

CATHOLIC EDUCATION AMONG THE OSAGE

By Velma Niederding

*"When the United States and Osages made peace, the United States gave the chiefs of the Osages a medal of silver, on one side the two hands shaken, with these precious words Peace and Friendship; And on the other the likeness of the President with a pipe of peace, and the hatchet crossed with a five foot gold chain and not a link to be broken. Was the great covenant made by our Old People kept unbroken?"*¹

The difficulties accompanying the establishment of St. Louis School at Pawhuska, Indian Territory, in 1887, and the establishment of St. John's Mission School near Grayhorse, Indian Territory, in 1888, are better understood when studied against a background of early Catholicity among the Osage.

From the year 1763, when Father Marquette, reporting on his explorations of the Mississippi River, located this tribe on the south bank of the Missouri River, the record of close friendship existing between the Osage and the "Black Gowns" is unmistakable.

The first official visit made to the Osage was that of Lieutenant Claude Charles Du Tisennet (frequently written Du Tisné) who, in the Spring of 1719, went up the Missouri to the mouth of the Osage River.² From this time it is possible to trace the predominant French-Catholic influence in the history of the tribe. French traders came to the Osage seeking their friendship; they entered Osage homes, adopted Osage customs, married Osage women. The name *Osage* is a French phonetic reproduction of the Indian name *Wa-zha 'Zhe*.³

In 1723, after a Spanish expedition had trespassed within the limits of French Louisiana, a fortification was constructed on the Missouri River. This was Fort Orleans, built in Carroll county Missouri, and apparently evacuated in 1728.⁴ During the brief existence of the Fort, the Chaplain, Father Jean Baptist Mercier, a Quebec seminary missionary, visited the Osage villages and made a good impression on the Indians.⁵ For, although no extensive missionary activity is indicated for the next several years, the Osage were the first of the western tribes after the acquisition of Louisiana by the United States, to apply for Catholic missionaries. The tradition of the earlier Jesuit workers in the Mississippi persisted far into the nineteenth century. Father Van Quickenborne relates that he and his men after their arrival at Florissant, Missouri, met

¹ W. P. Mathea, "A Voice from the Indian Territory" in *The Kansas City Catholic*, 1890.

² Anna Lewis, *Along The Arkansas* (Dallas, 1932).

³ Very Rev. Urban de Hasque, Historian, Diocese of Oklahoma.

⁴ Anna Lewis, *op. cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Indians who had known these predecessors of theirs in the western field.⁶

In 1820, a delegation of Osage from Western Missouri journeyed to St. Louis, by order of the Indian Agent, William Clark. They requested Bishop Dubourg as "Chief of the Blackrobes" to send priests among them to teach them the white man's religion and the way to heaven. The delegation was led by Sans Nerf, principal chief of the nation, who told Bishop Dubourg that although Protestant Missioners had settled among them, they were not content with them because they were not the French Black Robes as they had thought at first.⁷ The Bishop received the Indians cordially and promised to visit them. He had intended to go to the Osage villages himself in company with Father Felix De Andreis. Father De Andreis died however, before the trip could be arranged.⁸

In his place was sent Father Charles de La Croix, a Belgian priest, whose name was thus made immortal as the founder of the Osage missions. Father de La Croix made two visits to the Osage, the first in July, 1821, the second a few months later. During this time he baptized forty of their number. His second visit brought him into what is now southeastern Kansas.⁹ On this second visit he suffered constantly from fever, and was forced to relinquish his work because of his health.

Father Felix van Quickenborne, another Belgian priest, was next sent to the Osage. Providentially for the Indians, Bishop Dubourg had induced a group of Jesuits, priests and scholastics, to establish themselves on lands at Florissant, Missouri in 1823. It was 1827, however, before missionary work could be undertaken. In this year,

⁶ Gilbert J. Garraghan, S. J., *The Jesuits of the Middle United States* (New York, 1938), p. 177.

⁷ Rev. John B. Ebel, "Osage Sought Black Robe in St. Louis," *The Denver Register*, May 2, 1954.

They (the Osage) came in full dress; their copper colored bodies were coated with grease, their faces and arms were striped in different colors, white lead, vermilion, verdigris, and other colors formed a great variety of furrows all starting at the nose. Their hair was arranged in tufts. Bracelets, ear rings, rings in their noses and lips completed their head dress. Their shoes were made of buckskin which they ornamented with different designs in feathers of various colors. Hanging from their robes are little pieces of tin shaped like small pipes. These are to them the most beautiful ornaments. Their great object is to make a noise when they walk or dance. Their heads are ornamented with a sort of crown in which are mixed up birds' heads, bears' claws and little stags' horns. A woolen robe hung over their shoulders covers nearly all the rest of the body; again to this robe are fastened the tails of different animals, etc. Such is the attire in which the Chiefs of the Osages paid respects to the Bishop of Louisiana. John Rothensteiner, *History of the Archdiocese of St. Louis*. (St. Louis, 1928) The quotation is from a letter written by Father Eugene Michaud.

⁸ Rev. John E. Ebel, *op. cit.*

⁹ The Rev. John M. Moeder, *Early Catholicity in Kansas and History of the Diocese of Wichita* (1937). See also, T. H. Kinsella, *The History of Our Cradle Land* (Kansas City, 1921).

Father van Quickenborne visited the Osage village near the present town of Papinville. There he found the Mass vestments left by Father de La Croix five years before, carefully guarded by the Indians.¹⁰ He visited again the Osages on the Neosho in 1829 and 1830 and held services in Salina and at the Chouteau Trading Post in present Oklahoma.¹¹

Osage history in the eighteen-thirties parallels that of the Civilized Tribes, in that it is not pleasant to read. With Indian removal legalized by Congress in 1830, the Osage began to feel that inexorable push westward. Their poverty became acute as they found their efforts to obtain subsistence from land always considered their own, cramped by the presence of other tribes. Despite sincere efforts of missionaries at this time, the Government's policy of Indian removal hampered attempts to civilize them. Being pushed out of established communities to the frontier kept them in a constantly unsettled condition. To add to their suffering they were brought into contact with that portion of the white population which had the least respect for their rights.¹²

In 1836, Father DeSmet, the gifted Jesuit priest, writer, explorer, visited the Osages. According to a historical sketch published in *The Osage Magazine*, Pawhuska, in 1909, (George E. Tinker and C. J. Phillips, Editors) the priest baptized many Osages among them, Jane Conway. Several years later he performed the marriage ceremony of "aunt Jane Conway," to Mr. Tinker, father of the present Tinker family of Osage."

The Government seemed content to let the Osage remain as the "wild, predatory tribe" described by Commissioners' reports. It continually discouraged the various applications to erect missions and schools among these Indians. On March 26, 1838, the Protestant Episcopal Church expressed the willingness of the Society to establish schools among the Osage, Kansas and Delaware and "to become the disbursing agent of the Government in expenditure of the whole or a considerable part of the income of the education fund."¹³ The writer was informed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that such a project would be inexpedient because the tribe had given no indication of making permanent settlements and owing to their impoverished condition were wholly engrossed in the struggle to procure a subsistence.¹⁴

¹⁰ Father Van Quickenborne is sometimes called "Father of the Osage" because of far-sighted plans he drew up for the systematic civilization of the Indians. Although the plan he proposed was unrealized, his other accomplishments were numerous, one of which was to establish, in 1823, the college which was chartered as St. Louis University on Dec. 28, 1832.—Sister Mary Paul Fitzgerald, "Beacon on the Plains" (Leavenworth, Kan., 1939).

¹¹ W. W. Graves, *Early Jesuits at Osage Mission*, (St. Paul, Kan., 1916), p. 164.

¹² Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹³ School File C596, Indian Office Files, (Washington, D. C.), Carder to Harris.

¹⁴ Indian Office Letter Book, 24:144. C. A. Harris to J. D. Carder, May 4, 1838 (photostatic copies in files of author).

Between 1838 and 1843, the Osage were visited by Jesuit Missionaries from the Pottawatomie Mission at Sugar Creek in Linn County, Kansas. The Osage, seeing the progress of the Pottawatomie under the leadership of Father Christian Hoecken petitioned the government for a school to be established by Catholic missionaries "and no others." The years between 1843 and the establishment of Osage Mission in 1847, are marked with correspondence, petitions, councils and unsatisfactory negotiations as the Osage pleaded for Catholic missionaries.¹⁵

In 1845, Major Harvey entered into a contract with Father J. Van De Velde, vice-provincial of the Jesuits in Missouri, who agreed that the Jesuits would take charge of a school among the Osage, the Government to furnish the buildings (log cabins) and pay the Jesuits \$55 per year for each pupil attending the school. The present site of St. Paul, Kansas was selected for the school and on April 29, 1847, Father John Schoenmakers, destined to become the "Blackrobed Chief of the Mission," later called "Apostle of the Osages" left St. Louis to live and work among the Osage tribe.¹⁶

The impact of the Jesuit missionaries upon the Osage tribe has not been generally known nor understood. The story of Osage Mission opening in 1847, and serving the Osage until they were removed to Indian Territory in 1870, is a dramatic record of a handful of courageous Religious attempting the education of a restless, warlike tribe, beset with its own temporal problems of adjusting to a new way of life in a limited territory. The Osage mind had, for centuries, associated God only with material forms in the elements. They believed the air to be full of Indian spirits. They practiced polygamy. Horse-stealing was considered an honorable sport and work was degrading. Not only must they be taught that heathen customs must be exchanged for Christian if the Osage were to live in the White man's world. They must be shown that they could learn to work and that they could live without the hunt.

Father Schoenmakers seems to have possessed those qualities most needed for dealing with Indians. "There was nothing dynamic about the man," writes Sister Fitzgerald,¹⁷ "nor was he unusually gifted. But the Osage and the descendants of Kansas pioneers have cherished his memory in a manner not granted to more talented men." To the Indians, their version of his name (Shouminka) became synonymous with priest.

Father Schoenmakers deplored the horse stealing, the excessive drinking, the polygamous marriages, the superstitious worship rites of the tribe. But he went about his teaching patiently, methodically, knowing that a religion not fully comprehended could only cause

¹⁵ W. W. Graves, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*

confusion. His great influence over the Osages, says Graves, was gained by his kindness and by the diplomacy with which he conducted all of its relations with them. The new school opened unpretentiously in 1847 with thirteen Osage boys. Four Sisters of Loretto, Kentucky, came to teach the girls.¹⁸ Father Schoenmakers had as his co-worker, Father John Bax. He was joined by Father Paul Ponziglione in 1851.¹⁹

The problems of the Mission during the years of the Civil War were excruciating. Father Schoenmakers, intensely loyal to the Union, is credited with keeping the greater part of the Osage loyal to the North. It was said of him that he preached with the American flag in one hand and the crucifix in the other.²⁰

The Civil War had scarcely ended when the people of Kansas began to look with covetous eyes toward Osage lands. A great cry went up, "Drive the Indians out of Kansas." It was inspired by the same spirit that drove the Cherokees out of Georgia.²¹

The old Chiefs of the Osage were saved from the Sturgis Treaty of 1865, by the intervention of Father Schoenmakers although his role was necessarily in the background. Under the terms of this treaty (called also the Drum Creek Treaty) one-sixth of the entire area of Kansas or more than eight million acres would have passed to an eastern railroad corporation for the sum of twenty cents an acre! During the negotiations of the treaty, Father Schoenmakers stood firm in his role of protector of the Indians, insisting that they deal only with the Government and that the land was to be sold for the benefit of White settlers and not to any Corporation. The Indians gave this decision to the Commissioner, who urged them to re-consider the matter.

There followed a page of history indicative of the treatment of all Indians when a land-grab was in process. Father Schoenmakers was offered a section of land by the railroad interests if he would influence the Osage in its favor. Four barrels of whiskey had been brought into the Osage country as a further inducement for the Indians to sign. Finally it was reported that an Osage had

¹⁸ W. W. Graves, *Father Schoenmakers, S. J. Apostle to the Osage* (The Commercial Publishers, Parsons, Kan., 1928).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "If the Osages remained loyal to the Union after their Agent, A. K. Dorn, had gone over to the Confederacy and after the emissaries from the five civilized tribes residing just south of them in the Indian Territory were daily coming among them with flattering offers from the southern officers, the influences that were most effective among the Osages must be attributed to their faithful friends and advisers under the leadership of Father Schoenmakers at the Mission."—W. W. Graves *op. cit.*, p. 114.

²¹ "Shoot the half-breed renegade and I will pardon you before the smoke gets away from your gun" was the advice of Gov. Samuel J. Crawford to Theodore Reynolds when informed of the trouble Reynolds was having with Augustus Captain over a claim. George E. Tinker and C. J. Phillip, "The Osage," in *The Osage Magazine*. (File of W. W. Graves.)

killed a white man near Winfield, and the chiefs were advised that unless the murderer was delivered up they would forfeit the titles to their land.²²

Then they were told that the Governor would call out the militia to drive them off their lands or to kill them. Thus, they were tricked into signing the treaty in favor of the railroad company.

Incensed state officials belatedly realized that if the treaty were ratified that Kansas would be deprived of 444,160 acres of school land and that about eight million acres of the best agriculture and grazing lands of the state would pass into the hands of an eastern railroad corporation and finally that no provision had been made in the treaty to protect settlers already cultivating lands on the Diminished Reserve, nor those living on Osage Trust lands.

Sidney Clarke, Congressional representative of the southeastern district of Kansas, carried the fight to the House of Representatives and his intervention together with petitions of other citizens, eventually forced the Senate to reject the treaty.²³

On July 15, 1870, Congress approved an act which provided that the Osage then located in Kansas would sell the Diminished Reserve to the United States for \$1.25 an acre and that from the proceeds the government would purchase land for a reservation in the Indian Territory. The Act also provided that all money left above the cost of the new reservation (purchased at fifty cents an acre) would be placed in the United States Treasury to the credit of the Osage Indians to be paid to them, with interest, as annuities as the Government might direct.

This Treaty, known as the Treaty of 1865, further provided that:

Article 8: The Osage Indians being anxious that a school should be established in their new home at their request, it is agreed and provided that Father John Schoenmakers may select one section of land within their diminished reservation and upon the approval of such selection by the Secretary of the Interior, such section of land shall be set apart to the said Schoenmakers and his successors upon condition that the same shall be used, improved, and occupied for the support and education of the children of said Indians during the occupancy of said reservation by said Tribe.²⁴

The ratification of this treaty eventually made the Osage one of the fabulously rich tribes of the world for under its provisions they removed to Indian Territory. But they lost their great friend and benefactor for he was not allowed to accompany them. Although the treaty expressly provided that "we retain our Catholic priests

²² Graves, *Schoenmakers*,

²³ *Ibid.* See also, Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*

²⁴ "Treaty of 1865" printed copy in possession of author. Kapler, *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 673-76.

to live with us and give us their honest advice," events were happening in the Government which were destined to cause the Osages many years of unhappiness and discontent.

In President Grant's first annual message to the Senate and House of Representatives in 1869, was presented his famous "Peace Policy":²⁵

"I have attempted a new policy toward those wards of the nation (they cannot be regarded in any other light than as wards), with fair results so far as tried and which I hope will be attended ultimately with great success. The Society of Friends is well known as having succeeded in living in peace with the Indians in the early settlement of Pennsylvania, while their white neighbors of other sects in other sections were constantly embroiled. They are also known for their opposition to all strife, violence and war and are generally noted for their strict integrity and fair dealings. These considerations induced me to give the management of a few reservations of Indians to them and to throw the burden of the selection of agents upon the Society itself. The result has proven most satisfactory. It will be found more fully set forth in the report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs."

History shows that the "Peace Policy" removed thousands of Indians from Catholic influence to Protestant control under the plan to give the agencies to "such religious denominations as had previously established themselves among the Indians." As the plan worked out, only Quakers were appointed as Superintendents of Indian agencies during the fourteen years the policy remained in effect. Of the seventy-two Indian agencies in 1870, Catholic missionaries had been the first to establish themselves in *thirty-eight*. Despite this fact only eight were assigned to the Catholic Church and none of these were in Indian Territory. Furthermore, no Catholic Agents were sent to the Territory during Grant's administration, and exceptionally few during subsequent years.²⁶

The Osage, pinning their faith on the treaty clause that they retain their Catholic priests and teachers, were removed to Indian Territory, confident that Father Schoenmakers would accompany them. Instead, they were placed under the jurisdiction of a Quaker Superintendent who was bitterly anti-Catholic in feeling, practices and expression. The next seventeen years are a record of constant intercession on the part of the Osage for Catholic missionaries and a constant suppression of the practice of their professed religion by Government agents.²⁷

Isaac Gibson was made agent of the Osages in 1869, and accompanied the tribe from Kansas. The first agency was at Silver

²⁵ *Messages and Papers of Presidents*, First Annual Message of President Grant to the Senate and House of Representatives (Washington D. C., Dec. 6, 1869).

²⁶ Very Rev. Urban de Hasque, *Early Catholic History of Oklahoma*, Cap. 14 "The Catholic Osages under the Indian Peace Policy" (*The Southwest Courier*, 1928).

²⁷ *Ibid.* Reports of Agents in Indian Territory, 1875, *Osage File*, reveal the hostility of the Agent, Isaac Gibson to Catholic missionaries.

Lake near the present city of Bartlesville. When a new survey was made it was discovered that the agency was in the Cherokee Nation. It was moved to Pawhuska in 1872.²⁸

Although the Jesuits from Osage Mission made occasional visits to the Osage, these were discouraged by the Agent to the extent that they were threatened with forcible ejection from the reservation. The priest (said the Agent) disturbed the regulations of the (government) school and caused too much excitement, in the camps. The Indians ran after him to have their children baptized; all of them wanted to go to Confession and to attend Mass. They even insisted on the priest going to the cemetery to bless the graves of their dead.²⁹

To protect the rights of Catholic Indians and to correct false and partisan information sent to the Department of Indian Affairs, it was agreed that the Catholic Bishops of the United States should have a civil agent at Washington to represent them before the Government. On January 2, 1874, General Charles Ewing was formally appointed Catholic Commissioner for Indian Missions.³⁰

Ten months after his appointment, Ewing in a printed communication to the Secretary of the Interior called attention to the numerous, unanswered petitions of the Great and Little Osage that their former Catholic missionaries and school teachers be restored to them.

In June 1873, the petitioners had again addressed the President of the United States, reminding him that the Treaty of 1865 had been signed with the provision that "we retain our Catholic Priests to live with us, to teach our children and to give us honest advice." They recalled to his attention the clause on education contained in the same treaty: "Said Osage Treaty of 1865 provided besides the original Education Fund of \$3,565, an addition of \$4,000 annually for the sole purpose of board, tuition, and clothing for our children."

Nothing came of the petition. On March 31, 1874, a delegation of twelve Osages went to Washington and presented their grievances in person. Petitions and counter-petitions were filed until the Chiefs of the Nation asked for the removal of Agent Gibson. An investigation by Generals Blair and Ewing followed and the Agent was temporarily relieved of his duties at the agency.³¹

²⁸ The city was named for Pa-Hu-Ska, fourth Chief of the Great and Little Osage tribes. He was the last of the White Hair dynasty of Osage Chiefs. He died near Osage Mission, Kansas in 1869. For an account of this Chief's conversion to Christianity by Father Schoemakers, see Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

²⁹ De Hasque, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Rev. Peter J. Rahill (St. Louis University) *The Catholic Indian Missions and Grant's Peace Policy, 1870-1884*, (Catholic University Press, Washington, D. C., 1953) presents in detail how religious liberty was denied to the Indians by a Government ruling under Grant's Peace Policy. Particularly cited are operations among the Sioux.

³¹ Fitzgerald, *op. cit.* p. 247. The Osage File (1875) contains evidence taken during this investigation.

Meanwhile an event destined to have an important bearing on Osage history occurred in the Church. The Rt. Reverend Isidore Robot, of the Benedictine Order, was given jurisdiction over the whole of the Indian Territory by Bishop Fitzgerald of the diocese of Little Rock. Father Robot arrived at Atoka on October 12, 1875, and began his duties as a missionary to the Indians. Nine months later the Indian Territory was separated from the diocese of Little Rock and erected into a Prefecture Apostolic. Pope Pius IX at the same time appointed Father Robot its first Prefect Apostolic.³²

From his personal observations and studies of events with reference to missionary activity on the Osage Reservation, Father Robot was convinced that the majority of the tribe were Catholics; that their Chiefs were most anxious to have Catholic missionaries; that the Indian "Peace Policy" of President Grant, in its application to the Osages was preventing the realization of these desires.³³

In Order to implement the Peace Policy in what was considered the most effective manner, President Grant had provided that only one denomination should be tolerated on a reservation in order to prevent strife and bickering. Catholic missionaries had encountered opposition not only among the Osage but among other tribes when they dared cross the boundaries of a reservation to look after the Catholic Indians. In the year 1877, however, the barrier was removed and Catholic missionaries were allowed to enter all Reservations.³⁴ That the barrier had not been removed on the Osage Reservation was due to local prejudice, sustained and tolerated by Government officials in Washington.

In July, 1876, Father Robot made his first trip to the Osage nation where, during a ten days' stay, he visited the Indians and discussed with them the possibility of founding a mission Church and school. His plans were presented to the Indian Agent, who gave him little encouragement.³⁵

In January, 1887, Father Felix de Grasse, a Benedictine, left Sacred Heart Mission for a visit to the Osage, having been instructed to ascertain further the possibilities for establishing a mission among them.³⁶ He spent the first Sunday among the mixed-bloods of Bird Creek and the next day directed his steps toward the capital of the Osages.³⁷

An Indian who spoke English fluently preceded us on horseback. On the way we met a full-blood arrayed in all the glory of the Sons of the Prairie. A stately fellow with a good countenance as Washington Irving

³² De Hasque, *op. cit.*

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *The Indian Sentinel*, 1907 Annual p.21.

³⁵ De Hasque, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Letter of Jan. 4, 1889, to the Tr. Father Stephan Abbot of La Pierre Qui-Vire by Felix de Grasse, published in *The Indian Advocate*, 1890.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

would have put it. His dress consisted of leggins, moccasins, a shirt of gaudy color and a red blanket. His hair was cropped close except a bristling ridge on top like the crest of a helmet, with a long scalp-lock hanging behind. His prominent cheeks and his temples were tattooed with vermillion and deep blue; bracelets, ear-rings and beads completed his attire.

Our guide stopped the Indian to tell him who I was. You would have been moved to tears if you had seen the eagerness with which this poor native came forward and grasped my hand, uttering these cordial words with which the Indians who do not know any English always greet us: "Howe Wakhonta Tapouksa? Howe Shouminka?" (How do you do Father. How are you, Father Shoemaker?) Every since Father Schoenmakers was their apostle in Kansas for thirty long years, the Osages have saluted every priest with name of their great benefactor, which they pronounce "Shouminka".

We arrived a little before nightfall at Pawhuska, the capital of the Osages. It is a village composed of about forty houses, of which a few are fine stone buildings, as the government school, the Indian Agent's residence and that of his clerks, also the Capitol where the Indians assemble to discuss the affairs of their tribe.

Father Felix celebrated Mass the next day in the large hall of the capitol building and since the Osage had assembled at Pawhuska to receive their annual payment, a considerable number attended. Among these was their principal Chief, Ni-ka-ke-pa-nah. After Mass the priest made known to the Indians the object of his presence among them. The letter continues:

Scarcely had I finished speaking when Ni-ka-ke-pa-nah came forward majestically draping his stately form in the folds of a long, red blanket, trimmed with colored fringes with the dignity of the 'gens Togata' of the ancient Roman patricians, to inform me through the interpreter that his people had been very happy under the direction of the Catholic priest in Kansas. The Osages had lost much, he declared, by coming into the Indian Territory. They had agreed to sign the treaty with the United States and to sell their lands in Kansas on the express condition that the Catholic priest should accompany them to their new reservation. For the past twenty years they have been deceived in their dearest hopes, obliged to live at the mercy of Protestant sects who are determined to rule everything. They have sent petitions unceasingly to Washington in order to obtain justice and satisfaction but up to that time all their efforts have been in vain. Ni-ka-ke-pa-nah concluded his harangue by saying how happy he was to see, at last, a Catholic priest.

On January 19, 1887, the Osage National Council petitioned the Right Reverend Ignatius, Sacred Heart Mission, Indian Territory, as follows:³⁸

We, the Osage Council, do appeal to your honor for your kind assistance in trying to establish on our Reservation a Manual Laboring and Training Catholic School and for us in this place, Pawhuska, a suitable place to worship, as well as to furnish us priests and Sisters whom we can work with and encourage us in our good work. We have been neglected for over

³⁸ The petition was signed by Ni-ka-pa-nah, Principal Chief, and by Charles Choteau, President of Council and Anthony Dell'over, (Des Laurier) Acting Secretary.

twenty years and have been frequented by other religious denominations contrary to our wishes and religion and can assure you our desire is with the Catholic Church.

The petition was signed by Ni-ka-pa-nah, Principal Chief, and by Charles Choteau, President of Council and Anthony Dell'oiver (Des Laurier), Acting-Secretary.

Father Felix de Grasse took up residence in the hotel conducted by Mose and Clemy Plomondon and there awaited developments. During the months of March and April, he was visited by the Rt. Rev. Ignatius Jean, the Superior of Sacred Heart Mission, and by Rt. Rev. Fathers Stephan and Willard, directors of the Catholic Indian Bureau of Washington. A small house had been secured, promise of financial assistance to build a school had been received, and an appeal had been sent out for Sisters to staff a school. A petition had been addressed to the Osage Council to obtain the grant of 160 acres of land in a central location for the establishment of an Industrial School.³⁹

The response to all of these appeals was encouraging. The Osage Council had unanimously agreed to grant land for the school; the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Glen Riddle, Pennsylvania, were to send teaching Sisters, and the generous benefactress of the Indians, Miss Katharine Drexel, had promised financial aid to the school.⁴⁰ Scarcely had contracts been signed for the erection of a school when the priest was enjoined by the Agent from erecting any kind of a building in Pawhuska intended for school purposes.⁴¹

Father Felix, knowing that the way had been cleared in Washington for a mission school among the Osage, was not prepared for opposition on the local level. The unexpected blow made him ill. "I remained in bed for several days with a burning fever, brought on perhaps by my worries." As soon as he felt able to explain the situation in writing, he asked Father Stephan at Washington to lay the problem before the Indian Commissioner. The petition of the Catholic Indian Bureau to D. C. Akins, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, brought forth a letter to the Agent, C. I. Potter, that settled definitely the question of a Catholic school. Wrote the Commissioner:⁴²

I have to inform you that after full consideration of this case, I have decided that the religious choice of the Osage Indians will be respected

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Later Mother Katherine Drexel. In 1881 she founded a Congregation of Religious belief called "The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament for Indians and Colored People" and thus dedicated herself and her vast fortune to these two races. The Convent of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament is located at Cornwall Heights, Penn. The mission at Pawhuska was the first Indian mission school she built.

⁴¹ Sister Ursula Thomas, Ph.D., "The Catholic Church on the Oklahoma Frontier," unpublished manuscript for Doctoral Degree to St. Louis University, Graduate School, 1937.

⁴² *Ibid.*

by this office. If, through their Council, they express a preference for the Catholic or any other religious denomination, the representatives of this denomination must be given every facility to prosecute their missionary and educational work. In doing this I am not expressing an individual preference or attempting in any way to establish or force a particular religion upon these people but am recognizing their right to choose their own religion, and am endeavoring to simply give them the facilities to worship God in the way which to them seems best.

The new mission, St. Louis Industrial School, was opened October 10, 1887, in a most humble and unpretentious way. Four Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Glen Riddle, Pennsylvania, were in charge of the school. When the Sisters reached Pawhuska they found their convent only partly constructed. Mrs. Patrick Rogers, a full-blood Osage, whose husband was a native of Ireland, kindly offered them hospitality which was gratefully accepted.⁴³

"By the end of October," wrote Father Felix, "by the side of a little house bought and turned into a convent for five or six nuns, we could look upon a two-story building fifteen feet wide by twenty-two feet long."⁴⁴ This was the new St. Louis School. The buildings consisted of a house for two priests, a boarding school for 75 students and a convent for the Sisters. One of the school rooms was used for divine services on Sundays.

Father Felix De Grasse and Father Savinian Louismet were the missionaries for the Osages at that time. They were very poor. The altar in the chapel was made up of a door laid over the head of flour barrels while nail kegs with boards stretched across, served as benches. The Sisters had purchased furniture for the new convent as they passed through Chicago enroute to Indian Territory, since nothing of the kind could be bought on the reservation. But freight was slow in transit and for a time they were reduced to using a soap box for a dining board and their table service which was of tin, consisted of four cups and four plates. They had no knives, forks nor spoons. Three bricks served for a stove and an old lard can found on the grounds was scoured and converted into a coffee pot.

On November 15, the Sisters received forty-five young Indian girls, twenty as boarders and twenty-five as day scholars. By the end of January, 1888, the boarders had increased to forty, twenty of which were by Government contract. By June, 1888, the number of girls in the school had increased to eighty.

The Osage, the next year obtained a contract for fifty pupils for St. Louis School, and passed a law in Council that every child of school age was compelled to attend school for eight months of the year. Loss of annuity payment was the failure to comply. The

⁴³ "Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis," from the records of the American Catholic Historical Society, Vol. XL, No. 4, Dec. 1929. This society is hereafter referred to as *ACHS*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Indians displayed a great deal of interest in the school for which they had waited so long. "They come to see us daily and go all over the house, see what is to be seen, then go again," wrote a Sister. They were discontented however, because the new school was inadequate to accommodate all of the Indian children who wished to attend. Consequently a new petition was formulated asking for a larger school.⁴⁵ A larger building was purchased and the Sisters made preparation to take care of additional students. Improvements necessary on the new property were delayed because the Agent, Potter, stopped the work saying no orders had been received from the Indian Agent.⁴⁶

On October 17, 1888, Mother de Sales was thanking Miss Drexel for a check for \$400 and certain furnishing goods. "Instead of a passage from one house to the other I have found it necessary to building a little larger, to serve as a playroom on stormy days as the children have none."⁴⁷ A month later she wrote to Miss Drexel indicating that the improvements had been made and they were occupying the new department, with forty children in the old dormitory and forty in the new: "The children are well with the exception of one girl who has pneumonia. Their ulcers and other ailments are decreasing. There were several children I refused to take—we are unable to take care of more. All the beds are taken and our two schoolrooms will not give a single child another seat." She thanked Miss Drexel for a box of medicines and expressed the wish that she might visit the school and see some of the Indian dances and capers: "Every day at recreation they will take a shawl or other clothing and make a tent; then they all crush themselves tightly into it and begin to pray or sing. The only thing you can hear for an hour is 'Higa! Higa.'"⁴⁸

On February 14, 1889, the school of St. Louis Mission burned to the ground. The fire, believed to have been of incendiary origin, was discovered at one o'clock in the morning. All of the Sisters and the seventy little Indian girls boarding at the school escaped unharmed. The buildings were a heap of ashes.⁴⁹ To show their appreciation of the good work done by the missionaries and Sisters, the Osages on the following day voted sixty thousand dollars to be appropriated from their tribal funds for the rebuilding of the mission. They set aside 160 acres of land for the same purpose. The appropriation of money was never approved in Washington.

The Osages through their Chiefs sent an expression of condolence on the burning of the St. Louis Mission. It was dated February 20,

⁴⁵ Thomas, "Dissertation," *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ From the archives of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Elizabeth's Convent, Cornwalls Heights, Pa.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *The Kansas City Catholic* April 18, 1889 lauds the heroism of the Sisters insaving the children from the burning buildings.

1889 and signed by Cyprias Tayrien, President of the Council; Eu-tsa-tah-wah Tah in Ka, Principal Chief and Thomas Mosier, National Secretary.⁵⁰

The outlook for the missionaries at this time was anything but cheerful. Rev. Father Felix had been transferred to Guthrie, leaving Father Savinian as Pastor at Pawhuska. Homeless, with a Community of Sisters without a Convent, they were discouraged from rebuilding by officials of the Government school.⁵¹

Monsignor Stephan of the Catholic Indian Bureau continued with his plans to rebuild the school. Mother Katharine Drexel furnished funds for its rebuilding and for a church. The school was of stone and much larger than the first school. The cost was \$18,000.⁵² There were forty-seven rooms surrounding an open court in the center of the building.⁵³

An article on Osage Indians and St. Louis School⁵⁴ stated that the girls were taught all kinds of housework besides playing and singing, and added that some of the little girls began organ or piano lessons when only six or seven years old. Taking Easter Sunday for an example the *Chronicler* stated that for breakfast the children were served "ham, fried a delicious brown, and eggs, fresh from the little chicken house on the hill; jelly, sweet cakes, bread, butter and coffee."⁵⁵

From 1889 to 1900, the difficulties of the Indians seem to have ceased and the new school progressed. The curriculum of St. Louis included besides the ordinary grade school branches, instruction in the domestic arts, sewing, dressmaking, baking, cooking, housekeeping and laundering. One Sister of St. Francis recalled her almost fruitless efforts with a sewing class in those early days. Her pupils insisted they did not have to sew as their mothers did the sewing. They were brimful of protest: "We don't wear patched clothes," or "We don't wear darned stockings!" were stock objections to learning the homely art of mending. At times they sought refuge from work in the protecting shelter of a convenient haystack.⁵⁶

In 1915 the Sisters of St. Francis found it advisable to relinquish the direction of St. Louis School which was assumed by the Sisters

⁵⁰ *The Indian Advocate*, April 1893

⁵¹ W. P. Mathea, Executive Secretary of the Osage, in a letter to the *Kansas City Catholic*, June 10, 1889.

⁵² "The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis," ACHS, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Today a portion of U. S. Highway 60 crosses one corner of the 160 acres where the school is located and the Osage County line and Santa Fe railroad track crosses the center of the school.

⁵⁴ Archives of Sisters of Blessed Sacrament. *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ "Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis," ACHS *op. cit.*

of Loretto at the Foot of the Cross.⁵⁷ The attendance for that year was listed as 80 boarding students with nine Sisters teaching.

In 1942, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the Community founded by Mother Katharine Drexel in 1891, assumed charge of the school, succeeding the Sisters of Loretto. At this time the school was completely renovated so as to modernize it in every way. Improvements were made that brought the school up to the standard of efficiency required in the diocese. In addition to the elementary department the first year of high school was added and the Sisters planned to continue adding courses until a full high school course could be obtained.⁵⁸ The attendance this year (1942) was listed as 69 girls with nine Sisters teaching; Mother Pierre was the Superior and The Reverend William Huffer was Chaplain.

St. Louis School was closed in 1949. The Osage girls, now welcomed into local academies or in school anywhere in the United States by this time, were averse to attending a so-called 'Indian' School.⁵⁹

The highest attendance of the school was listed in 1926, when 123 Osage girls were enrolled. That year Mother Agnita was Superior and the Reverend Albert Negahnquet, a Pottawatomi priest, was Chaplain. Throughout its existence the school, according to diocesan records, retained a steady enrollment of boarding students, the average being forty.

The fortunes of the Osage changed as the Indian Territory grew into a state, and civilization transformed the wild prairie lands into farms and cities. The school had served its purpose. Osage children can now attend a parochial day school staffed by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

ST. JOHN'S SCHOOL FOR OSAGE BOYS 1888-1913

The Osage seeing the progress of St. Louis School for girls desired a school for boys. The Sisters of St. Francis opened St. John's School near Hominy, on October 23, 1888. 160 acres of land for this school had been given by the Osage Council.⁶⁰

The new school had been made financially possible through the efforts of Father Joseph Stephan of the Catholic Bureau of Indian Missions and of Miss Katharine Drexel of Philadelphia. Sixteen boys, full-bloods, were received the first week. Later the number increased to twenty-six. There were three log cabins; the twenty-

⁵⁷ Chancery Records, Diocese of Oklahoma.

⁵⁸ Archives of Sisters of Blessed Sacrament, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ "Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis" ACHS *op. cit.*

six Indian boys were lodged in two of these; Father Savinian occupied one cabin. The teaching Sisters lived in the cottage.⁶¹

By October, 1888, the Very Reverend Ignatius Jean, Prefect Apostolic of the Indian Territory, stated that when the projected buildings for the new school were finished that the missionaries would have in their schools among the Osages alone, more than two hundred children.⁶²

Ponca City, thirty-five miles distant from St. John's, was the nearest railroad station. The postoffice was fifteen miles away and once a week the Sisters' hired man drove this distance for the mail and provisions. The nearest neighbor lived seven miles from the school.

Hominy Creek supplied water for cooking, drinking and washing. In summer the creek ran dry and the Sisters were obliged to go two miles for drinking water. Finally a well was started and after digging and blasting for several months, water was found at a depth of eighty feet.

The small building had proved inadequate by 1891 because of increased enrollment. Father Stephan represented the needs of the school to Miss Katharine Drexel, who offered to defray the entire expense of a new building. The cornerstone of the new school was laid April 5, 1892, by Bishop Theophile Meerschaert, Vicar-Apostolic of Indian Territory (later first Bishop of Oklahoma).

The new four-story stone building was eighty by eighty-four feet, with an interior court thirty by forty feet, insuring maximum light. A Chaplain's cottage, a bakery, a blacksmith shop, a Sister's Convent and a cottage for the help made up the mission. Ten Sisters of St. Francis were in charge in 1892, and the Government gave a contract for fifty boys which was later increased to sixty-five at the request of the Indian Agent. The appropriation was to be taken from the Osage tribal funds but only on the condition that the Osage Council would approve. Chief James Bigheart was the first to sanction the appropriation and all the other Chiefs later followed his example.⁶³

The Indian boys were very easily managed, the Sisters of St. Francis thought, although as a rule they were averse to mental or physical exertion. They liked music and easily learned to play the Band instruments. Nothing pleased them like hunting and fishing; they were good ball players and experts with the bow and arrow.⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

⁶⁴ Chancery Records, Diocese of Oklahoma.

All the usual subjects of an Industrial School were taught at St. John's including a course in tailoring and baking. A man was hired to teach the boys to tend stock, milk cows, chop timber, etc.⁶⁵

In January, 1889, Father Savinian was Chaplain at St. John's School and Father Thomas of Sacred Heart Mission was assisting Father Felix DeGasse at Pawhuska. Other priests serving the Osages were: Father G. T. Dugal (1891), Father D. I. Lanslots (1892), Father Willebrod Voogden (1894), Father Alfred Dupret (1895-98). During those years, these priests were also in charge of the Osages for very short periods or as substitutes or visitors: Father Paul M. Ponziglione, Jesuit; Father Ignatius Jean, Benedictine; Father Germanus, OSB; Father Hippolyte Topet, OSB; Father Placidus Dierick (Chaplain at St. John's School); Father Yerman and Father Edward Reynolds. Father Edward Van Waesberghe was appointed pastor of the parish of Pawhuska (which then included practically all of Osage County) in 1898 and remained until 1925. Priests serving St. John's School also included Father Andrew Poey, OSB (now at Belloc Abbey, France) Father Bernard Mutsaers and Father E. Van der Grinten.

St. John's School maintained a steady enrollment of around seventy boys until 1907, at which time the Brothers of the Christian Schools of St. Louis assumed its management.

St. John's School for Indian Boys was closed in 1913. At that time, Brother Mathew of the Brothers of Christian Schools was in charge. Ten Brothers were teaching in the school at the time of closing, and the attendance was listed as fifty boys.

CONCLUSION

Those Indians who sat in the Osage Council year after year petitioned for the right to worship God as they pleased and to educate their children in schools of their choice, are gone. Their children walk the White Man's road, as the old Chiefs dreamed they would.

This sketch of Catholicity among the Osage, the account of the establishment of St. Louis Mission School for girls at Pawhuska and of St. John's Mission School for boys near Hominy, is fully confirmed by official documentation and reports. Space does not permit a chronicling of the story in its entirety—the suppression of religious liberty among the Osages, the disappointments, opposition and suffering incurred by the missionaries. Nor does it permit accounts from official records of the growth of these two schools in the field of Christian and scientific education or their gradual decline after the mission school period.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Where Mission Schools were established in Territorial days—wherever and by whomsoever—they were a boon and a blessing to the Indian tribes. Their contribution to the civilization of the Indian cannot be ignored.

St. Louis and St. John's schools during their co-existence, served the Osages an aggregate of 86 years under the direction of some twelve different foreign priests (but all Americans by naturalization and spirit!), two of whom each year consecrated an aggregate of 172 active years to the welfare of the Osages. An average of 18 teachers (Religious Sisters and Brothers) each year added another total of fully 1,548 years of service in the slow, gradual, laborious progress of the Osages in general and of the mixed-blood in particular.

The Osage Nation through its Chiefs has paid many public tributes to the Church whose years of unselfish and loyal devotion helped to advance this tribe in intellectual culture, patriotism and Christian principles.