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Harry A. Kersey, Jr.



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FEDERAL SCHOOLS AND ACCULTURATION AMONG THE FLORIDA SEMINOLES, 1927-1954

by HARRY A. KERSEY, JR.*

THE GREAT DEPRESSION of the 1930s would bring incalculable hardship to thousands of Floridians of all races. Actually, the state's economy had been in constant decline since the late twenties when the excessive speculation of the land boom led to a spectacular "bust," aided in no small part by a pair of devastating hurricanes occurring only two years apart. Thus, the southernmost state preceded the nation into the economic abyss. As is generally true in such periods of national economic decline, ethnic and linguistic minorities bore the brunt of unemployment and privation. In Florida, one of the groups most adversely affected by hard times was the Seminole Indian population.

Since the turn of the century this small remnant of a once independent people had waged a losing struggle to maintain social and economic equilibrium. Their formerly secluded domain at the tip of the peninsula was undergoing rapid change that would adversely impact the Indian life style. First, state drainage of the Everglades curtailed their trading in pelts, plumes, and hides. Then, prior to World War I, that market totally collapsed under the impact of anti-pluming laws at home and imminent conflict in Europe. A second and continuing pressure from rapid population growth in south Florida, following arrival of the railroads in the late 1890s, had forced the Indians from their traditional campsites and hunting grounds. They soon became an impoverished and propertyless element in what once had been their own land. At this point it was clear that, left to their own devices, the Florida Seminoles might lose their integrity as a people and be absorbed into the growing number of rural poor in the state. It would take the concerted efforts of the United States Indian Service, state agencies, and private citizens

* Mr. Kersey is professor of education at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton.

organized into supportive societies, to assist the Indian population in stabilizing their rapidly deteriorating position.¹

Through the depths of the Depression Era efforts to revitalize Seminole social and economic life were necessarily centered on federal trust lands, especially at the Dania Reservation near Fort Lauderdale where the headquarters of the Seminole Agency was located in 1926. Under the direction of resident Indian Service officers a number of programs were initiated in an attempt to redirect the Seminoles from their former seminomadic existence based on subsistence farming supplemented with hunting and trapping, to a more stable reservation life oriented toward agricultural and herding pursuits. Over the ensuing decades this transformation would have a deep-seated impact on every aspect of Seminole culture. The purpose here is to focus on one facet of this acculturational process, wrought between 1927-1954 through the operation of a reservation day school, and later by sending Seminole children to a residential boarding school.

The opening of a day school for Seminoles came at a time when the role of Indian education was undergoing critical examination at the federal level. In the early decades of the twentieth century there was a national outcry over the abuses in federal boarding schools for Indians. Especially cited were poor health services, food and clothing, an inadequate staff and curriculum, as well as the inhumane treatment inherent in the use of flogging and school jails. Indian welfare groups demanded reform in all areas of governmental relations with the tribes, and the blueprint for an altered federal Indian policy took the form of a 1928 Brookings Institution study, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, popularly known as the Meriam Report, after its director.² The report was highly critical of the residential boarding schools and called for massive overhaul of their programs. Moreover, it strongly suggested that "young children, at least up to the sixth grade, should normally be provided for

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1. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "Private Societies and the Maintenance of Seminole Tribal Integrity, 1899-1957," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LVI (January 1978), 297-316.
 2. Institute for Government Research, *The Problems of Indian Administration* (Baltimore, 1928). The director of this report was Dr. Lewis Meriam, later one of three major candidates considered for the post of commissioner of Indian Affairs in the Roosevelt administration. He ultimately lost out to John Collier.

either in Indian Service day schools or in public schools. Not until they have reached adolescence and finished the local schools should they normally be sent to a boarding school." ³

Positive steps were taken during the initial years of the Hoover administration to implement the recommendations of the Meriam Report. The appointment of Charles J. Rhoades, a prominent Quaker businessman and president of the Indian Rights Association, as commissioner of Indian Affairs was hailed by reform elements anxious to reverse what they considered to be oppressive federal policies. Similarly applauded was the naming of W. Carson Ryan, Jr. as director of education for the Indian Service. Ryan, a nationally recognized leader of the Progressive Education Association who had authored the education section of the Meriam Report, was firmly committed to the day school concept with a revitalized curriculum for Indian children. ⁴ Thus, in its initial stages at least, the Seminole endeavor appeared to be consistent with an emerging trend in national Indian educational policy.

It should be remembered, however, that education, or to be more precise, formal schooling, had long been considered the keystone in any effort to improve the economic condition, health,

3. *Ibid.*, 34.

4. Margaret Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self Determination, 1928-1973* (Albuquerque, 1974), 16-36. This work presents a study of federal Indian educational policy which evolved during the New Deal. The chapter cited details W. C. Ryan's role in the framing and implementation of that policy. He had direct contact with the Florida day school situation despite its relative isolation. In 1934, the agent, J. L. Glenn, at the Dania Seminole Reservation reported: "During the early spring of the present fiscal year Dr. J. [sic] Carson Ryan, Jr., . . . visited the Agency, and in connection with the Officer in Charge made an arrangement with the Dade County School Board looking toward the establishment of another school in the Miami area. A few weeks later a teacher was assigned to the field, but up to the close of the year was ill. The preparatory work which had been planned was not accomplished for this reason." Glenn had opposed opening another school, finding, "There is this difference in the two projects. The Indian pupils at the Agency are in constant contact with Indian Service employees and respond to the influences of these associates. The children of Miami, on the other hand are removed from this influence." U. S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report, Narrative Section 1934, Seminole Agency, Dania, Fla., Prepared by James L. Glenn, Special Commissioner* (Washington, 1935?), 11. Mimeographed copy in files of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, Fort Lauderdale, Florida; see also W. Carson Ryan, Jr., "A Trip Among the Indian Communities of the Southeast," *Indians At Work*, I (April 15, 1934), 41.

social acceptability, and general well-being of the Seminoles. During the 1920s, the federal bureaucracy charged with supervision of Indians, as well as those private individuals and societies engaged in this field, still manifested an inordinate zeal to Americanize and Christianize the Indian which had marked similar efforts in the previous century.⁵ Perhaps not coincidentally, the first two special commissioners (agents) appointed to serve the Seminoles in this century were former clergymen who conducted their administrations with a reforming fervor. Lucien A. Spencer served as Seminole agent from 1913-1930, and opened the day school in 1927. His successor, James L. Glenn, refined and upgraded the school program during the period 1931-1936.⁶ The successful operation of a day school would become one of their most elusive goals. Both men came to find that the Indians of south Florida had a very limited interest in formal schooling which was linked with an assumed governmental threat to their free existence, and a subversion of traditional cultural values.

By the mid-1930s the Seminole Day School was caught up in a national controversy over the direction which Indian education was taking during the "Indian New Deal" headed by the new commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier.⁷ Collier, a liberal reformer and trained social scientist, was also a mystic and visionary who found Indian life a paradigm of communal self-government and social interaction which should be preserved. For a decade prior to his appointment by President Roosevelt in 1933, he had been a leading spokesman for Indian rights as secretary of the American Indian Defense Association. Rather than assimilating the Indian into the main stream of American life, he espoused a policy of cultural pluralism with the tribes having a dominant voice in determining their own future.

Although his administration continued the expansion of reservation day schools and revamped the remaining boarding

5. Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (Norman, 1976), 402-05.

6. For an account of the operation of the Seminole School throughout this period, see Harry A. Kersey, Jr., and Mark S. Goldman, "The Dania Indian School, 1927-1936," *Tequesta*, XXXIX (1979), 42-53.

7. Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920-1954* (Tucson, 1977), passim. This work is the first comprehensive treatment of Collier's administration as commissioner of Indian Affairs. See also S. Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Washington, 1973), 112-37.

facilities, Collier introduced some overt policy changes which incurred the enmity of various conservative interests in the nation.⁸ Foremost among these was his insistence that the missionary influence in the federal schools be severely curtailed, and that Indian children no longer be compelled to receive religious training without their own or parental consent. A strong emphasis was placed on Indian cultural studies in the curriculum, focusing on their own heritage in language, music, and arts. His director of education, W. W. Beatty, who succeeded Ryan in 1936, was also a Deweyan progressive in his philosophy.⁹ He fostered the development of a more relevant curriculum coupled with a heavy reliance on planting community gardens, raising livestock, and learning new methods of conservation. These activities aroused the ire of religious reformers who accused Collier of being anti-religious and fostering a return to paganism, while political conservatives saw the communal activities of the schools undercutting the Indian's absorption into a free enterprise, capitalistic system. Both groups of critics held that the schools were failing to teach Indian children English and the "American Way."

Agent Glenn's own views on Indian education were more in line with the conservative critics of the Collier administration, although he recognized that there was much of value in the traditional Seminole culture. Nevertheless, he bitterly assailed the position which the commissioner took following a visit to Florida in March 1935. Collier, who was accompanied by Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, along with his wife and son, asked Glenn to take their party on a whirlwind tour of the Everglades. Their itinerary ended at West Palm Beach where an Indian "pow wow" had been arranged by local interests as part of a tourist festival.¹⁰

Upon returning to Washington, the commissioner wrote an editorial, "Seminole Policy," in which he asked: "Is it our duty

8. Philp, *John Collier's Crusade*, 131-33.

9. Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 48; John Collier, *Indians at Work*, III (August 15, 1935), 5. For the specifics of these day school curricular offerings, see Willard W. Beatty, *Education for Action: Selected Articles From Indian Education 1936-43* (Chilocco, Oklahoma, 1944), passim.

10. August Burghard, "Seminole Indians ask Uncle Sam for New Deal," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, March 21, 1935; John Collier, "With Secretary Ickes and the Seminoles," *Indians At Work*, II (April 15, 1935), 3-5.

to 'civilize' the Seminole? . . . Possibly-it might be-a very few of their young people should be chosen to receive an education most carefully planned-in English, in buying and selling, in modern health science, in biology, zoology, ecology and anthropology. These young people might mediate between the tribe and the white world; . . . Personally, I hesitate at one step more than the above. I deeply doubt the wisdom of schooling the Seminoles. Let English come, and the newspaper, and the kingly confidence, that radiant reality, which is their life in the wild, might grow less, might fade away. And what worth would be the exchange?"¹¹

Apparently Glenn's contacts with the Collier-Ickes entourage furthered his alienation from the New Deal reformers. Although Glenn never openly attacked Collier while employed by the Indian Service, many years later he wrote, "the primary issue between John Collier and me was . . . he is basically and fundamentally a pagan-a lover of life in the raw. He would exterminate progress and throw 'its whole blooming works out.'"¹²

Collier had evidently learned of the Florida agent's criticism, and as the commissioner came under increasing attack for his own policies he was less inclined to brook dissent within the Indian Service ranks. In 1935 Glenn was dismissed as special commissioner, reportedly due to criticism of his work by various interest groups in Florida. Glenn had also alienated a number of Indian Service officials by his outspoken advocacy of land purchases for Seminoles, as well as complaints about Washington bureaucrats. Then, too, there was the matter of expected staff reductions due to budgetary constraints and Glenn, a Hoover ad-

11. John Collier, "Seminole Policy," *Indians At Work*, II (April 15, 1935), 4.

12. In another place, Glenn also wrote: "Because we are disgusted with ourselves and with the wars that curse the higher educated communities of this world, we elevated men to high positions who are so misdirected in their convictions that, as John Collier said to me, they are afraid to teach these Indians to read, for they will read the newspapers and get in the awful world in which we live. In spite of his ecstasy over the glory and goodness of the primitive life, I think I have seen enough of it to be assured that it too has its 'sweat, blood and tears.'" James L. Glenn, "My Work Among the Florida Seminoles" (unpublished ms. in Fort Lauderdale Historical Society Archives), 40. This assessment of Collier's bitter, almost anti-white cultural bias, is confirmed by Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 49, and Philp, *John Collier's Crusade*, 239, 241.

ministration appointee without Civil Service protection, was expendable.¹³

One of the first acts of the new agent, F. J. Scott, was to severely curtail and eventually discontinue operation of the Seminole Day School. This action was ostensibly taken as part of a general retrenchment effort by the Indian Service in light of national economic conditions. It was argued that those Seminole youngsters who wanted to continue their education could do so in the schools of the nearby town at Dania. Moreover, officials held that attendance in public schools would accelerate the acculturation process. Such was the confused nature of Indian education policy that officials of the Indian Service who argued this course of action, although seemingly at odds with the self-determination goals of Commissioner Collier, were consistent with that section of the Meriam Report which held: "The present policy of placing Indian children in public schools near their homes instead of in boarding schools or even in Indian Service day schools is, on the whole, to be commended. It is a movement in the direction of normal transition, it results as a rule in good race contacts and the Indians like it."¹⁴

Unfortunately, in the case of the Seminoles, officials had conveniently discounted the lack of parental support for schooling, the Indian children's low state of readiness for entering public school, as well as the refusal of the Dania school to accept Indian children due to racial segregation policies. Even their friend Mrs. Frank Stranahan, appearing before a United States Senate committee in 1930, had declared that Seminole

13. In assessing the conditions surrounding his dismissal some forty years after the fact, Glenn told the author: "Collier had some good ideas. He wanted the Indians to have what they want. It's their life, their way of living. I made the mistake. . . . I went to Washington, and he called me in his office. He said, 'Glenn, there's been a lot of criticism of you. What have you got to say?' I didn't say anything. I should have defended myself." Taped interview with James L. Glenn, January 12, 1978. Tape in collection of Doris Duke Indian Oral History Project, Florida State Museum, Gainesville, Florida. Glenn's replacement as superintendent at the Dania Reservation was Agnes E. Fitzgerald, who reportedly had wide experience in Indian affairs. She apparently held the post for only a few months, and her name does not appear on the roster of Seminole Agents. "New Seminole Agent at Dania," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, March 1, 1935. This is also confirmed in the Glenn interview of January 12, 1978.

14. Institute for Government Research, *The Problems of Indian Administration*, 36.

children were not ready to enter public school due to their poor hygiene and lack of academic preparation.¹⁵ Despite these obvious impediments to continuing the education of Seminole students, the Day School was closed permanently in 1936.

In assessing this initial phase of federal educational intervention among the Seminoles there is little to suggest that the Day School was even a qualified success. From the assimilationist point of view there had been limited advance in teaching youngsters to read and write English, master the other subject areas, or to modify substantially their behavior in the direction of non-Indian norms. On the other hand, neither had the Day School become a center for community development along the model fostered by Collier, Ryan, and Beatty on the western reservations. During the years in which it operated the vast majority of the Seminoles had not accepted the value of education for themselves or their youngsters, and the school did not occupy a central role in community life at Dania Reservation. Additionally, most members of the tribe lived off-reservation and had no contacts with schooling at all during this period. In truth, the Florida school was out of the main stream of the reforms which swept Indian education during the New Deal period. Because of its geographic distance from the major centers of Indian population and isolation from the Indian Service bureaucracy, the school perhaps benefited from benign neglect until it was ultimately terminated during the height of the Depression Era.

One positive function of the Day School was to serve as a catalyst for a few Seminole youngsters who would seriously pursue an education even after the federal facility was closed. In 1934, Mrs. Stranahan organized the nucleus of the "Friends of the Seminoles" society which would actively support the educational and social development of the tribe. A number of promising youngsters had been singled out for assistance, and

15. Congress, Senate, *Survey of Conditions of the Indians in the United States: Hearings Before a Sub-Committee of the Committee on Indian Affairs*, 71st Cong., 1st Sess., 1930, pt. 16, 7603-14. Ivy Cromartie Stranahan was the wife of the Indian trader at Fort Lauderdale and a staunch defender of Seminole interests of the first half of this century. For an account of her work see August Burghard, *Watchie-Esta/Hutrie (the Little White Mother), The Remarkable Story of Mrs. Frank Stranahan, Broward County's First School Teacher* (Fort Lauderdale, 1968).

when they were not accepted at the public school in Dania, the "Friends" joined with the Indian Service in underwriting their expenses to attend the Cherokee Indian School in North Carolina. Later, the Daughters of the American Revolution, led by Mrs. O. H. Abbey, also joined in this local effort which sponsored Seminole children at the North Carolina boarding facility from 1937 through 1954.¹⁶

Until now it was possible only to speculate about the motivation and experiences of those Indian children who first undertook a journey so far away from family and friends in search of an education. They were confronted with the culture shock of a new living situation, a strange geographical setting and climatic conditions, as well as being thrown together with different Indians in a highly structured institutional environment. There can be little doubt that they were atypical Seminoles, and Agent Glenn's appraisal of their relation to much of the tribe was correct: "The Florida school was an expensive affair, and in some ways these children learned faster after they were separated from their people. But it made more difficult the gap between these educated Seminoles and their own people, and there were a smaller number of children who would go to school under these conditions."¹⁷ In seeking to develop a perspective on those early school years from the Indian point of view, it is necessary to draw heavily from two primary sources. The first is a limited set of recently uncovered letters written by the students to their sponsors in Florida. The second is a series of oral history interviews with Indian adults who attended the Cherokee School, including two who were in the 1937 vanguard. From these and other documentary sources a fascinating story emerges.

As might be expected, the Seminole students at Cherokee were homesick for family and friends, and this situation was not enhanced when some of the youngsters came down with measles during the first year. One of them recalls: "I didn't like it at first, I was homesick. I didn't like the snow. They'd build us a snowball, and they'd hit us. It was the first time we ever see

16. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., and Rochelle Kushin, "Ivy Stranahan and the Friends of the Seminoles, 1899-1971," *Broward Legacy*, I (October 1976), 7-11.

17. James L. Glenn, "My Work Among the Florida Seminoles," 27.

snow. First I was homesick, then I got used to it and I kind of like it up there." Another stated simply: "I liked it, that's beautiful country. When I first went away . . . I was homesick but I determined I was going to finish . . . and I did."¹⁸ It soon became apparent, however, that they were not prepared for the winter temperatures in North Carolina and lacked adequate clothing. Their letters evidenced great anxiety over not having appropriate clothes to wear to class and school functions; the older children also expressed a deep concern for the younger ones, especially in having their outgrown clothing replaced. Thus, there was a constant appeal for funds to buy clothing, shoes, books, and other school materials. One impoverished young Seminole girl remembered: "I was kind of homesick. And I have nothing like a lot of people, a lot of the kids take their extra, you know, a lot of socks and all this. I got one pair of socks I wear there. . . . I thought I had a hard time, but I make it. I never been that way up north before. . . . I didn't know nothing about it . . . it's cold . . . my Aunt she couldn't write . . . and they don't know what we need from there to here."¹⁹ The clubwomen in Florida tried to meet these needs as best they could with shipments of donated clothing and occasional gifts of cash although times were hard. Even so, at least one student wrote to complain that, as a disciplinary measure, she was being denied money sent for her use by the "Friends of the Seminoles" organization.

The children lived in dormitories, two and sometimes four to a room. They were expected to perform much of the work to keep the school buildings and grounds in operation. For the girls this generally meant working in the kitchen, making beds, washing windows, scrubbing floors, as well as ironing and sewing or other chores. The day usually began at six o'clock when students dressed and undertook early assignments, including helping the younger children. One of the Seminole girls later recalled: "I stayed in the girls building most of the time because I helped little girls get ready for school. You know, in the

18. Interview with Betty Mae Jumper, March 23, 1977, tape (SEM 156A) and transcript in University of Florida Oral History Archives, Florida State Museum, Gainesville.

19. Interview with Dorothy Tucker, February 10, 1977, tape (SEM 155A), and transcript in Oral History Archives, FSM.

morning we'd get them up and dress them for breakfast. We eat at seven o'clock . . . and some of us stayed in the dining room to help clean the dining room and everything. And at eight I come back and help little girls fix their beds and everything. Get them ready for school by eight twenty, we had to be at school at eight twenty. It was all day."²⁰ Except for the great amount of work expected of them, most of the Seminole adults interviewed felt that they had been treated kindly by the school staff and had found both their quarters and food generally acceptable. Yet, one of the first to go there did recall some difficulty in adjusting to their new diet: "Oh, we didn't like it at first. We missed our sofkee. That's our main food among our tribe. They had hash and beans, mostly potatoes and beans."²¹

The Cherokee School was originated in the 1880s by Quakers, and had a well-established tradition of combining practical vocational pursuits with standard academic subjects.²² When not in classes each student was assigned additional duties, the girls performing domestic chores and the boys working in plant maintenance and keeping the grounds. Nevertheless, the Seminoles still found time to undertake a variety of activities in the community such as babysitting and housecleaning to earn additional money. It was recalled that the going rate was fifteen cents per hour, yet they could make as much as \$18.00 to \$20.00 each month which was needed for shoes, socks, and other items of clothing. They often worked as late as eight o'clock in the evening, and then went back to the dormitories to study until bedtime.

Obviously this schedule did not leave much time for social activities, and indeed there was little for the young Indians to do away from the campus. Occasionally those who had the money would attend a movie in the town on a Saturday afternoon or go shopping. There were student activities such as clubs, student council, and athletic teams at the school. Ultimately the Seminoles became actively involved, though they were a minority in the school. They served as class officers, played on the athletic

20. Interview with Betty Mae Jumper.

21. Interview with Mary Parker Bowers, January 27, 1977, tape (SEM 154A) and transcript in Oral History Archives, FSM.

22. Sharlotte Neely, "The Quaker Era of Cherokee Indian Education, 1880-1892," *Appalachian Journal*, II (Summer 1975), 314-22.

teams, and took a leading role in the Cherokee Festival held each fall. On Sunday morning they were transported to a nearby Baptist Church, and attended mid-week prayer meetings as well. No one seems to have questioned whether there was any aspect of compulsion involved in this religious observance; it was just accepted as part of the scheme of things at Cherokee. Moreover, there was already a strong Baptist mission effort among the Florida Seminoles by this time.²³

Academically, the school was oriented to traditional subjects found in the public schools of the day—English, literature, mathematics, history, etc. One of the girls did write about her typing course which she took two periods a day along with three academic periods and three “detail” periods—a euphemism for the domestic arts program. Because the Seminole children, particularly in the first few years, were older and had a checkered pattern of previous schooling, they were often assigned to a special class at Cherokee until they could be accurately placed in a grade. This placement was difficult at best. One of the girls who went in 1937 was fourteen, and would take eight years to finish. As one of her companions recalls: “We were kind of bigger than those school kids . . . we were about eight or nine and they put us in the third grade.”²⁴ Another woman who attended in the 1940s reports: “I’d never gone to school before, and I went at sixteen in the first grade.”²⁵ Most of the Indian children would attend but a few years, and for this reason there was a heavy emphasis on the basic subjects, plus the domestic arts program. It was assumed that most students would return to their reservations and put the skills which they had learned to use.²⁶ In that sense the work which the girls and boys

23. James O. Buswell, III, “Florida Seminole Religious Ritual: Resistance and Change” (Ph.D. dissertation, St. Louis University, 1972), 259-63.

24. Interview with Mary Parker Bowers.

25. Interview with Dorothy Tucker.

26. During the 1930s there was a reorientation in the curriculum of the boarding schools to reflect the realities of the times. As Szasz points out, “While the self-supporting system was in part a matter of necessity, some kinds of school labor also served as training for students who were to return to their reservations. During the 1930s both Ryan and Beatty, with the firm approval of Collier, attempted to develop a vocational program to teach students skills that would be of use ‘especially on their own reservations or in Indian villages or communities.’ . . . The Depression gave added impetus to this policy. In 1931 Indian Service Schools were specifically directed to admit ‘as many

did around the school was an integral part of their planned acculturation. One Seminole who attended for only one year and a half still thought it was a valuable experience despite limited academic attainment: "They helped. We don't know how [to] fix a bed, for one thing. That's what we learned. We learned how to fix a bed, and we learned how to set the table, learned ironing clothes and folded sheets, and all this kind. They'd teach us to after school, they'd call it work, and they had some lunch and everything." Somewhat ruefully she also admitted, "That's all I learned."²⁷

Yet, during the years that they attended Cherokee a number of the Seminole youngsters did well academically, at least good enough to graduate. In 1945, after over eight years of study, Agnes Parker and Betty Mae Tiger became the first high school graduates of the Seminole people. Ms. Parker never returned to Florida permanently, but Betty Mae took nurses training and returned to serve her people. She married classmate Moses Jumper and raised a family, all of the children having completed public schools in Florida—a privilege not afforded their mother. In 1967 she was the first woman elected chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

In reflecting on their experiences at the Cherokee School after some forty years, the Seminole adults interviewed are almost unanimous in their acceptance of the education which they received, and are grateful for the opportunity which the boarding school offered them. When asked if it was worth the hardships, one of the 1937 group replied: "It's up to you, you want to make up your mind what you want to be. . . . I know we need our education. There was only a few of us that speak English at that time. . . . I thought to myself if I could go home and speak three or four words in English I could help my people."²⁸ The combination of desire for both personal advancement and to be of service to their people suffused virtually all of the accounts gathered to date. Perhaps the one Seminole who has spoken and written most extensively of her motivation, frustration, and fulfillment in seeking an education is Betty Mae

older boys and girls as possible' due to the pressures of the 'unemployment situation,'" Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 65.

27. Interview with Dorothy Tucker.

28. Interview with Mary Parker Bowers.

Jumper. In one sense she was the trailblazer who set a pattern for others to follow. When asked why she chose the difficult boarding school route, she answered: "Well there was no school here and we wasn't allowed to go to public school because we was Indians and there was no other school. I wanted to go to school . . . my father says that he got me in either Oklahoma or North Carolina. And so I told him North Carolina because in Oklahoma if I go there it would be a language to all of us, they talk in Creek and I do too, so I can't learn fast. But if I went to Cherokee I can't understand them so I figured that I would learn faster there. They have to talk to me in English. So yeah, I learned."²⁹

She also confirmed the gap which resulted between the children and the tribal elders as a result of this decision: "My people didn't believe in boarding school. They fought me going because my grandmother was really against it, because they didn't believe in school." Nevertheless she persisted, for, as she wrote to Mrs. Stranahan shortly before her graduation, "I hope that it will be possible for more to follow and as I saw children following my footsteps toward an education I knew then I would never quit school which my grandmother wished me very much to do, because it means everything to me to see my tribe take an interest toward the school which we need so badly. All the years I have been in school I pray that someday all my people may realize the needs of an education and that my influence may mean something to them."³⁰

A teacher who worked at the Cherokee School for over twenty-five years recalls the Seminole children, especially those who attended during the war years of the 1940s.³¹ Betty Mae Tiger and her future husband, Moses Jumper, were among her favorite pupils, as was Betty's brother, Howard Tiger, the first Seminole to join the armed forces. He left school and served with the marines in the Pacific. After the war he returned to Cherokee and married one of the local Indian girls. During the war years life at the school was spartan. There were no field trips due to gas rationing, and sports activities were similarly curtailed.

29. Interview with Betty Mae Jumper.

30. Kersey and Kushin, "Ivy Stranahan," 9.

31. Interview with Mary Chiltoskey, June 6, 1977, tape (SEM 170A) and transcript in Oral History Archives, FSM.

Classes spent much of the time combing the area for scrap metal and writing to the Indian boys who were in the service. Mostly the old teacher remembered how well the Seminole children fit into the school life. They were neat, well-mannered, looked out for one another, and responded to the academic-vocational program. Once she accompanied the children on their return trip to Florida, and was shocked at their meager existence on the reservations there. This further confirmed her belief that the boarding school with its orderly routine, substantial food, and clean living conditions was a positive experience for these children who came from a background of poverty. Nevertheless, the residential facility was closed in 1954 as a result of improved roads, busing, and increased public school attendance throughout the Cherokee communities in North Carolina. This meant that the Seminoles and fragments of other tribes who had attended the school would have to transfer elsewhere in the federal boarding school system, or enter the public schools in their home states. Fortunately, following World War II most resistance to accepting Indian children into public schools had disappeared in Florida, and they enrolled in increasing numbers. Eventually, new federal day schools were opened on the remote Brighton and Big Cypress reservations. Only the latter is still operated under Bureau of Indian Affairs control.³²

The Seminole youngsters who went to Cherokee School were archetypical of those from their generation who had accepted the notion that the white man's ways could be adopted for survival. Figuratively, they were the first passengers on a forty-year bus ride in search of the assumed advantages of acculturation. For decades the United States Indian Service, aided and abetted by private societies, had as a goal the Christianization and assimilation of the Indian. In the 1930s and 1940s, despite the reforms of the Collier administration, this was still a viable goal. Indeed as one writer has pointed out, "Although Collier walked the thin line between proponents of assimilation and proponents of reservation heritage, he too believed that the Indian could achieve a balance between these two seemingly contradictory ways of life. . . . Both Beatty and Collier recognized that their

32. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "The Ahfachkee Day School," *Teachers College Record*, LXXII (September 1970), 93-103.

aims conflicted with almost all of the earlier goals of the Indian Service. However, at least in the 1930s, they did not seem to regard their goal—that the Indian choose the best of both worlds—as unattainable.³³

It was in such an educational-ideological milieu that the Seminole students were fostered, in the full expectation that they could return to their reservations unchanged as Indians and as individuals except for the employment of newly-acquired skills and knowledge. This was a psychologically untenable position, as is now known, for at its root acculturation is a process of personality reorganization for adaptation to changed cultural conditions.³⁴ Having once undergone this process, the individual is never the same and often encounters a conflict between old and new value systems that can be devastating. Moreover, it was an essential tenet of Indian Service policy that schooling be accepted by the tribes, and, to the extent that those Seminoles who attended boarding school became role models among their people, the assimilation process was enhanced. Thus, they were singled out for special praise and support by both government functionaries and Indian aid societies in Florida, and played an important role in tribal renaissance during the 1950s.³⁵ Education thus became synonymous with high status and economic gain for successive generations of young Seminoles.

In 1957, the Seminole Tribe of Florida was incorporated under provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act, and for more than two decades the elected tribal leaders uncritically espoused the idea that more and better schooling was needed for Indian youngsters.³⁶ Attendance by Seminole youngsters in public schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs day schools steadily increased during that period. Despite this, relatively few Indians were successful

33. Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, 76.

34. Alan R. Beals with George and Louise Spindler, *Culture in Process* (New York, 1967), 242-47; George and Louise Spindler, *Education and Culture* (New York, 1963), 23-28, 34-38.

35. William C. Sturtevant, "Creek into Seminole," in *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Eleanor Burke Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie (New York, 1971), 118-19.

36. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "Educating the Seminole Indians of Florida, 1879-1970," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLIX (July 1979), 33-35. A description of tribal organization is found in Merwyn S. Garbarino, *Big Cypress: A Changing Seminole Community* (New York, 1972), 86-89.

in the white man's educational system.³⁷ That was attested to by limited academic achievement, a high dropout rate, and few high school or college graduates until the late 1970s. Ironically, at a time when their students were beginning to attain greater academic success, an increasing number of Seminoles were questioning whether an education totally dominated by non-Indian norms was any longer acceptable—a position taken by their Miccosukee brothers, a decade earlier. The Miccosukee Tribe, closely linked by culture, language, and kinship to the Seminole, were one of the first tribes in the nation to contract directly and thereby control their educational program.³⁸ The result was reportedly a school totally structured around Miccosukee cultural norms while preparing the youngsters academically to succeed outside the Indian community. Although it is impossible at this time to judge the academic success of the Miccosukee school, there is research which tends to confirm that it has produced positive psychological results among Indian youngsters.³⁹

In the future the education of Seminole children, too, must become more responsive to the values and needs of the Indian people. As the tribe expands its dialogue with public schools over the implementation of the Indian Education Act of 1972 and P.L. 94-142 education for handicapped children, and perhaps contracts with the federal government to assume control of the day school on Big Cypress Reservation, an Indian voice will increasingly make itself heard in policy decisions affecting Seminole students. It would appear that at long last, by the 1970s and the early 1980s, the Seminoles' symbolic bus ride had ended.

37. There is an extensive literature dealing with the cultural conflicts which inhibit the educational advancement of Indian children. One of the most provocative recent discussions of this issue is found in Vine Deloria, Jr., "The Indian Student Amid American Inconsistencies," in *The Schooling of Native Americans*, Thomas Thompson, ed. (Washington, 1978), 9-28.

38. Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*, 318.

39. Harriet S. Lefley, "Effects of a Cultural Heritage program on the Self-Concept of Miccosukee Indian Children," *Journal of Educational Research*, LXVII (July-August 1974), 462-66.