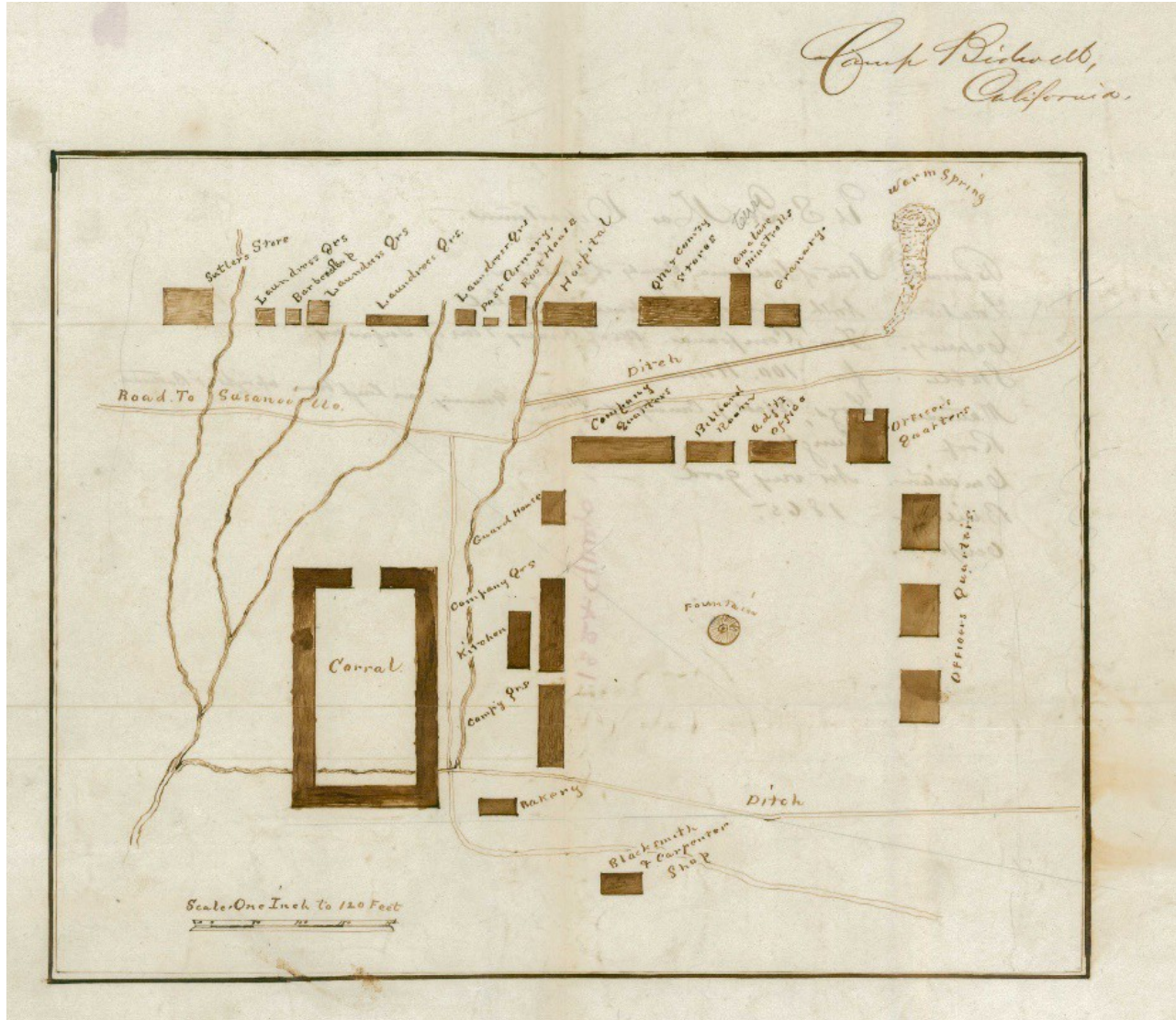


The Fort Bidwell Indian School: A Historical and Multicultural Context

by Laurie Pearce Price

This article presents the perspectives of a variety of people involved in the Fort Bidwell Indian School, with the hope that current and future generations may develop a greater understanding of the impact of Indian Boarding School system, particularly on the Fort Bidwell community.

-L.P.P.



March 23, 1871 Map of Camp Bidwell – Company Quarters in the center of the map include the buildings that became the Fort Bidwell Indian School; the area including the fountain is now the park at the Fort Bidwell Indian Community.

(Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, NSAID number 205135588,
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/205135588>)

1860s-1870s: Camp Bidwell, Fort Bidwell, and U.S. Military Presence on Indian Land

The first Camp Bidwell was built in 1863 to provide military protection for white emigrants and homesteaders along the Applegate and Lassen Trails who were traveling through, claiming, and settling on lands which Northern Paiute peoples already called “home.” The Kidütökadö (“Yellow-Bellied Marmot or Groundhog Eaters”)¹ or Gidutikad Band of Northern California Paiute historically lived around Goose Lake, in Surprise Valley in northern California and Warner Valley in Oregon, south to Long Valley and the Lower Lake, with a band territory of about 5,000 square miles. Neighbors to the west were the Achomawi (Pit River Indians), with other Paiute bands living to the northwest, northeast, east, and south.² Camp Bidwell was named for Major John Bidwell of the California Volunteers, a veteran of the Mexican War. Lake Annie, northeast of Fort Bidwell, was named for Major Bidwell’s wife, Annie Kennedy Bidwell.

The Camp was abandoned in early 1865 and rebuilt in July 1865 close to the site of the original Camp. Soldiers from Camp Bidwell engaged in military campaigns against the Paiute, Pit River, and Shoshone peoples in September 1867 near Likely in the two-day Battle of Infernal Caverns, which was part of the four-year Snake War throughout southeastern Oregon, southwestern Idaho, and northeastern California.³ After the Snake War ended in 1868, the Gidutikad Band of Northern California Paiute moved to the Fort Bidwell area.



1 https://narf.org/nill/tribes/fort_bidwell.html

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Paiute_people

3 <https://history.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/0236.pdf>

Traditional Northern Paiute shelter, shown with Gidutikad Band Chief Ochiho and his grandson Charlie (photo courtesy of Chief Ochiho's great-granddaughter Patsy DeGarmo Garcia)

The Camp relocated again in 1870, slightly to the south of the original site, and included a row of barracks that would eventually become the student dormitories of the Fort Bidwell Indian School. In 1872, Bidwell soldiers participated in battles against the Modoc Indians that unfolded over several months in the vicinity of the present-day Lava Beds National Monument. According to the U.S. Geological Service, the Monument was established in 1925 and covers about 73 square miles of "lava-tube caves and well-preserved young volcanic features," including the location of many of the battles of the Modoc War⁴. Modoc County resident (and later Fort Bidwell Indian School disciplinarian) Lester Vernon shared the following anecdote about the Lava Beds, where the Modoc War took place.

In 1933 the Lava Beds were in the National Forest Service. I helped build some of the roads there for the Forest Service. During our leisure time, which wasn't very often, usually on Sunday, some of us would explore the caves and places where Captain Jack of the Modoc Indians of his tribe lied. We found his village, what was left of it.

We also explored some of the caves that were new to most white men. In some we found big horn sheep heads with horns. Looked like they had got in there and couldn't get out, starved I guess, because there was a lot of them, maybe as many as 25 or 30 all piled together. As far as I know there hadn't been any big horned sheep in this part of the west since white men came to the west. So, it must have been during the eruption that caused the Lava Beds, or soon after that the big horns were killed there.

On the north central [side] of the Lava Beds is the Captain Jack's Stronghold, where the Modocs held off the soldiers for so long. I don't remember the exact year, but it seems like they said it was about 1872, however I could be wrong as to the date.

Then in the central south is the Prison Rock in the Tulelake, with the petroglyphs and drawings that the Indians made from their canoes. It is said that the Indians used this rock for a prison for the so-called captives, when the lake was full of water. However, for those that don't know, the soldiers killed Captain Jack and most of the Modoc Tribe. I think they captured a few women and kids and took them away from the west.⁵

Bidwell soldiers also traveled out of the area to fight the Nez Perce tribe in 1877 and Bannock peoples in 1878, who had chosen to leave the increasing deprivation on the Malheur Reservation and had begun to encroach on white homesteads for resources.⁶ In November 1878, the Army imprisoned over 500 Bannock and Paiute Indians on the Yakama Reservation in

⁴ <https://www.usgs.gov/volcanoes/medicine-lake/geology-and-history>

⁵ Lester Vernon's anecdote comes from the archives of the Modoc County Historical Society

Washington Territory, where they remained until the Indian rights activist Sarah Winnemucca lobbied for their release in 1883.⁷ Paula Sam, an elder of the Fort Bidwell Indian Community, explained that government rounded up California native people and marched them to Washington, then spread them out onto reservations, rather than allow them to continue to live on their traditional lands.

...we didn't have boundaries. You know, if we wanted to hunt, we'd go over there – sage hens over here, rabbits over here, the deer over here, we didn't have...boundaries. And they said, "No, this is your reservation...they rounded up multiple tribes [and marched us up to Washington in the winter] and put them in one place...this is why we all speak the same [Paiute language but with] a different dialect...."⁸

Many Paiutes, including Mrs. Sam's family, relocated to the Fort Bidwell Indian community, joining the members of the Gidutikad band already living there. In 1879, the Camp's named changed to Fort Bidwell, and housed soldiers until 1893.

⁶ <https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/fort-bidwell/#.ZFFKkXbMKF4>

⁷ Brimlow, George Francis. *Harney County and its Range Land*, pp. 81-30)

⁸ Excerpt from 4/7/2023 interview with Paula Sam, conducted by Tanja Ramming for "Valley Tales" on KDUP 88.1 FM.



Officers' Quarters, looking west, Fort Bidwell, 1877 (Photo courtesy of the Oregon History Project) When the Fort closed in 1890, these buildings became the dormitories for the Fort Bidwell Indian School when it opened in 1898.

1880s: Transformation from Fort to Reservation and Indian School

In 1887, Congress passed the General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Severalty Act, which legalized the segregation and relocation of Indian people in order to subdivide tribal lands into “allotments” with a single-family household structure; the ownership status and size of each parcel depended on the “blood quantum” of the Indians seeking allotments. Indians with less native ancestry (as deemed by Indian Affairs agents) were able to have immediate entrée to larger land allotments; those with at least half Indian ancestry (more than half blood quantum) had lands “held in trust” for them for 25 years, or until they were judged to be “competent and capable of managing their own affairs”.⁹ The land remaining after the allotments were created was sold to homesteaders or developers. Over the 47 years during which the Dawes Act was in effect, more than 60% of the remaining tribal land went to non-Indian owners.¹⁰

9 <https://nativephilanthropy.candid.org/timeline/era/boarding-school-and-land-allotment-eras/#timeline-content>

The following letters requesting assistance from the federal government were written in 1887 by L.W. Boggs of the Fort Bidwell post's Committee on behalf the Gidutikad band of Paiute Indians. These letters, as well as the photograph of Chief Ochiho, were shared by Fort Bidwell elder Patsy DeGarmo Garcia, who is the great-granddaughter of Chief Ochiho. The letters are reproduced here, followed by their transcriptions:

To the Hon. Sec. of the Interior,
Washington, D.C. Sir

I addition to the enclosed petition of Behaha and his principal men, I have been instructed to state regarding these Indians, that there are about two hundred warriors of this band of Indians, that for the past five years some of them have been engaged in fighting.

That this portion of the country is rapidly being settled by whites and all or about all the arable land in this section is now claimed by whites. Negotiating a forcible removal or provision for these Indians.

These commandus of the post during the past ten years have invariably recommended that they be not removed. As such action by the govt would inevitably cause a repetition of the lamentable Modoc War scene of a few years ago.

Yours Respectfully
L.W. Boggs
Secy of Committee

To the Hon. Sec. of the Interior.

10 Pfaelzer, Jean. *The "Outing Programs": Human Trafficking at California's Native American Boarding Schools*. Supportive Testimony H.R. 5444 / S. 2907 The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the US. From upcoming publication *California: A Slave State* by Yale University Press, June 27, 2023, p. 2 of testimony.

Washington, D.C.

Sir,

In addition to the enclosed petition of [Chief] Ochicho and his principal men, I have been instructed to state regarding these Indians [sic]. That there are about two hundred and ninety of this band of Indians, that for the past five years some of them have been engaged in farming.

That this portion of the county is rapidly being settled by whites, and all or about all the arable land in this section is now claimed by whites, necessitating a forcible removal or provision for these Indians.

The various commanders of this post during the past ten years have invariably recommended that they be not removed. As such actions by the gov'm't would inevitably cause a repetition of the lamentable Modoc War scenes of a few years ago.

Yours Respectfully,

L.W. Boggs,

Secretary of Committee

Fort Bidwell
 Modoc Co. Cal.
 March 21st 1887.
 To the Hon.
 Secretary of the Interior.
 Washington D.C. Sir
 We the undersigned chief and headmen of the Piute Indians residing in the vicinity of Fort Bidwell Cal. recognizing the benefits to be derived from adopting the manners and customs of civilized life. And desiring to receive some advantages of education for our children and assistance for ourselves in establishing homes and habitations at this place for our families and procuring the necessary wagons and farming implements, do most urgently request of the government the necessary aid to this effect.
 Promising on our part to act in good faith and do all in our power to become as good and law abiding citizens.
 Signed
 Ocha ho x his mark
 George x " "
 Long, J. x " "

We the undersigned citizens acting as a committee selected by the Indian residents do hereby certify that the foregoing is the true and correct copy as verbally approved by the Indians.
 Committee Pardon Brown
 C. C. Blackford
 J. B. Smith
 Address in reply.
 L. W. Rogers Secretary
 Fort Bidwell Cal.

Fort Bidwell

Modoc Co. Cal^a

March 21st, 1887.

To the Hon.

Secretary of the Interior.

Washington D.C.

Sir,

We the undersigned chief and headmen of the Piute Indians residing in the vicinity of Fort Bidwell Cal^a recognizing the benefits to be derived from adopting the manners and customs of civilized life, and desiring to receive some advantages of education for our children and assistance for ourselves in establishing homes and habitations at this place for our families, and procuring the necessary wagons and farming implements, do most urgently request of the government the necessary aid to this effect.

Promising on our part to act in good faith and do all in our power to become as good and law-abiding citizens.

Signed –

Chief Ochicho x his mark

Subchief George x
Long Jo x
Pete x
Jim x
Archie x
Nco-ah x
Beauty x
Squi-ne.man x

Wit-see x

Tom x
Old-Jim x
Hump-back x
Big-Tom x
Ochoe Charley x
Johns Charley x
Winnemucca's boy's-boy x
Dave x
Georges first boy x
Too-quod-na x

We the undersigned citizens acting as a committee selected by the Indians and residents do hereby certify that the foregoing is the true desires and wishes as verbally expressed by these Indians.

Committee Pardon Brown

C.C. Radford

J.B. Smith

Address in reply.

L.W. Boggs,

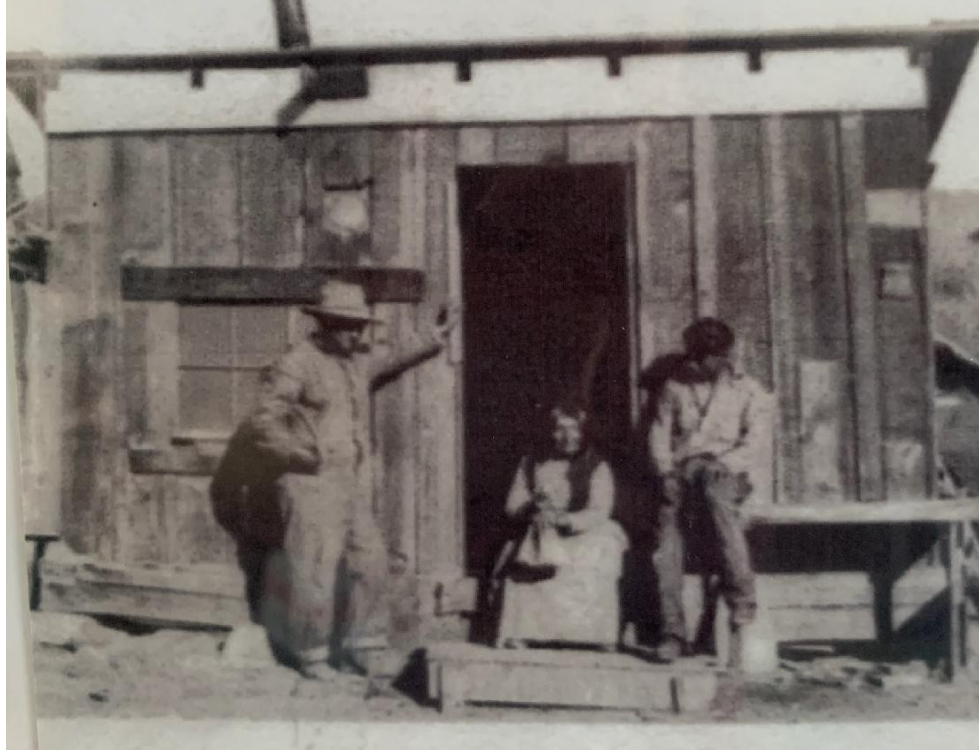
Secretary

Fort Bidwell, Cal^a



(Photos of Chief Ochoho and letters to the Department of Interior courtesy of Patsy DeGarmo Garcia)

The United States government closed Fort Bidwell as a military post in 1890, but the community of Paiute Indians that had emerged near the base remained. The Fort Bidwell Paiute Tribe is now one of 18 California tribes that do not have a “ratified treaty” with the federal government; rather, the lands are held in trust by federal agencies. In 1890, the U.S. Department of Interior converted the military base to the Fort Bidwell Indian Reservation. When the school opened in 1898, the former officers’ barracks housed students who were brought to the school from their home communities by Indian Affairs agents.¹¹ The reservation was enlarged in 1917 by Executive Order 2679.¹² The Constitution for the Fort Bidwell Indian Community of the Fort Bidwell Reservation of California was adopted in January 1936.¹³



Government-built housing, Fort Bidwell Indian Reservation, pre-1932 (photo courtesy of Patsy DeGarmo Garcia of her family)

1898-1931: The Fort Bidwell Indian School Years and the Boarding School Experience

¹¹ <https://legendsofamerica.com/ca-fortbidwell/>

¹² US Forest Service, <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r6/icbemp/pdfs/deis/eastside/volume2/apx1-2.pdf>

¹³ Library of Congress, <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.law/lscd.36026262>



View of buildings at the Fort Bidwell Indian School in Fort Bidwell, Modoc County, 1912

Photographers: E.F. Mueller (top), H.J. Brunner (bottom) (courtesy of California State Library, https://delivery.library.ca.gov:8443/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE261891; https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/view/delivery/01CSL_INST/12135907520005115)

In a 2017 promotion of an event called “Mount Bidwell California Indian Day” designed to honor the tribal elders of the Fort Bidwell Indian Community who had attended the Fort Bidwell Indian School, a tribal member shared the following description:

In the late 1800s, the U.S. Government took young Native American children away from their homes and families. They brought them to Fort Bidwell, California, where they were forced to go to school. They were not to speak their native language and beaten if they did. They had to have their hair cut off and were not to wear their own traditional clothing. They lived in dorms, one for the girls and one for the boys. They had to line up and march to and from school, if they marched out of place, they were whipped. Children would go out in the back of the school and cry in the evenings. They were far away from home. Some children refused to lose their native language and would go behind the building or away from the buildings to continue speaking their native language. Many children ran away and if caught, were severely punished. Some even ran away during the cold wintery days. Some elders, today, still have bad memories and refuse to come to Fort Bidwell.¹⁴

In 1891, it became mandatory for all Native American children to attend school. As there were few public or private schools on the reservations, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs devised the Indian Boarding School system. The purpose of the Indian Boarding Schools was to remove Indian children from their home culture and instill white Christian American values and behaviors in them, so that they could assimilate into white society and provide (often unpaid) labor to ranchers, farmers, homesteaders, and white businesses. By separating Indian children from their homes and families, the U.S. government undermined traditions of communal trust, shared land ownership, and Indian identity. Captain Richard Pratt of the U.S. Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania called the Indian Boarding Schools the “best opportunities [for Indian children] to prove their worth” and eradicate “savagery.”¹⁵

The *Annual Report of the Department of Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1903* clarified the role of the Indian Boarding Schools as “civilizing, cultivating the refinements of life and dispensing the gospel of cleanliness” in the Indian child, with the intent of nurturing “those characteristics of mind and body which fit him to assume the guardianship of his own interests and become self-supporting when the parental hand of the Government must be taken away.” The Commission on Indian Affairs believed that, if “pursued through a few generations, acquired habits will become fixed and transmitted by heredity, thus establishing characteristics which distinguished the sturdy white citizen.”¹⁶

14 <https://sierranevadageotourism.org/entries/mt-bidwell-california-indian-day-celebration-honoring-fort-bidwell-indian-boarding-school-elders/3230bfd2-d1ac-4518-851c-01f3c35ee8b8>

15 Pfaelzer, p. 5.

16 *Annual Reports of the Department of Interior for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1903 – Indian Affairs, Part I, Report of the Commissioners*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904., p. 8.

The Commissioner's report laments the challenge of these schools to combat the impacts that Indian culture had on the "moral upbringing" of Indian children. The Sun Dance and other traditions of "alleged religious enthusiasm disturb the moral training of boys and girls, interfere with school attendance, and can only result in nullifying the good work of teachers," encouraging "idleness" and wastefulness in children "who have for generations followed the instincts of nature."¹⁷

The employees of Indian Boarding Schools were chosen by certification from U.S. Civil Service Commission and rewarded with promotions for "uplifting the red man and preparing him for citizenship" through their work in these "industrial training institutions." Students would spend half of their day in academic lessons, and the other half in industrial training, according to gender and age. Girls were often taught laundering, ironing, and housekeeping skills in preparation for work as nannies or housekeepers. Boys were taught carpentry, farming, and other skills that would make them useful to farmers and ranchers as field hands.

By 1907, the Commission of Indian Affairs empowered local law enforcement to take children from their homes by force to bring them to schools, which may have been hundreds of miles from their communities and families. Many parents, if alerted that officials were coming to look for their children, often resisted the mandate by hiding their children in inventive ways, including rolling their children up in rugs and burying them with breathing straws until the agents had gone. Parents who lived on allotments and refused to send their children to boarding school faced penalties, including withholding of food and clothing rations.¹⁸

After the closure of the Army post in Fort Bidwell, many of the buildings remained and there was an established community of Paiute Indians living in the area. The United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs opened the Fort Bidwell Indian School, also known as the Fort Bidwell Training School and Fort Bidwell Boarding School, in 1898. As were other Indian Schools, the Fort Bidwell school was both a school and an agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and served predominantly Paiute children, but also a few Pit River children from the east side of the Warner Mountains.

The following documents from the Fort Bidwell Indian School of the early 1920s provide examples of behavioral expectations (different for boys and girls), as well as samples of school schedules.

¹⁷ Annual Report, p. 9.

¹⁸ Pfaelzer, p. 8.

-1-

***** Ft.Bidwell Indian School*****
Ft.Bidwell Calif.

JAN 26 1920

Course of study for Carpentry detail, ,

Assignment--

Farm Carpentry,

Aim-----

To teach Indian pupils common tools needed on farm.

Plan-----

Practical experience with each tool needed,

Three lesson's ending week of ~~Jan~~. Jan.30.'20'

Lesson No.(1)

Learn names of tools,

Lesson No.(2)

What different tools are used for,

Lesson No.(3)

How to keep tools neatly arranged, how easy to
Loose or misplace a tool when not kept in proper place

FIRST SEMESTER

FORT BIDWELL SCHOOL

YEAR 1922-1923

PREVOCATIONAL CHART-

GIRLS' INDUSTRIES.

Assignment List- Group "A"					Assignment List- Group "B"		
First Div.	Second Div.	Subject	Year	Qr.	Subject	First Div.	Second Div.
Audrey Sam	Hazel Pete Nellie Pete	Home Cooking I (20 weeks)	1	1	Plain Sewing I (20 weeks)	Minnie Dave F .	Sadie Capp & Ethel Williams &-
		3		Home Training (20 weeks)			
		4					
		Plain Sewing I (20 weeks)	2	1	Home Cooking I (20 weeks)	Maggie Northrup	Bertha Joe
		3		Plain Sewing II (20 weeks)			
		4					
Flora Dick	Virginia Murphy Alice Parker Minnie Taham	Home Train- ing (20 weeks)	3	1	Laundry & Poultry (20 weeks)	Marion Brown Dora Sam	Irene Harrison Elinor Williams Lola Peanuts
		3		Home Cooking II (20 weeks)			
		4					

*** SCHOOL CODE ***

Governing the conduct of the boys with the following objects in view:
To better familiarize the boys with their duties; to enable the boys and the employees to render individual aid in the general discipline of the school, and to establish a uniform system of correction.

DEMERITS and PENALTIES

1 demerit 1 hour, 2 demerits 2 hours, 3 demerits 3 hours, and each additional demerit 1 hour extra, working at cleaning up the school grounds, scrubbing floors, or such other useful labor as the Disciplinarian may designate. Said work to be done on Saturday afternoons.

5 demerits incurred during one week will debar a boy from leaving the school grounds for a period of one week; 10 demerits will debar him for a period of 2 weeks, and so on.

One demerit will be given any boy who is guilty of NOT DOING any duty named below:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Saying Grace | 8 Holding hat or cap on arm while marching in or out of chapel or dining hall |
| 2 Keeping locker and bed tidy | 9 Hanging uniform properly on the hanger, on time, after use |
| 3 Making his bed | 10 Blacking shoes for inspection and Sunday school formation |
| 4 Wearing overalls or old clothes while at work | 11 Keeping in step while marching |
| 5 Being prompt at all formations | 12 Brushing his teeth every morning while in line |
| 6 Washing hands and face before each meal | |
| 7 Keeping hands down to sides | |

One demerit will be given any boy who is guilty of DOING any wrong named below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Being slouchy or dirty | 4 Talking while in line |
| 2 Throwing trash around the school grounds | 5 Chewing gum in school or at entertainments |
| 3 Carelessly spilling food on table or floor in dining room | |

TWO demerits will be given any boy who does any of the following named wrongs:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Being disobedient | 8 Defacing or destroying government property |
| 2 Using profanity or vulgarity | 9 Visiting the girls' premises without permission |
| 3 Spitting on floors of buildings or on sidewalks | 10 Overstaying pass |
| 4 Leaving work or school without permission | 11 Improper conduct before ladies |
| 5 Leaving the school grounds without permission | 12 Making unnecessary noise at chapel, school or social exercises |
| 6 Taking vegetables out of any garden | 13 Talking back to an officer or employee |
| 7 Carrying food away from dining room or kitchen | 14 Climbing on autos, buggies or other vehicles |

TEN demerits will be given any boy for doing any of the following named wrongs:

- 1 Using tobacco in any form
 - 2 Stealing
 - 3 Immoral conduct
 - 4 Desertion
 - 5 Intoxication
 - 6 Breaking punishment
-

*** SCHOOL CODE ***

Governing the conduct of the girls with the following objects in view:
To better familiarize the girls with their duties; to enable the girls and the employees to render individual aid in the general discipline of the school, and to establish a uniform system of correction.

DEMERITS and PENALTIES

1 demerit 1 hour, 2 demerits 2 hours, 3 demerits 3 hours, and each additional demerit 1 hour extra, working at cleaning up the school grounds, scrubbing floors, or such other useful labor as the Disciplinarian may designate. Said work to be done on Saturday afternoons.

5 demerits incurred during one week will debar a girl from leaving the school grounds for a period of one week; 10 demerits will debar her for a period of two weeks, and so on.

ONE demerit will be given any girl who is guilty of NOT DOING any Duty named below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Saying Grace | 8 Hanging uniform properly on the hanger, on time, after use |
| 2 Keeping locker and bed tidy | 9 Blacking shoes for inspection and Sunday school formation |
| 3 Making her bed | 11 Keeping in step while marching |
| 4 Wearing work dresses or old clothes while at work | 12 Brushing her teeth every morning |
| 5 Being prompt at all formations | |
| 6 Washing hands and face before each meal | |
| 7 Keeping hands down to sides while in line | |

ONE demerit will be given any girl who is guilty of DOING any wrong named below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Being slouchy or dirty | 4 Talking while in line |
| 2 Throwing trash around the school grounds | 5 Chewing gum at school or at entertainments |
| 3 Carelessly spilling food on table or floor in dining room | |

TWO demerits will be given any girl who does any of the following named wrongs:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Being disobedient | 8 Carrying food away from dining room or kitchen |
| 2 Using profanity or vulgarity | 8 Defacing or destroying government property |
| 3 Spitting on floors of buildings or on sidewalks | 9 Overstaying pass |
| 4 Leaving work or school without permission | 10 Making unnecessary noise at chapel, school or social exercises |
| 5 Leaving the school grounds without permission | 11 Talking back to an officer or employees |
| 6 Taking vegetables out of any garden | |

TEN demerits will be given any girl for DOING any of the following named wrongs:

- 1 Using tobacco in any form
 - 2 Stealing
 - 3 Immoral conduct
 - 4 Being intoxicated
 - 5 Desertion
 - 6 Breaking punishment
-

By the 1903 *Annual Report*, the Fort Bidwell school had been in existence for five years. The Superintendent and Special Disbursing Agent of the Fort Bidwell Indian School, Charles D. Rakestraw, shared his reflections on the progress of the school in meeting the civilizing needs of the Fort Bidwell children. He was concerned about the proximity to the school of “two Indian camps” (the Gidutikad community that had formed since the late 1860s after the Snake and Bannock Wars), which were having a “demoralizing and degrading effect on the pupils of the Indian camps adjacent to the school.” Rakestraw believed that “abolishment of the camps” would result in more children having a greater chance to make progress.¹⁹

Mary H. Manning, a teacher at the Fort Bidwell Indian School, reported that the “progress of the children has not been entirely satisfactory” due to the “presence on the grounds of two Indian camps” with “gambling, transients, drinking, with attendant dirt and disorder, and without the advantage of the home atmosphere and Industries” and “vagrancy,” which “have a distinctly retrogressive influence on the pupils who have largely spent their recreation time here.” She observed that the Indian allotments (homes) were in poor condition, as opposed to white homes, which displayed some sense of order and cleanliness. The more time the children spent in the Paiute community, therefore, the harder it was for Mrs. Manning and the other employees of the school to instill an appreciation for order, morality, the “tendency to accumulate and care for personal belongings and property” (i.e., Paiute sense of communal ownership). Her suggestions for improvements follow:

The allotments [homes] of many of the Indians are undoubtedly poor, and having fallen into habits of vagrancy, it may be almost impossible for the Indians to go upon them and unassisted make the best of them and establish such homes as circumstances might permit. No greater benefit could be conferred on these Paiutes by the Government than to give them the assistance of a farmer, a broad-minded, big-hearted, practical man, who could show them how to make the most out of unfavorable conditions of soil, water, and climate. Could they be got on their allotments, taught to make homes and gardens, to save their earnings, or expend them wisely, in improvements, stock, and farm implements; could some have the judicious material assistance they really need to make a beginning, they would eventually be transformed from idle, shiftless nomads to a respectable, self-respecting, self-supporting part of the community. And I assuredly believe that many of them only need encouragement and instruction at the beginning, gladly to embrace the opportunity to make homes for their families.

A number of Indian men earn good wages - \$2.50 per day – during the six weeks or two months of the hay harvest and some few find employment a large part of the year on stock ranches and on the range. However, having no settled homes, there is no inducement to saving or wise investment, and most earnings are spent in the camps in gambling or otherwise foolishly or extravagantly.

¹⁹ Annual report, p. 412.

The girls and women are, like most Indians, deft and artistic. They make buckskin gloves which, I believe, are readily sold, but the scarcity of deer makes the materials for their manufacture difficult to procure. Though they are not basket makers, only making use of basket work in the papoose basket and some coarse domestic utensils, there is no reason why they should not learn the art, materials being plentiful and convenient, and there would always be a local market for plain, useful baskets as well as for more artistic work. When the girls and women are fitted for it, there will be some demand for their services as domestics and laundresses.²⁰

Rakestraw's report proposed ways to recruit more of the 300 local Paiute and Pit River Indian children to the school. Most of the 52 enrolled children for the Fiscal Year 1903 were Paiute, the Pit River tribe keeping their children at home in hopes that the Government would establish a school for them in the Pit River neighborhood. Rakestraw visited Indian communities between Fort Bidwell and Burns, Oregon to seek out potential students. He took Chief Ochoho with him on these recruiting visits. The Chief "kindly advised his people to send their children to school. Evidently the Paiutes have a great deal of veneration for their old chief, and in the near future I have hopes of seeing the attendance here increased as the results of these visits."²¹

Rakestraw reported on the conditions of the infrastructure of the school. There was a "fairly satisfactory" sewage system which disposed sewage from the school into "ditches, which carries it on to the fields at a distance from the school plant."²² The school's water supply came from from an "adjacent mountain canyon," stored in a reservoir above school in a canyon west of school. The dam shoring up the reservoir was old and in need of repair, as it was "liable to give way, thereby depriving the plant of water and fire protection." There was only one fire hydrant to protect whole school; Rakestraw made a request in his report for \$600 for repairs to dam. The school buildings in 1903 were heated by wood stoves and lit by coal-oil lamps; Rakestraw was concerned about fire danger, and requested \$2,000 to install electricity in the school.²³ Students set fire to the school twice in protest of the treatment they received at the school – once in the early 1900s and again in 1930.²⁴

The number of students at the school doubled over the next couple of decades. In accordance with the common employment pattern of hiring a man for one position at a Boarding School and his wife for another job, Modocer Lester Vernon and his wife Annie Vernon both worked at the school. His account was recorded and archived by the Modoc County Historical Society:

²⁰ Annual Report, p. 413.

²¹ Annual Report, p. 413.

²² Annual Report, p. 413.

²³ Annual Report, p. 413.

²⁴ Pfaelzer, p. 24.

My grandparents settled in the Surprise Valley in 1864 (the S.A. Boyds) just north of Lake City on what now is the Hapgood Ranch. Fort Bidwell was established in 1865 to protect the settlers from the Indians. My grandmother said it helped a lot, too. Anyway, in 1919 after the First World War, my wife and I went to work for Carl Gray the Superintendent of the Indian School at Fort Bidwell. The first year I was disciplinarian for boys and my wife was boys' matron. I just want to say that our son Darrell was born there in 1920. At that time there was about one hundred Indian children there or was supposed to be, with four class room teachers, up to and including the sixth grade. We had a hard time getting that many children to come to the school. Some of the time we would go out to the Nevada and Oregon after them. We didn't get much help from their parents either, as they didn't want to lose them for the winter.

By the way, the Army closed the Fort in 1892. I don't remember the exact date that it was established as an Indian School, but it was closed as a school in 1930. I left the school July 1926. The Government turned everything over to the Indians, ranch and all. I was a farmer after the first year. We had over three hundred acres of land with a dairy barn, with silo. They also had a very fine herd of Holstein cows. With everything it took to operate a fine farm, and a new hospital with a laundry, recreation hall with movie projector, and all the buildings it took to operate a school like that. A new school was built that I hauled the lumber for, with an electric light plant of their own. The last time I was there it was all gone, had been torn down, or let fall down. The Government, or somebody had built a few new houses for the remaining Indians. I suppose the Government did! Forgive me, but I do feel a little bitter, to see all that destroyed.²⁵

At the end of the school year, the Indian Boarding Schools were often hesitant to return children to their families and communities, as the schools relied on the children's labor at the schools. Many children grew very lonely, were punished for speaking their own languages and for seeking familiar sources of food and fun; many students ran away from the Boarding Schools, including from Fort Bidwell's school. A Fort Bidwell Indian School elder, who served Surprise Valley as a basketball coach for decades, often showed his damaged hands to his players and explained how he had all of the fingers in his hands broken with a meter stick for speaking Paiute in school. Parents occasionally tried to collect their children and protest their treatment, with limited success.

In 1928, the Rockefeller Foundation funded the *Problem of Indian Administration*, otherwise known as the Meriam Report, which documented abuses that occurred in the Indian school system. "The survey staff finds itself obliged to say frankly and unequivocally that the provisions for the care of the Indian children in boarding schools are grossly inadequate."²⁶ The Meriam

²⁵ Lester Vernon's anecdote, shared by Olene Grivel

²⁶ Institute for Government Research, The Problem of Indian Administration: Report of a Survey made at the request of Honorable Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and submitted February 21, 1928, Baltimore: Johns

team cited deficiencies in diet offered to the students, leading to outbreaks of preventable diseases like tuberculosis and trachoma; dormitories crowded “beyond their capacities,” insufficient supplies of soap and linens, poor water supplies, and underqualified teachers. The survey also found that many of the industrial instruction actually served to keep the schools running, relying on the Indian students to maintain the buildings and upkeep. Furthermore, even though the schools purported to prepare Indian children for employment in the dominant culture, “the industries taught may be called vanishing trades and others are taught in such a way that the Indian students cannot apply what they have learned in their own home and they are not far enough advanced to follow their trade in a white community in competition with white workers, without a period of apprenticeship [for which no arrangements were made.]”²⁷ After the Report’s release, many boarding schools closed and public schools were opened on reservations. Flogging was banned as a punishment in 1929, but other physical punishments were still allowed.²⁸

In a recent interview for KDUP radio in Surprise Valley, Fort Bidwell elder, community leader, and retired businesswoman Paula Sam, who is currently the second oldest elder in the community, shared her experiences of attending another boarding school – the Stewart Indian School in Carson City, Nevada – during the 1960s, in an interview with Tanja Ramming, with Surprise Valley Culture and Arts’ “Valley Tales” project. The routines and disciplinary practices that Mrs. Sam experienced in the sixties were not very different in the mid-century than in the early 1900s.

Paula Sam is enrolled with the Fort Bidwell tribe, as was her mother, while her father was enrolled with the Summit Lake Paiute Tribe, whose band is known as Agai Panina Ticutta, meaning “Fish Eaters.”²⁹ She spent her summers at Summit Lake, but lived with her grandmother during the school year until she finished 8th grade at the public school in Fort Bidwell. Since “there was no place to go to school” in Fort Bidwell past 8th grade, her mother enrolled her in Stewart Indian School near Carson City, Nevada, which she attended with her cousins. From her interview:

PS: We all went down to Stewart [Indian School] and that was like living in the army.

TR: Like in a barrack kind of dorm?

PS: Yes, a dorm. They had...60-plus beds and one long hallway and every morning you had to get up early. You had to make your bed, and if you didn't make your bed tight enough, they would tear it apart.... You had to remake it and then you had your chores. You had to do the baseboards, you had to clean the bath, vacuum.... You had to be clean.... Once you finished your

Hopkins University Press, p. 3.

27 Meriam Report, pp. 12-15.

28 Pfaelzer, p. 24.

29 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summit_Lake_Paiute_Tribe_of_Nevada

chores, you had to march to the mess hall to get your breakfast...then back into our chores. And then we had to go to school and do all these different classes.

Mrs. Sam shared in the interview that she ran away from the Stewart Indian School.

PS: Once I got with these girls from Nevada, we all ran away one time.

TR: Did you?

PS: Got tired of being treated like that. So, we ran away.... We made it, all the way in the sagebrush, all the way. We got close to Washoe Valley, that little valley before you go to Reno. We made it that far. Then we got hungry and tired, so we stopped at this neighbor's. The neighbor called the police so they took us back to Stewart. We were punished.

TR: What did they do to punish you for running?

PS: Well, there was like four or five other young girls with me...they rounded us up and took us back. They, you know, they said so you have to have punishment, you're not supposed to run away. So, they lined us up and you had to...They had all these girls, 60 some-odd girls. They had this big paddle with the holes in there. Yeah, they all got to spank us.

TR: So, all the other kids, they made the other kids spank you for running away?

PS: ...we couldn't sit down for a while. I think it was the last time I ran away.

After this incident, Paula Sam told her parents she did not want to be at the Stewart Indian School anymore, and they picked her up and took her back to Surprise Valley, where she went to high school. In her interview, she shared the struggles she and her cousins had in the Surprise Valley High School setting because they were Indian students.

Mrs. Sam went on to have further education, a career, and a family in the Los Angeles area, and decided to retire to Fort Bidwell to be closer to her home community.

PS: I was talking to a person I know and they said, "Couldn't you move somewhere else?" and I said, "No, not so, I can't do it. This is where my ancestors were from – not really, because they put us here in the reservation, [but at one time] we (the Gidutikad Band) rode all the way [out over this] big area, but this where my grandma and grandpa lived, this is where my people are, this is where they lay them to rest. I can't move like a Caucasian person. I might have to when I get old, can't take care of myself, but this is my home.

The Fort Bidwell Indian School was closed in 1931, just before the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934 was passed that closed most other boarding schools. When the federal government closed the Fort Bidwell Indian Boarding school, the U.S. Congress released \$10,000 to be spent on building new homes in Fort Bidwell. A July 29, 1932 article in the *Alturas Plaindealer* announced a "Home Celebration" to herald "a revolutionary change toward a home improvement for all Indians in the state of California." At the weekend event, "Indians will participate" in "a huge

bonfire of the old unsanitary shacks...as the Indians accept the modern, up-to-date type of cottage.”³⁰ After her birth at the Fort Bidwell hospital (once part of the military base), Patsy DeGarmo Garcia grew up in one of these newer homes. Her house is pictured below:



Photo courtesy of Patsy DeGarmo Garcia

As Paula Sam’s interview indicates, a few boarding schools, like the Stewart Indian School which she attended, the Chemawa School in Oregon, and several others, remained open. As the decades passed, the degree of intertribal interaction that resulted from children of multiple tribes and language groups being housed together led to a “pan-Indian collective voice” and the development of the Indian rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1974, the U.S. Congress passed the landmark Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA, pronounced “Ick-wah”), which empowered Indian families to reject involuntary removal and foster care of Indian children,

30 “Fort Bidwell to Celebration Completion of New Indian Homes,” *Alturas Plaindealer*, (Friday, July 29, 1932).

forced adoption by non-Indian families, and forced attendance at boarding schools. ICWA also allowed tribes to represent their children in court.³¹

Fort Bidwell Today

³¹ Pfaelzer, p. 28.



Scenes from the 2017 Mount Bidwell California Indian Day parade honoring Fort Bidwell Boarding School elders

For the past several years, the Fort Bidwell community has hosted the Mount Bidwell California Indian Day Celebration on the first weekend of October to honor the surviving Fort Bidwell Indian Boarding School elders with a parade and community meal. The event is an opportunity to educate the community about the reality of the boarding school days, remember former

students who have passed away, and celebrate the leadership of the tribe's elders. The sponsor of the event invited the entire community "to come learn, heal and celebrate with us."³²

In August 2022, the Fort Bidwell Indian Community hosted a traditional Pow-Wow for the first time in over a decade. The Padua'a Lake Pow-Wow attracted tribal members from all over the country and world, who gathered in Fort Bidwell to share dances, drumming, food, and storytelling. These traditions are the very spiritual and connecting practices that the Indian Affairs employees wanted to eradicate for fear that Indian children would not be able to assimilate into white culture.

At the 2022 Pow-Wow, the great-granddaughter of Chief Ochiho of the Gidutikad Paiute Band, elder Patsy Garcia, shared her photographs of her great-grandfather and other documents that are important to the tribe. She also told traditional stories to the people gathered at the Pow-Wow, helping to keep her community's voice alive.



Patsy Garcia sharing her photo of her great-grandfather Chief Ochoho at the August 2022 Padua'a Lake Pow-Wow, Fort Bidwell, California

32 <https://sierranevadageotourism.org/entries/mt-bidwell-california-indian-day-celebration-honoring-fort-bidwell-indian-boarding-school-elders/3230bfd2-d1ac-4518-851c-01f3c35ee8b8>



Pa

Patsy Garcia leading a dance, Padua's Lake Pow-Wow, Fort Bidwell, California, August 2022

"The Sucker and the Eel"

As told by Patsy Garcia at the Padua'a Lake Pow Wow: August 7, 2022

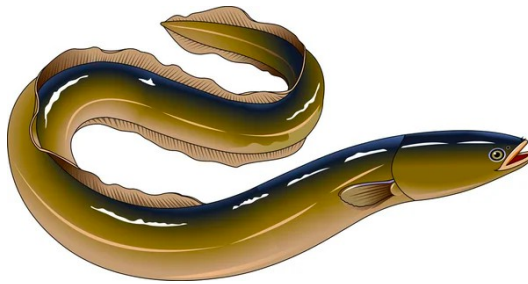
One day Sucker and Eel were having a gambling game. Sucker was very lucky at gambling that day, and Eel was very unlucky. The two of them played their game until night.

When they decided to stop, Sucker had won all of Eel's fine furs, all of his shell wamdums, and all of his best baskets. Sucker had even won Eel's house.

Eel was very sad.

Eel sat thinking for a long time. Finally, he said, "I am going to play one more game and bet all of my bones. I am going to win this game!"

So, they played, and as usual, Sucker won! That is why today Sucker has many bones and Eel has only one.



"The Fire"

As told by Patsy Garcia at the Padua'a Lake Pow Wow: August 7, 2022



Long ago there was just one fire in the world. This fire was very stingy. He did not want any other fires.

All the birds and animals got together and said there should be more fires, so they could cook and keep warm when they went to other places.

Coyote said, “I will get some of that fire,” and he went to visit that fire. When Coyote was visiting Fire, Coyote took a live coal and ran off with it between his toes. Each of the other animals then went to visit Fire, then took a live coal, and ran away with it. The last to carry a live coal was Frog. He jumped into the water and into the roots of a willow tree with the coal. Ever since that time, Indians have rubbed dry willow sticks together to make a fire.



The history of the Indian Boarding Schools in the United States is a deeply connected to the migration west of white American homesteaders, looking for land to establish their family farms and ranches. There is a direct connection between the “rounding up” of tribal people (as Paula Sam describes the forced relocation of Indians by the government) onto isolated reservations, the perceived needs for labor on homesteads and for “civilizing” Indian people with the development of training facilities (boarding schools) to address these needs. It is a gift to hear the voices and experiences of former Indian Board School students; may we learn from their history and may we recognize and respect people’s stories and differences.

About the Author:

Laurie Pearce Price is a Professional Land Surveyor and a member of the Modoc County Historical Society. She lives in Surprise Valley and thanks the Fort Bidwell community for their contributions to this article on a difficult period in history.