.

"Sister with students at Crow Agency school. St. Xavier, Montana, ca. 1890" Second from left, Pete Charges Strong. Far right, Alphonso Hill. Little Big Horn College Archives.

Heritage Living Center, Livingston, MT

(The residents were displaced to the Caslen Center in Livingston, Montana, due to water damage to their facility in Ashland, Montana)

Commission members in attendance: Walter Fleming and Richard Littlebear, with support from Curtis Yarlott, Amber Doyen, and Troy Spang from St. Labre.

The purpose of these listening sessions was to provide a safe and welcoming environment within which people who had a personal experience, either through themselves or members of their families, with the St. Labre boarding schools: St. Labre, St. Charles, and St. Xavier. Because this session provided some people their first opportunity to address the historical trauma suffered upon them or their family members, there was significant latitude allowed for attendees to comment on, or share stories about, experiences that went beyond the limited scope of the Commission's work. Thus, much of the conversation dealt with various forms and experiences of abuse, rather than only focusing on undocumented graves on the St. Labre campuses.

The following narrative conveys the main points of the session, with editing for length. As noted in another of these listening session narratives, "The Commissioners are here to listen, not to edit, redact, or impose their own viewpoints on whatever the community members are discussing."

Commission member Dr. Walter Fleming, Professor Native American Studies at MSU-Bozeman, chaired this session in Livingston, Montana, for Heritage Living Center residents. He introduced the purpose of the Commission and listening session.

Among topics of interest to attendees was, besides the boarding schools, the sanatoria where Native children received care. Attendee [redacted] relayed her account of witnessing nighttime burials at the Rapid City Sanatorium, originally set up for care of tuberculosis patients, but she was there for hip conditions. She and a friend despaired of their situation and planned to end their own lives. Her friend jumped to her death but when [redacted] jumped, an orderly caught her and pulled her inside. While this was beyond the scope of the Commission's work, she sought healing by telling her story (transcript p. 16, timestamp 23:49).

Frequently, attendees spoke Cheyenne; Richard Littlebear was the only Commission member who could respond in Cheyenne.

[redacted] shared that she went to St. Labre with her two sisters, and relayed account of hitting a nun with her belt because the nun was beating the attendee's sister (p. 18, 28:24).

Attendees returned to conversation about sanatoria, hoping that the work of the Commission could initiate similar investigations of sanatoria.

Attendees shared skepticism that the St. Labre investigation could be credible, given the board was investigating itself. Dr. Fleming reminded the attendees that the Commission was independent, and that the majority of Commission members were not connected with the Board (p. 21, 34:32).

One attendee challenged the Commission to investigate sexual abuse of both boys and girls that occurred at St. Labre.

Attendee [redacted] relayed an account of his brief time at St. Labre (his mother was a cook there). A priest frightened him late one night in his dorm, and his parents took him out of the school right away, though his mother continued to work at the school. Thus, his memories were few. He also relayed an account of three girls who ran away from the school who never returned. [redacted], relayed stories of her grandparents being buried in the hills, like others in the 1950s and 1960s.

As an attendee returned her attention to the deaths of her grandparents [not under the purview of the Commission], Mr. Yarlott sought information for where they were buried. He then reviewed the Commission's work, including the archival research, and returned the session to the topic of the day: undocumented burials at the St. Labre schools. Yarlott emphasized the value of the list-

ening sessions by explaining that the listening sessions were intended to cross-reference accounts shared at the listening sessions with the historical record in the archives.

One attendee, [redacted], noted a difficulty with the work: many families did not discuss what happened during their boarding school years, and noted, "They kept a lot of secrets."

The wide-ranging conversation also included comments about the practice of adopting out children from the reservations to non-native parents. One attendee noted that she had adopted out her first-born, and the trauma of that experience continues.

The listening session conversation included family accounts of burials in the hills and the experiences of grandparents beyond the boarding school years. Conversation also touched on accounts of run-aways from Indian boarding schools such as the Haskell Boarding School in Kansas, and the apportionment of the reservations to various religious groups and congregations. Several times, very poignant comments were made, such as the aforementioned "They kept a lot of secrets," and "But one thing I always remember my mother telling us, don't forget who you are" ([redacted] 1:19:04, p. 41).

Near the end of the session, [redacted], who serves as a counselor at St. Labre, spoke of the impact of this process on him and his people. He shared with the attendees the power of memories and the stories that he had heard as part of the support group for the listening sessions. The commitment to turn pain to healing comes from the shared power of story and memory. [redacted] is committed to St. Labre because of the immense impact the institution has on young Crows, Cheyennes, and non-Indians alike.

As well, [redacted], who worked for the Indian Health Service, relayed a story about an IHS recruiting trip to the Pueblo Culture Center in New Mexico, where local Native peoples commented on Native Americans recognizing differences in appearance between tribal groups. This ended in a moment of levity that brought the listening session to a close.

When the listening session came to an organic conclusion, Walter Fleming adjourned the session. Following the end of the session, one attendee, [redacted] shared a story about the repatriation of the remains of deceased children "where they took the remains of the children and wrapped them in blankets and gave them to the grandmothers to sit and rock and hold and sing to them, and tell them that they were loved before they were reinterred" (p. 55, 01:42:37).

The St. Labre Indian School Boys Brigade inauguration, April 16, 1928. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

Shoulderblade Center 2023

The Shoulderblade Center is located in Lame Deer, Montana, on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation

Because of background noise, including talking and laughter, it was difficult to render a coherent copy of the listening sessions at the Shoulderblade Center in Lame Deer, Montana. The Cheyenne language was used to a greater extent at this session than at any other; however, even the Cheyenne language was difficult to understand because of the background noise.

The central purpose of these listening sessions is an attempt to find unmarked graves on the St. Labre, St. Charles, St. Xavier, and Pretty Eagle school grounds. Some deviation is allowed in discussing unmarked graves not associated with those affiliated with St. Labre. The Commissioners are here to listen, not to edit, redact, or impose their own viewpoints on whatever the community members are discussing.

The session at the Shoulderblade Center began with a prayer in the Cheyenne language by one of the Cheyenne ladies present. Again, because of the ambient noise, no Cheyenne translation of the prayer was possible.

This was a well-attended listening session because people from the Tribal Council, Tribal programs, and residents of the Shoulderblade Center were in attendance. Richard Littlebear explained the purpose of this listening session. The listening session meant that the St. Labre Commission members were at the Center to listen. He explained that the Commission had already attended eight listening sessions throughout the two-reservation area. Each of the Commissioners in attendance introduced themselves and gave their family, educational, and employment backgrounds and why they consented to be Commissioners.

People in attendance introduced themselves, of which there were 15 in this group.

Richard Littlebear explained that the Commission will conduct this listening session. The movement to find unmarked graves began in Kamloops, British Columbia where about 250 unmarked graves of students were found. So, if any of you know or heard of unmarked graves, this is a good time to bring it forth. These listening sessions are to make sure that no unmarked graves are present at the schools that are controlled by St. Labre. If you have any information but you don't want to share it in this group, one of us can listen to you in a private room or you can fill out a form and mail it in. That way, you can share this valuable information. As a part of the research that this Commission is doing is contracting with an organization called Historical Research Associates. James Grant will be leading that effort. He is a Little Shell Chippewa. HRA will be researching the Jesuits, the Capuchins and the Ursuline sisters. Each of these Catholic orders were involved in all the Catholic schools on both the Northern Cheyenne and Crow reservations. Historical Research Associates will be visiting Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, University of Providence in Great Falls, Montana. Marquette and Providence are examples of academic institutions that Historical Research Associates will investigate. Whenever the tenure of each of the Catholic Orders was done, the Orders would take their records and store them at universities or other non-academic institutions for safe-keeping. HRA will be accessing these records as part of the effort to find unmarked graves. This kind of archival research will be done by HRA.

There was a lot of discussion which dealt with possible unmarked graves on and off the grounds of the various Catholic schools, deaths both accidental and non-accidental, possible location of forgotten cemeteries on and off the St. Labre school grounds as expressed by [redacted] said that some families buried their relatives on their homelands. [redacted] stated that there's another cemetery behind the Heritage Center. He did not know who was buried there. The suggestion was that it is White peoples' cemetery. Besides it is not near the St. Labre school grounds. There was also some recollection by [redacted] about a cemetery near Busby. Again, that was away from the St. Labre school grounds. [redacted] also discussed graves that were recorded by the Forestry Service but, again, they were located away from the St. Labre school grounds. [redacted] also discussed graves away from

the St. Labre school grounds.

As the listening session at the Shoulderblade Center progressed, Janine Pease and Curtis Yarlott talked about the limited nature of the St. Labre Commission. While the Commission could investigate the grounds of those schools that St. Labre controlled it could not physically go further.

It could, however, use the latest techniques and technology to do as thorough an investigative effort at those locations it had access to. Thus, LiDAR technology was used at Ashland, Saint Xavier, and Saint Charles at Pryor. This technology uses a drone to investigate an identified location that might have unmarked graves. LiDAR penetrates foliage and to a certain depth of the ground itself. It is useful in locating ground that might have been disturbed by locating anomalies in the ground being overflown by the drone.

Another investigative technique is the use of cadaver dogs. As of this writing, this technique has not been used. Another technique is ground-penetrating radar. Likewise, this technique has not been utilized as of this writing.

As for the listening session at the Shoulderblade Center in Lame Deer, much information about marked and unmarked graves was gathered. None of it was useless, it just did not fit in with the parameters of the St. Labre Commission.

This ends the report on the listening session at the Shoulderblade Center in Lame Deer, Montana.

Harriet Blank, Ruby Spottedwolf (Flying) and Mexican Cheyenne, ca. 1938, St. Labre Mission, Ashland MT. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

Boys and Girls Club, Lame Deer, MT

The Listening Session at the Boys and Girls Club in Lame Deer was chaired by Dr. Richard Littlebear. With introductions, Dr. Littlebear described the purpose of the Commission , and the schedule of listening sessions that are taking place. He stated there was a listening session in Livingston, Montana, where the residents of Heritage Center are living on a temporary basis. He noted the statement from [redacted] that "You guys are about 40 years too late (to gather these stories)."

[redacted] recalled hearing "dark history at St. Labre" and there were behaviors of the priests at St. Labre that were not good. He attended St. Labre during high school, and heard rumors about someone finding babies there; he also read articles in a Catholic magazine about a young boy who was recruited to attend St. Labre, and upon his arrival he was made to take off his Cheyenne clothing and put on a uniform; the boy did not like the clothing; and when they were about to cut his hair, he ran away from the school, in the coldest winter night, and as he ran he took off the uniform clothes; he ran a couple miles to his home. He recalled talk about a room where students were disciplined. He heard about harsh punishment, but never saw that for himself.

[redacted] said her grandmother attended St. Labre in 1884, brought here to Ashland from Miles City, from Fort Keogh. Her families are [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted]. They considered themselves fortunate to attend a school locally instead of being sent away to a BIA boarding school. On her first day going to St. Labre she and her brother met the bus, their grandpa walked them to the bus stop with their tin suitcases. They were eating chokecherries and plums on the way, and when she spit a pit out, it stuck to the priest's neck. The bus was stopped, and they demanded to know who spit that pit out. At school kids would have their mouths washed out with strong soap for speaking Cheyenne. She got her braids cut off on the first day, and they were thrown out in the trash. That night she went back to the trash and retrieved her braid, then took it home to her grandfather on the weekend. He wrapped it and tied the braid in raw hide and put it in a tree, out of respect. She recalled finding out a third-grade student in their school had been shot in Ashland town; he died from the gunshot wound.

[redacted] recalled her excitement for going to school at St. Labre on the first day. On the first day, on the bus, she was throwing spit wads with the rest of the kids, and they stopped the bus to find out who threw the spit wads. She admitted to doing that and the nun slapped her across the face as punishment. Her feelings were hurt, it was heart-breaking. (She cried remembering this punishment). Once they got to school another student in her class was unable to speak English and he was made to kneel on the floor as punishment for that.

Little Big Horn College- Listening Session. October 17, 2023

Commissioners attending the Listening Session at Little Big Horn College were: Anda Pretty On Top, Richard Littlebear, and Janine Pease. Attendee [redacted] discussed the Cheyenne naming tradition as one that occurs according to the wishes of the family. Often naming takes place in a sacred lodge or ceremony, although some families will name their children at home in the presence of the immediate family. Grandparents may name their grandchildren. [redacted] gave an account of the names the nuns gave to her grandmother and her grand aunties when they first attended St. Labre School: [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] and [redacted]. After they had been attending school for a while an older brother told the girls the names they were given at the school were the names of the milk cows in the school barn: [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted]. The name Regina was the name of one of the nuns. Commissioner Pease summarized a description of how school personnel gave English names to the students when they arrived at school, that included choosing from a long list of names on the blackboard in the room. In spite of students not being able to read, they chose a name with a pointer stick. Dr. Pease told about the names given by teachers at the Bond's Mission School near Custer to Crow students: one was given the surname of Dawes after the Senator Dawes who was instrumental in the passage of the Allotment or Dawes Act, another had the surname Wentworth after one of the teachers. These names are listed in Time A Worthy Work in a Needy Time by Margery Pease. Commissioner Littlebear shared his Cheyenne name Howling Bird.

Harry Beads, Frank He Does It, Alaysius Holds the Enemy, Albert Iron, Fno Little Owl, Sam Old Horn, Joe Short Bull, John Sits Down Spotted, Bro Taggasto, Charles Eagle Turns, Father Aloysius Vrebosch, Crow Absorkee Apsaalooka, St. Xavier, Montana, ca 1860-1960. Little Big Horn College Collection.

There was a woman who came to visit with us at St. Xavier. I cannot recall her name. She said that her grandmother had gone to one of the Catholic schools. Her grandmother, another little girl and a Catholic father were in a wagon when they got to the Bighorn River. It was very high. The Father who was in charge of the horses and the wagon said we'll go ahead and cross. They chose a shallow place to cross the River but, no sooner were they in the River when the wagon started to drift. The Father said to the little girls to jump in the River and to swim to the shore. The little girls managed to get ashore, but the Father drowned. That was what happened. Shortly after that woman told the story, the HRA researcher, James Grant, found the record of that exact incident with the names of the children and the Father who drowned. We tell this story to show you how reliable oral history can be. So, if you are thinking that your statement might not be true, you remember this story. Often stories are told because they are based on truth. I want you to introduce yourselves; we'd like to know who you are.

There were introductions of the attendees, including the Commissioners. In this section, the people introduce themselves, tell where they are from, tell which tribe they belong to. The discussions that followed each introduction were often not about unmarked graves. Each person listed is listed because they attended the listening session. People who also introduced themselves were Janine Pease, Anda Pretty On Top, and Richard Littlebear, Commissioners; Curtis Yarlott, executive director; [redacted], resident and Cheyenne; [redacted], resident and Cheyenne and St. Labre graduate.
[redacted], Crow, had a discussion with Janine about his father, [redacted] about being local politicians.

Deborah Russell, clinical social worker, St. Labre Board member, and Northern Cheyenne Tribal member: Some of you know me. I come here (Awé Kúalawaache) to see patients. I work next door at the (Crow-Cheyenne) hospital as a clinical social worker, and I just feel like this Commission is providing opportunity for healing. When we first started talking about it (the Commission), we were going to open a can of worms and we just wanted to make sure that we had safeguards. There's stuff to mess with your hands (fidget spinners and other stress-reducing manipulatives). You can write stuff in the little notebooks but it's an opportunity for healing. A lot of the times we take in experiences, and we don't heal from them, they are unresolved, and they bother us in life and it comes out through our health. So, if you do have feelings of unresolved issues, unresolved trauma issues, you know you can sign up for therapy, psychotherapy, you can contact Joann here at the clinic or here at the Care Center. Joanann will make an appointment with me over at the hospital. I just want you to heal. I want good things for our people. And when we heal, that just breaks down a lot of barriers for our physical health because physical health and mental health go hand-in-hand. So, this (listening session) is an opportunity for healing.

[redacted], half Cheyenne and half Crow; also went to St. Labre from about the second grade, like [redacted] over there, to the 12th grade. The stories I heard, you know, I dealt with and forgot about that. Hatred afterwards towards these White people, the priests, the nuns or whoever it was. Walk by the cemetery with me.
A priest was buried there and had the ashes to be. I blacked out then woke up. There they buried him in the cemetery. That night she woke up.
Already buried. Kids scream, hollering , tries to walk by there. Walk by there, I hear a woman hollering. My mother told me to tell that story to you. My mother went to school there all her life, hearing people talk about St. Labre like it is a bad place. St. Labre was my home. I grew up there. They taught me everything I know. That's the only thing I have to say. St. Labre. It's where I grew up.

Speaker 2: I grew up in the Benteen area and then I moved to Browning for 30 years. Now I'm back in the Benteen area. So, anyways, I went to school at St. Xavier. There used to be the St. Xavier Eagles back in 1976 and I had a good experience there. One priest was kind of mean but that was about it. Everybody else, the sisters and the nuns were pretty good; pretty good to us and stuff. Our experience was good. Mine was good. It seemed like everybody else's was too. We were there for a couple of years. Before we got on the bus at St. Dennis Hall like on Sunday afternoon, and they

brought us back on Friday evening. It wasn't half a day on Friday. We went through the whole day on Friday, and they brought it back in the evening, so we usually got home by 6 or 7 pm. That was my experience in boarding school. We always went to St. Labre and St. Charles. I think St. Charles was not a boarding school back then. St. Labre was one too. After I graduated from St. Xavier, I went to Hardin instead of St. Labre. That's the experience I had with boarding schools.

Janine: So, you were from third maybe third or fourth grade to eighth grade.

Speaker 2: Yeah, I'll tell you a story. Every time I look at a tile, it gives me bad memories of St. Xavier and the reason was because it was lunch time, and we were running around this corner and my friend had his arm on the fire alarm, and I pulled it and the fire alarm went off. They had us all go to the common area. They had everyone from the first grade to the eighth grade all stand there. The Father said, "So, who pulled the fire alarm?" We don't say nothing. We stood there for almost four hours and we wouldn't say nothing. The little kids were crying, and my buddy goes, "Why don't you act like you did it." It was him. He was holding it and pulled it down . He went forward and I didn't go forward. He turned around and goes, "He was with me." The Father took us into the gym, and he said, "We need a new floor." So, we had to peel that whole gym tile floor by hand." That was kind of our own doing too. But then we got about halfway and finally got some contractors to help us. Now I look at tiles and I remember those gym tiles. Yeah, that was the only experience I had. We kind of did it on our own too but everybody suffered because of what we did.

Speaker 3: I have no experience with boarding schools because I went to public schools.

Speaker 4: (no last name given) He is a prairie shooter (?) and a Crow Indian who went to St. Labre and Busby and one of his grandmothers went to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. My grandmother is [redacted]. I went to school in Wyola for the fifth and sixth grades. He says the country around Wyola is God's country.

Amber Doyen introduced herself. "I work at St. Labre. I'm just here to help make sure that you guys have everything that you need. And that everybody is able to feel welcomed and comfortable while we work through this process. So, if you can't get a hold of Janine or anything like, you can always call St. Labre and I can find her one way or another.

Speaker 5 is a Crow from Wyola, Montana, a Wyola Wildcat.

I'm Curtis Yarlott, a member of the Crow tribe and the executive director of St. Labre. I've been at St. Labre for quite a few years now. I've been in my current role since 1996 but I started in 1986. I worked in the group homes for a number of years. I want to thank you all for being here today. The Board felt that it was important to look at the history of St. Labre and see if there were any of the types of things that were found in Canada happening at any of the schools that St. Labre is currently associated with. As Janine said, St. Labre was established in 1884 and then St. Xavier was set up in 1888 and St. Charles in 1891, so there is a lot of history there. All three of these schools were boarding schools at one time. St. Labre is the only one that still continues as a boarding school. As we heard, some of you have attended St. Labre. The Board just wanted to know if there was any of that kind of history that occurred in Canada also occurring at St. Labre or the other Catholic schools on the two-reservations.

Dr. Janine Pease: It's important that the oral history, the story that maybe have been passed down through families. It's important to have that information because we do have a historical research firm that's looking at all the documentation that the different Orders kept, documentation that the BIA and other branches of the federal government has regarding the operation of the school. But sometimes the oral history can fill in some of the gaps and also direct that research. Janine gave the example of a person telling a story at the session over at St. Xavier at Pretty Eagle and our historical researcher was able to find documentation that matched up with what that person had said. So, that's why the Commission is doing these listening sessions. So, any stories that you

have would be helpful to guide and direct maybe uncover something that maybe needs to be looked at. So, aho.

Speaker 7: had somebody in the family passed (died) so he asked me just to let everybody know his name is [redacted] and that he's just here to listen.

Janine: Thank you for joining us today. Good to make your acquaintance. All right. I think we've had everybody. I think we've had everybody. We are very anxious to know if you have anything more that you'd like to share. As Dick said, sometimes we talk too much. We want to listen.

Speaker 8: I'm from the town of St. Xavier. The town that disappeared off the face of the reservation. His mother is a Youngman. She was married to [redacted] ([redacted]??). The home actually burned down. And coming to my house. I've been moving all over the western United States until I got here. Yeah. More Sioux than Crow but I can talk Crow. And my grandfather was [redacted], a scout for Custer. I also graduated from St. Labre. I went there for four years. I went to school with Curtis Yarlott back in Junior high. I graduated from the Marine Corps a couple of times. I didn't recognize you with all that white hair (laughter).

Janine Pease: wiser and older. Well, I don't know if you know what we're doing here. We're listening to people about their experiences. If they know anything about deaths that occurred at St. Labre or any unmarked graves, that's our purpose. But we're also listening to whatever stories you have of St. Labre school and those schools that it is associated with on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Speaker 8: When I went to school at St. Labre, we used to live in that big gray building. Then this one White man, he's a millionaire opened those new dorms and I got to stay there for three years. Roger Barnes was a good man. He stood about six three and about 279 pounds or something like that. He looked good to everybody. I think he's passed away.

Commission Members Anda Pretty On Top and Janine Pease discussed tribal affiliations, marriages, separations in marriages, and family relationships. Janine said that there's people from all nations here. Cheyenne, Dakota, Crow, the three affiliated tribes, Hidatsa, Mandan, and Dakota from North Dakota. A discussion centered on origins especially on the Highline in Montana.

Two female students clean floors in St. Labre Indian School, Ashland, MT, ca. 1935, St. Labre Museum and Archives.

The St. Labre community on Decoration Day 1929, The Corpus Christi Procession along Cemetery Hill at St. Labre Indian Mission. ca. 1929. St. Labre Museum and Archives.

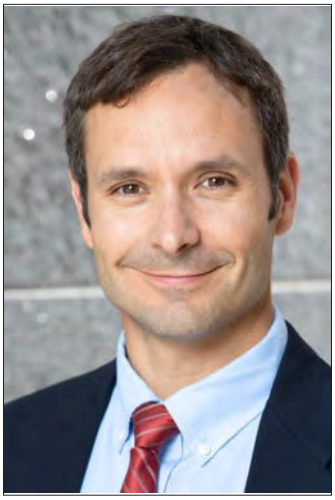
PART THREE Archival Rese

"Indian graves in the hills west of St. Labre, Fr. Benno" ca. 1920s, St. Labre Museum and Archives.

Historical Research Associates (HRA) is a Montana-based corporation with offices across the country. Established in 1974, HRA's staff includes nineteen historians who meet the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualification standards in History, twenty-one archaeologists who meet qualification standards in Archaeology, and seven full-time architectural historians and historic preservationists who meet qualification standards in Architectural History. HRA has significant relevant experience in working with Native American tribes and on reservations across Montana. HRA's proposal identified Senior Historian James Grant as the lead researcher for this project.

Mr. Grant has performed exhaustive historical archival research at a wide variety of archives and institutions, including federal government, local Catholic Churches, and privately–held archives and other relevant records at the national, state and county vital statistics level. The most significant archives he scoured as part of this work are the National Archives at Denver, the Marquette University Archives, the Archives of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings, Parish archival records in Crow Agency, St. Xavier, Pryor, and Ashland, Montana, the Little Big Horn College Archives, the archives of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, and the archival records of the religious orders most significant in the history of St. Labre Catholic boarding schools in Montana: the Jesuits, the Ursulines, and the School Sisters of St. Francis. See later in this report for more detail on the archival work Mr. Grant completed as part of this investigation.

At the beginning of the Commission's work, besides the basic archival research that we anticipated HRA would carry out, there was a consideration of more invasive methods of archeological research. The two most prominent methods were ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR). LiDAR investigations are carried out using aerial drone technology, and HRA shared



James Grant,
Senior Historian
Historical Research Associates,
Missoula, MT

its experience with these techniques. There was literature reviewed on the utility of cadaver-detecting dogs, but the Commission concluded that this would likely go beyond the Commission's charge, and discussion concluded that other methods of research, if they were needed, based on evidence, would be considered. Ultimately, by the spring of 2024, the Commission concluded that a LiDAR survey would provide essential information on the possible existence of unmarked burials.

James Grant is leading HRA's team of historians conducting nationwide research on this project. He is an experienced historian and project manager who has spent more than two decades working in the field of public history. Mr. Grant is a graduate of the University of Montana and earned his MA in History from Providence College. He has extensive subject matter expertise in Native American history and has worked on projects with Tribal communities throughout the country. He also brings personal interest to the research, as his grandmother attended both Wahpeton and Flandreau Indian schools. Mr. Grant is a member of the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe.

St. Labre Schools Investigative Report

Re: Student Deaths and Unmarked Burials

Submitted to:
St. Labre Investigative Commission

St. Labre Indian School

Submitted by:
Historical Research Associates, Inc.
James A. Grant
Principal Investigator

Missoula, Montana
June 2024

Historical Research Associates, Inc.

Caution to readers concerning sensitive content:

This report contains information that readers may find disturbing and traumatic. It documents instances of child abuse, neglect, sickness, death, and burial. It also includes the names of individual students who died at the schools and sometimes quotes school and government officials who express insensitive and disrespectful language. As an investigation that seeks to expose the true circumstances surrounding student deaths, we believe that offering clarity and straightforward terminology provides the most direct means to deliver the necessary information.

Executive Summary and Findings

The St Labre Indian School Educational Association's Boarding School Investigation Commission asked Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), to research the history of the St. Labre, St. Xavier (Pretty Eagle Academy), and St. Charles schools to determine the circumstances surrounding student deaths that may have occurred at the schools over the course of their history and determine whether any unmarked burials exist on school property. As part of this year-long investigation, HRA conducted archival research to collect and analyze historical records documenting the history of the schools and their operations.

The investigation produced the following findings:

- Historical records show that between 1884 and 1960, at least 113 students died while enrolled at the schools or shortly after attending them, inclusive of students who left the schools due to illness and died at home. It is likely that many other students died while enrolled at the schools, but their deaths are not recorded in documents reviewed during this investigation, or we are unable to confirm that local children whose deaths are recorded attended the schools.
- School overcrowding, poor sanitation practices, enrolling and keeping sick students in school, and unreliable access to medical care contributed to student deaths.
- In nearly every instance when students became severely ill, the schools sent them home. They either recovered, or they died among their families sometime later. There are very few documented student deaths that took place on school property.
- Students who died were sometimes buried at the mission cemeteries located on St. Labre and St. Xavier grounds. Other times, families buried their children elsewhere. We located no documentation that students are buried on school grounds other than within current and historical cemetery boundaries.
- Historical records show that unmarked graves may exist in and around the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery due to deteriorating grave markers. Grave markers have also deteriorated at the St. Labre Mission Cemetery at various points in time. Records do not show any instances of intentionally unmarked burials existing at St. Labre, St. Xavier, or St. Charles.

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Investigative Approach

The history of St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles schools dates to the late nineteenth century, when they operated as residential boarding schools. The three schools generated a variety of archival records over the course of their history that contain information about children who died while attending them. The records also include insightful information concerning school operations and the conditions children experienced there.

HRA organized a research plan that identified the locations where the school records are held and worked with archivists and other custodians of those records to gain access to them. Archival research included record repositories located throughout the United States.[1] The collections originated with the various religious orders that operated the schools, the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions (BCIM), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the counties where the schools are located.

To supplement the historical record, the St. Labre Boarding Schools Investigative Commission organized and facilitated community listening sessions to draw on community memory and inform the archival research. The seven primary listening sessions took place at Ashland, Busby, Lame Deer, Crow Agency, Lodge Grass, St. Xavier, and Pryor. The Commission held additional listening sessions with Tribal elders at Awe Kualawaache Care Center in Crow Agency, Heritage Living Center Residents in Livingston, Shoulderblade Center in Lame Deer, Boys & Girls Club in Lame Deer, and Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency. HRA's principal investigator attended the first seven listening sessions and reviewed audio recordings and typed transcripts of the remaining listening sessions. HRA investigated leads developed from these sessions.

While the archival research and listening sessions provided valuable information about the schools and the children who attended them, this investigation also encountered challenges. We are unable to account for every student who died, nor can we determine the circumstances surrounding all known student deaths. This can be attributed to several factors, including poor record keeping, gaps in records, students identified under multiple names, periods when the surrounding counties did not record deaths, and the fact that nearly all the records were generated by school administrators, with few coming from the affected communities themselves. It is unlikely that death caused by abuse or neglect would be recorded as such in the historical records.

Such challenges are not unique to St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles. Researchers investigating student deaths at other Native American boarding schools have encountered similar difficulties.[2] As one historian explained:

> Names, tribal affiliations, diagnoses, and nineteenth century medical terminology differed across records, schools, and times. The sources often raise more questions

[1] For a list of record repositories containing records reviewed over the course of this investigation, see Bibliography at the end of this report.

[2] For a discussion of some of the common challenges encountered when investigating the history of Native American boarding schools, see Preston Scott McBride, "A Lethal Education: Institutionalized Negligence, Epidemiology, and Death in Native American Boarding Schools, 1879-1934" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2020), 23.

> than they answer. But, they do give us records that tell us much about how lethal these institutions were. Indeed, the smoking gun is the trail of paperwork.[3]

The paperwork in this case shows that students died while attending St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles boarding schools, but for much of their institutional history, the causes of death are not always clear. Most of the deaths are attributed to tuberculosis, also called consumption. There are very few instances during the early years of the schools when an attending physician was available to determine cause of death, but the symptoms of the disease could be readily identified by school staff. Infected children were often stricken with the disease for extended periods. Correspondence between school officials and the BCIM describes some of the deaths; other times, descriptions appear in the St. Labre Annals or the St. Xavier House Diary. There are also mentions of student deaths recorded in quarterly attendance reports. Sometimes the deaths received only a brief mention, while in other instances, school staff appear to be devastated over the loss of a child. Student deaths rarely took place on the school campuses; more often, the schools sent sick children home. While students who died at the school campuses are the primary focus of this study, we investigated the deaths of all children who died while enrolled in the schools, including those who died shortly after going home.

Whenever possible, we relied on a variety of historical sources to identify student deaths. Sometimes, however, only a single source is available identifying a child who died and only through cross referencing student names and date of death with other sources could we determine that the student had recently attended the schools. For example, we reviewed Rosebud and Big Horn County death records of school-age children through the year 1960. We sometimes found that they had attended the schools prior to their death but were not recorded as having died on student enrollment lists. In other instances, there are no death records, so we reviewed census records to determine if children died after leaving school. By relying on multiple sources, we determined such things as the student's age, Tribal affiliation, cause of death, burial location, and other relevant information. A list of all known student deaths at St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles is located in Appendix A of this report.

The scope of this study is limited to the period 1884 to 1960—a point in time when the schools operated as hybrid day/boarding schools and students only boarded there five days per week. By that time, the schools also benefitted from increasingly modern facilities, more reliable health care, and greater community and government oversight. These changes contrast significantly with the conditions that existed during the schools' formative years when most deaths occurred and the circumstances surrounding student deaths are often unknown. Within the 1884 – 1960 time period, the focus is then narrowed to the points in time when students boarded at the schools. St. Charles only operated as a boarding school from 1892–1898. St. Xavier operated as a boarding school from 1889–1921 and resumed boarding students in 1935. St. Labre boarded students most years over the entire period covered in this study.

[3] McBride, "A Lethal Education," 23.

Overview of the Mission Schools

In 1884, a group of Ursuline Sisters established St. Labre Indian School. St. Xavier and St. Charles soon followed. The schools instructed students in educational curriculum and the Catholic faith. Social and cultural assimilation also figured prominently, with the schools developing and operating in the context of prevailing federal Indian policy. Known as the "Peace Policy," which emerged under the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant, it called for a focused effort on assimilating Indians to non-Indian culture. Boarding schools became a primary means to implement the Peace Policy, which expanded the federal school system and provided funding for religious denominations to establish and operate schools. The BCIM was created in 1874 as a charitable organization to support and advocate for the Catholic Indian mission schools.[4]

From an education policy standpoint, St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles Missions operated their schools in a similar way to government schools located on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservations. According to a former Northern Cheyenne superintendent, "I regarded the St. Labre Mission School, in the same light as I understood my predecessors had; as an active part of the Reservation. In all matters pertaining to the school interests of the Indian children, the parents of the children attending the school generally held their meetings in the Mission school." He explained, "The children were sent to the school in the same manner as they were to the other schools on the reservation; as parents living in the vicinity of the Mission preferred to send their children there." As far as overseeing the student health and enrollment, he noted "The Agency Physician when called upon visited the Mission school and rendered professional services in the same manner as the other schools on the Reservation. The quarterly school reports from St. Labre's Mission, were sent through Tongue River Agency, for approval of the Agent; before being forwarded to the Department." He concluded that the priest and sisters at St. Labre were "considered as being under the same rules and regulations which governed the Reservation"[5]

The Catholic Indian mission schools also approached enrollment and attendance the same way that federal schools did. Parents had little choice but to send their children to school. The historical record is replete with instances of the schools calling on Indian police to bring in students, track down runaways, or to prevent children from leaving with their parents. In January 1894, the police were especially busy at St. Xavier. On the 17th, they brought two girls to school but "did not stop there" and "went to hunt children."[6] When the effort produced few results, the staff at St. Xavier surmised that "all children seem to be hidden." Failing to come up with school-age children, the Indian police attempted to bring in a "little boy two years old but the parents objected to leave him

[4] Francis Paul Prucha, *Indian Policy of the United States* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 236–42; Denise K. Lajimodiere, *Stringing Rosaries: The History, the Unforgivable, and the Healing of Northern Plains American Indian Boarding School Survivors* (Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2019), 10. For information on the mission schools and the Peace Policy, see Peter J. Rahill, *The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy, 1870–1884*, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953).

[5] A. Clifford, Supt., & S.D. Agt., Wahpeton School, to P. M. Gallagher, September 14, 1907, Folder 15, Box 57, Series 1-1, Records of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Marquette University Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin [hereafter BCIM].

[6] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," January 17, 1894, p. 39, pdf p. 207, Roll 14, *The Pacific Northwest Tribes Missions Collections of the Oregon Province Archives of the Society of Jesus*, 1853–1960, Jesuit Archives & Research Center, St. Louis, Missouri [hereafter Jesuit Archives].

at school" so they let him go.[7] The very next day, the police brought in a four-year-old girl. The parents again resisted, and it is unclear if the child stayed.[8] The schools sometimes paid the Indian police bounties for bringing students in. In one 1894 example, St. Charles offered three dollars for each child the Indian police brought in who was accepted into school. Apparently eager to collect payment, the police arrived with fifteen children. Ultimately, the school turned away four of them for either being too sick or too young to attend school, while seven others were denied because they were already enrolled at St. Xavier.[9]

While the Catholic Indian mission schools aligned with the overall goals of the federal Indian education system, they also operated with their own agenda as part of the Catholic missions' evangelization among the Tribes. In a critical distinction from local government boarding schools and off-reservation boarding schools, Catholic religious orders at the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservations established the missions and schools to serve as a center of spiritual life for the community. Tribal people gathered around the schools to be near their children, and many engaged with the Catholic religion. They visited their children, participated in feast days, and attended Mass and undertook the sacraments.[10] As one Jesuit priest wrote in 1893, "Great hopes are expected with the help of God for the conversion of the tribe by means of the children. The children are docile and tractable, and with a little toil and care can be made the nucleus for the civilization of the whole tribe."[11]

Government Funding

Government funding supported the schools in their formative years, and the funding process helps explain why the schools went to such lengths to get children enrolled and keep them there. Throughout Indian Country, the federal government built and operated schools and funded BIA contracts with private organizations to provide education to Indian children. Federal funding of contract schools began in 1869.[12] By 1887, the BIA had opened sixty-eight boarding schools and ninety day schools and provided funding for forty-one contract boarding schools and twenty contract day schools.[13]

The funding arrangement for contract schools created a mutually beneficial relationship among the U.S. government and religious organizations, including the BCIM. The schools furthered the goals of federal Indian policy, while the funding enabled the Catholic Church to expand its missionary work throughout Indian Country. The government paid the schools on a per capita basis

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[7] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," January 18, 1894, p. 39, pdf p. 207, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[8] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," January 19, 1894, p. 40, pdf p. 208, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[9] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," January 25–26, 1894, pp. 40–41, pdf p. 208, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[10] Karen Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation" (Master's thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, 1983), 4. St. Xavier also permitted parents to see their children on certain holidays. In 1903, for example, the school welcomed parents to visit on Thanksgiving. See "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," November 26, 1903, p. 112, pdf p. 322, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[11] "St. Xavier's Mission, A Sketch," 1893, Folder 40, Box 32, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[12] Jon Allan Reyhner and Jeanne M. Oyawin Eder, *American Indian Education: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 112. Although the BIA was known by several different names before 1949, including the Indian Service and the Office of Indian Affairs, this report refers to it as the BIA throughout.

[13] Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 73.

based on enrollment and attendance. The schools reported quarterly on the number of students enrolled and the number of days each student attended school.[14] From 1874 to 1890, federal funding for Catholic missionary work on Indian reservations increased from $8,000 to over $500,000.[15] The federal government supported both St. Labre and St. Xavier as contract schools. St. Charles did not receive federal funds directly, but it benefitted incidentally from federal funding granted to St. Xavier.[16]

Beginning in 1895, Catholic mission schools encountered a gradual reduction in federal funds.[17] This trend became law with the act of June 7, 1897, which included a provision declaring it "settled policy of the government to hereafter make no appropriation whatever for education in any sectarian school."[18] An immediate consequence of the policy was the closure of the St. Charles Mission boarding school, since St. Xavier Mission no longer had sufficient income to support a second Catholic boarding school on the Crow Reservation.[19] The loss of funds also meant an enrollment decline at St. Xavier School, which dropped from as many as 150 pupils to just 60 in 1902.[20] St. Labre fared slightly better. Because no government boarding school existed on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, it temporarily managed to avoid losing all of its funding. However, in 1904, the BIA established the Busby Boarding School, and the government discontinued direct funding to St. Labre.[21]

Lacking federal funding, the BCIM raised alternative funds from private sources to support the schools. The BCIM also sought Tribal funds to operate St. Labre. In 1905, it notified the commissioner of Indian affairs that St. Labre intended to provide education for sixty pupils "upon the same terms and conditions as stipulated in its contracts" for fiscal year 1905, but that the renewal of the contract be payable from "the trust and treaty funds of the tribe." The "treaty funds" in question were funds appropriated by Congress in pursuance of certain treaty stipulations and to be applied to such things as education.[22]

The BCIM regularly submitted applications to fund the education of Northern Cheyenne children at the St. Labre Mission utilizing Tribal "trust and treaty funds." The St. Labre funding petitions called for a contract with the BCIM for the "care, maintenance and education of . . .

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[14] See Quarterly Attendance Reports, Records of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, Series 2-1, BCIM.

[15] Mark Clatterbuck, *Demons, Saints, & Patriots: Catholic Visions of Native America through The Indian Sentinel (1902–1962)* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2009), 39.

[16] Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 104.

[17] L. B. Palladino, S.J., *Indian and White in the Northwest; or, A History of Catholicity in Montana* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Company, 1894), 117–19.

[18] Act of June 7, 1897, (30 Stat. at L. 62, 69, chap. 3); Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education,* 88–89.

[19] Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 104.

[20] Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 110.

[21] Tom Weist, *A History of the Cheyenne People* (Helena: Montana Council for Indian Education, 1977), 107.

[22] *Rueben Quick Bear v. Leupp*, 210 U.S. 50 (1908), 28 Supreme Court Reporter, Oct. Term, 700–701. See also Francis Paul Prucha, *The Churches and the Indian Schools* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 84–88.

children of the Northern Cheyenne tribe of Indians" to be paid "as you may determine out of trust and treaty funds."[23] The contract funds supported St. Labre's operations until 1943.[24]

Both St. Labre and St. Xavier (which became Pretty Eagle Academy) started receiving federal funding again in the late 1970s, after Congress passed several pieces of legislation designed to move Indian Tribes toward a path of educational and economic self-determination. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 empowered Tribes to contract with the BIA for the operation of federally funded schools. Both St. Labre and Pretty Eagle received funding under the 1975 act and operated as BIA "contract" schools. The schools received BIA funding until 1984.[25]

St. Labre Historical Overview

St. Labre Indian School opened in 1884 with an enrollment of thirteen Northern Cheyenne girls in a "room about twelve feet square." The simple facility operated as a day school and had no floor and no fire to warm it. Student dismissal took place each day at 6:00 in the evening.[26] Despite the basic facilities, Helena Diocese Bishop John B. Brondel claimed that due to the school's limited capacity, many of "[t]he Indians were greatly disappointed over our inability to take their children to live with us and to be fed and clothed."[27] The Ursuline Sisters at St. Labre filled the school to capacity, and by year's end, they had overseen construction of a new school building capable of boarding students. The bishop called the building "a fine school erected for the Cheyennes so that they can easily lodge 50 children."[28] Fr. Eyler, from Cleveland and a chaplain for the Ursuline Order, served as the mission's first priest and diocese priests served the school until October 1885 when Jesuit priests arrived to replace them.[29]

St. Labre's funding contract compensated it for pupils at a rate of nine dollars per month for boarding, clothes, and tuition. In 1885, U.S. Indian Inspector Frank C. Armstrong recommended increasing the contract from thirty to fifty pupils. "Indians are willing and anxious to place their children at this school," he wrote to the secretary of the Interior, "and it is so unusual to find them

[23] For example, see Petition of Northern Cheyenne Indians, Tongue River Reservation, Montana, For Contract for St. Labre's Mission School, Montana, Fiscal Year 1918, File: 404 St. Labre Mission Concerning, Box 12, Northern Cheyenne Agency, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration at Denver, Broomfield, Colorado [hereafter NARA Denver].

[24] Paul L. Fickinger, for the Commissioner, to Gordon Macgregor, Superintendent, December 10, 1945, File: 806.3 Catholic Mission, Northern Cheyenne Agency, Box 150, NARA Denver.

[25] Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 121; Lorna Thackeray, "School Returns to Fold," *Billings Gazette*, September 28, 1984, 1.

[26] Sister Saint Angela Louise Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana: Recollection of the First Indian Mission in Montana," Orlan J. Svingen, ed., *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1984): 22.

[27] John B. Brondel, Bishop of Helena, to Chas. L. Lusk, Sec. Catholic Indian Bureau, July 11, 1884, Folder: 3, Box 11, Series 1-1, BCIM; Irene Mahoney, O.S.U., *Lady Blackrobes: Missionaries in the Heart of Indian Country* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2006), 25.

[28] John B. Brondel, Bishop of Helena, to Rev. Father Hephan, Catholic Indian Bureau, December 4, 1885, Folder 9, Box 15, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[29] Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest*, 213–214; Sister Carlan Kraman, A Portrait of Saint Labre Indian Mission Through One Hundred Years (Ashland, MT: St. Labre, 1984), 2–3.

so inclined, that I think they should be encouraged in sending them."[30] By 1887, Agent R. L. Upshaw reported that St. Labre could support up to fifty boarders and twenty day students.[31] The school's early success in attracting students did not last. Agents initially reported favorably on school attendance, but most Cheyenne did not embrace the Catholic faith.[32] At one point, in 1888, attendance dropped to just four students.[33] Without sufficient students, the school was forced to close for a brief time.[34]

Northern Cheyenne parents may not have supported everything about the school, but they did appreciate its proximity to their homes. When the commissioner of Indian affairs threatened to send Northern Cheyenne children to the Fort Shaw Indian School, more than three hundred miles away, parents asked the St. Labre staff to return.[35] In 1889, the school reopened and welcomed forty-six students. Father A. van der Veldon suggested that it could enroll "more children than we can accommodate."[36] The following month, he requested funding for up to fifty-five students but noted that the size of the school facilities prevented it from accommodating many more.[37] School enrollment remained steady for a time, but the school closed again in July 1892 and remained closed until the spring of 1893. In 1897, conflict on the reservation led parents take all of their children out of the school, and the Jesuits decided to give up the mission for good.[38]

The Ursuline Sisters remained at St. Labre after the Jesuits left, and the mission fell back under the jurisdiction of the Helena Diocese and later the Diocese of Great Falls. Diocesan priests served the mission until 1914.[39] That year, Diocese of Great Falls Bishop Mathias C. Lenihan asked the Society of St. Edmund in Swanton, Vermont, to send missionaries to St. Labre. The Edmundites, as they were known, agreed and arrived that September. During their tenure, a fire destroyed the girls' school building. The Ursuline Sisters partitioned the chapel to provide space for the school, and instruction took place there until supporters raised money to build a new school building for the girls. A new boys' building followed, replacing the "ramshackle affair that had served for many years."[40]

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[30] Frank C. Armstrong, United States Indian Inspector, to Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar II, Secretary of the Interior, November 28, 1885, M1070, Roll 53, Frame 389–396.

[31] Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest*, 249.

[32] Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest*, 212.

[33] E. D. Bannister, Inspector, to the Secretary of the Interior, September 1, 1888, M1070, Roll 53, Frames 464–465.

[34] Rev. Emmanuel Roets, O.M. Cap., *Historical Sketch St. Labre's Catholic Indian Mission* (Detroit: The Capuchin Fathers, 1927), 13–14.

[35] Litterae Annuae, 1893–1895, pdf p. 23, Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus Pacific Northwest Indian Mission Collection: St. Joseph Labre Mission, Montana.

[36] A. Van der Velden, S.J., to Reverand Father Stephen, March 31, 1889, Folder 8, Box 24, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[37] A. Van der Velden, S.J., to Reverand George L. Willard, April 20, 1889, Folder 8, Box 24, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[38] Synopsis of Report of Inspector Gardner, Tongue River Agency Schools, July 9, 1890, Reports of Inspection of the Field Jurisdiction of the Office of Indian Affairs, 1873–1900, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Rcord Group 48, and Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1070 [hereafter M1070], Reel 53, Frame 502; Synopsis of Report of Inspector Cisney, Tongue River Agency School, June 19, 1891, M1070, Reel 53, Frame 521; Roets, *Historical Sketch St. Labre's Catholic Indian Mission*, 15.

[39] Roets, *Historical Sketch St. Labre's Catholic Indian Mission*, 15.

[40] Roets, *Historical Sketch St. Labre's Catholic Indian Mission*, 18–19.

By 1924, the Edmundites had left St. Labre due to a lack of priests in their order. Great Falls Diocesan priests returned for a brief time until 1926, when the bishop obtained the commitment of the Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph to serve the mission. Not long after their arrival, one Capuchin friar proclaimed that "the boarding school is our greatest hope"[41]

Figure 1. St. Labre Cemetery, circa 1930. St. Labre Indian School Archives, Ashland, MT

The Ursuline Sisters left St. Labre in 1932. In their place, the School Sisters of St. Francis, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, arrived to operate the school.[42] Gradually, by 1948, St. Labre's enrollment had stabilized, and the school operated as a hybrid boarding/day school with 120 pupils, half of whom boarded. The school offered daily bus service to both Lame Deer and Birney. In 1950, it acquired a second school bus, and in 1956, enrollment reached 246 pupils with 199 boarders. The school buses allowed St. Labre to draw from a wide population area, and busing meant boarding students could go home on weekends.[43] In 1957, the school was "again filled beyond capacity" with more than 200 boarding students out of its total enrollment of 250 students.[44] By 1958, the school

[41] Roets, *Historical Sketch St. Labre's Catholic Indian Mission*, 22.

[42] Donna Peterson, "Conflict, Tension, Strength: The History of St. Paul's Mission, St. Labre Indian School, and St. Stephens Indian School, 1884–Present" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 2015), 67.

[43] Peterson, "Conflict, Tension, Strength," 122; "Ashland Indian Mission to Note Jubilee," *Eastern Montana Catholic Register*, September 23, 1959, pdf p. 193, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[44] St. Labre Indian Missions, November 22, 1957, File 40, Box 309, Series 1-1, BCIM.

had added a third bus.[45] As of 2024, St. Labre continued to board some students who stayed at the school during the week and returned home on weekends.

St. Xavier Historical Overview

In early 1887, Jesuit missionaries cleared snow and pitched a tent at the mouth of Rotten Grass Creek along the Big Horn River to serve as the first iteration of what became St. Francis Xavier Mission—known simply as St. Xavier. The Jesuits soon built a more permanent frame structure to serve as the school, and a group of Ursuline Sisters arrived that October to operate it.[46] By Christmas, the school had attracted fifty pupils. St. Xavier added additional structures in 1888, and school enrollment quickly reached 150 children.[47] Like St. Labre, St. Xavier served as a mission among the Crow people, not just a boarding school. By 1891, records show that the missionaries had performed a total of 1,070 Catholic baptisms, or approximately half of the entire estimated Crow population.[48]

Despite their ties to the mission and the Catholic faith, many Crow parents proved reluctant to enroll their children in boarding school. Only when pressured by the BIA agent did many of the families send their children.[49] Understandably, like the Northern Cheyenne with St. Labre, Crow families preferred keeping their children close by at St Xavier, rather than enrolling them at off-reservation boarding schools. According to the 1905 report of the superintendent of the Crow Agency School, "These Indians are greatly opposed to sending their children away from the reservation to school and it is almost impossible to get their consent."[50] At St. Xavier, Crow parents often camped nearby and visited their children on a regular basis. This arrangement allowed parents to maintain close contact with the children and observe school operations.[51]

The relationship between parents and the schools sometimes became adversarial rather than cooperative. Writing in the St. Xavier House Diary in 1893, one St. Xavier staff member remarked that the time set aside for Crow parents to see their children was too much. "Oh! If the Crow children had no Crows for parents!-How much better would they be."[52] Entries showing such opinions from school staff appeared in records during the school's early history and reflected both the prevailing cultural attitudes held by school staff and the assimilationist policies within which the institution functioned. Staff viewed boarding school as a necessary way to remove children from Crow culture. According to St. Xavier's Mother Magdalen, "These children are taken away from

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[45] "Sister is Preparing History of Ashland Indian Mission," *Western Montana Catholic Register*, July 6, 1958, St. Labre Mission, Montana, Newspaper Clippings, pdf p. 192, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[46] Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest*, 257–58.

[47] Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest*, 260.

[48] Palladino *Indian and White in the Northwest*, 261.

[49] Mother Magdalen, "History of St. Francis Xavier Mission, Crow Indians," 12, Records of the Ursulines of Toledo, Ohio.

[50] Lorenzo D. Creel, Superintendent, "Report of Superintendent of Crow Agency School," July 31, 1905, *Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1905, Indian Affairs, Part I* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 239.

[51] Frederick E. Hoxie, *Parading through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805–1935* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 202–3.

[52] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," June 21, 1893, p. 12, pdf p. 194, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

their lodges and brought to school where they will lose the Indian Mythology and foolish traditions . . . the very fact of having the children out of their lodges is a great step towards civilization and religion."[53] In the late 1890s, children were not allowed to go home during the school year. All boys and girls under age twelve were allowed to go home for summer vacation. But the school required girls over age twelve to remain there year-round, with parents only permitted to visit their children on Sundays.[54]

The U.S. Government's views on education began to shift in the 1910s as it established more day schools on reservations. St. Xavier's Father Thomas Grant predicted that allowing parents to choose day schools over the boarding schools would result in the end of boarding schools. The parents, he explained, "Will not send their children to boarding school if they can get out of it." He recommended that the BCIM start a new day school.[55] Nevertheless, in 1912, after previously admitting day students, St. Xavier limited enrollment to boarding students only, and "the Indians did not like the change very much."[56] After the deaths of St. Xavier students Mary Born Last and Irene Little Owl in 1914 and 1915, Crow parents increased their calls for a day school. Eventually, the House Diary reported that "the storm blew over."[57]

Figure 2. St. Xavier Mission, circa 1909. William Brings photograph. Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

[53] Mother Magdalen, "History of St. Francis Xavier Mission, Crow Indians," 13, Records of the Ursulines of Toledo, Ohio.

[54] Charles C. Bradley, Jr., "After the Buffalo Days: Documents on the Crow Indians from the 1880's to the 1920's," (Master's thesis, Montana State University, Bozeman, 1970), 188.

[55] Thomas Grant, S.J., to Wm. H. Ketcham, September 25, 1911, Folder 7, Box 75, Series 1-1, BCIM

[56] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, October 2, 1912, p. 55, pdf p. 384, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[57] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, September 1914 to January 1, 1915, p. 94, pdf p. 404, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives. For information about these and other student deaths, see Appendix A.

St. Xavier's enrollment dwindled during the 1910s. In 1917, amidst the growing push for day schools, a House Diary entry called the situation "a crisis… for the Mission School." Yet student numbers rebounded dramatically only months later when St. Xavier accepted an influx of Metis, Cree, and Chippewa students it categorized universally as "Cree." A number of these families moved to the area, as reflected in a House Diary entry that summer remarking that St. Xavier had hired "Crees" to help with haying. The new students changed the school's trajectory.[58] "The prospects for the school year were not bright," explained an entry in the House Diary, "but God in his Providence watched over the Mission and owing to a goodly number of Cree children our attendance is as large as last year."[59] In 1918, St. Xavier benefitted from additional Cree students who transferred from St. Peter's Mission near Cascade, Montana, when that school burned down and closed permanently.[60] St. Xavier staff decided that the school would "allow all Crow boys and the small Crow girls to come to school as day scholars, and to take in as many Cree children for boarders, as our school and the sisters' school can accommodate."[61] One missionary summarized the change, "As the number of Crow children declined; Indian children called 'Crees' came and were admitted. This was done with great success."[62]

The influx of Cree students allowed St. Xavier's boarding school to continue for a time, even though it had lost favor among the Crow people. Writing in 1919, Father Louis Taelman conceded that the Crows "have always considered a Boarding school as a jail."[63] But the school quickly encountered new challenges when influenza swept through the Crow Reservation and federal legislation passed in 1920 provided, among other things, "That the Crow Indian children shall be permitted to attend the public schools . . . on the same condition as the children of white citizens of said State."[64] Enrollment declined. In September 1920, the House Diary noted, "The school opened with very few children. Indeed we were puzzled: will more children arrive, or not. The future of boarding schools on the reservation looks very dark."[65]

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[58] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, July & August 1917, p. 127, pdf p. 420, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives. For a discussion of the application of the name "Cree" to the Cree, Chippewa, and Metis in Montana, see J. Elizabeth Sperry, "Ethnogenesis of Metis, Cree and Chippewa in Twentieth Century Montana" (Master's thesis, University of Montana, Missoula, 2007).

[59] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, September, October, November 1917, p. 128, pdf p. 421, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[60] Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 139.

[61] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, September to December, 1918, p. 136, pdf p. 425, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[62] Annual Letter of the Mission of St. Xavier Among the Crows, 1916–1920 (Con't), pdf p. 21, File: Jesuit House Diary – 1910–1923, Box: Crow Catholic Collection, Little Big Horn College Archives, Crow Agency, Montana [hereafter LBHC].

[63] Louis Taelman, SJ, to Ketcham, July 7, 1919, File 21, Box 116, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[64] Act of June 4, 1910, 41 Stat. 751.

[65] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, September 3, 1920, p. 152, pdf p. 437, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

In August 1921, St. Xavier closed the boarding school "since there was no longer Crow children for boarders."[66] With the boarding school discontinued, the Ursuline Sisters left the mission.[67] Upon hearing of the closure, the BCIM director explained, "I had been aware for sometime that it has been a difficult matter to prevail on Crow parents to place their children in boarding schools, but there has been in attendance at St. Xavier's Crow Boarding School a number of Cree children and it has been our wish that the school should continue as long as possible, not only for such Crow children as would be sent to it, but also for such children of the Cree and other tribes as might attend."[68]

The final St. Xavier boarding school quarterly report listed eighty-seven pupils, consisting of eighteen Crow boys, eighteen Cree boys, twenty-six Crow girls, and twenty-five Cree girls. Of those totals, there were eleven Crow boarders, thirty-two Cree boarders, and twenty-four Crow half boarders.[69] St. Xavier operated exclusively as a day school beginning in the fall of 1922 and continued as such into the 1930s.[70]

In 1935, St. Xavier administration reopened the school's boarding facilities. The School Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenburg, Indiana, arrived to operate it.[71] In its first year, the revived boarding school welcomed twenty-five boarding students to add to a population of day students.[72] The school operated as a hybrid boarding and day school for several decades. Father C. L. Owens explained his motivation to reopen the boarding facilities: "We have here twenty orphans and half-orphans whose one parent is either an old man or woman unable to support their children and care for them." He felt that the boarding school was a way to eliminate the risk that such children would be adopted into non-Catholic families. "It is chiefly for these that I opened the boarding school." He explained that families that could take care of their children at home sent them to the mission day school.[73]

As St. Xavier reestablished itself as a hybrid boarding and day school, enrollment numbers increased. In 1938, the school reported a "large attendance" of fifty boarders and fifty day scholars. According to the House Diary, "This is a very noticeable increase over previous years and is a deserved tribute to all connected with the school."[74]

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[66] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, August 28, 1921, p. 161, pdf p. 437, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[67] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, September 4, 1921, p. 162, pdf p. 438, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[68] Director to Rev. F. C. Dillon, SJ, October 1, 1921, Folder 22, Box 124, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[69] Director to Dillon, October 1, 1921, Folder 22, Box 124, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[70] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, September 1922, p. 167, pdf p. 440, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[71] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1933–1960, June 6, 1935, p. 29, pdf p. 521, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[72] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1933–1960, September 3, 1935, p. 30, pdf p. 522, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[73] C. L. Owens, S.J., to Mother Katherine Drexel, Folder 8, Box 228, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[74] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1933–1960, September 12, 1938, p. 57, pdf p. 535, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

By the 1930s, boarding schools had lost favor with the BCIM. Director Father John B. Tennelly felt that Crow parents preferred to keep their children at home, which was also better for family life. He suggested that a "good day school at Pryor and at St. Xavier with active pastoral work among the older Indians" would be the best approach for the mission.[75] Tennelly explained, "The Indian Office itself is getting out of the boarding school business as far and as quickly as possible," and the remaining federal boarding schools mostly housed high school students and were "not institutions for smaller children." The preference for day schools, he noted, "antedates the present administration and goes back about ten years at least."[76] He pointed to the pope's views that "the first natural and necessary educational agency is the family," and it was the duty of the parents to educate the children in "moral and religious training as well as for their temporal well-being."[77]

St. Xavier continued to board students in the face of such concerns, accepting both day students and boarding students through the early 1960s. These numbers included Native and non-Native students, some from as far away as Hardin, Billings, and other surrounding communities. In the 1960s, however, enrollment dropped. In 1965, only 19 students attended the school, a decrease from nearly 100 students just five years before.[78] St. Xavier faced closure when the Jesuits announced that they could no longer staff the St. Xavier and St. Charles Missions. The Capuchin Franciscan Province of St. Joseph took over operations in 1965. St. Xavier constructed a new school building in 1967, and it reported an enrollment of over 100 students. A year later, an explosion destroyed the dorms, and the school operated as a day school until facilities were rebuilt in 1969. It continued to board students until 1975, when it became a day school only.[79]

St. Charles Historical Overview

In 1889, the Jesuit missionaries from St. Xavier identified the site for a new chapel at Pryor, roughly sixty miles away from the mission. The Crow people under the leadership of Chief Plenty Coups donated the land for the church. Three Ursuline Sisters opened the first school there in 1892.[80] The school operated in a fifty by twenty-four foot building that served as chapel, school headquarters, and even housed boarding students. On March 8, 1892, three boys became the first boarding students at St. Charles. That September, the mission completed construction of a two-story frame building to house the Ursuline Sisters. The first girls arrived as boarding students in December 1892.[81]

The Ursuline Sisters had a separate frame building constructed to accommodate the boys. A log building housed the priests. Operating two schools—St. Xavier and St. Charles—strained the

[75] Fr. John B. Tennelly, Director, to Charles L. Owens, S.J., August 26, 1937, Folder 25, Box 239, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[76] Tennelly to John Laux, S.J., St. Charles School, September 28, 1938, Folder 27, Box 244, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[77] Tennelly to Owens, October 5, 1938, Folder 27, Box 244, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[78] St. Xavier Mission, Present Enrollment, File: Parish – St. Xavier: Clipping, Letter, Enrollment & GFDA, Box 5, LBHC.

[79] History – St. Xavier Mission, File: Parish – St. Xavier Mission, History, No Date/Author, Box 5, LBHC.

[80] A Few Facts Concerning Saint Francis Xavier Mission, pdf p. 274, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.; John W. Noble, Secretary, to Commissioner, March 20, 1890, BCIM Series 1-1, Box 27; Thomas Grant, S.J., "The New Chapel at Pryor Creek, Montana," May 1, 1930, Frames 496–497, Reel 162, Series 1-1, BCIM; Palladino, *Indian and White in the Northwest,* 266.

[81] Grant, "The New Chapel at Pryor Creek, Montana," May 1, 1930, Frames 496–497, Reel 162, Series 1-1, BCIM.

resources of Jesuits and Ursulines on the Crow Reservation. Noted philanthropist Mother Katherine Drexel supported the mission by funding the construction of the chapel and frame buildings at St. Charles, but St. Xavier covered all operating expenses. When the latter lost federal funds, the Jesuits decided to close St. Charles.[82]

St. Charles only operated as a boarding school from 1892–1898. Because of the brief six-year history, far less is known about the student experience there compared to St. Labre and St. Xavier, which boarded hundreds of students over many decades. Nevertheless, the school and surrounding properties do have a complicated history. As early as 1897, with the school still in operation, the Crow Agency superintendent inquired into the possibility of the United States purchasing the St. Charles school buildings from the BCIM to open a federal boarding school there. He cited the desire of the local Indians to have a government school at Pryor and the United States' promise for such a school. He concluded that it would not be necessary for two schools at Pryor, so it could be advantageous for the BCIM to sell the buildings.[83]

When the school closed, the parties explored the possibility of the sale for several years but never reached an agreement.[84] In 1902, the United States solicited bids for the construction of a government school to be built, in the words of Father Taelman, "in the very tooth as it were of the old mission buildings which are now empty and falling to pieces."[85] The government built the new school approximately seventy yards from the St. Charles school property.[86] The St. Charles school buildings fell into disrepair, but Taelman felt that "the church should be kept for many reasons," mainly to provide a place for their ministry among the people of Pryor.[87]

The United States' boarding school adjacent to the St. Charles property, known as the Pryor Creek Boarding School, operated from 1903 to 1919. The government closed the school during the height of the Spanish Flu epidemic. Jesuit missionaries from St. Xavier maintained a close relationship with the Pryor Creek Boarding School and the Pryor community during the Pryor Creek Boarding School years. According to one 1905 entry in the St. Xavier House Diary, "The children at the Pryor School are in good hands. The Matron, Miss Grimes, and the teacher Miss [illegible] are both excellent Catholics. The Superintendent & his wife are also most favorable."[88]

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[82] Grant, "The New Chapel at Pryor Creek, Montana," May 1, 1930, Frames 496–497, Reel 162, Series 1-1, BCIM; Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 104.

[83] Superintendent to Rev. Francis Andreis, August 20, 1897, Folder 2, Box 36, Series 1-1 BCIM.

[84] J. A. Stephen, Director, to Rev. F. Andreis, S.J., September 4, 1897, Folder 2, Box 36, Series 1-1 BCIM; Fr. Andreis, S.J., to Rev. Fr. Stephan, September 18, 1897, Folder 2, Box 36, Series 1-1 BCIM; J. A. Stephan, Director, to Rev. L. Van Gorp, S.J., August 17, 1898, Folder 8, Box 37, Series 1-1 BCIM; Van Gorp to Stephan, August 22, 1898, Folder 8, Box 37, Series 1-1 BCIM; A. C. Tonner, Acting Commissioner, to Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, September 20, 1899, Folder 13, Box 38, Series 1-1 BCIM; W. H. Ketcham, Director, BCIM, to W. A. Jones, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 5, 1903, File 14, Box 45, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[85] Louis Taelman, SJ, "A Few Remarks about St. Xavier's Mission and the work for the Crow Indians," enclosure, p. 3, in Louis Taelman, SJ, to Rev. Ketcham, April 21, 1902, Folder 20, Box 43, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[86] Taelman to Ketcham, May 4, 1902, File 20, Box 43, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[87] Taelman to Ketcham, February 4, 1903, Folder 14, Box 45, Series 1-1, BCIM

[88] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," January 14, 1905, p. 130, pdf p. 331, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

After the closure of the Pryor Creek Boarding School, the Pryor community supported the establishment of a Catholic day school there.[89] By the fall of 1925, "Sacred Heart Day School" had begun operating. It is unclear what building the school occupied during its early years. In 1929, Father Grant requested permission to use a room in the "old brick building" (formerly the federal Pryor Creek Boarding School) as a school room, and around that time, the Catholic day school once again became known as St. Charles.[90]

In 1936, the status of the St. Charles day school changed again when Father Owens reported that they turned over operations of the school to Big Horn County to be operated as a public school "on account of the Bureau cutting off the teacher's salary."[91] The arrangement appeared short lived, however, with the Franciscan Sisters operating the school by 1937.[92] St. Charles continues to operate as a Catholic day school.

Enrollment and Attendance

From their earliest days, school administrators worked to increase student enrollment and maintain adequate student attendance. School funding directly correlated with student enrollment, and in turn, the schools tracked the attendance of each student. This required the schools to maintain detailed records of individual children, but it also meant that school administrators went to great lengths to get students in school and keep them there. This included keeping children in school when they were sick and only sending them home when they were severely ill, enlisting police to track down runaways, using corporal punishment against students who tried to run away, and demanding that parents of truant students be punished.

Indeed, truancy provided a regular challenge for the schools. Quarterly enrollment reports show frequent runaways, including some students who fled the school for extended periods or never returned. According to an 1897 Jesuit report discussing St. Labre, "Many children, both boys and girls had run away from the Mission School: so many, in fact, that out of the fourty [sic] in attendance not a boy or girl was left at the school. No reason could be assigned for the movement except a natural love of freedom on the part of the children seconded by the connivance of their parents."[93]

The motivations for running away from school are not always known. Regardless of the reason, both boys and girls, young and old, ran away from school. Sometimes they remained absent for extended periods. The act of running away and the resulting discipline are indicative of the difficult situation many Indigenous children encountered at boarding schools. School records show that school administrators often used severe discipline and other controls to prevent it. In 1894, for

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[89] Taelman to Rev. William Hughes, October 16, 1923, Frame 460, Reel 110, Series 1-1 BCIM; Hughes to Taelman, October 27, 1923, Frame 461, Reel 110, Series 1-1 BCIM.

[90] Superintendent to G. C. Swarts, Farmer, October 1, 1929, File: 806 Schools Catholic Mission, Box 56, Crow Agency, NARA Denver; Assistant Commissioner to C. H. Asbury, Superintendent, September 27, 1929, File: 806 Schools Catholic Mission, Box 56, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver; Grant to my Dear Friend, October 29, 1930, Reel 162, Series 1-1, BCIM; Grant to Hughes, n.d. [circa November 1930], Reel 162, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[91] C. L. Owens, SJ, to Tennelly, March 22, 1936, Folder 10, Box 234, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[92] Tennelly to John Laux, S.J., St. Charles School, June 6, 1944, Folder 26, Box 271, Series 1-1 BCIM.

[93] History Transcript 'Reminiscences of a Threatened Indian Way,' Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus Pacific Northwest Indian Mission Collection: St. Joseph Labre Mission, Montana.

example, St. Xavier officials determined that "[r]un-aways should be whipped."[94] The severe punishment may have deterred some students, but others kept running away. In one particularly disturbing incident, a Crow boy called Philip ran away for twenty-two days. When returned to the school, the priests locked him in a dark room for ninety days, calling it a "retreat." Whippings extended beyond runaways. Children were whipped for "immorality" or, like one boy named James, for "trying to stop a Perfect." What the boy was trying to stop is not clear.[95]

School records at St. Xavier describing punishment are brief, and given the numerous runaways reported, it is certain that other severe punishments occurred at the schools. Crow parents took notice and complained about the treatment of their children.[96] By the early 1900s, the school appears to have used corporal punishment less frequently, and instead added other approaches to discipline such as expulsion or denying students the opportunity to see their parents during the Sunday visit.[97]

At various points in time, St. Labre school administrators asked the BIA with withhold rations until parents enrolled their children in school or returned their runaway children. In 1888, U.S. Indian Inspector E. D. Bannister remarked in a report to the secretary of the interior, "I promised them that I would most earnestly recommend that their rations be cutoff for all time to come, unless they kept the school house filled with children." The use of rations to force attendance continued at St. Labre for years, and it became increasingly common as families resisted sending their children there.[98]

In 1908, the school reportedly had a "great deal of difficulty in keeping the pupils regularly in school," even though the school superintendent "spared himself no trouble to hunt up the runaways and to endeavor to have them returnd [sic], but, being unable to employ force of any kind, he meets with por [sic] success in keeping the children in school."[99] St. Labre's Father Peter Gallagher asked the BIA agent to deny St. Labre parents their rations until their children returned to school. The request triggered discussion among the BCIM and the commissioner of Indian affairs, who determined that because St. Labre existed outside of the reservation boundary, it was beyond their authority to force the children back to school.[100]

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[94] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," November 14, 1894, p. 75, pdf p. 225, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[95] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," October 9, 1894, p. 73, pdf p. 224, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," November 16, 1894, p. 75, pdf p. 225, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," October 27, 1895, p. 103, pdf p. 239, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[96] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, January 16, 1910, p. 19, pdf p. 366, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, December 1, 1911, p. 39, pdf p. 376, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; Charles Crane Bradley, Jr., "The Effect of Abundant Resources on the History of Crow Reservation Schools" (EdD diss. Montana State University, Bozeman, 1982), 121.

[97] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, January 24, 1910, p. 19, pdf p. 366, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, January 2, 1913, p. 61, pdf p. 387, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[98] E. D. Bannister, Inspector, to Secretary of the Interior, September 11, 1888, M1070, Roll 53.

[99] W. H. Ketcham to F. B. Leupp, Commissioner, February 3, 1908, Folder 19, Box 60, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[100] Ketcham to Leupp, February 3, 1908, Folder 19, Box 60, Series 1-1, BCIM. Commissioner F. E. Leupp explained the law did not support the BCIM contention that the school should be treated the same as a reservation school. Leupp quoted the law, 28 Stat. 906, as follows: "[I]t shall be unlawful for any Indian Agent, or other employee of the Government, to induce or seek to induce, by withholding rations or by other improper means, the parent or next of kin of any Indian to consent to the removal of any Indian child beyond the limits of any reservation." He also cited a court case that upheld the law in U.S. District Court. It states "Under the provisions of this section of the Act of 1895 Indian Agents and School Superintendents are clearly prohibited from using compulsory means, such as withholding

In 1915, St. Labre's Sister St. Thomas complained that "the farmer nor police do not seem to have any power" to force children back to school. She concluded that she hoped a parent would be "put in jail for a few days to show the other Red ladies what will be their share in the future."[101] In response, the agency superintendent requested "discretionary authority" to cut off rations and withhold payments to the parents who refused to put their children in school.[102] The commissioner of Indian affairs appears to have agreed to the request. Later that year, Northern Cheyenne parents faced arrest and loss of rations if they did not send their children to St. Labre, despite previous policy prohibiting such punishment.[103]

Despite tension and occasional conflict with school officials, parents valued the proximity of the mission schools to their homes. Historical records also show both Crow and Northern Cheyenne preference for local schools over off-reservation boarding schools. The Cheyenne apprehension to send their children away grew in the early twentieth century after the BIA sent children away with disastrous results. According to Superintendent John Eddy, testifying before Congress in 1914, the Tongue River Agency had "poor success with nonreservation schools." He recalled that during his first year at the agency some eight years earlier, he sent thirty-five Northern Cheyenne children to Carlisle in Pennsylvania, but "the results were so disastrous I could not bring myself again to encourage the Indians to go great distances." He explained that there "was such a tremendous death list—sickness—homesickness." He concluded that the Cheyenne people had "not got over the Carlisle and Haskell experience[s]."[104]

St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles were relatively small schools. Between 1884 and 1940 St. Labre's enrollment ranged from only a handful of students to nearly 100 inclusive of both day students and boarding students. Typically, the school enrolled around 50 students. St. Xavier's enrollment peaked at 150 students in just its second year of operation. More often enrollment appeared closer to 60 students.[105] Annual enrollment totals for St. Charles during its boarding school years are not reported, likely because it did not receive federal funding at the time. However, St. Charles does appear to have been a much smaller school with a likely annual enrollment of around twenty students.

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rations, payment of annuities and the like, in order to coerce the parents or next of kin of any Indian child into permitting the removal of the child beyond the reservation, and this Congressional enactment necessarily abrogates and nullifies all rules and regulations of the Department of the Interior or any of its Bureaus which conflict therewith." Leupp explained that the Mission school property was "expressly excluded" from the reservation. See Leupp to Ketcham, February 7, 1908, Folder 19, Box 60, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[101] Sister St. Thomas to Chas. L. Lusk, Sec. Catholic Indian Bureau, November 9, 1915, Folder 14, Box 96, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[102] Superintendent to Mother St. Thomas, November 10, 1915, File: 404 St. Labre Mission, Box 12, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver; Superintendent to Commissioner, November 13, 1915, File: 404 St. Labre Mission, Box 12, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[103] For example, see Superintendent to Sister St. Thomas, December 6, 1915, File: 404 St. Labre Mission, Box 12, Northern Cheyene Agency, NARA Denver.

[104] "Tongue River Reservation, Serial One," *Hearings before the Joint Commission of the Congress of the United States to Investigate Indian Affairs*, 63rd cong., 2d sess., May 25, 1914, Part 14 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1914), 1764–65.

[105] For a table listing the number of individual children enrolled at St. Labre and St. Xavier, see Appendix II.

Students from Other Tribes

Student demographics at the schools are important to understanding the student experience. Not all students lived locally, so it is unlikely that all students enjoyed regular contact with their families. Local students, on the other hand, experienced weekly visits with their families and, for many, extended school breaks after Christmas and during the summer. Some Cheyenne and Crow families even located themselves near the school to be close to their children. At one point, St. Labre's Father van der Veldon complained that the Cheyenne people living in the vicinity of St. Labre constructed a "dance house," and "our larger boys are hearing the drum, it is hard to prevent them from running away."[106] Beginning in the early twentieth century, both St. Labre and St. Xavier began to enroll increasing numbers of Indigenous children from Tribes other than Northern Cheyenne or Crow. Some came from families who lived nearby, but others came to the schools from distant areas and had far less contact with their families than the Cheyenne and Crow students did.

By the 1910s, the St. Labre school population included Northern Cheyenne, Crow, Sioux, Arikara, and Arapahoe. The most common students other than Cheyenne and Crow were "Cree."[107] According to one letter describing students who enrolled in St. Labre in 1929, "Three girls – Breeds – attend our school- although they do not belong to the Cheyenne Tribe. Their names are: Iona LaRance and Irene LaRance – they have Chippewa blood in them, as they say, Lucille la Pier is Cree. Two boys, nephews of the above-mentioned LaRance girls are here too. Their names are David and Andrew Babcock. These children are included in the above mentioned 71 pupils."[108] In the 1950s, Cheyenne children remained in the majority at St. Labre, but Chippewa, Sioux, Cree, Crow, and non-Indigenous students also attended the school.[109]

At St. Xavier, non-Crow enrollment increased through the 1910s. In the fall of 1916, for example, thirty-three of forty-six students enrolled at St. Xavier were Crow. The school listed the rest as Cree or Sioux.[110] The trend continued, and by 1918, St. Xavier had enrolled a large number of students identified as "Cree," coinciding with the closure of the St. Peter's Mission School. At certain points, the Cree population exceeded the Crow population at the school.[111] Enrollment reports list many students as Cree having come to the school from various communities in central Montana, including Lewistown, Roy, Grass Range, Stanford, and Hilger. In 1919, sixty-two of the eighty-seven students at St. Xavier were listed as Cree.[112] When St. Xavier reopened its boarding

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[106] A. van der Veldon, SJ, to Catholic Indian Bureau, December 1889, Folder 8, Box 24, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[107] Identified collectively as "Cree," these students also included both Chippewa and Metis children whose descendants are members of both the Chippewa Cree Tribe and the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe. For a discussion of the Cree, Chippewa, and Metis in Montana see Sperry, "Ethnogenesis of Metis, Cree and Chippewa in Twentieth Century Montana."

[108] Rev. Richard Brunner to Rev. William Hughes April 21, 1929, Frames 331–334, Reel 156, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[109] For enrollment demographics from 1950, see St. Labre Mission School, Report of Attendance, Period ended December 31, 1950, File 4, Box 19, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[110] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, August–December 1918, p. 118, pdf p. 416, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[111] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, August–December 1918, p. 138, pdf p. 426, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[112] See St. Xavier Mission Boarding & Day School, Quarterly Boarding & Day School Report, June 30, 1919, Folder 3, Box 15, Series 2-1, BCIM.

school in the mid-1930s, it continued with a relatively diverse student body. The *Montana Catholic Register* reported in 1941, "St. Xavier's Enrolls White, Indian, Mexican Children."[113]

Living Conditions and Complaints

The proximity of the schools to the primary communities they served allowed for parental scrutiny of the student experience there. Occasionally, school officials appeared threatened by even brief parental interaction with the school. According to one Jesuit missionary at St. Labre, "Many of the Indians would skip either before or after prayers on weekdays to see their children and have a little talk with them and as true Indians these children would communicate a pack of lies or give some alarming news about the health of the others, which many a time has upset the camps and given plenty of trouble."[114]

At various points, St. Labre had difficulty maintaining a positive relationship with the Northern Cheyenne.[115] In 1911, a Cheyenne delegation visiting Washington, D.C., accused St. Labre of misusing Tribal contract funds. BCIM Director Monsignor William H. Ketcham recognized the seriousness of the complaint and directed that any money belonging to the Northern Cheyenne, "be spent on their clothing, food, and on keeping up the buildings, and if any portion of it has been sent away a great mistake has been made. . . . I want to know the truth, however, because if St. Labre's school cannot be up to the satisfaction of the Indians, it will be absolutely necessary to discontinue it." St. Labre's Mother Thecla denied the accusation: "I can say that every cent received has been spent right here for the food and clothing of the children of St. Labre."[116]

The Northern Cheyenne delegation also raised concerns with the treatment of students at the school. Big Head Man, a delegation leader, pointed to the difficult living conditions students endured at St. Labre, including a lack of clothing, dishes, and food. Most concerning, however, was an allegation that students found a human finger within a shipment of clothes at the school. He also complained, "Of course, a lot of the children have been sick, and a good many of the children died in that school; and hereafter we would like to have it fixed so that when a child gets sick, we could take it home." He also asked for a different school in the district and that the buildings be improved to reduce fire risk.[117]

Superintendent John Eddy disputed the allegation of student deaths occurring at the school and contended that "I have not in mind a single death reported at the school." However, he asked Red Water, another Cheyenne delegation member and St. Labre parent, if there was any basis for the allegation. Red Water replied that there was. He recalled that Otis Fingers' daughter died "shortly after being taken out of school. Little Bird's son, too. Those are the only ones I remember." Charles

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[113] "St. Xavier's Enrolls White, Indian, Mexican Children," *Montana Catholic Register*, 1941, File: Montana Catholic Register, Excerpts of Crow Reservation, 1941, Box 5, Crow Catholic Collection, LBHC.

[114] Litterae Annuae, 1893–1895, pdf p. 29, Oregon Province of the Society of Jesus Pacific Northwest Indian Mission Collection: St. Joseph Labre Mission, Montana.

[115] Mahoney, *Lady Blackrobes*, 291–92.

[116] Quoted in Mahoney, *Lady Blackrobes*, 261.

[117] "Continuation of conference between delegation of Northern Cheyenne Indians, accompanied by Superintendent Eddy, and Mr. Abbott; Rev. Wm. H. Ketcham and Mr. Chas. S. Lusk were also present. Willis Rowland acted as interpreter," November 6, 1911, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

Lusk, secretary of the BCIM, followed up, "Extending over a period of five years, there has been that number of deaths. There has been an average of between 55 and 60 pupils in that school, and in five years there have been two deaths, and one had left the school. I think that ought to be reported."[118]

BCIM Director Ketcham interjected that the children who died had been taken out of school when they were sick. He also suggested that they probably "would not have died if they had been left" in school. Red Water countered that Ketcham was right that none died in the school, but by the time they went home, "they were ready to die." He argued that the government school took better care of the children than the mission did. Fellow delegation member Little Son offered his own observation that "the sisters and the mothers" at the school were not taking care of the children:

> So I told the Agent I was going to take my people's children out of the Mission school and take them back home, because I did not think they was treated right at the Mission school; they were not clothed, did not get enough food to eat; did not have a good place to sleep; so I took them back home, and asked the Agent to ask the Commissioner to put a little school building in my district…. There is a very nice little school over on Tongue River for a day school; they have good clothing and plenty to eat and are well treated.[119]

Ketcham notified Father Grant at St. Xavier about the "rather serious complaints against the St. Labre's school." He dismissed the delegation's concerns as being pushed on them "by the Mennonite Mission and by the pagan medicine man." However, he suggested that the BCIM could do more for the mission, since now "whoever takes up the Cheyennes work now will meet with some opposition. I do not think that the Indians have been very badly scandalized although they have not been very greatly edified, and to tell you the truth 'all priests look alike to them.'"[120]

St. Labre's Mother Thecla wrote to the commissioner of Indian affairs to defend the school. She called the Northern Cheyenne "a very difficult tribe to please." She said such complaints "are not new to us, we are, in fact, accustomed to them." She said that the children at the school were never neglected, and there was "no truth" to the claims. She said that Otis Fingers' daughter "took sick suddenly at bed time." The child's aunt came and took her away on her back. "After a few weeks of sickness, the girl died." Little Bird's son, meanwhile, appeared to be in good health and left the school at "vacation time." He developed swelling and sores, never returned to school, and died at home. She claimed that "[i]n the twenty years of the Mission, no child has ever died at the school, neither are they turned out as said by Red Water; but the Indians ask to take them home as soon as they show signs of ill health. We always allow them to go. There is, therefore, no necessity for any regulation concerning this as demanded by Big Head Man."[121]

In another letter, Thecla directly addressed the allegation that children found a human finger there. She said the clothes came from St. Mary's in Kansas and she folded the clothes herself and

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[118] "Continuation of conference," November 6, 1911, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[119] "Continuation of conference," November 6, 1911, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[120] Director to Rev. Thomas Grant, S.J., November 21, 1911, Folder 7, Box 75, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[121] Sister St. Thecla, Supt, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, February 25, 1912, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

found no finger. "About a week later two girls were sent to the store room to get something and picked up from the floor what they thought looked like a human finger." They showed it to a sister who felt it looked "more like the tip of the tail of an animal." She concluded that "it was about three inches long, the hair had fallen off and it was quite dry and shriveled up and had probably been carried in there by the cat."[122]

Some Northern Cheyenne defended the school. "I never see sisters never do any bad things to the children," wrote James Yellowhair. "And I am all true what I say, no lies in it . . . And I never see a girl or boy died [in] this mission. I guess that's all I can tell you now . . ."[123] According to Whitefrog, in a speech transcribed by Father T. O. Rocque, "The sisters always treated us very good also. The school building is very old and is rotting at the bottom and that is the reason why we would like a new schoolhouse." He explained that "[w]hen at any time a child gets sick you must leave him go home. When the children get sick it would be nice to leave them go and they'll come right back."[124]

Despite support from some members of the community, St. Labre continued to encounter negative sentiment from many Northern Cheyenne. Writing in 1915, Sister Mary Theresa explained that "[t]he old Indians are becoming more and more bitter against the church and the school. The father is completely discouraged and says nothing can be done."[125] That year, St. Labre parents reportedly took issue with the disciplinary measures of a male teacher and refused to send their children back to school. According to the superintendent, "[T]hese Indians strongly object to their children being punished even when they are guilty of misconduct. They particularly complain against the man who has charge of the boys."[126]

Adam Yelloweyes, one of the parents who protested having his son in school, explained to the superintendent that he was pleased with the school except for the treatment by the "one man teacher whom he says the Indians are afraid of." The superintendent conceded that "I understand that they have numerous excuses, but for some cause they seem to be opposed to one teacher. It is very likely that the man they are opposed to is an excellent man and doing the right thing; but you know how they are when they take such a stand." According to the superintendent, "I would pay no attention to one or two [complaints] but there are so many, it is good to understand their view point."[127] A year later, Mother A. Thomas wrote Major J. L. Buntin concerning what she characterized as "lies that are told of our school," which included allegations that "children get nothing to eat, they are not cared for, they are so full of lice, have no school . . ." She countered by remarking on "how clean the children's heads were" and that she was "heart sick of all these reports."[128]

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[122] Sister St. Thecla to W. H. Ketcham, March 17, 1912, November 6, 1911, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[123] James Yellow Hair, to Dear Father, February 25, 1912, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[124] T. O. Rocque to W. H. Ketcham, August 3, 1912, Folder 18, Box 81, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[125] Sister Mary Theresa to Ketcham, June 12, 1915, Folder 14, Box 96, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[126] Superintendent, to Commissioner, November 13, 1915, File: 404 St. Labre Mission, Box 12, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[127] Superintendent, Tongue River Agency, to Mother St. Thomas, Superintendent, St. Labre's Mission, December 7, 1915, File: 404 St. Labre Mission, Box 12, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[128] Mother A. Thomas to Major J. L. Buntin, December 3, 1916, File: 404 St. Labre Mission, Box 12, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

School staff sometimes disputed criticism targeted at the quality of care children received, but other times they personally remarked on the difficult conditions that existed at the schools. At St. Labre, for example, Sister Mary Imelda Hanratty arrived in 1922 and later recalled, "One great source of suffering was the cold in our building. The children's dining room was over the furnace so that it was the only room that had any heat."[129]

Conflict at St. Labre sometimes involved staff and individual families. In 1925, Father Rocque wrote that he hoped to make an example of St. Labre parent Frank Standing Elk, who took his children out of school. Rocque suggested Standing Elk displayed insubordination for "pretending that his little child was dying." Rocque asked "[w]ould it not be wise to teach this all-powerful Indian a little lesson of proper submission to the proper government by letting him meditate on the meaning of law and order in a quite [sic] little room in jail." Rocque called for such punishment to help "settle these questions of stubbornness among our Ashland and Birney Indians for quite a while at least. An example has to be made and fortunately the two culprits involved deserve it more . . . than any other Indians I know around here."[130] Evidently BIA Superintendent E. B. Lohmiller agreed with Father Rocque's recommendations. He responded that Standing Elk and another parent Rocque accused of insubordination had been arrested, would be tried, and "will receive punishment that is justly due to them"[131]

In a letter dated April 9, 1938, Father Matthew responded to the BIA superintendent after parents raised allegations of physical abuse of a student named Jimmy Whitebird. The child had run away from school multiple times, and Father Matthew recounted what he told the boy's mother:

> 'Three years ago I had asked permission of old Jim Yellow Hair (the boy's grandfather) to trash Jimmy just once, believing this to be a sure means of settling the boy once and for all. Do you see this hand? If I had used it to slap him down at that time Jimmy would be a better boy to-day. I should do that now since it seems that the boy has no proper parents to bring him up in the right way.'[132]

Father Matthew claimed that he never hit the boy and "only once did I give one boy one slap for downright insubordination and insult." He continued, "there is no truth to her story that I told anyone that I have the authority of the Superintendent to 'knock around children,' or anything of the sort." He went on to state that school policy "is in line with the policy of the government schools in handling the children." He also had "a meeting with the Indians," where they agreed "that a slap for serious misbehavior and an unharmful whipping of legs for running off from school

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[129] Mary Imelda Hanratty, "I Remember," 4, undated, St. Labre Mission, Montana, History Manuscript, Roll 11, Jesuit Archives.

[130] Rev. T. O. Rocque, Superintendent, St. Labre's Mission, to E. B. Lohmiller, Superintendent, March 25, 1925, File: 404 St. Labre's Mission, Correspondence 404-505, Box 4, General Correspondence Files, 1900–1925, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[131] E. B. Lohmiller, Superintendent, to Rev. T. O. Rocque, March 30, 1925, File: 404 St. Labre's Mission, Correspondence 404-505, Box 4, General Correspondence Files, 1900–1925, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver. Although the relationship to Frank Stading Elk is not known, seven-year-old Elizabeth "Bessie" Standing Elk died and was buried at St. Labre in early 1925.

[132] Father Matthew to Superintendent, April 9, 1938, File: 806.3 Catholic Mission, Box 150, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

would be wholesome for their children." He noted that he had only resorted to such corporal punishment three times since 1934.[133]

School administration resolved other behavior issues through student expulsion. In addressing the practice, BIA Education Field Agent Homer B. Frailey wrote to the superintendent in 1940, "I do not think that St. Labre's should be allowed to select pupils. They should take them as they come (living around Ashland) until their quota is filled. Dismissal from school [is] not the proper procedure." That same year, Superintendent Chas. H. Jennings remarked on "troubles" with students at St. Labre. "I am a little afraid that the reverend father is not handling some of the pupils and the parents in a very tactful way, and it has also been reported that some of the sisters have perhaps been a little tough on the pupils, although some of the things the sisters have to put up with from both pupils and parents are no doubt very trying."[134]

Occasionally, internal conflict arose concerning certain individuals working at the school. In 1924, Mother M. Xavier questioned Father Charles Renaudi's "mentality" and presented the ultimatum "if he is to be in the Mission as superior we shall withdraw our nuns." She also said that of the "three men employed there," one was "a thoroughly immoral man, and whose presence around the girls terrify the nuns."[135] Father Rocque expressed his own concerns for the mission and blamed the Edmondites for leaving it in disarray. "My little boys, about 18 or nineteen of them, out of everything but rags," Rocque explained. He said that they lacked underwear, shirts, and shoes but only had "old rags." The mission had also gone into debt and due to "back bills," it lacked funds for basic necessities like blankets "nor enough beds for my children." He pointed out that there were "33 girls in 25 beds with hardly sufficient blankets to go around." The children lacked shoes despite it being winter. "It is discouraging to see those little tots as poorly clad," he wrote and cautioned that "If an inspector in authority came along, I know that he would and he could make a very bad report on our Mission school. This is what I want to prevent."[136]

Rocque's concerns about an inspector's visit appear warranted. That June, an inspector visited the school and reported to the commissioner of Indian affairs that although the children "appeared healthy," and the mission was in better condition than in the past, he found "the usual unsatisfactory conditions in the boys' dormitory where bedding was very badly soiled and in need of laundering," while the girls' dormitory appeared to be in better condition than the boys'.[137]

Sickness and Disease

Substandard living conditions contributed to the sickness and epidemics that appeared throughout the history of the Native American boarding schools. As Historian David Wallace Adams observed, when referring to the diseases inflicting Indigenous peoples in the early nineteenth century, "The situation was especially acute at boarding schools, where epidemics of tuberculosis,

[133] Father Matthew to Superintendent, April 9, 1938, File: 806.3 Catholic Mission, Box 150, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[134] Chas. H. Jennings, Superintendent, to H. B. Frailey, Education Field Agent, February 23, 1940, File: 806.3 Catholic Mission, Box 150, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[135] M. M. Xavier to Rev. William Hughes, October 18, 1924, Frames 465–469, Reel 117, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[136] T. O. Rocque to Rev. William Hughes, November 9, 1924, Frames 470–474, Reel 117, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[137] Charles Henry Burke, Commissioner, Office of Indian Affairs, to Rev. William Hughes, BCIM, June 26, 1924, Frames 463–464, Reel 117, Series 1-1, BCIM.

trachoma, measles, pneumonia, mumps, and influenza regularly swept through overcrowded dormitories, taking a terrible toll on the bodies and spirits of the stricken"[138] Disease presented a constant threat to the schoolchildren of St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles. At various times, school officials implemented quarantine or suspended operations altogether to reduce the impact of infectious diseases on the student population. When children became severely ill, the school typically notified parents, and the children were dismissed. Many of the students sent home died in the days, weeks, or months after returning to their families. In some instances, children died at the schools.

The circumstances surrounding student deaths are not always documented in the historical record. Yet by gathering isolated pieces of historical evidence, an understanding of the conditions that contributed to student deaths emerges. At all three schools, tuberculosis appeared as the leading cause of death. The same can be said for Native American boarding schools elsewhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Adams:

> [T]uberculosis was the most menacing [of the diseases]. In its most life-threatening form, pulmonary consumption, the disease attacked a child's lungs, slowly eating away at the afflicted's strength. When it ran its course, coughing, spitting up blood, and hemorrhaging finally resulted in death. Another form of the disease, scrofula, attacked the lymph glands, causing eruptions and running sores in the regions of the lower face and neck. . . . Both forms were highly contagious. The best defense against the disease was strict hygiene, a nutritious diet, plenty of exercise, and well-ventilated living quarters.[139]

The precautions Adams identifies as means to control the disease are things that the schools often failed to implement. Reports of tuberculosis appeared in the St. Xavier House Diary as early as 1893. When the illness became severe, the school sent the sick children home, sometimes on the advice of a doctor. Other times, the parents of sick children took the initiative to ask that their child be sent home.[140] One consequence of this policy is that children themselves recognized that illness was a way out of the schools, and as one St. Xavier staff member explained, "Our boys feel yet very lonesome; some are sick, and others try to be sick to be able to go home."[141] Another consequence of sending severely ill children home was sickening the children's families and communities. As historian Preston S. McBride observed, "[s]ending sick students back to their communities made them deadly pathogen carriers."[142]

Student illness often progressed to a critical stage before the schools notified parents their child was sick. In 1896, for example, a St. Xavier student became severely ill. After administering last rites, the school notified the girl's parents "when she was considered dead." Suggesting that the situation may not have been handled properly, the House Diary recorded that "God knows how this case was

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[138] David Wallace Adams, *Education to Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 124–25.

[139] Adams, *Education to Extinction*, 130.

[140] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," August 11, 1895, p. 97, pdf p. 236, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," September 29, 1895, p. 100, pdf p. 238, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[141] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," October 4, 1895, p. 101, pdf p. 238, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[142] Preston Scott McBride, "A Lethal Education: Institutionalized Negligence, Epidemiology, and Death in Native American Boarding Schools, 1879-1934" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2020), 192.

treated and the writer knows something also."[143] Nevertheless, the school continued its practice of waiting until students became severely ill before sending them home. Holds Enemy, writing to Plenty Coups in 1905, complained that "[t]his Mission school is no good. . . . When [the children] are sick he keep them untill they are very bad and he gives them back but they do not get well I wish [you] would talk about it."[144]

Influenza, like tuberculosis, also spread among the students at the schools. In 1894, influenza—referred to at the time as la grippe—sickened children at St. Xavier. The outbreak impacted the Crow Reservation as a whole, with one school official writing, "La grippe is all over the country, we have some boys and some girls with la grippe. –boys several mornings have been left in bed during mass."[145] At other times, smallpox and measles threatened the school.[146]

Severe disease outbreaks continued as regular occurrences at St. Labre and St. Xavier well into the twentieth century. Such conditions also proliferated at other reservation schools. It is not known how many of these outbreaks can be directly attributed to the schools themselves, or if they result from the difficult public health conditions that existed throughout the reservations. The 1911 annual statistical report for the Tongue River Agency jurisdiction, which included St. Labre, provides insight into the challenging health situation. That year alone, the BIA identified 73 new cases of tuberculosis and estimated that 427 people had the disease out of a total population of 1,398. Fourteen minors died that year, including five under age three.[147] On the Crow Reservation in 1911, the government estimated that 9 percent of the total Tribal population, or approximately 150 people, had tuberculosis.[148]

[143] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," April 29, 1896, p. 112, pdf p. 244, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[144] Quoted in Bradley, "After the Buffalo Days," 250.

[145] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," February 10, 1894, p. 46, pdf p. 211, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[146] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," December 3 and 17, 1896, p. 39, pdf p. 261, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; January 22, 1905, p. 128, pdf p. 330, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[147] Tongue River Annual Statistical Report, 1911, File: Annual Report [2 of 3], Box 22, Northern Cheyenne Agency, RG 75, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[148] Hoxie, *Parading through History*, 173.

Figure 3. St. Labre Cemetery, undated. St. Labre Indian School Archives, Ashland, MT

The infectious diseases took a devastating toll. Census figures show the population decline on the Crow Reservation from 2,456 in 1887 to 2,126 in 1894. In 1903, the population dropped to 1,941. The population gradually stabilized, but the 1890s marked a time of widespread death. In 1890 alone, the agency recorded 165 deaths, or more than three deaths per week, with half of those who died being less than twenty years of age. In 1887, there were 726 Crow children ages twelve or younger. By 1900, 244 of them had died.[149]

Reliable access to medical care could be difficult to come by on the reservations, which likely contributed to fatal outcomes of children stricken by illness and disease. When children became severely ill, school officials sent for the government physician. This included instances of high fever, influenza, and pneumonia.[150] But doctors were not always available. More often, school personnel who lacked professional training attended to the sick. It is unclear what type of medical care severely sick children received, if any, after being sent home from school. Some of the staff were better equipped than others in caring for the sick. Father Peter Prando at St. Xavier, for example, was reportedly a skilled medical provider known to treat students and community members alike.[151] Even when medical professionals were available, they did not always maintain a positive relationship with the schools. According to one entry in the St. Labre Annals, "The Doctor came this afternoon

[149] Hoxie, *Parading through History*, 132–33.

[150] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," April 26, 1897, pdf p. 255; October 18, 1897, pdf p. 260; November 16, 1897, pdf p. 260; December 6–7, 1897, pdf p. 261, all Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," September 16, 1900, p. 56, pdf p. 294, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," April 25, 1896, p. 111, pdf p. 243, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[151] Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 134.

to investigate our school reports, we are anxious to have everything all right because we have reason to believe he is an enemy in disguise."[152]

A lack of adequate medical facilities through the early 1900s also played a part in the quality of health care available to boarding school students. In 1911, St. Xavier's Father Grant reported on the government's interest in constructing a "general hospital on the reservation . . . owing to the prevalence of tuberculosis & other diseases among them."[153] Grant suggested the possibility of converting the St. Xavier boys school building into a tuberculosis hospital. "The number of boys is decreasing every year," Grant explained, "owing to the general tendency towards day schools on the reservation, the number of diseased children, & the general apathy of the Crows towards schools, especially boarding schools." He anticipated that eventually a lack of enrollment would close the St. Xavier's boarding school "within the next two or three years." The commissioner of Indian affairs ultimately rejected the plan.[154]

By 1913, the government had opened a hospital at Crow Agency and temporarily appointed a doctor at St. Xavier, although he was referred to by St. Xavier's B. C. Keough as "an old man who had not practiced in twenty years."[155] Access to medical care had improved by 1917, when a resident doctor reportedly lived permanently at St. Xavier.[156] The Northern Cheyenne Reservation went without a hospital for longer. According to the agency superintendent writing in 1915, "The are probably very few, if any, Agencies in the Indian Service which are in greater need of a hospital than this one. Many of the Indians of this reservation are located seventy miles from the railroad which would prevent them from being taken to a hospital to be cared for if they were very ill and were so disposed financially able to incur the expense." He also explained that the agency physician and field matrons faced transportation difficulties, including a lack of automobile or horse-drawn passenger vehicle.[157]

Much of the community-wide public health situation existed beyond the control of school administrators, but living conditions at the schools compounded an already difficult situation. Notably, the large number of children living in confined and sometimes-overcrowded student dormitories created situations where illness spread rapidly and often uncontrollably. Poor

[152] Annals of St. Labres Mission, April 13, 1909, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum, Great Falls, Montana. Around six weeks after that entry, another entry in the Annals offered similar sentiment: "We heard good news that Dr. Blakely is going to resign on the first of the month we hope it is true!" Annals of St. Labres Mission, May 30, 1909, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum, Great Falls, Montana

[153] Thomas Grant, SJ, to Fr. Provincial, February 15, 1911, St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, pdf pp. 23–30, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[154] Grant to Provincial, February 15, 1911, St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, pdf pp. 23–30, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; F. H. Abbott, Assistant Commissioner, to Chas. L. Lusk, Sec. Catholic Indian Bureau, May 26, 1911, Folder 7, Box 75, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[155] B. C. Keough to W. H. Ketcham, November 10, 1913, Folder 12, Box 86, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[156] Watembach, "The History of the Catechesis of the Catholic Church on the Crow Reservation," 134.

[157] John A. Buntin, Superintendent, Tongue River Indian Agency, Annual Report, June 30, 1915, Section 2, Narrative, 6, File: Annual Report, Box 22, Northern Cheyenne Agency, RG 75, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

sanitization practices, such as a lack of disinfectants, and insufficient ventilation added to the problem.[158]

A common preventive strategy for controlling disease outbreaks at the schools involved closing school or imposing a quarantine. In March 1900, St. Xavier agreed to a smallpox closure recommended by the agent and the agency physician.[159] The closure was brief, but in April, "fear of an epidemic" led to another closure and concern that "[v]ery likely the children will not return till the beginning of next school year."[160]

When St. Xavier imposed quarantine, it restricted parents from visiting their children to reduce the introduction of disease. In 1903, for example, a smallpox scare led one sister to write, "[s]mall pox is at the agency. May God preserve us from it, around this place."[161] Several days later, she reported "No Indians were allowed to come around today. No mass in the church, owing to the scare of the small pox."[162] Similarly, in 1913, cases of the mumps and the measles led St. Xavier to send three boys home "to prevent the sickness spreading among them," and parents were not allowed to visit.[163] The schools often relied on physician recommendations when dealing with health concerns. In 1906, St. Xavier followed the government doctor's advice that school be let out early that year due to the threat of meningitis after "[a]bout 6 small children died in the valley from this sickness this spring."[164]

School officials often remarked on the difficult health situations they faced, and historical records show many instances when staff perpetuated the myth of the vanishing Indian by predicting the demise of the populations they served. Such commentary positioned the health crises as a foregone conclusion, rather than something that required serious attention.[165] At St. Xavier in 1904, Father Taelman wrote that the Crow people "have died off very fast this winter."[166] A 1913 House Diary entry remarked that the "Crows seem to be losing their fervor. Children still dying & some of the boys sick."[167] An annual letter that same year noted that of the more than forty school children,

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[158] "St. Francis Xavier's Mission, Historical Points," November 16, 1897, pdf p. 260, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; B. C. Keough to W. H. Ketcham, November 10, 1913, Folder 12, Box 86, Series 1-1, BCIM; T. O. Rocque to Rev. William Hughes, November 9, 1924, Frames 470–474, Reel 117, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[159] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," March 23–24, 1900, p. 50, pdf p. 291, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives

[160] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," April 14, 1900, p. 50, pdf p. 291, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[161] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," February 19, 1903, p. 100, pdf p. 316, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[162] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," February 22, 1903, p. 100, pdf page 316, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[163] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1809 – 1933, "Historia Domus," April 13, 1913, page 67, pdf p. 390, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1809–1933, "Historia Domus," April 13, 1913, p. 67, pdf p. 390, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[164] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1898–1908, "Historia Domus," May 21, 1906, p. 152, pdf p. 342, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[165] Preston, "A Lethal Education," 24–25.

[166] Louis Taelman, SJ, to Ketcham, April 20, 1904, Folder 14, Box 47, Series 1-1, BCIM

[167] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, "Historia Domus," May 11, 1913, p. 68, pdf p. 391, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives. St. Xavier's Aloysius Vrebosch, SJ, reported in June 1913 that "about 60 Crow babies died last winter" and the schoolgirls "lost two of their number." See Aloysius Vrebosch, SJ, to Rev. William Ketcham, June 11, 1913, Folder 12, Box 86, Series 1-1, BCIM.

only a dozen were in good health and suggested that "[e]ach generation becomes weaker."[168] By that November, the school reported, "Between 30 and 40 children died last winter in this district and the probabilities are that many more will die this year, as no doubt the germs of the two diseases scarlet fever and diphtheria still remain. There was no quarantine and as far as I could learn no disinfectants used."[169] In 1917, a House Diary entry concluded, "Evidently the tribe is dying out. It's the same process that has been going on for the past thirty years. The Crows as a tribe are bound to become extinct. It's a question of only a few years. 'May they all go to Heaven'"[170]

Beginning in 1918, a nationwide influenza outbreak known as the Spanish Flu swept through the Northern Cheyenne and Crow Reservations. St. Labre recorded its first death from the pandemic that October. According to Bishop M. C. Leachman of the Great Falls Diocese, the child was Yellowhair's daughter, who had recently been expelled from school.[171] The bishop explained that "The poor Indians were just returning from two or three Fairs and brot [sic] thee 'influ' to the reservation. Some of the school children were ill and one… died from the disease."[172] By November, the disease had spread to the point that Father William Arendzen estimated that 90 percent of the Northern Cheyenne were sick with the Spanish Flu. He remarked that "one of our boys," presumably James Bigfoot who reportedly died of the flu that fall, was "dying at the Mission." and that "17 Indians died – three more died yesterday. I spent the whole day in the camps, But I think the worst is over." The school closed temporarily, and Arendzen expressed hope that colder weather would slow the outbreak.[173] Later that month, he remarked that "[T]he Influenza has left a bad 'scar' on the Indians some 65 of them already have died from the disease." However, he continued, "We have had no new cases for the past two weeks."[174]

St. Xavier officials also reported the presence of "Universal Flu" in late 1918, but they expressed relief that the Big Horn Valley had largely been spared.[175] The following spring, however, proved challenging, with sickness becoming prevalent at St. Xavier.[176] In the fall of 1919, based on the agency physician's recommendation, St. Labre again closed temporarily because of influenza. School staff there reported that the disease spread rapidly among the Northern Cheyenne, with a "reported 75% of the Indians ill with Influenza and more new cases every day." The disease appeared most

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[168] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1809–1933, "Historia Domus," June 15, 1913, p. 70, pdf p. 392, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[169] B. C. Keough to W. H. Ketcham, November 10, 1913, Folder 12, Box 86, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[170] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, "Historia Domus," April 1917, p. 153, pdf p. 182, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[171] M. C. Leachman, A. Bishop of Great Falls, to Father William Ketcham, October 18, 1918, BCIM Microfilm, Reel 98, Frame 432.

[172] Bishop of Great Falls to Rev. E. M. Salmon, S.S.E., October 17, 1918, BCIM Microfilm, Reel 98, Frame 433.

[173] William Arendzen, SSE, to Rev. & Dear Father, November 5, 1918, BCIM Microfilm, Reel 98, Frame 434. St. Labre's quarterly attendance report for December 31, 1918, shows the impacts of the influenza, with most children missing school because of the illness. St. Labre suspended operations from October 13 through November 14. See St. Labres Mission Boarding School, Quarterly Contract School Report, December 31, 1918, Folder 2, Box 19, Series 2-1, BCIM.

[174] Arendzen to Dear Father, November 26, 1918, BCIM Microfilm, Reel 89, Frames 435–436.

[175] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, December 1918, p. 138, pdf p. 426, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[176] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, January–March, 1919, p. 139, pdf p. 426, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

prevalent among young people, "especially the age 15 – 25."[177] Even in the midst of the influenza pandemic, other disease outbreaks caused problems. That November, a government physician diagnosed three St. Labre students with smallpox. The BIA detailed a physician from Crow Agency to assist with smallpox vaccinations on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.[178]

Widespread sickness plagued the reservations into 1920. A February St. Xavier House Diary entry described "[m]any children sick everywhere" from the "grippe," or influenza. Several children died of the flu that February.[179] In the early 1920s, ongoing health challenges and low attendance stymied operations at both schools. In August 1921, St. Xavier boarding school closed after declining enrollment.[180]

At St. Labre, Sister Gertude described the community-wide health crisis. "The Cheyenne Indians wish to have their children with them when their health is poor," she explained, "There are so few children of school age, in the Tribe at present and a number of these few are physically not able to attend school." She pointed to tuberculosis as the "prevailing ailment," and "the greater number of pupils who had a severe attack of the flu in 1918 are subject to a weak constitution since that date."[181] The situation became so severe by August 1921 that Sister Gertrude remarked that "[t]here are so few children in the Tribe of school age, they die out like flies in October." She explained that twelve Cheyenne children had died in the Ashland District of whooping cough since March. Those who died were all under age six years except one, who she identified as a "school child."[182] In 1923, health challenges continued. According to Father Renaudin:

> There are no children of school age, chiefly among the boys, death has made quite an ample harvest in the last two years, and there seems to be no improvement to the situation. I have buried two boys last month, one 5 years old, the other 10. If this goes on for a while, there will be only women on this reservation.[183]

St. Labre continued to operate its boarding school, but illnesses remained a constant threat. In 1927, a BIA inspector noted a discrepancy on enrollment figures within a quarterly report that showed 96 percent attendance, but on the date of his visit, he was "informed that the attendance is

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[177] Sister M. Gertrude to the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, October 14, 1918, Series 1-1 BCIM Microfilm, Reel 89, Frames 430–431; Agency Physician to County Health Officer of Rosebud County, November 1, 1919, File: 176 Epidemics, Box 8, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[178] Agency Physician to County Health Officer of Rosebud County, November 1, 1919, File: 176 Epidemics, Box 8, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[179] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, February 9–13, 1920, p. 147, pdf p. 430, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, August 28, 1921, p. 161, pdf p. 437, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives; The school report dated March 31, 1920, lists the following deaths: William Taft Bull in Sight, age 8, Crow, died February 28th of the flu; Vivian Azure, age 10, Cree, died Feb. 22nd of the flu; Alice Ducharme, age 15, Cree, died February 20th of the flu. The St. Xavier House Diary reported the deaths along with those of other community members. William Taft Bull in Sight is listed as having died of influenza in school records, but the cause of death on his county death certificate states that he died of "inanition due to lack of proper food." See State of Montana, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate of Death, Big Horn County, William Taft Bull in Sight, Filed May 1, 1920.

[180] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, August 28, 1921, p. 161, pdf p. 437, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[181] Sister M. Gertrude to BCIM, March 19, 1921, Folder 13, Box 125, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[182] Sister M. Gertrude to Rev. William Ketcham, August 18, 1921, Folder 13, Box 125, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[183] Chas. Renaudin, SSE, to Chas. L. Lusk, Sec. Catholic Indian Bureau, May 7, 1923, Folder 20, Box 137, Series 1-1, BCIM.

irregular and that about one half of the children were out on account of an epidemic of measles on the reservation."[184] Moreover, the impact of the Spanish Flu could still be felt at St. Labre more than a decade after the pandemic subsided. In January 1933, for example, Father Francis Busalt remarked with regard to a seasonal influenza outbreak that "Many Indians are sick. Some have died. They are always afraid of the hospital but now remembering the ravages of 1918 they are just anxious to get in."[185]

The health situation at St. Labre and St. Xavier mirrored the situation at many Native American boarding schools. From the 1880s through the 1930s, historical records are filled with reports of illness. Historian David Wallace Adams described the national scale of the problem, noting that in 1890, "Boarding school students were more likely to die than any other groups in the United States."[186] Over time, however, the schools became better equipped to handle health challenges. Improved facilities with indoor plumbing helped, as did modern medicine. Notably, the development of antibiotics, starting with penicillin in 1928, provided a critical form of treatment for various ailments.[187] Most importantly, school administrators developed policies aimed at curtailing infectious disease. By the 1940s, for example, the Franciscan Sisters at St. Labre had developed protocols for handling tuberculosis that were both simple and effective. Students were "screened, taken to hospitals, cured and returned to school, where conditions were carefully monitored."[188] The result of the improved facilities, medical treatments, and concerted policies meant that death from illness and disease had become far less common at the schools by the 1940s and 1950s.[189]

Student Burials & Mission Cemeteries

Both the Northern Cheyenne and Crow customarily buried their dead shortly after death. This practice continued at the missions, with records showing that burials took place on the day of, or day after, the death. Sister Saint Angela Louise Abair described the first death of a child at St. Labre. She said the child succumbed to unknown causes at the "Indian tents" where children lived with their families a half mile from the school. The experience proved memorable for the Ursuline Sisters, who heard screams of grieving family but did not understand why until morning, when they learned a girl had died and was buried. Sister Abair did not record the child's name or even if she attended the school but did note that it "was our first experience with the death toll of the Indian, and we did not forget it for some time."[190]

As part of their ministry, Ursuline Sisters attended the deaths of many Cheyenne and Crow children near the schools, but not all of them were students. Sister Abair described visiting a ten-year-old boy who was dying. She recalled that he was partly paralyzed and not baptized, and there was no priest. As with many children who died at the time, the parents buried him in the hills.

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[184] Charles F. Peirce, Supervisor, Report on Schools at Tongue River Agency, Mont., February 2, 1927, 3. File: 055 School Supervisors Report 1927-1929, Box 11, Northern Cheyenne Agency, NARA Denver.

[185] Father Francis Busalt, OFM Cap, to 99+Mathias Weldon, January 3, 1933, Folder 17, Box 216, Series 1-1, BCIM.

[186] Adams, *Education to Extinction*, 124–25.

[187] Preston, "A Lethal Education," 30.

[188] Reneé S. Flood, *Renegade Priest Among the Northern Cheyenne: The Life and Work of Father Emmett Hoffman 1926-* (self-published, 2003), 64.

[189] For known causes of death at St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles, see student death tables in Appendix I.

[190] Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana," 22.

Similarly, she wrote about visiting a sick girl who she baptized before the girl succumbed to her illness. She was also buried in the hills.[191]

Sister Abair arrived alongside other Ursuline Sisters to establish St. Labre in 1884 and spent more than a decade there. She later wrote a memoir recounting her experiences that describes the circumstances surrounding the death of three students that took place on the St. Labre campus. "In my twelve years of mission work," Abair wrote, "only three children died at the mission, and that was because they would not go home." She recounted the death of a little boy "about six years old" who had been baptized Peter Paul. She explained that he refused to go home until his grandmother agreed to let him stay. He died and was buried in the mission cemetery.[192]

Sister Abair recalled the second death at the mission as a little girl named Theresa. The third child was "little Mary about ten who was sick only a few days." Her death came at a time when the Cheyenne families camped nearby had traveled to the agency for food. Presumably to prove that the child died a natural death, the Ursuline Sisters delayed her burial until the parents returned. "We knew her parents would make a big fuss, so we did not put the coffin in the grave, but left it near till the next day." The nuns eventually buried Mary "near the other two, to the great joy of all the children."[193] Although she may not have been a student, the 1898 St. Labre funeral of four-year-old Sarah Standing Elk was reportedly the first funeral there to have "all the ceremonies and psalms" sung from "the church to the grave yard."[194]

Burials took place on St. Xavier property in the early 1890s, too. The location of this original cemetery is not recorded, and most of the burials at the time continued to take place at unknown locations "in the hills." Historical records show that the mission developed a new cemetery in 1895. According to a House Diary entry dated June 11, 1895, the "new graveyard was selected below the ice house, area 50 ft x 50 ft."[195]

The St. Xavier Mission Cemetery provided consecrated grounds for both student and community burials. In at least one instance, a Catholic priest refused to bury a woman within the cemetery because "she was living with a man who had been separated from his lawful wife" so "She was buried outside of the grave yard by the Inds. themselves."[196] This appears to have been an unusual situation, but it does raise the possibility of additional burials existing on St. Xavier Mission property outside of the cemetery.

In 1938, St. Xavier expanded its cemetery. According to an article in the *Montana Catholic Registry* "the old graveyard that has been used since the early days of the mission has no room for new graves and it is necessary to add to it."[197] The House Diary reported that the "addition to the old Mission cemetery was graded & Fenced & great credit is due those who aided withe [sic] the work.

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[191] Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana," 23–24.

[192] Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana," 29.

[193] Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana," 30.

[194] Annals of St. Labres Mission, March 13, 1898, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum, Great Falls, Montana.

[195] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Historical Points, June 11, 1895, p. 93, pdf p. 234, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[196] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1909–1933, June 15, 1913, p. 70, pdf p. 392, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[197] "Indian Cemetery Will Be Enlarged," *Montana Catholic Register*, undated [circa April 1938], File: Montana Catholic Register, Excerpts of Crow Reservation, 1938, Box 5, Crow Catholic Collection, LBHC.

A dinner was given Sunday in the School recreation hall to celebrate the finishing of the cemetery work."[198]

The St. Labre Mission Cemetery appears to have existed in the same location throughout the mission's history. It is described in historical records at various times, including May 1957, when "Indians turn[ed] out to help fix the cemetery, level ground etc. White crosses were painted and lettered by boys of school, mostly during school hours. A sturdy 4 foot metal fence was later set in place all around the cemetery plot."[199] Both St. Labre and St. Xavier Mission Cemeteries continue to be used for community burials. There is no known cemetery located on St. Charles Mission property. Additionally, records show that there are many unmarked burials "in the hills" surrounding Ashland, St. Xavier, and Pryor.

Figure 4. St. Labre Cemetery, undated. St. Labre Indian School Archives, Ashland, MT

Summary

The student experience at the St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles Mission Schools shares characteristics in common with Native American boarding schools elsewhere during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The schools got their start as a mechanism of federal

[198] St. Francis Xavier Mission, Montana, House Diary, 1933–1960, September 11, 1938, p. 57, pdf p. 535, Roll 14, Jesuit Archives.

[199] St. Labre House Diary, May 11, 1957, pdf p. 38, St. Labre Archives, Ashland, Montana.

Indian policy with school curriculum focused heavily on assimilation to Anglo-American culture through various means, including strict discipline and corporal punishment.

At various points in time, the schools were poorly equipped to care for the large number of children in their custody. Historical records show frequent complaints about the substandard facilities and lack of financial resources to provide for the students there. Students sometimes lacked things essential to their well-being such as adequate clothes, shoes, beds, blankets, and heat. School funding arrangements compensated the schools on a per capita basis for student enrollment and attendance, which incentivized the schools to admit children ill-equipped to attend and to keep students at the schools who suffered from various ailments. Parents maintained contact with their children, although this was sometimes limited to just one hour per week. Parents became aware of the conditions that existed at the schools and sometimes spoke critically about the living conditions and treatment students endured there.

The groups of children living in confined spaces at the schools allowed infectious disease to proliferate. Tuberculosis, influenza, measles, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and other illness spread within the buildings. Children who got sick may have been isolated from the general school population, but they often lacked access to professional medical care. Government physicians were responsible for providing health care for large populations spanning considerable geography, all during a time when transportation could be unreliable. School officials called for the physicians, but it sometimes took children days to receive the necessary, and potentially lifesaving, care.

The sisters and priests who operated the schools often expressed resentment toward the parents and the Northern Cheyenne and Crow communities and showed reluctance to let the children leave their control. The actions of school officials reflect social and cultural influences that existed at the time. School staff regularly predicted the extinction of the Tribes, and they assumed the children would get sick and die. The priests and sisters tended to the sick and anointed them with their last rites. They also conducted funerals and held Christian burials in the mission cemeteries.

St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles have important differences from off-reservation Native American boarding schools. The Jesuits, Ursulines, and other missionaries operated the schools as part of their ministry among the Cheyenne and Crow. They intended the missions to be a central part of community life for the populations they served. Community members often lived near the missions and attended services, religious feast days, and holidays. Parents saw and visited their children. Children went home for Christmas and summer breaks. The schools sent severely sick children home to be cared for by their families. Sometimes, families buried their deceased children in their own custom at locations other than the mission cemeteries. At various points, parents supported the schools and advocated for their continuation rather than send the children away to distant off-reservation boarding schools.

By the 1910s, views on Native American education had begun to shift. Community members advocated for day schools, and St. Labre and St. Xavier allowed some day students. In the 1920s into the mid-1930s, St. Xavier operated exclusively as a day school. From there, both schools functioned as hybrid day and boarding schools. Operating as a hybrid school meant even greater transparency relative to school operations and strengthened connections with the local communities. The 1910s also marked a notable influx of students other than Northern Cheyenne and Crow into the schools. Some of these students enrolled as full-time boarding students and likely had little contact with their families, while others lived locally.

The circumstances surrounding student deaths and burials at St. Labre, St. Xavier, and St. Charles are not always clear. Death is unique to each individual, and occasionally poor record keeping limits what historical documents can tell us about each child who may have died at the schools. We do know that at least 113 children died while enrolled in the schools, or shortly after attending them, between 1884 and 1960. This total includes 59 Northern Cheyenne and 37 Crow children, but also two children identified as Cheyenne Arapahoe, one child identified as Cheyenne Sioux, three children identified as Cree, two children identified as White, and one child identified as Mexican. There are at least eight children who died whose Tribal affiliation is not known from the documents. This is a substantial loss of life, and there are likely many others whose deaths are not recorded in documents reviewed during this investigation. The factors that influenced how the schools operated and the conditions in which they existed ultimately created an unhealthy environment for school children and contributed to their deaths.

Known Student Deaths

The following tables provide a summary of known student deaths based on historical records reviewed over the course of the investigation. These tables are limited to children ages 4–18, unless otherwise noted. It is not always documented if the children were enrolled in the schools, where they died, or where they are buried. In all instances, deaths listed on records like sacramental death registries or within death certificates were cross referenced with school enrollment lists.

Table 1. St. Charles Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Antonia	May 20, 1896	n/a	Crow	Listed as a schoolgirl at Pryor, presumably St. Charles.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
John Woagstas	Circa 1890	n/a	Northern Cheyenne (NC)	St. Labre student reportedly killed by U.S. soldiers for allegedly assisting an accused murderer escape.	Wilfred Schoenberg, S.J., *Jesuits in Montana* (Portland: The Oregon-Jesuit, 1960), 58
Peter Paul	Circa 1890	6	NC	Described as one of three children who died at the mission during its first twelve years. Baptized as Peter Paul. Went home sick with his grandmother but returned to the mission to die. He had a high fever. Buried in a coffin made by old school boys. Funeral and burial in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	Sister Saint Angela Louise Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana: Recollection of the First Indian Mission in Montana," Orlan J. Svingen, ed., *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1984)
Therese (or Theresa)	Circa 1890	8	NC	Described as one of three children who died at the mission during its first twelve years. Refused "to go to the Indian tent." Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana"
Little Mary	Circa 1890	10	NC	Described as one of three children who died at the mission during its first twelve years. Died when parents went to the agency for food. Sisters kept her out of the coffin until the parents returned. Buried in a coffin in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery "near the other two" (Therese and Peter Paul).	Abair, "A Mustard Seed in Montana"

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Annunciata Calf	Circa 1895	n/a	NC	Sister of John Calf. Cause of death unknown, buried in the hills.	St. Labre Annals
John Calf	February 5, 1897	10	NC	Sick, living off-site, buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	St. Labre Annals
Stephanus Wiogtye, AKA Stephen	February 10, 1897	4	NC	Died and buried the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No cause listed. Son of Maheyanne. "[B]uried in the church w fine procession. The cloths [?], bedding etc was put with the grave of Stephen." School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; Labre Annals
Augustinus Farvini, AKA August Yellow Hair	April 2, 1897	11	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No cause of death listed. Son of Yellow Hair and Rattlesnake. School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Illuminata Ekossesa	February 5, 1898	9	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No cause listed. Child of Moisa and Mokya. School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911
Rose Mary	Novemb er 15, 1898	n/a	NC	Living offsite, received sacraments, unknown burial location.	St. Labre Annals
Sarah Standing Elk	March 6, 1898	4	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Listed as daughter of Eugene Standing Elk. Identified as "Little Sarah." Father present at funeral. Referred to as a "baby." School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; St. Labre Annals; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Julia	October 27, 1899	n/a	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No other information. School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911
Francis Big Crow	Septemb er 27, 1901	10	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No cause listed. Son of Big Crow and Door Woman. School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Marianne Haowots	May 15, 1903	14	NC	Died after going home.	Handwritten enrollment record, June 30, 1903, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Helen Gosick	June 1903	10	NC	Died during "vacation 1903."	Handwritten enrollment record, June 30, 1903, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum
John Shoulderblade	March 7, 1906	8	NC	Death reported on quarterly report. Did not list name, but he was only child not in full attendance that quarter. Census records confirm his death.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Census records; Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum
Victor Red Bird	April 13, 1907	9	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Son of Sioux Red Bird and Cecelia Spotted Wolf. Baptized April 24, 1898. School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Charles Bigcrow	July 28, 1909	11	NC	Son of Big Crow. Left school in late March.	St. Labre Annals; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Bernadette (Bernadette Koosahahe)	February 2, 1910	n/a	NC	Sick and died at home but brought to the mission for burial. Doctor told the school in March 1909, "Bernadette is not fit to be in school and must be taken off the reports."	St. Labre Annals; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Emily Bigcrow, AKA Francis Big Crow	February 20, 1910	7	NC	Listed on attendance roll as only present 34 days and removed the following quarter. Out of school since Christmas, buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of Big Crow. Report listed one student death that quarter.	St. Labre Annals; St. Labre Cemetery Database; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Richard Basil Crawling	Ca. September 30, 1910	18	NC	Listed as deceased on quarterly report. As explained in *The Indian Sentinel*, "Bazil Crawlin" had tuberculosis and was taken home, but "insisted that his tent should be moved near the Mission where the good missionaries could visit him daily." Mother St. Thecla present at his death. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery with personal belongings, including his spring bed, cup, and tea plate.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; *The Indian Sentinel* 2, no. I (January 1920): 92; St. Labre Annals

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Clara Fingers	1906	16	NC	Died after a few weeks of sickness. Death took place during "Mr. Clifford's term." Possibly Otis Fingers daughter who "took sick suddenly at bedtime." Taken home by her aunt.	BCIM Correspondence; St. Labre scholarship record; Indian Census Rolls; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Son of Little Bird	Ca. 1906	n/a	NC	Swelling and sores. Became sick and aunt took the child because parents were gone.	BCIM Correspondence. Possibly Thomas Little Bird.
Caroline Red Bird	May 16, 1914	18	NC	Daughter of Sioux Red Bird and Cecelia. School enrollment status not known.	Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Oliver Brownbird	October 26, 1915	14 or 15	NC	Died of tuberculosis. Son of Joseph Brownbird. Left school May 8, 1915, on Sick Leave. Listed as buried on October 28, 1915, in the Sacraments Register. Appears on BCIM Quarterly Reports.	Labre Annals; Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Mary Medicinebird, AKA Josephine Medicinebird	February 7, 1917	13	NC	Pulmonary tuberculosis. Death certificate says Mary was in school, daughter of Nelson Medicinebird. Only Josephine and Gertrude Medicinebird listed as students at St. Labre. Josephine was listed as out sick. Gertrude listed as married in 1923, father is Nelson. It is likely Josephine Medicinebird is Mary Medicinebird.	Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Paul Whitehawk, AKA Thomas Whitehawk	May 6, 1917	6	NC	Died of tuberculosis. Report listed sickness and death. Out of school since April 22. Another report listed his death date as May 5 at the age of 7.	St. Labre Archival Records, Term Record enrollment list; Death Certificate
Mary Whitehawk	June 14, 1917	14	NC	Report listed sickness and death. Out of school since May 2. Another report listed her death date as June 10.	BCIM Quarterly Reports
James Bigfoot	Ca. December 31, 1918	14	NC	Died of influenza. Reportedly "dying at the Mission." BCIM Quarterly Report states that he died October 14 of influenza. Last appeared on census records September 30, 1918.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; U.S. Census

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Mary Bigfoot, AKA Anna Whitebigfoot	June 26, 1921	7 or 8	NC	Died of tuberculosis. Daughter of White Big Foot and Louise Sunbear. Listed as age 8 with last name Whitebigfoot and having died on the September 1921 quarterly report.	Death Certificate; NARA Quarterly Reports
Joseph Standingelk	October 10, 1921	6	NC	Son of Henry Standing Elk and Laurentia Walks Easy.	NARA Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Annals; Vol. 1 St. Labre Mission Sacraments Register, 1883–1911; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Mattias Foot, AKA Mathew James Foot, AKA Jacobus, AKA James (Joseph) Foot	January 25, 1922	7 or 8	n/a	Unknown cause of death. Son of Albert Foot or Poplar and Jennie or Josette Littlewhiteman. Listed as Jame Foote on St. Labre Cemetery Database	NARA Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; St. Labre Burial Registry; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Patrick Brownbird	April 29, 1922	16	NC	Unknown cause of death.	NARA Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Burial Registry, St. Labre Cemetery Database
Peter Little Bird	July 21, 1922	19	NC	Enrollment report listed "incurable disease" and on sick leave; listed as buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	NARA Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Burial Registry; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Lucy Hallowbreast	1923	8	NC	Became sick and aunt took the child because parents were gone. She died after a few weeks of sickness. Took place during "Mr. Clifford's term."	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; NARA Quarterly Report
Stephen Chasing Bear	January 26, 1923	17 (18 on death cert.)	NC	Buried in Mission cemetery on January 26, 1923. Death certificate reports that he died of tuberculosis. Son of Casey Chasing Bear. Listed as a school boy.	St. Labre Burial Registry; Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Report; St. Labre Cemetery Database
John Crawling, AKA James Basilius Crawling, Alfred Crawling	June 2, 1923	10	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Son of Earoli Crawling. Death certificate lists father as Chas. Crawling. Died of snake bite.	St. Labre Burial Register; Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Report; St. Labre Cemetery Database

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Isabel Sanchez, AKA Grace Elizabeth Sanchez, Isabel Grace Elizabeth Sanchez	June 30, 1924, or July 11, 1924	7	n/a	Died of tuberculosis of the lungs. Sick for 31 months. Not recorded if she ever attended St. Labre due to her sickness. Sister attended school, but child was sick before enrolling. Listed as "out of school" in Ashland district. Letter denying her admission into a tuberculosis sanitorium stated, "I am sorry, I assure you, that we cannot make room for the girl." Listed as excused from school by Fr. Renaudin SSE in 1923. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of George Sanchez and Cecelia Whitemoon. Named Grace Elizabeth on death certificate.	St. Labre Burial Register; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database; NARA School Census correspondence
Regina Wooden Thigh	October 2, 1924	14	NC	Left school with tuberculosis. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of Raphael and Lena Sponge.	St. Labre Burial Register; BCIM Quarterly Report; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Elizabeth (Bessie) Standingelk	March 11, 1925	7	NC	Bronchial pneumonia. Daughter of Henry and Laurentia. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	NARA Quarterly Enrollment Report; Death Certificate; St. Labre Burial Registry; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Rose Angela White Big Foot, AKA Rosa Bigfoot	June 15, 1925	6	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of White Big Foot and Louise Sun Bear. Died of valvular heart disease.	St. Labre Burial Registry; Death Certificate; NARA Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Mary Helen White Hawk	August 30, 1925	5	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of Andrew White Hawk and Helen Big Head Man.	St. Labre Burial Registry; BCIM Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Mary Wolf Ear	April 15, 1926	14	NC	Developed a cold over Christmas that worsened over the winter. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of Willis Wolf Ear and Rose Sponge.	St. Labre Burial Registry; NARA Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Cemetery Database; St. Labre Diary, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Mary Wolf	July 1926	12	Cheyenne Arapahoe	Developed a cold over Christmas and was sent home at Easter and "hung on until July" when she died in Miles City with her family where they were attending the round up. Buried "some where in the outskirts of Miles City."	St. Labre Diary, Ursuline Collection, Great Falls History Museum; NARA Quarterly Reports
John (Dan) Wolfblack	December 9, 1926	16	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Listed as 17 in the burial registry. Son of Dallas Wolfblack and Ella Americanhorse. Died in a car accident.	NARA Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Mary Big Head, AKA Laura Mary Bigheadman	November 6, 1934	6	NC	Report says she left school October 26, 1934. Also known as Laura May Bigheadman. Died of tuberculosis and meningitis.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database; Indian Census Roll
Mary Margaret Theresa O'Leary	January 12, 1935	16	White	Died of acute dilatation of the heart and epilepsy "5 years duration." Cause listed from patient history, not autopsy. Listed as a high school student from Big Horn, MT, who died at St. Labre Mission.	Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Annie K. Soldier Wolf, AKA Katherine Soldierwolf	February 1935	12	NC	Listed as having left school sick on February 11. Died a short time later. Death certificate lists cause of death as "Exposure to Cold." Daughter of Mary Killsnight and John Soldierwolf. Listed as a student. Died and buried at Lame Deer.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; U.S. Census
Margaret Hardrobe, AKA Mary Margaret Hardrobe	June 5, 1935	17	NC	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis, daughter of John Hardrobe and Esther Hardrobe. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Charles Shaved Head	July 20, 1938	14	Cheyenne Arapahoe	Died of tuberculosis, trachoma, and enlargement of the heart. Died in Birney, not in hospital. Day school student, not clear if he ever boarded at St. Labre. Son of Jeffrey Shavedhead and Jean Swallow	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; Death Certificate

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Virginia Sinclair	1938	12	Cree	Lobar pneumonia and influenza. Daughter of Jeremiah Sinclair and Eliza Rosett, from Choteau. Parents originally from North Dakota and Alberta. Died at the hospital in Lame Deer.	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Ella Lonewolf, AKA Mary Ella Lonewolf	May 15, 1940	14	NC	Tuberculosis, pulmonary, daughter of Charles Lonewolf and Rose Blackmedicine.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Julius Seminole, AKA Jules Seminole	March 7, 1941	9 or 8	NC	Diphtheria, tracheal, son of John Seminole and Mary Redbird. Listed as a St. Labre student, died at the hospital in Lame Deer.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Theresa TwoTwo	February 28, 1941	8	Cheyenn eSioux	Poliomyelitis acute, anterior. Daughter of Stephen TwoTwo and Thelma Foot. Listed as a St. Labre Student, died at hospital in Lame Deer.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Stephen Sponge, AKA Charles Sponge	1941	10	NC	Died of tuberculosis condition. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Son of Oliver Sponge and Clara Tangleyellowhair.	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Paul Sponge	April 9, 1941	13	NC	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Father was informant. Son of Oliver Sponge and Clara Tangleyellowhair. Listed as a St. Labre student.	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Robert Chasingbear (Albert Bigfoot)	Septemb er 17, 1941	17	NC	Died of drowning and also had epilepsy. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. He was a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division when he died, so may have recently left school. Son of Florence Big Foot.	Death Certificate; St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Jerome William Little Bird, AKA James Little Bird	March 14, 1942	17	NC	Died of pneumonia, right lower lobe, and pulmonary tuberculosis. Son of Peter Littlebird and Jennie Brownbird. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	1942 Annual School Census; BCIM Quarterly Report; Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Bertha Sponge, AKA Roberta Sponge	April 5, 1942	8	NC	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Daughter of Oliver Sponge and Clara T. Yellowhair.	Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database

Table 2. St. Labre Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Charles Sponge, AKA Stephen Charles Sponge	April 22, 1942	11	NC	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Son of Oliver Sponge and Clara Tangle Yellowhair.	Death Certificate, BCIM Quarterly Reports
Marie Bigheadman	July 28, 1942	13	NC	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Daughter of William Bigheadman and Nellie Yellownose. Father listed as informant. Listed as a St. Labre student.	Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Marie White Horse, AKA Rite Marie White Horse	1943	14	NC	Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of William White Horse and Agnes Yellow Nose.	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Elva (Eva) Big Head	July 24, 1944	11	NC	Died of unknown cause. Daughter of Charles Big Head and Clara Old Bull. Appears to be buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	St. Labre Archival Records, Scholarship record; St. Labre Cemetery Database
Mary Bigheadman, Possibly Louise Bigheadman	May 28, 1950	14	NC	Died at home of tuberculosis of kidney. Daughter of Ben Bigheadman and Julie Swallow.	Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Belva Littlebird	December 25, 1959	15	NC	Died in a rollover car accident. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery. Daughter of Roberta Littlebird.	Death Certificate; St. Labre Cemetery Database; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Eva Mae Big Head	December 25, 1959	14	NC	Died in a car rollover car accident. Daughter of Ben Big Head and Mary Limpy. Buried in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery.	Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Reports; St. Labre Cemetery Database

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Anna	July 1, 1890	11	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Flora	February 18, 1891	7	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Maria Immaculate	April 18, 1892	5	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Mary	October 28, 1892	12	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Rose Mary	October 3, 1892	6	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Thomas	December 21, 1892	6	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Teresa Harrison	Ca. January 30, 1894	10	Crow	Sick for several weeks. Given sacraments when "nearly dying." Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery with "very few Indians present."	St. Xavier "Daily Account," Jesuit Archives; St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Agnes	April 22, 1895	11	Crow	Former schoolgirl, died at camp. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	St. Xavier "Daily Account," Jesuit Archives
Mary Hill, Amajauish	June 18, 1895	12	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Nellie Zahm Cummins	December 16, 1895	17	n/a	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Unknown school enrollment status. Sick for at least two weeks before death.	St. Xavier "Daily Account," Jesuit Archives; St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Name Unknown	April 29, 1896	n/a	n/a	Received last sacraments and sent home when "considered dead."	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Lucy	May 21, 1896	n/a	Crow	Listed as a schoolgirl who died at home.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Mary Louise Gunchief	July 17, 1899	16	Crow	Listed as a schoolgirl. Died at "the camp," likely buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Died of consumption/tuberculosis. Daughter of Sun Chief, who brought the girl to see the doctor.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; St. Xavier Mission Burials Register, St. Dennis Parish
Josie (Josephine Arm)	July 21, 1899	n/a	Crow	Listed as schoolgirl, likely home for the summer. Parents prevented the priest from giving her last sacraments. Buried in the hills. House diary stated "Josie is sick. Has she been drugged?" Probably Josephine Arm, age 13, on BCIM Quarterly report of September 1899 who was listed as only attending 27 out of 92 days that spring.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Appolonia Mountain	February 5, 1902	12	Crow	Went home sick, died three weeks later. Buried in the hills.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Little Rita (Rita Buffalo)	Unknown, ca. February 23, 1903	8	Crow	Listed as Pius's sister. Died at home of consumption/tuberculosis. Quarterly report does not list withdrawals that quarter, but her name disappeared from the roll.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Michael O'Brien	April 17, 1901	n/a	n/a	Reportedly cared for by Fr. Prando beginning February 24. Student of the school who left and came back to the mission to be near the priests. "They did all they could for him." Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Regis Mount	January 30, 1904	n/a	Crow	Stayed at the Mission. Died surrounded by his mother, his brother and sisters "to whom he affectionately bid good-bye the moment before he died." Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Little Daughter of Tsukash	February 5, 1904	n/a	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery with "quite a few Indians present." School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Walter Hunt	March 1, 1904	n/a	Crow	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Leading one school official to remark, "A good change for the better is setting in among the Indians."	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Columba Rides the Horse	November 6, 1904	16	Crow	Had gone home, but she asked to return to Mission to die. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Aegidius Last	Circa January 1905	n/a	Crow	Aegidius Last reportedly only attended 60 days and was the only student not in full attendance. Report lists one student death that quarter, so it was presumably Aegidius Last, who no longer appeared on school rolls.	BCIM Quarterly Reports
Gabrial Goes Plain	March 14, 1905	n/a	Crow	Identified as a schoolboy, not recorded if he attended school in Pryor or St. Xavier.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Margaret Faces the Mountain	June 10, 1905	13	Crow	Sent home with consumption, received sacraments, buried in the hills.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Bella Sucker, AKA Belle Sucher on Indian Census Rolls	Circa August 3, 1906	12	Crow	Death reported on quarterly school report.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Indian Census Rolls
Philip Born Last	Circa March 30, 1907	8	Crow	Death reported on quarterly school report.	BCIM Quarterly Reports
Unnamed child	February 9, 1913	n/a	Crow	Funeral and presumably burial in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. "[A]ll the children and most of the Inds. Present attended."	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Cecelia Old Elk, AKA Mary Old Elk	April 9, 1913	14	Crow	Died of tuberculosis. Sick and left school at Christmas. Funeral and presumably burial at St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Her name is listed as Mary on the death certificate.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Reports

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Joseph Short Bull, AKA Joseph Holds Up	January 22, 1914	19	Crow	He asked to be returned to mission after his death. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Listed as Joseph Holds Up on death certificate, age 18. House Diary lists him as age 14 and "one of our old school boys."	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; Death Certificate
Mary Born Last	June 6, 1914	14	Crow	Died of tuberculosis 7 weeks after leaving school in April. Unknown burial location	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Irene Little Owl	September 4, 1914	14	Crow	Died of acute indigestion and weakness of the heart. Ate raw musk melons from her mother's wagon, which are known to cause cardiac issues.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Angela Buffalo, AKA Angela Birds Go Fast; AKA Birds Go First	December 17, 1915	14	Crow	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis two months after being sent home sick. Dropped from school roll December 1. Identified as Angela Buffalo in 1914, but Angela Birds Go Fast in 1915 and Birds Go First on death certificate.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate
Mary Rose Plenty Good	August 9, 1915	19	Crow	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Contracted the disease at St. Xavier. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Died at Crow Agency.	Death Certificate; BCIM Quarterly Reports; St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives
Regina Among the Fog	May 28, 1916	12	Crow	Dropped from the roll May 26, with reason listed as "sickness & death." Death certificate listed her as 11 years old and cause of death as pulmonary tuberculosis. Disease contracted at St. Xavier, died at Crow Agency.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate
Mayvale (Mary) Knows	May 25, 1916	16	Crow	Dropped from the roll May 27. Listed due to "sickness & death." Died of pulmonary tuberculosis at Crow Agency.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate
Peter Two Belly	June 6, 1918	10	Crow	Death listed on the Quarterly Report as having died on June 6.	BCIM Quarterly Reports

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Vivian Azure	February 18, 1920	10	Cree	Died of the flu. Buried February 19.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Vincent O'Brien	March 14, 1920	10	White	Son of Daniel F O'Brien and Anna O'Brien. Likely a day student and not clear if he ever boarded. Appears in 1920 U.S. Census as White, living in Big Horn County, born in Minnesota, son of Daniel O'Brien, a native of Ireland. Not on any enrollment registers. Documents show a Dan O'Brien sometimes worked at St. Xavier. BCIM Report specifically states that "full-blood white pupils" should be reported separately; he did not appear on BCIM Quarterly Reports. Obituary for his mother, Anna O'Brien, said she was also born in Minnesota and moved to Montana in 1908, the family was Catholic, and attended St. Xavier Church for 40 years as of 1956.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; U.S. Census; *Billings Gazette*
William Taft Bull in Sight	February 28, 1920	8	Crow	Died of influenza. However, death certificate says he died of "inanition due to lack of proper food." Son of Bull in Sight and Paulie Takes the Feather. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate
Alice Ducharme	February 20, 1920	15	Cree	Died of influenza and pneumonia, one of three people who shared a funeral that day. House Diary listed death on February 14, 1920, at 5:30 PM, likely at the school.	St. Xavier House Diary, Jesuit Archives; BCIM Quarterly Reports
Day School Only 1922–1935					
Thomas Abel Hill	February 23, 1938	4	Crow	Unknown cause of death and no doctor in attendance. Son of Thomas Hill and Edna Stops. School enrollment status not known.	Death Certificate
Rose (Rosa) Chavez	December 12, 1938	12	Mexican	Died of "[n]atural cause not definitely known." Death occurred at home in St. Xavier. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Daughter of Joe Chavez and Delorea Corona. School enrollment status not known.	St. Xavier Death Register; Death Certificate

Table 3. St. Xavier Known Student Deaths.

Child Name	Death Date	Age	Tribe	Circumstances/burial	Sources
Pauline Crooked Arm	December 6, 1939	15 (18 on death cert.; 19 on Death Register)	Crow	Died of pulmonary tuberculosis. Daughter of Carl Crooked Arm and Philomena Fire. Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery.	BCIM Quarterly Reports; Death Certificate; Find a Grave; Death Register
Mary Alham/ Mary Alden	December 10, 1955	15	n/a	Died of hydrocarbon poisoning, inhalation of gasoline "Girl had been inhaling fumes from gasoline for several years (at least 3) parents knew it but could not stop her." She also had a heart condition. Death at home, ruled accidental. Buried at the St. Xavier. Daughter of Fred Alden and Maude Prairie Bird. School enrollment status not known.	Death Register; Death Certificate
Dorthy Little Owl	December 8, 1958	15	n/a	Died of labor pneumonia. Listed as a student. Died and buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Daughter of William Little Owl and Agnes Ceasley. School enrollment status not known.	Death Register; Death Certificate
Georgina Reed	April 15, 1959	n/a	n/a	Buried in the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. School enrollment status not known.	Death Register

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Appendix I: LiDAR Investigation

Aerial LiDAR Investigations at the St. Charles Property and the St. Labre and St. Xavier Cemeteries, Big Horn and Rosebud Counties, Montana

Re: Student Deaths and Unmarked Burials

Submitted to:
St. Labre Investigative Commission

St. Labre Indian School

Submitted by:
Historical Research Associates, Inc.
Ethan P. Ryan, PhD

Missoula, Montana
May 2024

Historical Research Associates, Inc.

This portion of the project was implemented by HRA archaeologist Ethan P. Ryan, PhD, who meets the Secretary of the Interior's professional qualifications standards for archaeology and is a certified FAA Part-107 Remote Pilot. This report is intended for the exclusive use of the Client and its representatives. It contains professional conclusions and recommendations concerning the potential for project-related impacts to cultural resources based on the results of HRA's investigation.

Executive Summary and Findings

HRA completed 113.5 acres of aerial survey across five flights at the St. Charles, St. Xavier, and St. Labre properties. The goal of the aerial survey was to determine if there is evidence of undocumented and unmarked graves outside of the cemetery boundaries at St. Labre and St. Xavier and on the property of St. Charles. The resulting LiDAR and photogrammetry data revealed several cultural and natural features that are not visible from the surface. However, there is no evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves outside of the cemetery boundaries or on the St. Charles property in surveyed areas. The major findings from the aerial surveys are as follows:

- No evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves was found in the flight path at St. Charles. However, footprints from historic-period structures relating to the early development of St. Charles were visible. Building footprints include the original chapel location, several residential structures, and a possible garden or other cultivated area.
- No evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves was found outside the cemetery boundaries at St. Xavier Mission Cemetery within the flight path. However, approximately 54 currently unmarked graves were identified within the cemetery boundary. These currently unmarked graves were likely marked at an earlier point in time. However, grave markers have either been lost, overgrown, or decayed since then. The west-central portion of the cemetery without grave markers is likely the cemetery's original location, which has expanded over time to the current boundaries.
- No evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves was found in the three flight paths at the St. Labre campus. There is no evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves outside or along the margins of the established St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No surface features indicate the presence of graves in either the area near the current grotto location or in the area north of the baseball field.

Given that the mission of this fieldwork was to identify any evidence of unmarked graves outside of known cemetery locations, HRA recommends that no further fieldwork is necessary. The LiDAR and photogrammetry aerial surveys did not identify any surface feature that would indicate the presence of an unmarked grave. Therefore, additional field efforts would likely not yield different results, unless new information proved otherwise.

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1 Introduction

The St. Labre Indian School Education Association hired Historical Research Associates, Inc. (HRA), to research the history of three boarding schools currently operated by the association to determine whether any students died while attending the schools and if there are instances of undocumented burials on school grounds. HRA worked in close collaboration with school administration and an independent commission appointed to oversee the project. Research has included visiting record repositories in Montana and throughout the United States and participating in community listening sessions within communities on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservations. This report documents on-the-ground efforts to conduct remote sensing within and surrounding the school properties and cemeteries using aerial Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) and photogrammetry technology to search for possible undocumented or unmarked burials.

The results of the remote sensing study represent another level of due diligence in the research regarding the history of the boarding schools and their cemeteries previously conducted by HRA Historian James Grant. Grant's findings (within the main body of this document), as they specifically relate to undocumented burials, were as follows:

- Students who died were sometimes buried at the mission cemeteries located on St. Labre and St. Xavier grounds. Other times, families buried their children elsewhere. We located no documentation showing that students are buried on school grounds other than within current and historical cemetery boundaries.
- Historical records show that unmarked graves may exist in and around the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery. Unmarked graves have also existed in the St. Labre Mission Cemetery at various points in time.

This study will document the development of the cemeteries through time and provide maps showing the locations of greatest potential for the presence of undocumented or unmarked burials, if they should exist, gleaned from historic-period documents and the remote sensing work. Special attention will be paid to areas outside the boundaries of the cemeteries and to areas identified as possibly containing unmarked burials due to the information provided in community listening sessions previously conducted. The ultimate goal of this on-the-ground study is to determine whether or not graves exist outside of known locations within the grounds managed by the St. Labre Indian School Education Association.

The LiDAR study is limited to three specific locations, which include the property of the St. Charles Mission School in Pryor, Montana, the cemetery associated with the Saint Francis Xavier Mission Church and Pretty Eagle Academy in St. Xavier, Montana, and the cemetery and grounds at the St. Labre Indian School in Ashland, Montana (Figure 1). Given this project's limited mission and scope, these were the only locations surveyed with the LiDAR drone.

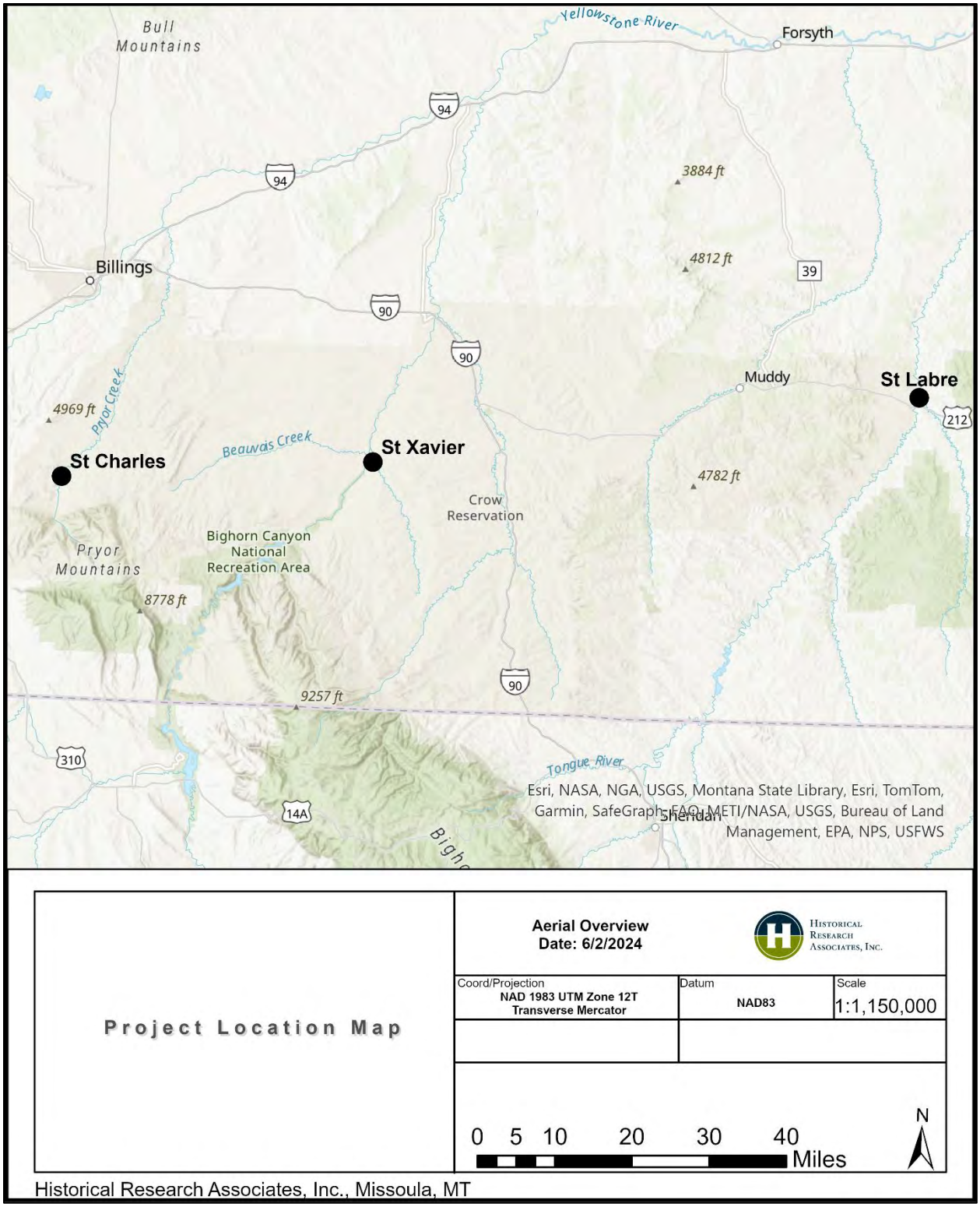

Figure 1. Locations of aerial surveys.

2 Methods

2.1 LiDAR Survey Methods

HRA collected LiDAR data and high-resolution aerial imagery (photogrammetry) through a series of low-altitude, systematic, and automated gridded flights using a small unpiloted aerial system (sUAS), or drone, centered on areas of interest. The aerial survey was conducted with a DJI Matrice 300 RTK drone with an L1 LiDAR sensor and camera. The LiDAR data provides an extremely high-resolution surface or digital elevation model (DEM) that can be analyzed for subtle topographic changes that may indicate the presence of an unmarked grave. The LiDAR sensor uses a laser emitted from the drone and reflected back to a mirror. The laser is small enough to penetrate the gaps between branches and leaves growing on trees and bushes to provide an accurate model of the earth's surface. However, the laser cannot penetrate the ground or thick grass mats. The high-resolution aerial photogrammetry imagery (less than 5 centimeter [cm] resolution) provides visual surface context for the LiDAR results and can also provide a surface elevation model if needed. However, photogrammetry surface models do not have the ability to remove surface vegetation such as trees or shrubs.

The aerial flights varied in size depending on the individual flight location. At St. Charles, approximately 30 acres were surveyed, while 19 acres were surveyed at St. Xavier. At St. Labre, three locations were surveyed, including the cemetery (22 acres), the grotto (5.5 acres), and the open field north of the school complex (37 acres). In total, HRA collected 113.5 acres of photogrammetry and LiDAR data.

HRA used Agisoft Metashape Professional to process and view LiDAR data and Pix4D Cloud to process the aerial imagery. Processed data can be viewed as 2D and 3D models of the project areas that are then incorporated into ArcGIS Pro. LiDAR data was processed into DEM of the surface with the vegetation removed to visualize subtle topographic features. The natural topography was extracted as much as possible to separate subtle topographic features, such as unmarked burials, from major features, leaving only the smaller elevation changes (such as +/- 10 cm). Unmarked burials would most likely appear in the LiDAR data as subtle depressions or mounds. These results were then colorized to assess the project area for discrete mounds or depressions that may indicate grave locations. Following the processing and assessment of LiDAR data, the surface models were compared to and overlain on current and historical aerial imagery (when needed) and maps. The comparison of modern imagery to LiDAR data helps contextualize the results and ensure that no modern features or disturbances are interpreted as a possible grave in the surface models.

3 Results of LiDAR Surveys

3.1 Introduction

HRA archaeologist and drone pilot Ethan P. Ryan, PhD, conducted five flights across the three project locations on April 29 and April 30, 2024. The flight conditions were challenging, given the sustained winds between 15–20 mph. However, the windy conditions did not prevent the collection of accurate data. Each of the three project locations had unique ground conditions and surface features. Therefore, the data analysis and mapping approach differed slightly for each location. Each location and flight are discussed and analyzed separately.

3.2 St. Charles

HRA completed approximately 30 acres of aerial survey at the property of the St. Charles Mission School near Pryor, Montana (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The flight area was immediately west of the school, approximately 300 meters east–west from the playground to Pryor Creek and 400 meters north–south. The flight centered on the original church location in an area now covered by mature trees. A handful of residential and other structures are still visible in the flight area. After removing surface vegetation from the LiDAR data, a handful of large topographic features were immediately visible. However, none of the topographic features are consistent with the expectations of an unmarked grave. No small mounds or depressions the size of an expected grave are visible anywhere in the St. Charles flight path. All subtle topographic features can be explained by other modern phenomena, such as surface disturbances, prairie dog holes and mounds, or fragmentary building material.

There are at least four topographic features that do, however, relate to the historic-period development of the St. Charles Mission School. Two large circular depressions are visible in the tree-covered area near the center of the flight (Features 1 and 2 in Figure 4). In an aerial image from 1954 (Figure 5), the two depressions correlate to the eastern ends of two former structures. A hand-drawn map from 1902 suggests that the western structure (Feature 1) was a log house residence, while the eastern structure (Feature 2) was the location of the original church (James Grant, personal communication 2024). While the depressions do not match the entire footprint of the structures, they may represent the locations of partial basements or cellars. Feature 1 is approximately 30 feet in diameter and 4 feet deep, while Feature 2 is 45 feet in diameter and 5 feet deep.

Feature 3 is immediately northwest of Feature 2 and is a series of five subtle linear ridges trending approximately north–south (see Figure 4). Each ridge is approximately 80 feet long and averages about 6 inches in height. Feature 3 overlaps with the former church location but may post-date the presence of the former structure. Given the subtle linear ridges, this feature may instead be the remnants of garden furrows or some other cultivated area. The ridges are continuous and not individual mounds, meaning there is little chance that this feature may represent a cemetery or group of burials.

Feature 4 is farther south from the first three features and is a linear, rectangular depression with a "tail" or other linear depression extending to the east (see Figure 4). The rectangular depression measures approximately 28 by 28 meters, while the extension to the east is around 30 meters long.

This feature surrounds a structure on the 1954 imagery (see Figure 5), and the linear extension to the east is visible as a darker, vegetated area. The linear depressions are consistent with the expectations of a shallow irrigation ditch that may be running water from a pump house or well.

Figure 2. High-resolution aerial imagery from the St. Charles drone flight.

Figure 3. A bare surface topographic model of the St. Charles property with as much vegetation removed as possible.

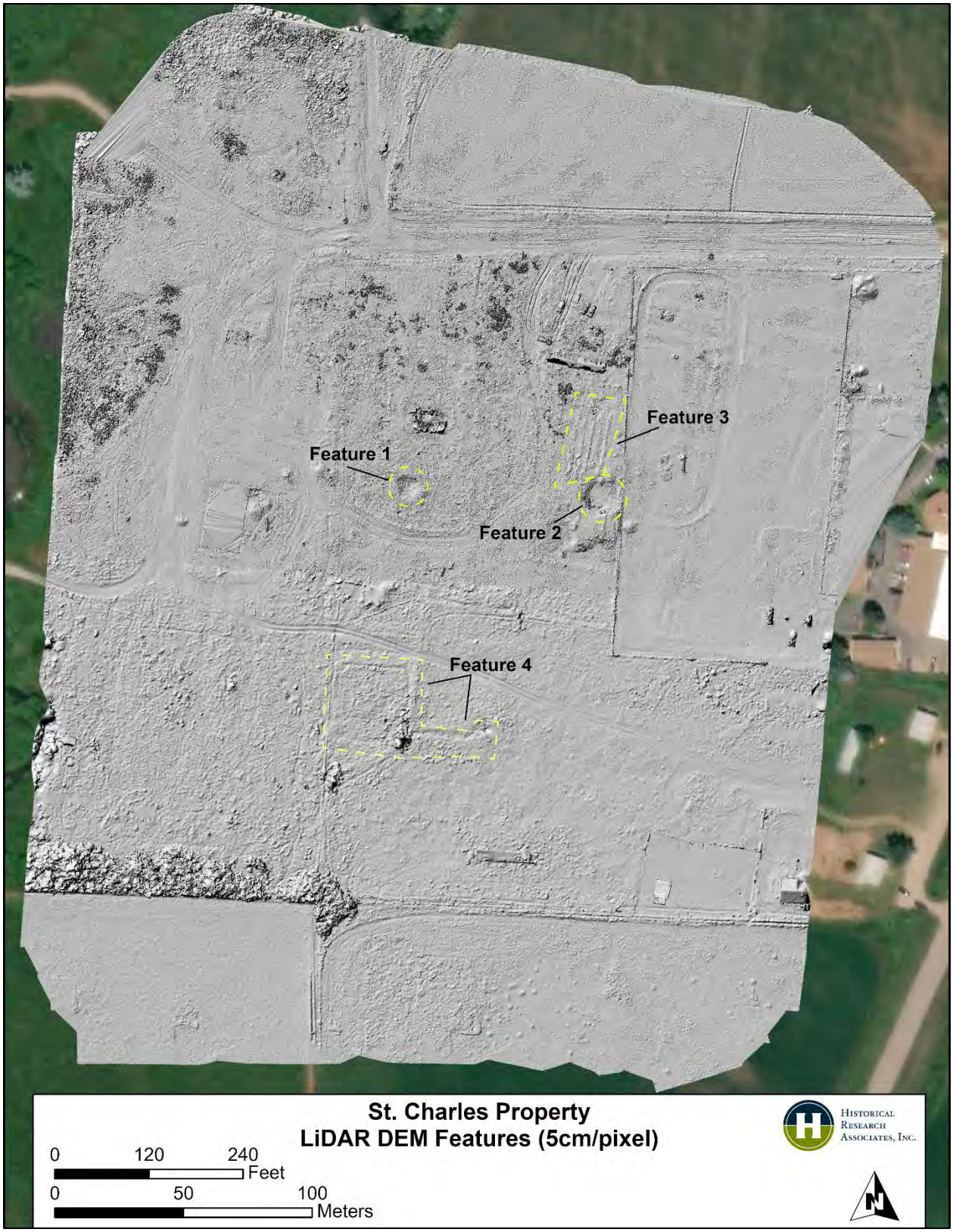

Figure 4. Topographic features identified on the bare surface topographic model of the St. Charles property.

Figure 5. Topographic features overlain on 1954 aerial imagery of the St. Charles property.

3.3 St. Xavier

HRA completed approximately 19 acres of aerial survey, including and surrounding the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery in St. Xavier, Montana (Figure 6 and Figure 7). The flight centered on the cemetery, which is partially maintained and mowed. The cemetery is currently active and has many known graves. The approach to this LiDAR dataset was slightly different from the St. Charles data processing. After removing the surface vegetation from the LiDAR data, graves visible in the aerial imagery were identified and marked in ArcGIS Pro. Visible graves were identified based on the presence of grave markers, stones, flowers, or other visible objects. Following the identification of marked graves, the surface model was colorized by elevation to increase the contrast between subtle topographic surface changes (Figure 8 and Figure 9). Subtle topographic changes consistent with the size and shape of a grave were then marked. There were no topographic features indicating the presence of graves outside of the current cemetery boundaries. However, 54 locations are either depressions or mounds, consistent with the expectations of a currently unmarked grave. These graves are referred to as "currently unmarked," given that they are within the cemetery boundaries and were likely interred early in St. Xavier's history. Therefore, the graves likely were marked at one time, but the markers have either decayed or been removed over time.

Most of the evidence for currently unmarked graves is in the west-central portion of the cemetery, near some of the earliest graves at St. Xavier. The concentration of currently unmarked graves in this area likely indicates that this is the original part of the cemetery. Over time, the cemetery expanded until it reached its current extent, and more recent graves are concentrated in the north and eastern half of the cemetery. A handful of unmarked graves are scattered in other cemetery areas where grave markers are absent. All identified currently unmarked graves are oriented east–west based on the surface depression or mound. As visible in Figure 9, there are some gaps in the cemetery where there are no known or currently unmarked graves. These are areas where the LiDAR data did not record significant topographic changes. However, the lack of surface topography does not mean that graves do not exist in this area. Instead, the gaps in the cemetery are areas without significant surface variation.

The LiDAR data does not contain evidence of graves outside the current cemetery boundary. No topographic features like those within the cemetery boundary are found anywhere where LiDAR data was collected. However, surface expressions of graves would not be expected to be found in the cultivated field or other disturbed, plowed, or flattened areas. No grave markers or other indicators of graves were identified in the aerial imagery.

Figure 6. High-resolution imagery from the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery flight.

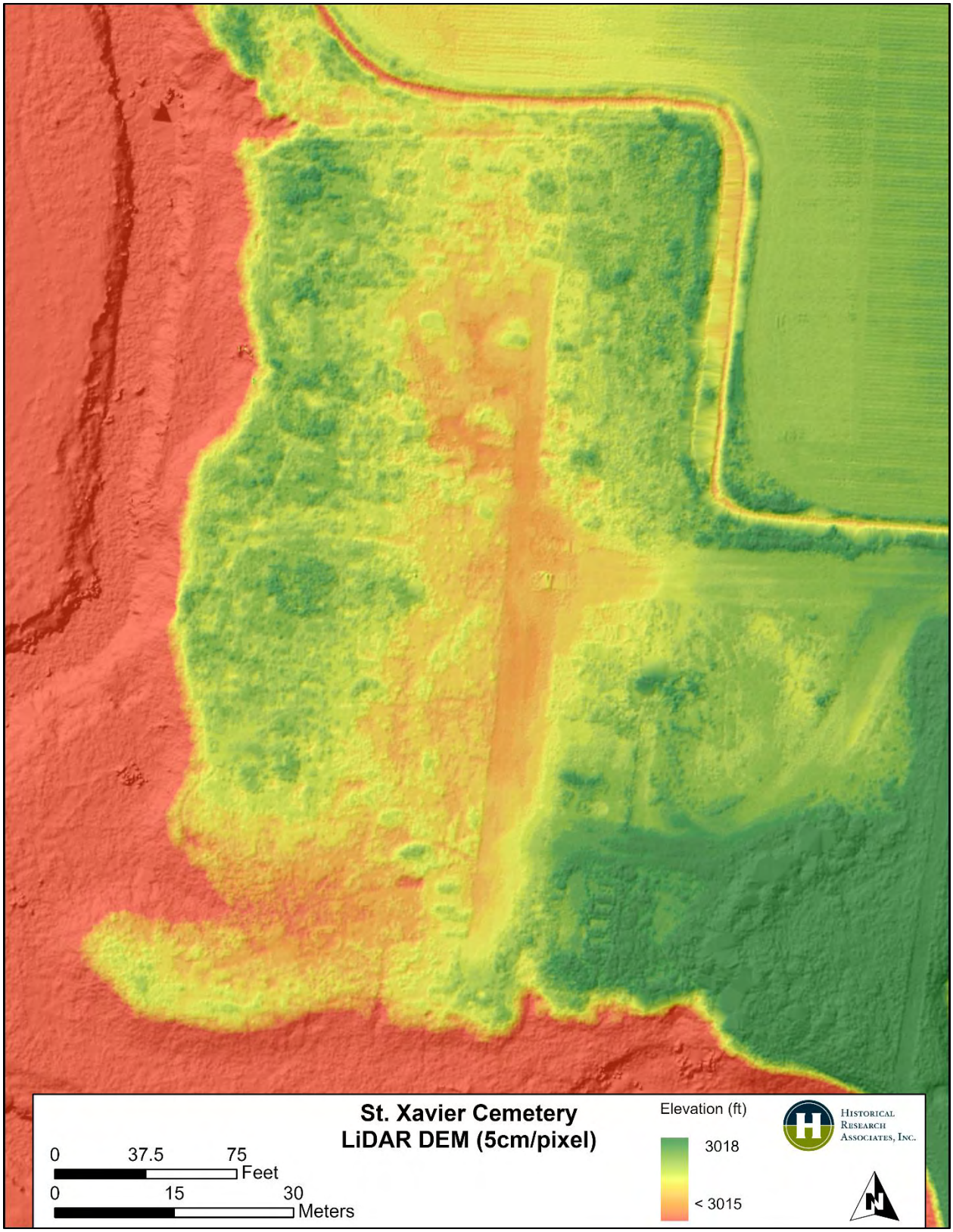

Figure 7. A bare surface topographic model of the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery, with as much vegetation removed as possible. Elevation values are colorized to increase the contrast of graves.

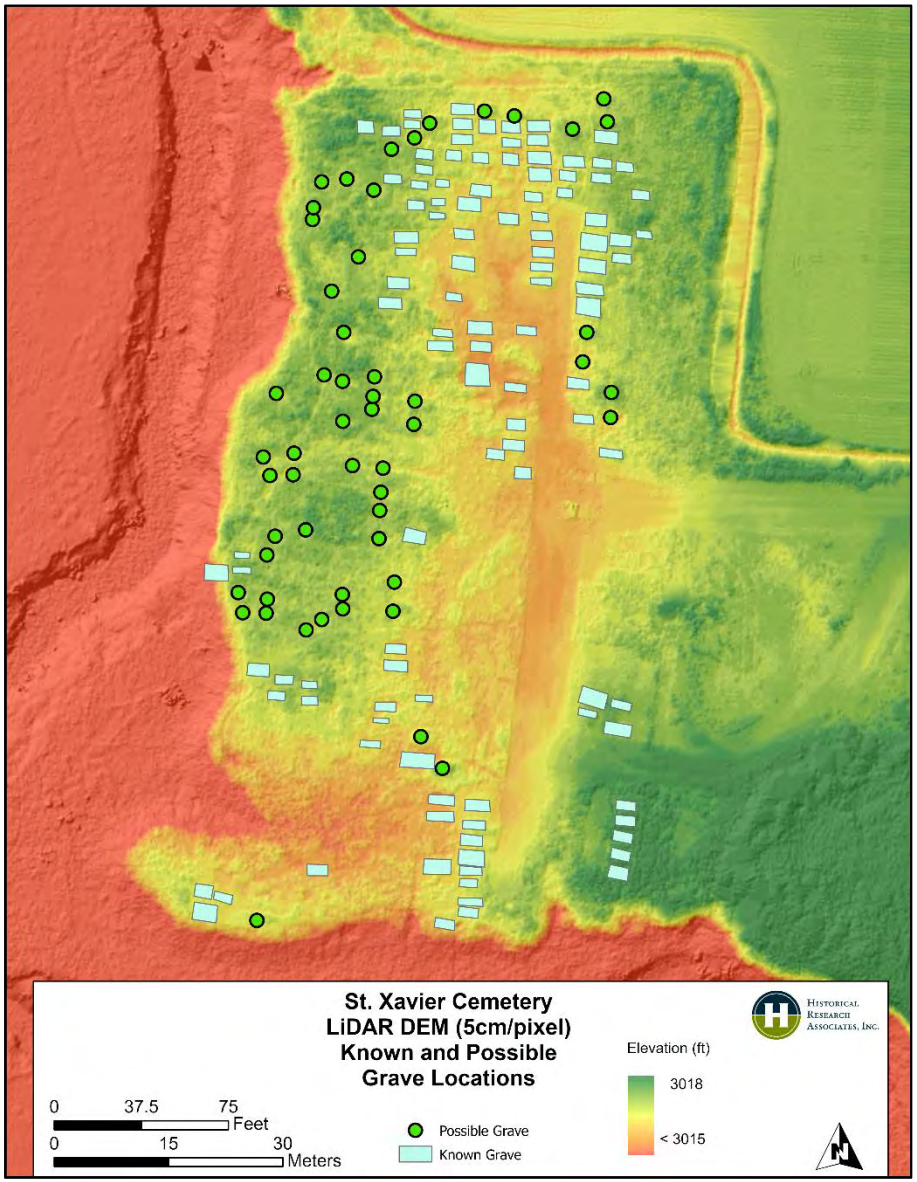

Figure 8. Known and possible grave locations at St. Xavier Mission Cemetery (DEM).

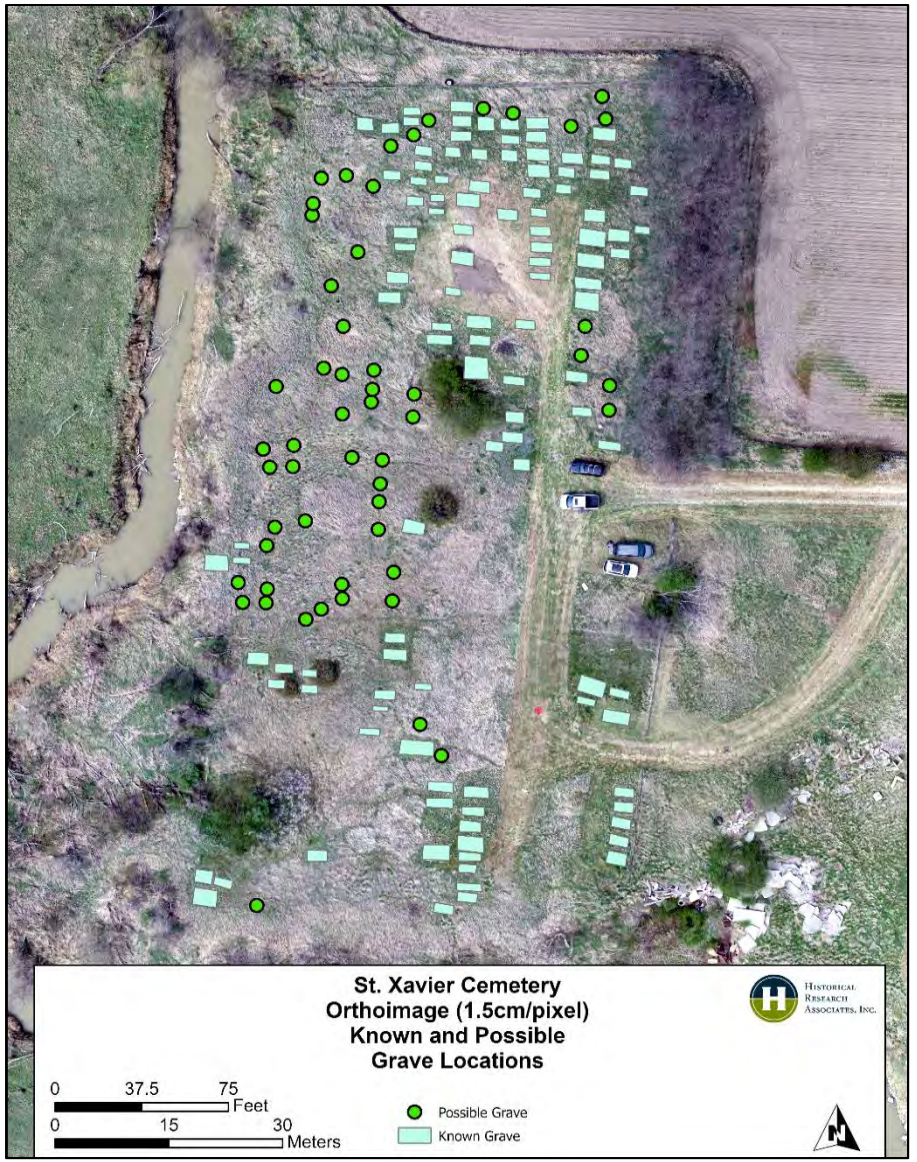

Figure 9. Known and possible grave locations at St. Xavier Mission Cemetery (imagery).

3.4 St. Labre

HRA completed three flights on the St. Labre campus in Ashland, Montana, including the cemetery (22 acres), the grotto (5.5 acres), and the open field north of the school complex (37 acres). The goal of the cemetery flight was to identify any possible grave locations outside of the known cemetery boundaries. At the grotto location, a community member recalled the presence of wood crosses in the open area behind the current grotto location decades ago. The goal of the grotto survey was to investigate if there is still surface evidence of graves at the location of the crosses, which are no longer present. In the open field, the aerial survey sought to identify any potential grave locations on the property's perimeter, as listening sessions revealed that some community members remembered graves near the trees by the river. However, the exact location is unknown, and the open-field flight is based on the speculated location.

3.4.1 St. Labre Cemetery

During the cemetery flight, the LiDAR sensor malfunctioned and did not collect data over the center of the cemetery. However, data was successfully collected in all areas surrounding the cemetery boundary (Figure 10 and Figure 11). Supplementary topographic data from the photogrammetry dataset was used in areas where LiDAR data was not collected (Figure 11). Little vegetation needed to be removed from the LiDAR dataset, as the cemetery and surrounding area are mostly grass and maintained by St. Labre staff. Special attention was paid to the open grassy areas surrounding the cemetery to see if any graves were outside of the cemetery. Graves are obvious and visible, especially within the eastern portion of the cemetery. The older graves on the west side are less visible in the photogrammetry surface model, but grave markers are obvious in the imagery. Using the topographic signatures of graves within the cemetery as a guide, the surrounding areas of the surface model were thoroughly examined. However, no subtle topographic features indicating the presence of a grave were identified outside of the cemetery boundary.

Figure 10. High-resolution imagery from the St. Labre Mission Cemetery flight.

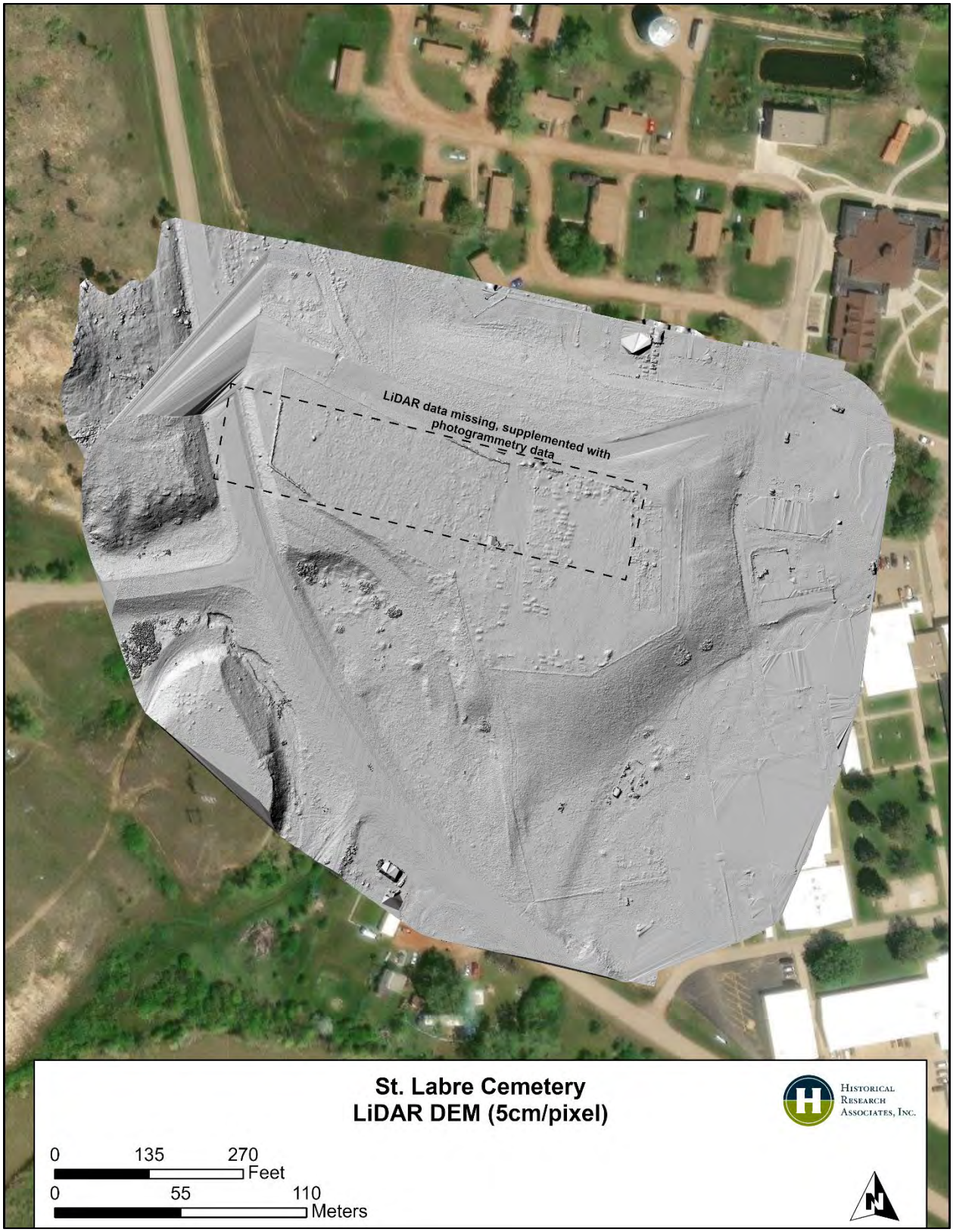

Figure 11. A bare surface topographic model of the St. Labre Mission Cemetery, with as much vegetation removed as possible. Note area where LiDAR data was not collected.

3.4.2 St. Labre Grotto

The area of interest in the grotto location was very small, approximately 35 by 35 meters. However, data was collected over a much broader area to provide context for the results from the surrounding surface (Figure 12 and Figure 13). The surface vegetation, including nearby trees, was removed from the LiDAR data. It should be noted that the bases of the tree trunks form small topographic features in the data that look similar to graves, given that the LiDAR laser does not penetrate the trunks. However, each "artifact" in the data from the removed trees corresponds to a standing tree, and no inexplicable features are amongst the trees. There are a handful of subtle topographic features in the area of interest. However, when cross-referencing these features with aerial imagery, they can be explained by recent surface disturbances from utility work. No subtle topographic features indicating the presence of graves were identified in the grotto flight area.

Figure 12. High-resolution imagery of the St. Labre grotto area flight.

Figure 13. A bare surface topographic model of the St. Labre grotto location, with as much vegetation removed as possible.

3.4.3 St. Labre Field

During listening sessions within the community, there was discussion over a possible grave location in an area of trees on the St. Labre campus. Though the exact location was not known, it was speculated that it may be in the area north of the running track, in an open field and treed area near the river. The flight centered on the open field but included part of the airstrip, tree-covered park, and riverbank. The trees were removed from the LiDAR data, leaving just the surface topography. Again, as discussed in the grotto flight section, small topographic features remained following the removal of trees in the data. No other topographic features other than tree removal artifacts were noted. The surface model revealed several subtle features, such as vehicle tracks, animal trails, and areas of recent disturbance. However, none of these features are characteristic of a depression or mound that would suggest the presence of an unmarked grave.

Figure 14. High-resolution imagery from the St. Labre open-field flight.

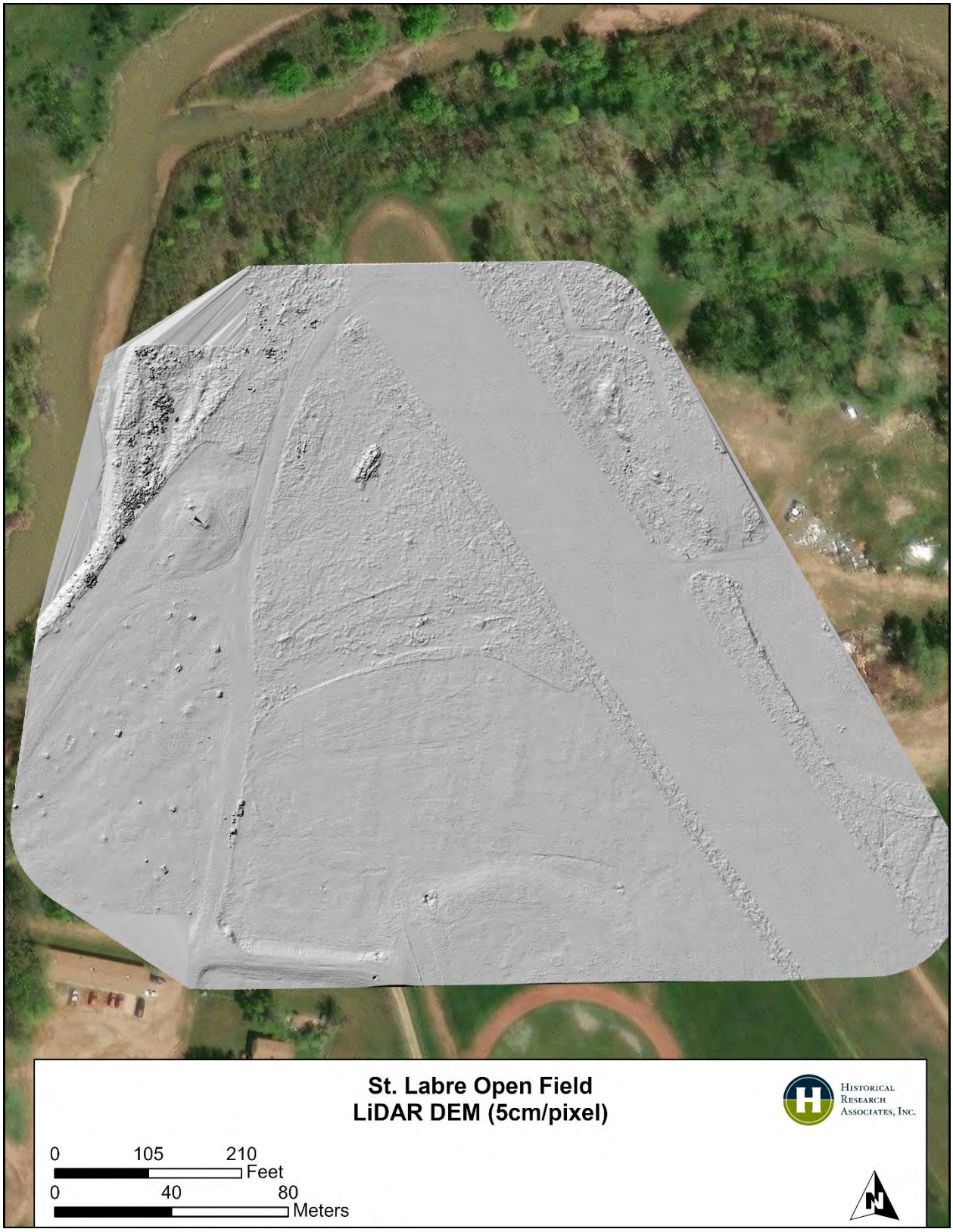

Figure 15. A bare surface topographic model of the St. Labre open field, with as much vegetation removed as possible.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

HRA completed 113.5 acres of aerial survey across five flights at the St. Charles, St. Xavier, and St. Labre properties. The goal of the aerial survey was to determine if there is evidence of undocumented and unmarked graves outside of the cemetery boundaries at St. Labre and St. Xavier and on the property of St. Charles. The resulting LiDAR and photogrammetry data revealed several cultural and natural features that are not visible from the surface. However, there is no evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves outside of the cemetery boundaries or on the St. Charles property in surveyed areas. The major findings from the aerial surveys are as follows:

- No evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves was found in the flight path at St. Charles. However, footprints from historic-period structures relating to the early development of St. Charles were visible. Building footprints include the original chapel location, several residential structures, and a possible garden or other cultivated area.
- No evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves was found outside the cemetery boundaries of the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery within the flight path. However, approximately 54 currently unmarked graves were identified within the cemetery boundary. These currently unmarked graves were likely marked at an earlier point in time. However, grave markers have either been lost, overgrown, or decayed since then. The west-central portion of the cemetery without grave markers is likely the cemetery's original location, which has expanded over time to the current boundaries.
- No evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves was found in the three flight paths at the St. Labre campus. There is no evidence of unmarked or undocumented graves outside or along the margins of the established St. Labre Mission Cemetery. No surface features indicated the presence of graves in either the area near the current grotto location or in the area north of the baseball field.

Given that the mission of this fieldwork was to identify any evidence of unmarked graves outside of known cemetery locations, HRA recommends that no further fieldwork is necessary. The LiDAR and photogrammetry aerial surveys did not identify any surface feature that would indicate the presence of an unmarked grave. Therefore, additional field efforts would likely not yield different results, unless new information proved otherwise.

However, beyond this project's original goal, HRA has several recommendations for further fieldwork that may improve upon the existing knowledge of the history of these properties and improve the management of cemeteries. The recommendations are as follows:

- Further fieldwork at the St. Charles property may reveal more about the history of St. Charles. The LiDAR data identified clear boundaries of the original structural features. Additional mapping, surface surveys, or other archaeological and historical research combinations may interest the local community. Further exploration of the features may provide insight into the early days of the St. Charles Mission.
- The St. Xavier Mission Cemetery would benefit greatly from more active management practices. Only small portions of the cemetery are currently maintained and mowed. However, much of the cemetery is overgrown, contributing to the loss of knowledge about where some graves may be. Without knowing where graves are, it is more likely that an old

grave will accidentally be exhumed while excavating a new grave, as the cemetery is still actively being used. In addition to mowing, the St. Xavier Mission Cemetery would benefit from a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey in areas with no visible grave markers. The currently unmarked grave locations identified in the LiDAR data could be adequately assessed using GPR, which in turn would identify the exact locations of these graves. Following a GPR survey, new grave markers could be installed to ensure that grave locations are not lost again. Finally, creating a database of grave markers and the information recorded on them may be useful in tracking the cemetery's growth over time.

Appendix II: Supplemental Tables

Table II-1: St. Labre Student Attendance Totals Reported by Year, 1884 - 1940[200]

Year	Number of Students	Year	Number of Students
1884	13	1918	49
1885		1919	
1886		1920	
1887	35	1921	46
1888		1922	31
1889	46	1923	39
1890		1924	52
1891		1925	55
1892		1926	58
1893		1927	60
1894		1928	60
1895		1929	63
1896		1930	55
1897		1931	74
1898		1932	92
1899	65	1933	98
1900	75	1934	84
1901	56	1935	80
1902	55	1936	73
1903	57	1937	78
1904	53	1938	79

[200] School attendance reported as the total number of different pupils to attend at least one day at the school during a fiscal year. Information derived from BCIM Quarterly Reports and other enrollment lists when available. Numbers include both day students and boarding students reported annually in the second quarter.

Table II-1: St. Labre Student Attendance Totals Reported by Year, 1884 - 1940[200]

Year	Number of Students	Year	Number of Students
1905	70	1939	80
1906	56	1940	87
1907	68		
1908	67		
1909	59		
1910	62		
1911	54		
1912	49		
1913	38		
1914	30		
1915	42		
1916	47		
1917	38		

Table II-2: St. Xavier Student Attendance Totals Reported by Year 1889 to 1930

Year	Number of Students	Year	Number of Students
1887	50		
1888	150		
1889	120	1918	77-hybrid total
1890		1919	97-hybrid total
1891		1920	83-hybrid total
1892		1921	Day school only
1893		1922	Day school only
1894		1923	Day school only

Table II-2: St. Xavier Student Attendance Totals Reported by Year 1889 to 1930

Year	Number of Students	Year	Number of Students
1895		1924	Day school only
1896		1925	Day school only
1897		1926	Day school only
1898		1927	Day school only
1899	86	1928	Day school only
1900	57	1929	Day school only
1901	63	1930	Day school only
1902	67		
1903	66		
1904			
1905	74		
1906	64		
1907	62		
1908	52		
1909	52		
1910	49		
1911	38		
1912	42		
1913	50		
1914	48		
1915	47		
1916	54		
1917	60		

Table II-3. Known Student Deaths by Listed Tribe/Ethnic Background from Documents Reviewed

Tribe/Ethnic Background	**St. Labre**	**St. Xavier**	**St. Charles**
Northern Cheyenne	59		
Crow		36	1
Cheyenne Arapahoe	2		
Cheyenne Sioux	1		
Cree	1	2	
White	1	1	
Mexican		1	
Unknown	2	6	

PART FOUR Findings

Boys at the St. Labre Mission. Identifying John Wolfblack, who died in a car accident in December 1926, age 16, matc
Labre Museum and Archives.

Finding 1: Based on the extensive archival research by HRA, and the community listening sessions, there were at least 113 documented student deaths during the focus period of the study, 1884 to 1960, primarily due to illness and disease. The student deaths are documented through school staff narratives, school records, house diaries, church records, and/or cross-referenced records with Rosebud and Big Horn County vital statistics.

Finding 2: Based on the extensive archival research performed by HRA and the community listening sessions, ten deaths are evident from causes other than illness and disease.

Finding 3: Attendee accounts at the listening sessions and the research conducted by HRA conveyed stories of harsh and potentially abusive punishments of students, as well as accounts of retribution inflicted upon families who resisted sending their children to the boarding schools.

Finding 4: The presence of Cree children (including Metis, Cree, and Chippewa students, collectively identified as "Cree") at the St. Labre boarding schools was unexpected to the Commission. Their school near Cascade, Montana, had burned and they arrived at St. Xavier. Significantly, Cree children are listed among the students who had died due to illness or disease.

Finding 5: The number of religious Orders who worked at various times at St. Labre schools was also unexpected. While the Capuchins, Ursulines, Jesuits, and diocesan priests were widely known as having worked at the schools, these were augmented by Edmundites and School Sisters of St. Francis over the course of the years under investigation.

hing information found in historical archives research. St.

John Wolfblack

Finding 6: The St. Charles Boarding School only operated as a Catholic boarding school for six years, from 1892 to 1898. It continued as a federal boarding school under a different name after 1898. It reopened as a Catholic day school in 1925.

Finding 7: The regular involvement of students' families during their time at the boarding schools was unexpected. Boarding students had relatively frequent contact with their families. Moreover, the student bodies at all three boarding schools included a combination of boarded students and day-school students in many of the years under investigation.

Finding 8: Federal funding of the boarding schools ceased around 1895. After the end of this federal funding, Tribal trust money and Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission resources replaced this lost federal funding.

Finding 9: While the general history of the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the late twentieth century includes regular references to the impact of disease on society, the boarding schools, like the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribal communities, suffered terribly due to diseases. Due largely to the crowded conditions in the boarding schools, diseases such as tuberculosis, influenza, scarlet fever, diphtheria, and whooping cough were the causes of 90 percent of the student deaths examined in this report.

Reflections by Commission Members

Dr. Janine Pease, Commission Chair, Reflections

Accepting this Commission membership was a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege to pursue this research with esteemed colleagues, to design a research process, to discover and analyze the data, and meet face to face with the findings about the St. Labre, St. Xavier and St. Charles boarding schools. The responsibility is a noteworthy task of timely and significant value to the Board. As with any major research project I had a fascination with the unknown, that combined with my interest to research these three specific boarding schools without bias.

The Investigation Process was in four parts: the historical/archival research, the community-based listening sessions, the application of the LiDAR survey, and overarching negotiation of the research components with and among the Commission members.

Archival/Historical Research. At first glance, the historical/archival research would begin from the collections/ records of the three boarding schools and respective Catholic parishes, and the archival collections of the Jesuits, the Montana Ursuline Sisters., and the Bureau of Indian Affairs of the US Government. Reflective of the actual schools' history, the research destinations became far more expansive, to include the collections held at the tribal colleges Little Big Horn College and Dull Knife Memorial College. More Catholic orders administered and taught with the schools, while Montana counties vital statistics and news outlets in nearby towns and cities were cross-referenced.

Press Conference and Press Package. The Commission members chose to bring news of the Investigation Commission and the Listening Sessions to the tribal nations and public through a Press Conference and the publication of a Press Package. The attendance of the state and regional press gave broad-based coverage to the investigation and the listening sessions agenda.

Listening Sessions. The implementation of the listening sessions was approached with care, for locations, amenities, mental health concerns, and an open and welcoming agenda. Commission members attended each session. Commission members, fluent speakers in Cheyenne and Crow languages were key assets, in respect of tribal elders' first and preferred language. The first round of sessions met limited response. Commissioner Dick Littlebear suggested a second round of sessions, with special written invitations to elected officials, tribal council members, legislators and tribal historic preservation officers. In retrospect, the sessions with the greatest attendance and response were those held in the retirement homes and nursing home centers (Heritage Living Center in Livingston, Awekualawaachee Center, and Shoulder Blade Center). Importantly, the Northern Cheyenne Mental Health attended each session to meet anyone who requested a consultation. Certainly, there were narratives shared by former boarding school students, some painful and some joyous. Several elders shared parents' and grandparents' accounts of their boarding school experiences, attesting to the tribal oral tradition.

The LiDAR Survey. With the historical/archival based study and analysis in full view, evidence of undocumented student graves did not exist. However, to fulfill the charge of investigation and in continued effort for process transparency, the Commission chose to commission a survey of the schools' grounds with LiDAR. Knowledge of this technology was enlightening; however, the LiDAR results gave further traction to the archival study/analysis.

The Context. The context within which these Indian boarding schools were built and operated is complex and contributes to the students' experiences. The earliest reservation days of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne tribes were cataclysmic times of war, disease, starvation and death. Certainly, the people were in survival mode. The Crow and Northern Cheyenne children/students were victims of these times, along with their families, clans, bands and indeed the entire nations. The American civilization/schooling mandate bore down on these children, they received the brunt of further unkind and punitive policies. What began in the 1700's with migration, economic and social change and adaptation, meant the people traveled to a zenith of Plain Indian lifeways with the horse

culture and following the buffalo, through to the crucible of war, disease, starvation, and death, to the utter collapse of the tribes' population, resources, cultures and social systems. From 1890 to 1920 are the lowest, most devastating times for both the Crow and Northern Cheyenne people, despite their entirely distinct and different histories. The three boarding schools were one condition in this greater conundrum with the mitigating factors of the priests, nuns, buildings and campus compounds. There are unique, qualifying factors of these mission schools that set them apart from the greater general portrayal/history of the American Indian boarding schools: impactful, interactive and responsive tribal leaders and family members, resourceful and intelligent students, innovative and caring teachers and clerics and the juncture of all of these. More than ever before, I stand in awe of each student who managed to come through this time with their lives and some education in hand. Conversely, I extend respect and recognition of the students who lost their lives during their boarding school enrollment. So much more could be said.

Dr. Matthew Redinger, Commission Vice Chair

As a result of this investigative process, I am a changed person. I was selected to be a member of this Commission because of my historical expertise and my responsibilities as a member of the St. Labre Boarding School Board of Directors. As a member of the Board, and motivated by the accounts of the discovery of undocumented graves in Canada, I was completely dedicated to the process of determining whether there were any undocumented graves on the St. Labre campuses. The process of examining archival records and the emerging technology of employing LiDAR to detect grave sites brought a great deal to light. While it was very difficult to read stories of death, disease, and dislocation reflected in the written record, this was necessary for the Commission to carry out its appointed task. Accounts of the 113 deaths are difficult to read about, but I am extremely gratified to have been part of this process, and am proud of the work we have completed.

The listening sessions, however, moved me in unexpected ways such as no other experience in connection with this process. Many attendees embraced the vulnerability inherent in reliving painful family stories of sons and daughters forced into the boarding school system through legal and extralegal means. It was integral to this process for these stories to be told and recorded. As attendees at the listening sessions shared their personal and familial accounts, it was clear that deep historical trauma still torments many former boarding school students. These are stories that deserve being brought to the light of day. It was at times difficult to stick to the charge that drove our work, which was focused exclusively on undocumented deaths of boarding school students. Full healing of the pain suffered by former boarding school students will require the unflinching exposure of the trauma suffered by some boarding school students. This may require that the original charge of this Commission, in time, be expanded to include work typical of "truth and reconciliation commissions" conducted throughout Latin America in the late 20th century.

That this investigation and the report that resulted from it is focused solely on undocumented student deaths does not negate the responsibility to work towards full reconciliation and healing for former boarding school students and their families by examining the full impact of the boarding school era.

Dr. Richard Littlebear

Maybe there is some canon law that forbids commenting on the cruelty of fathers, priests, nuns, and Catholic Church personnel because there seemed to be no consequences for those Church personnel who inflicted harsh punishment. If harsh punishment no longer is the norm, what eventually brought that change about–a closer reading of the scriptures, a collective realization that those being so harshly punished are actually human? I sincerely hope that such cruel behavior is no longer happening, especially in educational venues wherever the Catholic Church is operating educational institutions.

I left Tongue River Boarding School (TRBS) to attend a high school in Lind, Washington. I found the education atmosphere quite different from the government boarding school (TRBS). Lind High may have had faults and shortcomings but none of them included physical punishment or sexual harassment. I liked that because even though I was not a top-notch student I was allowed to learn subject and content matter without fear of punishment. I hope that our investigation contributes to that kind of learner-friendly school atmosphere. I also hope that this investigative mission does not find any unmarked graves directly attributable to St. Labre.

Dr. Walter Fleming

My reflections really begin with a reminder of our charge, as a Commission "to investigate: 1) Whether there are unmarked graves on the St. Labre properties, and 2) Whether any St. Labre students died while attending St. Labre, and if any died, the circumstances surrounding the death."

Reflecting back on my experience of service on the Commission toward meeting that charge has been thought-provoking. I have mixed emotions. It is somehow comforting that the findings do not show evidence of undocumented deaths and/or burials on school properties. Of course, those findings are not absolute; there well could be graves discovered by better technology than exists today. Nor do the findings negate the pain that many individuals expressed at the many listening sessions held in Native communities in support of this investigation.

Probably the most instructive part of the experience, for me, has been that community members saw the Listening Sessions held at the various locations as an opportunity to share painful memories of their own experiences or those of relatives about their experiences at a boarding school, whether parochial or Federal. These issues fell outside the narrow parameters of the Saint Labre Commission's query

Many spoke of their experiences at Federally-run boarding schools, or at institutions, like sanitariums. Others shared their experiences of facing harsh punishments by priests, nuns, or school personnel at mission schools. Again, these are not issues under the purview of the Commission. That being said, I appreciate that the Commission believed in the importance of listening to those stories, and listening with patience, understanding, and empathy. And, I marvel at the good humor and teasing that occurred before and after the Listening Sessions despite the sadness of the task at hand. That shows the resilience of the communities and, perhaps, why they survive.

Ultimately, my "take-away" from my experience as a member of the Commission is clearly that it is important to acknowledge that Native communities continue to live with the pain of the Boarding School Era, in all its forms. The Secretary of the Interior, herself a Native person, has initiated a process, the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, that has actively listened to families of federal boarding school survivors and from survivors themselves. There is a movement afoot to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to decide direction for the future.

I recall the words of one elder, a respected Cheyenne woman, who said at the beginning of a listening session: "You're 40 years too late!" I take her admonition to heart. But, is it too late?

I urge the Board of St. Labre Schools to continue its leadership role in being transparent about its past and seek a future that acknowledges the necessity to help the communities it serves find peace and good health. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Anda Pretty On Top

The chairman of St Labre Board of Directors Fr. Zoy informed me about the investigation of unmarked graves at the Boarding schools here in St. Labre, Ashland, Mt. St. Xavier, and St. Charles, Pryor, Mt.

Fr. Zoilo Garibay asked if I could be on the investigating committee. Thought very hard about the request. Did not respond then decided to accept the appointment.

The commission consisted of 5 members. We met monthly.

My grandmother Angela Star started her Boarding school days at Pryor St. Charles, then on to St Xavier and St. Ann church outside of Lodge Grass, Mt.

While at the Boarding schools my grandmother did not have an English name, her Crow name is Star in which the Boarding school translated to the name Star.

While at the Boarding school, my grandmother was treated very well! No abuse of that nature! Structure and the Catholic philosophy were instilled in my grandmother who we all adhere to her Catholic beliefs.

My paternal grandmother went to Carlisle Boarding School. Not familiar with her school in Carlisle apparently, she did come home but had no knowledge other than being in Carlisle. My grandfather Jack Stewart played baseball with Jim Thorpe while at Carlisle. My grandfather ran away from Carlisle and came home but was sent back. He ran away again and this time didn't send him back.

My mother also was at St. Xavier Boarding school. At no time did she tell us of any abuse or undocumented graves of the children while at St. Xavier.

My sister Jacqueline Stewart graduated from St. Labre plus my brother Dwight Stewart in which St. Labre were class C state basketball Champions 1967, I believe.

Familiar with the Boarding school attended by my family. All was good during their time.

Education was a very important factor in all the grandkids that we go beyond high-school. My grandparents never went beyond elementary grades.

Therefore, all the grandkids apparently went on to achieve higher education.
