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COLLABORATING WITH THE SAC AND FOX COMMUNITY TO DOCUMENT THE
PAST AND CHART A FUTURE FOR THE SAC AND FOX MISSION BOARDING
SCHOOL

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PAST AND CHART A FUTURE FOR THE SAC AND FOX MISSION BOARDING
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the history and legacy of the Sac and Fox Mission School (1872-1917) through community-engaged research grounded in oral histories, archival investigation, and site-based collaboration. By centering the voices of Sac and Fox community members, this project surfaces stories of silence, loss, and rediscovery that have long been obscured in official records. Many community members and interviewees were unaware of their relatives' attendance at the school until shown archival materials, revealing the profound emotional weight of reconnecting with fragmented family histories. Themes such as language loss, cultural disruption, and intergenerational disconnection emerged alongside expressions of strength and curiosity. The project also highlights the importance of material culture, the landscape as a living archive, and the need for respectful stewardship of school records. Guided by the principles of community-based archaeology and the “archaeology of the heart”, this work underscores the value of collaboration, care, and continued dialogue in addressing the histories of boarding schools. Ultimately, it seeks to contribute to community healing while offering a model for ethical, relational research within and beyond the academy.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Positionality Statement

In community-based research, positionality refers to acknowledging how a researcher's identity, background, and experiences influence the questions they ask, the relationships they build, and the interpretations they make. I begin my thesis with this statement because recognizing one's positionality is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly when engaging with Indigenous communities and working with sensitive histories. While some scholars question whether positionality should be explicitly addressed, I view it as an ethical responsibility. It requires continual self-reflection on how one's social, cultural, and disciplinary positioning shapes both process and outcome, and it helps ensure that authority and interpretation are shared rather than imposed.

I am a master's student in anthropology with an emphasis on archaeology at the University of Oklahoma (OU). As a first-generation Canadian with German and Danish parents and fostered Indigenous siblings, I have always navigated multiple cultural frameworks within my family and community. Growing up surrounded by differing worldviews taught me that identity is fluid, relational, and contextual, less about fixed categories and more about lived experiences and shared responsibilities. This understanding has deeply informed my archaeological approach, prompting me to see research not as a detached analysis of the past but as a dialogic process grounded in relationships, listening, and reciprocity.

My positionality in this research is that of a non-Indigenous, settler-descended archaeologist working collaboratively with the Sac and Fox Nation to document and interpret the

history of the Sac and Fox Mission Boarding School. This institution is referred to by multiple names in archival and community sources, including the *Sac and Fox Agency School*, *Sac and Fox Manual Labour School*, and the *Sac and Fox Boarding School*. Throughout this thesis, I use “Sac and Fox Mission School” to reflect the terminology most commonly used in the archival record and within current community conversations, while acknowledging that these variations reflect changes in administration, context, and meaning over time. I approach this work as both a learner and a guest on lands and within histories that are not my own. I recognize that I benefit from institutional and academic structures that have historically marginalized Indigenous perspectives, and I therefore aim to use my position within those institutions to support community-led goals and highlight Indigenous voices. My archaeological training provides tools for documentation and interpretation, but my ethical commitments, shaped through collaboration and mentorship, guide how, when, and for whom those tools are used.

Acknowledging my positionality allows me to make my research process transparent and hold myself accountable to the communities whose histories I am working to help preserve. It also reminds me that all interpretation is situated: the themes I identify are informed by my background and experiences, and another researcher might read these histories differently. Rather than viewing this subjectivity as a limitation, I see it as intrinsic to community-engaged research, where trust, reflexivity, and humility are vital to producing meaningful and ethical scholarship.

Research Questions and Aims

The remains of the Sac and Fox Mission School (recorded as archaeological site 34LN136, where “34” refers to Oklahoma, “LN” to Lincoln County, and “136” to the site’s sequence number) are nestled in an overgrown grove behind the Sac and Fox Casino in Stroud (Lincoln County), Oklahoma. Joe Deere Consulting conducted a Class III archaeological survey of the site

from late 2021 to early 2022 at the request of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to comply with Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Joe Deere Consulting, LLC 2022). The work consisted of a background file search and a pedestrian survey with shovel testing (Joe Deere Consulting, LLC 2022). The archival survey determined that the school operated from around 1872 until 1917 (Joe Deere Consulting, LLC 2022). This site is situated within the tribe's history post-contact period which spans over Oklahoma's reservation and allotment periods, a critical time in the tribe's history, shaped by the U.S. Government's legacy of forced removals and assimilationist policies.

Understanding this context is vital, because it frames the school not just as an isolated site but as part of a broader federal agenda aimed at erasing Indigenous people's way of life, cultures, and communities. While Joe Deere Consulting's survey provides significant historical context for the Sac and Fox Mission School, it only, and by design, scratches the surface of the story that could be told. I was first introduced to the Sac and Fox Mission School site while pursuing a master's degree and working as a teaching assistant for Voices of Oklahoma, a high school internship program run by OU's Oklahoma Public Archaeology Network (OKPAN) (Pitblado, 2023). As I learned more about the school's history, I reached out to the Sac and Fox Business Committee, the elected leadership of the Sac and Fox Nation, a sovereign dependent nation with a constitutional government within the United States, and began meeting with Elders and other community members to ask whether they would be interested in collaborating on a thesis project. Archaeological work should be conducted for, with, and by community members, particularly given that many Nations have historically been excluded from such processes. This collaboration is what gives the work meaning to me. I did not realize how unconventional my thesis would be

when I started this project. However, due to my strong commitment to community-based archaeology, I knew I would be willing to go wherever the community wanted to take me.

Although this thesis does not represent more traditional methods in archaeology such as survey or excavation, it is rooted in archaeological practice through its emphasis on community collaboration, material culture, and place-based interpretation. My training in community-based archaeology has taught me that archaeology is not only about recovering and interpreting objects, but also about working in partnership with communities to understand and preserve their histories. This project draws on archaeological methods such as archival research, analysis of material culture, and landscape interpretation, while centering the knowledge and priorities of the Sac and Fox Nation. In doing so, it reflects a broader shift within archaeology toward more inclusive and community-driven approaches that seek to repair and reframe narratives of the past (Atalay 2012).

Throughout my archival research and conversations with Sac and Fox community members, I realized that the perspectives of the individuals who attended these institutions were notably absent from official records, historical narratives, and archaeological interpretations. The more my partners and I delved into this project, the more we recognized that many community members are descendants of those who attended the school. These descendants hold valuable knowledge, memories, and insights that have yet to be fully documented or integrated into the historical narrative.

This study begins to address this gap by centering community voices and preserving their stories for future generations. It explores the research question: *What elements of the Sac and Fox Mission boarding school do citizens want recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations?* Using a collaborative archaeology approach, this project aims to empower the

community to actively shape how their history is understood and shared. The project's methodology includes archival research, oral history interviews, and community events aimed at making descendants aware of materials and prompting intergenerational dialogue.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is composed of seven sections. The second chapter offers *Historical Context*, exploring the history of the Sac and Fox Nation, the U.S. boarding school system, and the role of the Sac and Fox Mission School within these larger narratives. Following this, the *Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks* chapter examines the principles of community archaeology, landscape archaeology, place-based methodologies, "archaeology of the heart," and the concept of events and non-events, providing the foundation for this study's collaborative and decolonizing approach.

The *Methodology* chapter outlines the collaborative research process, highlighting partnerships with the Sac and Fox Nation, the collection and analysis of oral histories, the integration of archival and material evidence, and the role of public events in fostering community engagement. The *Findings & Interpretations* chapter presents insights from interviews and community collaboration, organized around themes of silence, intergenerational disconnection, cultural loss and persistence, and emotional connections to place. The *Discussion* chapter reflects on the broader significance of these findings, emphasizing the power of oral histories, the ways archaeology is strengthened by them, and the barriers and ethical questions of access and stewardship. Finally, the *Conclusion & Reflections* chapter synthesizes the project's findings, explicitly answers the research question, and considers their broader implications for preservation, interpretation, and future directions in community advocacy and healing.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the history of the Sac and Fox Mission School cannot be understood through a single line of evidence or from an outside perspective alone. Its story emerges through the convergence of archival traces, community memory, and the lived landscape. Bringing these forms of knowledge together reveals not only what has been forgotten or obscured but also how the Sac and Fox Nation continues to engage with this history in ways that center care and responsibility. By grounding the research in collaboration and community priorities, this project demonstrates that archaeology can operate as an act of relational accountability, one that listens and helps sustain the stories that matter most.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The United States' federal Indian boarding school system unfolded in multiple phases; this chapter focuses on the phase that operated from the mid-nineteenth century through much of the twentieth century, during which federal policies sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples by systematically erasing their languages, cultures, and tradition (Ellis 1996:3). As part of this system, the Sac and Fox Mission School profoundly shaped the lives of many Sac and Fox community members, leaving a complex legacy of both cultural disruption and resilience. Understanding the historical contexts of the Sac and Fox Nation, the broader boarding school system, and the specific experiences tied to the Sac and Fox Mission School is essential for comprehending the school's lasting impact on individuals and the community. This chapter examines these interconnected histories to lay the groundwork for the rest of the project.

Sac and Fox Nation

In compiling the brief historical background on the Sac and Fox Nation that follows, I relied heavily on the work of Charles Callender, whose entries on the Sauk and Fox tribes appear in Volume 15 of the *Handbook of North American Indians*, published by the Smithsonian Institution (1978). This volume was recommended to me by Lina Ortega, who is Sac and Fox and an associate curator at the Western History Collections (WHC) at the University of Oklahoma. Her guidance has been central in shaping my research approach. Callender was a cultural anthropologist trained in the mid-twentieth century whose scholarship reflected the anthropological frameworks of his era, often descriptive, comparative, and written from an outsider's perspective. Engaging his work today requires recognizing both its value as an early ethnographic synthesis and its limitations, particularly in representing Indigenous histories through non-Native academic lenses. These entries, written in the 1970s, remain among the most

comprehensive and widely cited ethnographic and historical overviews of the Sac and Fox people. While I recognize that Callender was not a member of the community and that his work reflects the scholarly conventions and limitations of his time, there are very few published sources available that address the broader history of the Sac and Fox. My intention in including this background is not to recount ceremonial practices, traditions, or beliefs, topics that are not appropriate to detail in this thesis, but rather to offer a brief historical overview to help situate the Sac and Fox Mission School within the wider contexts of federal assimilation policies.

The Sac and Fox people originated as two distinct tribes: the Sauk and the Fox. Although they were culturally similar and closely associated, they were not originally a single political entity. From 1733 until about 1850, the two groups were linked by a formal alliance, but they remained distinct tribes throughout their histories (Callender 1978). The idea of the Sac and Fox as a single, unified tribe was not one the communities themselves adopted, but rather a construct imposed by the United States government, which often misunderstood or oversimplified Indigenous political structures (Callender 1978). While the Anglicized names "Sauk" and "Fox" are widely used, the Sauk refer to themselves as *Asakiwaki*, often interpreted as “People of the Yellow Earth,” and the Fox identify as *Meshkwahkihaki*, or “People of the Red Earth” (Lina Ortega, pers. comm. 2025, Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa, 2025).

Today, the legacy of this imposed unification is still reflected in their shared name, though the Sac and Fox peoples are now organized as three separate tribal nations. These include the Sac and Fox Nation in Oklahoma (historically the Sac and Fox Tribe of Indians of the Mississippi River), the Meskwaki Nation in Iowa (officially the Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa), and the Sac and Fox Nation of Missouri in Kansas and Nebraska (also called the Sac and Fox of the Missouri band, referring to the Missouri River). The Sac and Fox

Nation traces its presence in Oklahoma to the multiple 19th-century forced removals that followed treaty negotiations and settler encroachment (Callender 1978).

The Sauk's traditional homelands were located near the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, with early settler accounts describing them as refugees fleeing Iroquois attacks (Chris Boyd, pers. comm. 2023; Callender 1978). As seen in Figure 1, by the late 1600s, they had migrated westward into the Great Lakes region, with European documented presence in present-day Wisconsin by 1677 (Callender 1978). Between 1733 and 1850, the Sauk and Fox formed a formal alliance, although they remained distinct political groups (Callender 1978). During this period, the Sauk and Fox moved through Iowa and Illinois, eventually establishing Saukenuk, a large and politically significant village situated along the Rock River in present-day Illinois (Callender 1978). From approximately 1764 to 1830, Saukenuk served as the principal Sauk settlement and was considered the tribe's spiritual and political center (Wagner et al. 2023). It was one of the most important Indigenous settlements in the Upper Midwest at the time, known for its agricultural productivity, defensive positioning, and its role in resisting settler encroachment. The village remained a central part of Sauk life until increasing U.S. expansion and land pressures forced its abandonment in the early 1830s (Wagner et al. 2023).

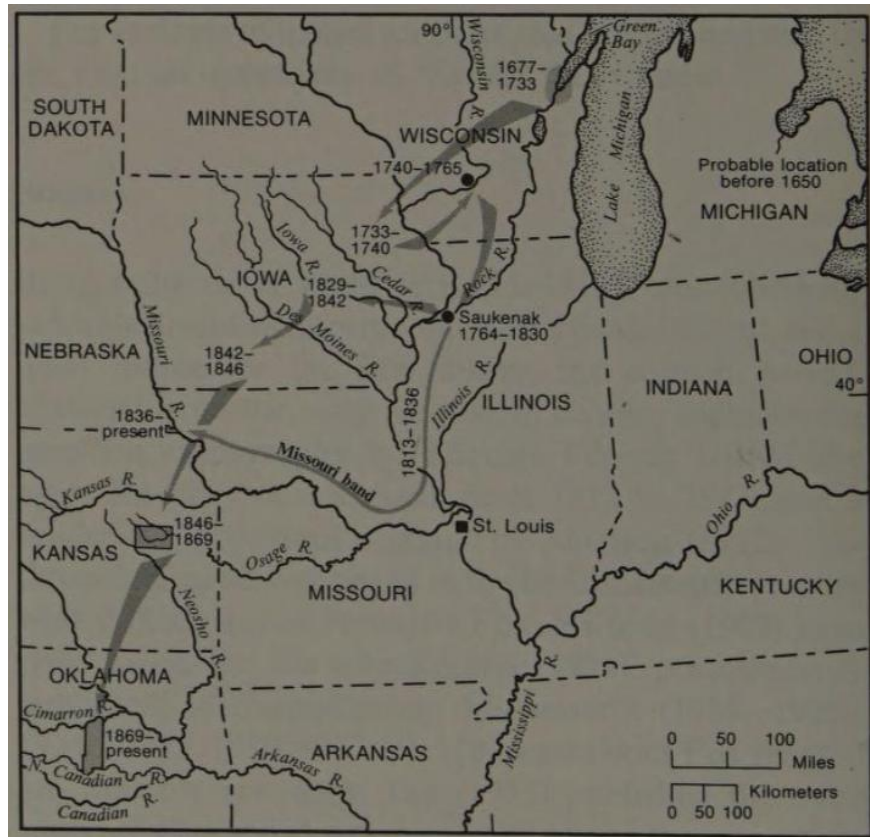


Figure 1: Routes of Sac and Fox Displacement and Relocation. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from *Handbook of North American Indians, Volume 15: Northeast* (p. 648) edited by Bruce G Trigger 1978, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

In 1831, as part of the U.S. government's broader campaign of Indigenous removal, the Sauk were forcibly displaced from Illinois into Iowa (Callender 1978). Winter settler encroachment into Saukenuk heightened tensions, and in Iowa the Sauk faced increasingly difficult conditions, including inter-tribal warfare, resource scarcity, and continued displacement (Callender 1978). Under the leadership of Black Hawk, the Sauk resisted U.S. military forces during the Black Hawk War of 1832 (Callender 1978). However, due to increasing pressure from settler incursions and military force, and facing starvation, the tribe was ultimately forced to sell their remaining land to the U.S. government (Callender 1978). Keokuk, who maintained closer ties with U.S. authorities, negotiated the terms of these land cessions and managed the distribution of funds from the sales (Callender 1978). His decisions sparked internal tensions (Callender 1978).

The Sauk and Fox continued to experience population decline following their forced removal to Kansas and later to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). Under the terms of their final treaty with the U.S. government in 1867, the Sauk and Fox were resettled in Indian Territory. Beginning in 1869, U.S. government officials, often working with military enforcement, relocated many Sauk and Fox people to Indian Territory, with the last group to be removed being the Mohohoko band (Callender 1978). In 1890, as part of federal assimilation policies, their reservation lands in Oklahoma were divided into individual allotments (Callender 1978). Land was also set aside for the use of the tribe as a whole, including for the school, and the remainder was opened to non-Native settlement. Since the passage of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act in 1936, the Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma have maintained a tribal government composed of a business committee, including a principal chief and four other officials, as well as a governing council, consisting of all adult members of the tribe (Callender 1978).

Today, the Sac and Fox people are represented by three federally recognized tribes based in Oklahoma, Iowa, and parts of Nebraska and Kansas. Although separated by political designations and geography, many community members continue to emphasize that the Nation's identity is not bound by state lines.

Boarding School System

A phase of the United States federal Indian boarding school system emerged in the late nineteenth century and operated well into the twentieth as part of the government's broader "Civilizing Agenda," which sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples by systematically erasing their languages, cultures, and traditions. These so-called "educational" facilities aimed not to empower Native students but to sever them from their families, communities, and ways of life (Ellis 1996). Initially, most boarding schools were established by Christian missionaries with

federal approval. Richard Pratt, founder and superintendent of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania infamously articulated the assimilationist mindset when he stated, “I am a Baptist...because I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under, holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked...and once soaked...Indian’s [will] never return to the blanket” (Ellis 1996:3).

Boarding schools appeared to be an ideal solution for U.S. officials because they could be established in remote areas; assimilationist goals could be externally measured through discipline, language loss, and cultural conformity; and, most importantly, they targeted children, who were perceived as the most susceptible members of Indigenous communities (Adams 1995). Many of these institutions followed the manual labor boarding school model, which combined limited classroom instruction with hours of unpaid labor in fields, kitchens, workshops, or laundries. This model was designed not only to instill Euro-American gender roles and work ethics but also to offset the operational costs of the schools themselves. In practice, these facilities did not prioritize education but instead functioned primarily as key sites of forced assimilation (Adams 1995).

In Oklahoma, boarding schools boomed in operation during the era of Indian Removal [1830-1887], driven by President Andrew Jackson’s belief that Indigenous peoples could not become "civilized" while remaining in their homelands (Baird and Goble 2008:81). By 1838, five mission schools were operating within the Choctaw Nation, making the Choctaw among the first Native nations in Indian Territory to establish such institutions (Oklahoma Historical Society 2007). Some of the Five Tribes had already supported mission schools in their homelands prior to Removal, and several of the schools founded in Indian Territory were continuations of those earlier efforts. Not all of these schools were solely run by missionaries;

some were later developed under agreements with Indigenous nations. For example, the Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Nation females, which opened in 1852, well after the original five Choctaw schools, was established under a Chickasaw–missionary agreement (Oklahoma Historical Society 2007). As of 2021, 83 Native American boarding school sites have been formally identified within Oklahoma (National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition 2021). However, ongoing research of which I am a part of suggests that the number is likely over 100 (Farina King, pers. comm. 2025).

Language & Respecting Identity

Through reading historical accounts and conducting oral history interviews for this project, I quickly recognized the importance of respecting the diversity of Indigenous perspectives on boarding schools. Experiences varied widely across Indigenous nations and individuals, and no single narrative can adequately represent them all (Adams 1995). Many survivors and descendants have expressed that while boarding schools were rooted in assimilationist goals, their experiences were more complex, involving both loss, unexpected forms of cultural resilience, and even, sometimes, positive experiences (Adams 1995).

This theme is particularly visible in Amanda Cobb's *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females* (2000). Cobb, a Chickasaw citizen, explores the tension between narratives of assimilation and those of cultural survival, highlighting how Chickasaw students at Bloomfield Academy appropriated education as a tool for survival without abandoning their Indigenous identities. Although students were prohibited from speaking their language or openly practicing their culture while at Bloomfield, Chickasaw girls formed strong relationships and community ties that helped sustain their cultural identity

(Cobb 2000). Cobb argues that these experiences, while shaped by colonial violence, also contributed to the continuance of Chickasaw culture on Indigenous terms.

Through these conversations and readings, I came to appreciate a core principle: experiences of boarding school are not easily categorized. For many, these institutions were sites of profound trauma, marked by loss, cultural suppression, and separation from family. Yet within those same environments, some individuals also formed lasting friendships, accessed new forms of knowledge, or found moments of connection and growth. These realities are not mutually exclusive. They often existed side by side. Understanding this complexity requires careful attention to language. Some former students identify as "survivors," emphasizing the trauma they endured. Others prefer the term "attendees," distancing themselves from the framing of survivorship. Respecting each individual's chosen framing is critical for honoring their autonomy and ensuring that representations of boarding school experiences remain diverse, accurate, and community driven.

Sac and Fox Mission School

The Sac and Fox Mission School was not an isolated educational endeavor, but part of a broader federal effort to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Euro-American society. The historic period saw the relocation of tribes beginning with the Indian Removal Act of 1830, when the U.S. government forcibly removed many tribes from their homelands to Oklahoma (Baird and Goble 2008). This era also saw the implementation of assimilation policies like the Civilization Fund Act of 1819, which provided federal funding for mission schools to "civilize" Indigenous peoples (Adams 1995). The Sac and Fox Mission School, Indian Territory (Oklahoma) was established by the Quakers as part of this broader effort, underscoring the U.S. government's assimilationist mindset. Schools like the Sac and Fox Mission School were not isolated

institutions but were part of a systematic tool used in an attempt to erase Indigenous cultures and languages (Adams 1995; Ellis 1996). At the Sac and Fox Mission School, as at many other boarding schools, children were forcibly taken from their families and taught English, Christianity, and Euro-American cultural norms, often at the expense of their own languages and traditions (Adams 1995; Ellis 1996). For many students, this school was only the beginning of their boarding school experience; several subsequently attended larger off-reservation federal institutions such as Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, the model for the entire federal system, and Chilocco Indian Agricultural School in northern Oklahoma, one of the region's largest off-reservation boarding schools. These schools were designed to remove children further from their families and homelands, extending the assimilation process beyond local or agency-level institutions like the Sac and Fox Mission School. Some students reflect on this time with deep pain and loss, while also recalling moments of connection and learning. Lifelong friendships were formed; skills were acquired and acts of adaptation emerged within the constraints of these institutions. The school's operation left a lasting impact on the Sac and Fox Nation that is complex, multifaceted, and deeply personal.

Most of what is currently documented about the Sac and Fox Mission School comes from archival photographs and the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. At the Western History Collections (WHC) at the University of Oklahoma Libraries, I located a report for nearly every year the school was operated, allowing me to construct a timeline from the perspective of the U.S. government.

It is important to note that enrollment and capacity figures across these reports often vary significantly from year to year, making them difficult to interpret with consistency. For example, some early reports suggest a higher capacity than those from later years, despite relatively stable

enrollment numbers. These inconsistencies likely do not reflect actual changes to the school's infrastructure or population, but instead reveal the biases inherent in government-produced documents. Annual reports were written to demonstrate "progress," a term that, in this context, meant the successful assimilation of Indigenous children into Euro-American norms. This included evidence of increased attendance, improved facilities, and student performance in both academic and manual labor tasks. Displaying such progress was essential for securing continued federal funding and political support. As such, I believe that the data was often selectively presented, or potentially manipulated, to align with assimilationist goals and bureaucratic expectations, a tendency well documented in scholarship (Adams 1995).

While these reports are inherently biased, intended to portray "progress" at each agency and school, they nonetheless provide a framework of dates, construction details, enrollment numbers, and other institutional data. In contrast, community members often carry knowledge shaped by lived experiences and oral histories: memories of people, events, and impacts that are not captured in government records. Both forms of knowledge are essential to understanding the school's legacy.

Importantly, the Sac and Fox Mission School was not isolated in an empty landscape. Historical maps and oral history interviews confirm that it was located on the tribal reservation, and was adjacent to the agency town, which served as a vibrant center of life for residents and travelers alike. The Sac and Fox Agency included a blacksmith, physician, "The Only Way" Church, Keokuk's original store, a licensed trader's store, the Indian agent's office and Council House, Goodell's boarding house, a home for the captain of the Indian Police, a calaboose (jail), and several other services that would have been part of the school's immediate environment (Figure 2). To illustrate the role of the local economy within this setting, I include an archival

photograph of the licensed trader's store (Figure 3), which demonstrates how commerce and exchange were woven into the everyday life of the agency and, by extension, the mission school.

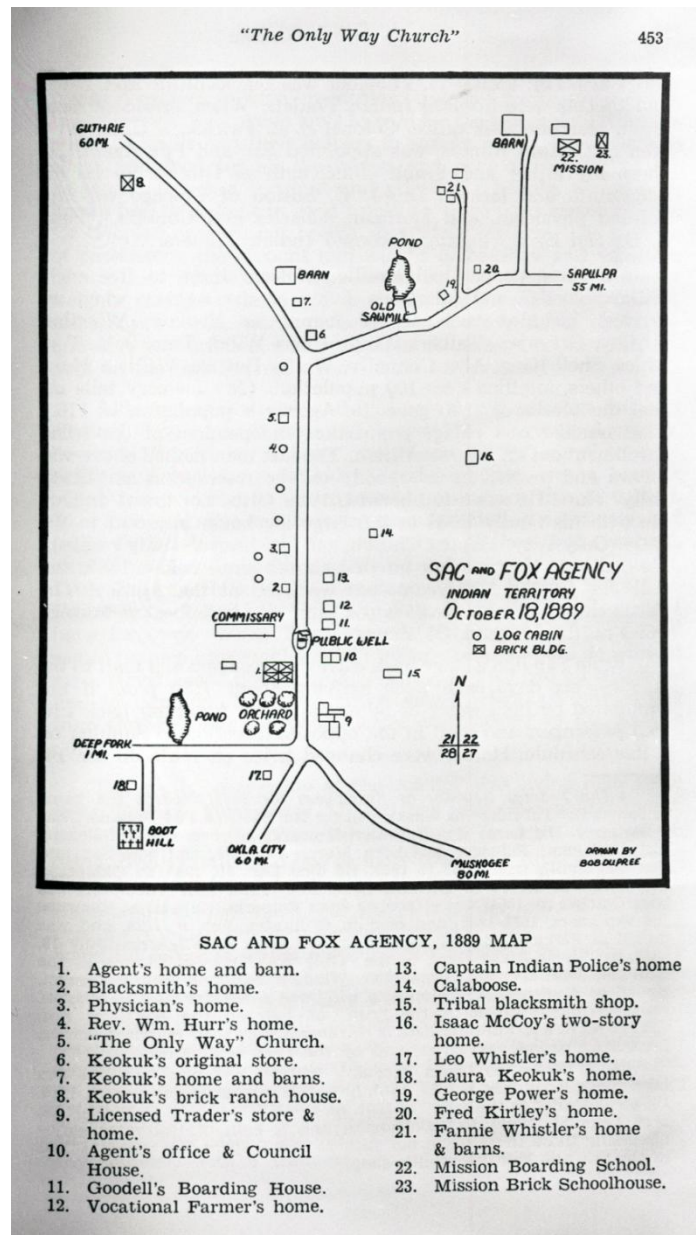


Figure 2: Sac and Fox Agency Map 1889. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from John W. Morris Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.



Figure 3: Sac and Fox Trading Co at the Sac and Fox Agency. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.

Early Establishment (1871–1875)

In June of 1871, the Sac and Fox Indian Agent John Hadley reported: “I have selected a site for the mission-school building, and am now having a well sunk, and as soon as sufficiency of water is obtained, expect to commence the erection of said building hoping to get it in readiness for school during winter or early spring” (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1872:494). The school became known as the Sac and Fox Mission School because it was initially established under Quaker supervision, part of the federal government’s “Peace Policy” of the 1870s that placed certain tribal agencies under the management of Christian denominations, primarily the Society of Friends. The Quakers’ involvement reflected the federal government’s belief that missionary organizations could advance assimilation through education. Over time, as administrative control shifted from Quaker to federal oversight, the institution became known interchangeably as the Sac and Fox Agency School, likely reflecting its close proximity to the Sac and Fox Agency town and its operation under the Office of Indian Affairs. Although the

historical record does not clearly indicate how long Quaker involvement lasted, it is likely that by the late 1870s the school had transitioned to direct agency management, aligning with broader federal trends toward centralizing control of Indian education. Further research is needed to clarify this transition timeline.

Later reports indicate that the Sac and Fox Nation were required to pay for the school's construction under the terms of treaty agreements imposed by the U.S. government (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1887:143). By 1872, Hadley reported the school was established and operating "very well" (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1873:244).

Although Commissioner of Indian Affairs reports from 1871 to 1873 document ongoing smallpox outbreaks across Indian Territory, no specific references to the Sac and Fox Mission School appear (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1872:12, 1874:83). Given that the school opened during a period of widespread smallpox transmission, it is likely that the epidemic impacted attendance and operations. The pandemic's effect on the Sac and Fox community is well-documented through oral histories, raising important questions about why these impacts are absent from official records.

Expansion and Daily Life (1873–1879)

By 1873, a new agent, John H. Pickering, described the school as a Manual Labour School and declared it a success. In this context, "success" referred to the school's effectiveness in promoting assimilation, measured by attendance numbers, English language acquisition, religious instruction, and the imposition of Euro-American gender roles and labor practices. He boasted that of 48 children over six years old on the reservation, 28 attended the school, although he noted that "few full-blood children attend the school other than orphans" (U.S. Office of

Indian Affairs 1874:231). Staff included a matron, an assistant matron, a teacher, an assistant teacher, a cook, and a farmer. Agricultural work was emphasized: the school maintained 450 acres for crops and pasture and raised cattle and hogs. Despite reporting drought conditions, Pickering insisted that children had sufficient food, clothing, and positive relations with teachers (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1874).

In 1875, Pickering again reported the school's "success," citing improvements to facilities, including the addition of playrooms, reception rooms, and a reading room (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1876:286). He also reported that enrollment reached 49 students, with an average daily attendance of 31. Pickering framed students' academic progress as a success, organizing public oral examinations and performances that he claimed would reduce "timidity" among Indigenous children (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1876:286). While he presented these events as celebratory, they likely reflected a coercive environment in which students were expected to publicly demonstrate assimilation under pressure. In his report, Pickering emphasized manual labor as a cornerstone of what he described as "civilizing" efforts, claiming that many students exhibited a "natural aversion to manual labour" (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1876:286). His language reflects the assimilationist attitudes of the time and should not be read as an objective assessment of the students or their experiences. He also specified that all the children in attendance were old enough to perform manual labour and that the superintendent arranged a program for each week specifying the work to be done by each pupil (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1876). As seen in Figure 4, later examples of such schedules show pupils divided into weekly departmental assignments such as industrial detail or matron's detail.

Jan - 1914

SAC AND FOX INDIAN SCHOOL.

Q

ENGINEER'S DETAIL.	
FRYOR BROWN	LEE GIVENS
GEORGE FRANKLIN	WILLIAM JEFFERSON
FARM DETAIL	
BEN HULL	FRANK HARRISON
HARRY DAVIS	ADAM GOKEY
FRED GRANT	EDWARD CARTER
EDWARD MCCLELLAN	FRANK DAVIS
LAUNDRY DETAIL	
EDWARD MACK	WALTER SOOCEY
HENRY INGALLS	CARL COUTEAU
	GEORGE HUNTER
TEACHERS' DETAIL	
WILLIAM WAKOLLE	EVANS WALKER
ALEX FRANKLIN	ERNEST COUTEAU
	WILSON LONGSHORE
MATRON'S DETAIL	
OSCAR W. LASLEY	JOHN CRANE
JOHN GOKEY	JOHN BUTLER
HARRY CRANE	AMOS BLACK
	WILLIE SOOCEY
CAMPUS DETAIL	
(CAPTAIN) ROY FOSTER	
BENSTON McCLELLAN	RICHARD WAKOLLE
EDGAR ELLIS	EDGAR WAKOLLE
CHARLES McKOSITO	WALLACE McCLELLAN
JAMES GOKEY	LUCIEN RICE
JOHN B. McCLELLAN	JOSEPH RHODD
INDUSTRIAL DETAIL.	
ROBERT FALLS	
EDGAR SCOTT	WILLIE LASLEY
DANIEL S. HUNTER	SOLOMAN KENT

JANUARY. 1914.

Approved... *Andrew J. ...* ...Principal.

Figure 4: Example of work arranged for students each week, 1914. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.

Pickering's report also reflects settler-colonial tensions about identity and belonging. He argued that students faced a stark choice after leaving the school: "re-adopt Indian customs or forsake their relatives and seek association elsewhere" (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1876:286). He believed many of the children were in a "transitional period", but Pickering believed that only by adopting manual labor and western practices could the Sac and Fox people survive settler encroachment and change their ways, especially by "[...] making improvements [to their land] and having their corner-stakes driven" (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1876:286).

Shifts in Conditions and Administration (1879–1887)

Reports from 1879 and 1881 portray the school as having broad community support, noting that parents visited the grounds and that the Sac and Fox allocated \$5,000 annually from annuity payments to support education (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1880:79; 1882:101). However, these documents were produced by federal officials and reflect the government's perspective and goals, particularly the desire to demonstrate success in assimilation efforts. As such, it is unclear whether parental visits reflected support, obligation, or attempts to maintain connections with children who may have been forcibly enrolled. Environmental challenges, including severe drought, were also documented during this period, impacting agricultural production and delaying school openings (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1882:101).

The agent at this time, Neal, also described the school farm as "worthless," stating that only a small portion of the land could be cultivated (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1887:143). Yet in the same report, he claimed the school was increasing its capacity to 50 students. This raises important questions: how could the institution justify expanding enrollment if it lacked the agricultural output to reliably feed its students? Such contradictions highlight the inconsistencies, and likely political motivations, within these reports, which often prioritized demonstrating institutional "progress" over accurately conveying conditions on the ground.

Conditions in the Early 20th Century (1900–1917)

By the early 1900s, reports from the Department of the Interior painted a mixed picture of the school's facilities. A 1903 report described all major buildings, their purposes, capacities, and some of them include construction dates and conditions (U.S. Department of the Interior 1903:103).

- The Girls' Building (two-story frame, 1892) served as a dormitory, hospital, dining hall, and employee quarters (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Girls Building, 1892. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Jerry Whistler Snow Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

- The Schoolhouses (one two-story frame, 1875, one one-story brick, 1892) were used for instruction and chapel services (Figures 6 & 7).



Figure 6: Schoolhouse two-story frame with water tower in view, no date. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.



Figure 7: Schoolhouse one-story brick, 1875. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Frank Phillips Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

- The Boys' Building (three-story brick) functioned as a dormitory, washroom, and commissary (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Boys building, 1886. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Guy Whistler Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division.

- Additional structures included another boarding home with a hospital, a barn, a carpenter shop, a smokehouse, a woodshed, and laundry facilities (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Landscape view of the Sac and Fox Mission School, barn in view on left, 1910. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.

All buildings were heated with wood stoves and lit by kerosene lamps; ventilation was considered inadequate. The agency noted that water was supplied from a reservoir system and waste was managed through primitive drainage systems. Officials estimated the school's highest attendance in 1900-1901, with 90 pupils enrolled (U.S. Department of the Interior 1903).

In 1905, the superintendent, W.C. Kohlenburg, reported that only the schoolhouse and girls' building were in acceptable condition, stating that all other buildings were in bad condition and "poorly arranged for the purpose for which they are used" (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1905:319). He noted that this was to be expected, given that the school had been in operation for over thirty years but emphasized that most buildings required additions or significant repairs (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1905). Kohlenburg also described the water supply as inadequate and called for the installation of a new sewage system because the existing lines were no longer functional (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1905). This report foreshadows the broader shift in federal policy, where the government began to view boarding schools as too costly to maintain.

Closure and Broader Changes (1917–1919)

The Sac and Fox Mission School closed in 1917, during a period when federal Indian education policy was shifting away from small, agency-run schools. Although no formal explanation was given at the time of closure, a 1918 report from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs later justified the decision by noting that "it has already been found practical and wise to close [the school]...[as] public schools are abundant" (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1918:12). A 1919 report echoed this rationale, linking the widespread closure of day and boarding schools to the expansion of public-school access and federal cost-cutting efforts (U.S. Office of Indian Affairs 1920).

By the early 20th century, federal Indian education policy had begun to shift significantly. Boarding schools, once the centerpiece of assimilation efforts, came under increasing criticism for their high cost, inefficiency, and failure to assimilate Native students into Euro-American society (Adams 1995). Mounting public scrutiny and changing federal priorities led to the widespread closure of smaller boarding schools between the 1910s and 1930s (Adams 1995). Policymakers increasingly pushed for Native children to be enrolled in nearby public schools, believing this would accelerate assimilation while also reducing expenses (Ellis 1996). The emphasis on public schooling reflected a continued colonial agenda but marked a significant change in how that agenda was pursued (Ellis 1996).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter presents the background research that informed the development of a collaborative project designed to be meaningful to the Sac and Fox Nation. I examine five key concepts that shaped the project's framework: community and collaborative archaeology, landscape archaeology, place-based methodologies, the archaeology of the heart, and the concept of events and non-events. While I discuss each of these in turn, they are not mutually exclusive; instead, they are deeply interconnected and together provide a foundation for the interpretive and collaborative choices made throughout this study.

Community and collaborative archaeology are frameworks for conducting archaeological work by, for, and with communities, creating new perspectives on the archaeological record and ensuring that research reflects the needs, values, and voices of those most connected to the history. Landscape archaeology considers how physical spaces and natural features hold meaning, memory, and social importance, encouraging archaeologists to view sites as parts of dynamic cultural environments. Place-based methodologies emphasize the role of specific locations in shaping cultural identity, resilience, and belonging, highlighting how memory and tradition are tied to particular lands. The archaeology of the heart introduces a care-centered approach to archaeological practice, emphasizing the importance of emotion, relationality, and empathy in working with communities who have experienced historical trauma. Finally, the concept of events and nonevents encourages attention not only to significant historical moments but also to silences, absences, and everyday experiences that reveal deeper truths about community life and cultural persistence. Together, these concepts provide the theoretical and ethical foundation for a collaborative, community-driven investigation into the history and

legacy of the Sac and Fox Mission School. I elaborate on each concept in the sections that follow.

Community and Collaborative Archaeology

Recent archaeological work on Native American boarding school's centers survivor and attendee experiences, marking a significant shift from earlier studies that prioritized institutional structures, architectural features, and federal policy documentation over the lived realities of students. These earlier approaches often treated boarding schools as static historic sites rather than as places of deep personal and cultural trauma. In contrast, current research increasingly involves marginalized Indigenous communities at every stage of the archaeological process, working to decolonize methodologies and foster ethical, reciprocal relationships. This shift aligns with the principles of community-based and collaborative archaeology, which position archaeology not only as a means of uncovering the past but also as a potential tool for healing, truth-telling, and social justice.

One of the leading voices in shaping community archaeology is Sonya Atalay. In her foundational work, *Community-Based Archaeology: Research with, by, and for Indigenous and Local Communities* (2012), Atalay defines community archaeology as a research approach that prioritizes the needs, interests, and self-determination of the communities connected to the archaeological record (Atalay 2012). Rather than treating communities as sources of information or passive consultants, Atalay emphasizes that genuine community archaeology requires shifting control over research questions, methods, interpretation, and outcomes into the hands of the community itself (Atalay 2012). Her framework challenges traditional archaeological hierarchies and promotes accountable, reciprocal, and beneficial research to descendant communities (Atalay 2012).

Another important expansion of community archaeology comes from Sarah L. Surface-Evans and Sarah J. Jones, who applied a collaborative approach in their work at the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (2020). Their concept of "haunting" highlights how archaeological practices can assist survivors and descendants in processing collective memory and trauma. By involving community members in every research stage, including handling artifacts and shaping interpretations, Surface-Evans and Jones demonstrate how archaeology can become a tool for empowerment and cultural persistence. This example is not only an illustration of community and collaborative archaeology but also resonates with the principles of the archaeology of the heart, which I introduce later, showing how these frameworks overlap rather than stand apart as mutually exclusive categories.

Surface-Evans and Jones's article, "Discourses of the Haunted: An Intersubjective Approach to Archaeology at the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School," explains that the goal of the collaborative work done at this school was not only to allow survivors to shape the direction of the research but also to let them interact with objects recovered from archaeological digs to help facilitate memory work (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020). Surface-Evans and Jones stressed that collaboration between archaeologists and Indigenous communities should bring marginalized narratives to the forefront and decolonize the archaeological interpretations that emerge from this research (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020). They argue that this approach aids in challenging the settler narratives that typically surround Native American boarding schools and can only be achieved through a multidisciplinary approach that includes the diverse experiences of survivors, attendees, and their descendants (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020).

Surface-Evans and Jones use the concept of “haunting” to help communities conceptualize traumatic memories and support healing (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020:111). They argue that one of the greatest strengths of a collaborative archaeological approach is its ability to “draw out ghosts, acknowledge their presence, and give them a voice” (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020:112). This perspective allows the research team to interpret the ongoing impact of the past on the present. In stories, ghosts often symbolize what is missing, unseen, or unresolved. This metaphor is particularly relevant in the archaeology of Native American boarding schools, which continue to exert an “invisible” influence on Indigenous communities due to persistent public ignorance. Marginalized communities continue to experience the intergenerational aftermath in their daily lives while being ignored and erased from dominant historical narratives (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020).

At the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, beading served as both a cultural practice and a quiet form of resistance. As described by Laura L. Kellogg, community member and daughter of Florence D. (Red Sky) Watkins, older girls would intentionally “lose” or drop glass seed beads around the school grounds, particularly near the Domestic Science building, as a covert way to teach younger girls how to bead (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020). In a setting where traditional practices were forbidden, these small acts functioned as discreet invitations to learn, passing down knowledge through subtle mentorship rather than overt instruction. By picking up these beads, younger students engaged with an underground network of cultural transmission, one that fostered resilience, creativity, and community connection in the face of assimilationist policies. Beading, in this context, became a powerful expression of survivance: a way to preserve cultural identity and to quietly defy the institution’s erasure of Indigenous knowledge. After leaving Mount Pleasant, Watkins continued to bead and teach

others, turning this skill into her primary source of income and a means of cultural perseverance. Kellogg expressed pride in knowing that her mother's beading was an act of resistance and a testament to cultural survivance (Surface-Evans and Jones 2020). This example underscores how a small artifact, like a single bead, can reveal profound narratives of resilience and empowerment. These stories might have been overlooked without collaborative engagement with community members.

Landscape Archaeology

Landscape archaeology emphasizes that land is not a passive backdrop to human action but an active participant in shaping memory and identity. For Indigenous communities, this relationship to place is particularly powerful, as landscapes embody cultural continuities, survivance, and spiritual connection. In the context of Native American boarding schools, engaging landscapes as storied environments provides a crucial way to recognize ongoing colonial impacts alongside the persistence of Indigenous identities.

Bender's work on landscape theory offers a critical foundation for understanding how land serves as a living archive of memory and identity. In *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, Bender argues that landscapes are socially constructed spaces where relationships, histories, and cultural meanings are continually produced and negotiated (1993). Rather than viewing landscapes as static or purely natural, Bender emphasizes that they are dynamic, shaped by the lived experiences and interpretations of those who inhabit them (Bender 1993). For Indigenous communities, landscapes are deeply tied to spiritual beliefs and collective memory, making them vital to cultural continuity. In the case of Native American boarding schools, landscape archaeology allows researchers to engage not only with the physical remnants of the site but also with the stories, emotions, and identities embedded within the land itself (Bender 1993). This

perspective underscores the importance of treating boarding school sites as culturally significant landscapes that continue to carry meaning for descendant communities.

Hayden (1995) expanded the interpretation of landscapes by highlighting their political dimensions, particularly in how they can both reflect and resist systems of power. In *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, Hayden argued that landscapes are not neutral but are often shaped by dominant narratives that seek to erase or marginalize certain histories (Hayden 1995). She emphasized the potential of landscape interpretation to recover hidden or suppressed stories, especially those of marginalized groups, and to foster public memory as a form of resistance. This framework is highly applicable to Native American boarding school sites, where landscapes were co-opted to serve colonial assimilation goals. Applying Hayden's concept to the Sac and Fox Mission School encourages a recognition of the site not simply as a relic of forced assimilation, but as a space that Indigenous communities can reclaim by asserting their own narratives and historical interpretations (Hayden 1995). Landscape archaeology, therefore, becomes a powerful tool for challenging colonial histories and supporting Indigenous sovereignty and remembrance.

Place-Based Methodologies

Understanding the Sac and Fox Mission School as a meaningful place requires attention to the intimate ties between people, memory, and landscape. Place-based methodologies, especially the work of Keith Basso and Setha Low, offer frameworks for recognizing how sites become storied and emotionally charged across generations.

Keith Basso's (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places* offers a foundational understanding of how places are repositories of memory and cultural identity. Working with the Western Apache in

Arizona, Basso shows that places are storied. They are associated with narratives, moral lessons, and histories that are constantly recalled through language and daily movement across the land (Basso 1996). His concept of place emphasizes that meaning is not static; it is continually reinforced through storytelling, naming, and community engagement with the landscape. In the context of the Sac and Fox Mission School, Basso's work suggests that a site is more than the sum of its physical structures; it is a memory-laden landscape where past experiences of loss, adaptation, and survivance are continually re-engaged by the community.

Setha Low's work on embodied spaces expands the understanding of place by emphasizing how physical, emotional, and sensory experiences are interwoven into landscapes. In her article *Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture*, Low argues that spaces are not merely containers for action but are co-produced by the movements, feelings, and memories of those who inhabit them (Low 2003). By recognizing the emotional geographies that shape places, Low's framework helps reveal the deeper layers of meaning that might otherwise be invisible in traditional archaeological interpretations.

Archaeology of the Heart

Whereas place-based methodologies emphasize the deep connections between people and landscapes, the archaeology of the heart (Supernant et al. 2020) shifts the focus even further inward, highlighting the emotional, relational, and care-centered dimensions of archaeological practice when working with communities impacted by historical trauma.

The archaeology of the heart is a relatively new theoretical framework that calls for a more empathetic, relational, and care-centered approach to archaeological practice. Introduced by Kisha Supernant, Jane Baxter, Natasha Lyons, and Sonya Atalay in *Archaeologies of the*

Heart, this framework challenges the traditional Western separation of emotion from scientific inquiry (2020). Instead, it holds that care, emotion, relationality, and rigor are necessary for ethical and effective research (Supernant et al. 2020). In this framework, rigor is not measured by detachment or neutrality, but by the researcher's commitment to honesty about their own emotions, accountability to community partners, and transparency in interpretation (Supernant et al. 2020). An archaeology of the heart encourages practitioners to acknowledge their own emotional responses, honor the emotional realities of the communities they work with, and design research that prioritizes healing and social justice (Supernant et al. 2020). This perspective is particularly important in contexts such as Native American boarding school archaeology, where the histories being uncovered are deeply tied to intergenerational trauma, resilience, and survivance. Applying the archaeology of the heart to the Sac and Fox Mission School project ensures that the work is grounded in scholarly accountability and emotional awareness, relational responsibility, and care for the community's well-being.

Events and NonEvents

While the archaeology of the heart encourages researchers to honor emotional and relational dimensions of the past, understanding the distinction between events and nonevents invites a deeper interrogation of how history is constructed, remembered, and sometimes silenced within Indigenous contexts.

Raymond Fogelson's (1989) concept of *events* and *nonevents* challenges traditional, positivist definitions of history by questioning who decides what counts as a significant occurrence. He argues that historical narratives are shaped by those in positions of cultural and political authority, often colonial or state institutions, who determine which events are

documented, commemorated, and legitimized, while other experiences are silenced or rendered invisible as “nonevents” (Fogelson 1989).

In his influential essay "The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents," (1989) Fogelson argues that while historians often prioritize major occurrences, wars, treaties, and political changes, much of cultural history is shaped equally, if not more profoundly, by periods of continuity, silence, or suppressed memory. He encourages ethnohistorians to recognize that events are culturally defined and valorized differently across societies, and that what Western historians might perceive as uneventful may in fact hold deep significance within Indigenous worldviews. For instance, periods of deliberate invisibility, avoidance of colonial documentation, or the suppression of traumatic memories, such as those surrounding boarding school experiences, can be seen as nonevents that are critical to understanding Indigenous survivance. Incorporating the concept of nonevents into archaeological and ethnohistorical practice allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the past, where silences, absences, and latent histories are acknowledged as vital parts of cultural persistence.

This contrast illustrates Fogelson’s argument that what Western institutions choose to record or ignore reflects a cultural framework that often fails to capture Indigenous realities. It also highlights why descendant communities must be empowered to define what happened in their own histories. One of the clearest examples of this is the treatment of Native American boarding schools themselves. Until very recently, these institutions were rarely acknowledged in public discourse as historically significant or as sites of trauma. The U.S. government did not issue an official apology until 2024, suggesting that, for over a century, the boarding school era was treated as a nonevent within state-sanctioned narratives (U.S. Department of the Interior 2024). However, as made evident in every interview I conducted, boarding school experiences

were not only events for the community members. They were life-altering, generationally impactful experiences that reshaped families, cultures, and identities. Recognizing them as such is a critical step toward truth-telling and social justice.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Guided by these theoretical frameworks, the research design includes oral history collection, archival research, material culture documentation, and public events to collaboratively reconstruct the history of the Sac and Fox Mission School. Each of these components was developed to address the central research question; *What elements of the Sac and Fox Mission boarding school do citizens want recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations?* This was done by ensuring that community members directly shaped what forms of knowledge, materials, and memories were prioritized.

Preliminary Collaboration

Atalay's work directly informed the foundation of this project, particularly with its emphasis on relationship-building, transparency, and shared authority. From the start, I conversed with the Sac and Fox Nation's Business Committee and Elders Advisory Board to ensure this research aligned with the community's priorities and values. Rather than approaching the project with predetermined outcomes, I let community needs guide the direction of the work, particularly the decision to focus on oral histories and public events. This shift in control, as Atalay advocates, allowed the research to become more valuable to the community, ethical, and grounded in care. These principles also shaped the connections I built with individuals who became central to the project's early development, and especially Chris Boyd.

I was first connected with Mr. Boyd, then serving as the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Director for the Sac and Fox Nation, through Dr. Bonnie Pitblado, The Robert E. and Virginia Bell Endowed Professor in Anthropological Archaeology at the University of Oklahoma and my thesis committee chair. Dr. Pitblado knew of

both my research interests and Mr. Boyd's position through his involvement with the Voices of Oklahoma program (Pitblado, 2023). After her introduction, Mr. Boyd and I arranged to meet over lunch in Norman, where OU is located. That initial meeting served as a way for him to gauge my sincerity and commitment to the project; to see whether I genuinely cared about the history of the Sac and Fox Mission School and the community connected to it. From there, we continued to check in and develop plans together.

The project more formally began during a gathering on February 26th, 2024, which Mr. Boyd organized. He brought together a group of elders to talk about the Sac and Fox Mission School, presenting some of his own research on the topic. Also present were Dr. Farina King, another of my committee members and a professor of Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Pitblado, Ms. Ortega, and several students with broader interests in boarding school histories (Figure 10). Together with the elders, we asked whether they felt a project like this, one centered on the school's history, would have value for the community. What followed was a moving conversation about how few concrete details such as dates or timelines, had been preserved, even though they knew important knowledge still existed with the elders, often in the form of small stories or passing memories. It raised the question of what it might mean to undertake a project to gather and preserve what remains. One elder commented, "If you would have been here a few years earlier, you could have asked my brother." He had since passed away. Another elder went on to emphasize how important it was to begin gathering oral histories before more knowledge was lost. That moment, the realization that a thread of memory had already disappeared, coupled with a call to act before others did too, was what truly sparked the idea for this project. Mr. Boyd's willingness to help me and his own enthusiasm for learning more about the school were also pivotal. The interest and encouragement expressed during that

gathering gave me the confidence to bring the idea forward to the Sac and Fox Business Committee and begin shaping the work that would eventually become my thesis.



Figure 10: Group of elders, professors and students at the first gathering, 2024. From left to right in the back row are Ashley Moelling, Bonnie Pitblado, and Chris Boyd. In the middle row are Cheyenne Widdecke, Savannah Slayton, Anna Smist, Nancy Nullake, Lina Ortega, and Farina King. In the front row are Stella Nullake and Delores Byford.

Building on that gathering, I continued to hold meetings with key stakeholders within the Sac and Fox Nation, including members of the Sac and Fox Business Committee and Elders Advisory Board. These meetings were instrumental in shaping the planning phase of the project, ensuring cultural sensitivity and determining how best to approach the broader community. I asked for input on whether a focused project on the Sac and Fox Mission School would be meaningful, and sought guidance on outreach, data storage, and maintaining alignment with the Nation's values and priorities.

It was through these ongoing conversations that the idea of an oral history project took on a more formal shape. Many community members expressed the urgent need to record stories that

were still circulating about the school, that had been passed down from family members who had attended but were no longer living. All attendees of the Sac and Fox Mission School have now passed on, meaning that only descendants remain to carry and share these memories. Community members felt that preserving what was still known was critical before even more was lost.

Background Archival Research

I began this project by conducting background research at three archival repositories: the Western History Collections (WHC) at OU, the Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), and the Sac and Fox Nation Archives. Together these hold the bulk of known sources of Sac and Fox Mission School documentation.

The Western History Collections (WHC) at the University of Oklahoma is a special collections library that focuses on the history of the American West and Native Nations, with particular strengths in U.S. Indian policy and education. I first had to register as a researcher before gaining access. Materials must be used on-site in the reading room, and I identified boxes to request by searching the WHC's online database for keywords such as *Sac and Fox Mission School*. However, the box descriptions are often short, vague, or inaccurate.

The Oklahoma Historical Society (OHS), which serves as the state's official archive, also required me to register with patron forms in advance and I would notify staff of upcoming visits before materials were pulled. Like WHC, I used OHS's online database to identify potential boxes with content of interest, though the descriptions there are also limited and can obscure the content. The collections are curated and maintained by non-Native staff and reflect the priorities of a state agency rather than a tribal nation.

By contrast, the Sac and Fox Nation Archives are tribally maintained and operate under the Nation's authority. Before each visit, I contacted Katie Thompson, Director of the Sauk Language Department, who granted us access to the archives. These collections preserve community-held records, oral histories, and culturally significant materials. Access protocols ensure that tribal priorities and cultural sensitivities guide archival use. For example, certain boxes were clearly marked to indicate the presence of culturally sensitive materials, and I understood that these folders were not to be opened or reviewed.

Lina Ortega, Associate Curator at the WHC, a Sac and Fox community member, and a member of my thesis committee, helped guide both my archival research and later, oral history interviews. For about five months, we visited the OHS and Sac and Fox Nation archives nearly every Friday, alternating between the two, to gather materials for the public presentations connected to my thesis. Ms. Ortega played an active role in shaping the research, offering invaluable insight into interpreting sensitive materials and identifying sources of particular significance for the community. Her deep personal knowledge of the Sac and Fox Nation allowed her to anticipate which community members might attend presentations and to suggest documents, such as specific names in enrollment records or photographs, that would be especially meaningful to those individuals. This ensured that the archival work not only reflected institutional history but also honored the personal and collective memory of the Nation.

This archival work was not conducted solely for the benefit of my thesis. At WHC and OHS, I focused on locating and gathering materials related to the Sac and Fox Mission School that could be shared back with the Sac and Fox community. At the same time, we carried out an archival survey of the Sac and Fox Nation Archives, noting every reference to the Mission

School, because such a survey had not previously been undertaken. This approach reflects the project's care-centered and community-based methodology. The material culture I examined included a range of photographs, documents, and artifacts connected to the Sac and Fox Mission School. I paid particular attention to historic photographs and lists of student names. This was what community members expressed the most interest in, as many of the family names in the records are the same contemporary Sac and Fox citizens. I documented all sources and used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to catalog them using collection names, box numbers, and folder numbers so that, should the Sac and Fox Business Committee wish to revisit or request specific documents, they will be easy to locate. With permission from each institution, I scanned relevant records with Adobe Scan using both Ms. Ortega's and my iPhones. I then uploaded these scans to secure SharePoint folders, organized and labeled them for later use in presentations and for sharing with community members.

Throughout this phase of the project, I studied the archival sources not as static pieces of evidence, but as living records that reveal both overt information and unspoken silences because doing so allowed me to recognize how power, omission, and perspective shape the historical record. I carefully recorded contextual notes about each item's provenance and significance, which are also documented in the Excel file stored on SharePoint. I transcribed many documents that included student names to make them easier to read during public events or when sharing them with interviewees (see public presentation slides in Appendix C & D). I treated these items as active carriers of cultural meaning and emotion.

By centering community involvement in this process and cataloging each step with future access in mind, I aimed to ensure that this material would not only support my academic work but also contribute meaningfully to the preservation and interpretation of Sac and Fox history.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Review

Once I received approval from both the Sac and Fox Business Committee and the Elders Advisory Board, I began preparing to record oral histories. Much of what I learned about conducting oral histories came from mentorship by Ms. Ortega and Dr. King. I also used training materials from the Baylor University Institute for Oral History. Following this guidance, I decided interviews should be semi-structured and guided by a set of open-ended questions approved through OU's IRB process, while still encouraging participants to direct the conversation and share stories in their own way. This approach made sense given the nature of the interviews as oral histories, where the goal is not simply to extract specific information but to create space for personal narrative, memory, and reflection to unfold organically. Allowing flexibility in the conversation honored the storytelling traditions of participants and helped ensure that their voices remained central to the process.

The IRB process involved multiple steps to ensure ethical standards were upheld throughout the research. Because the Sac and Fox Nation does not have its own IRB, OU's IRB served as the formal review body, while the Sac and Fox Business Committee provided a letter of support approving the project (see Appendix A). Navigating these procedures was one of the most time-consuming parts of the process but also an important learning experience.

The IRB required a detailed proposal outlining the project's purpose, methods, and ethical considerations. Consent forms informed participants of their rights, including the ability

to exclude information or withdraw at any time (see Appendix E for OU IRB-approved materials). Protecting participants' privacy and respecting cultural protocols were central priorities. OU's IRB reviewed and approved my research questions, consent forms, and recruitment materials to ensure these standards were met. Throughout this process, I worked closely with Ms. Ortega to align the project with both academic ethics and the expectations of the Sac and Fox Nation.

Recruitment

Through conversations with Sac and Fox elders, it became clear that inclusivity was a central concern. I wanted to ensure that every elder had the opportunity to participate and that no one would feel excluded. To reach a wide audience, I distributed project information through multiple press releases in the *Sac and Fox News* (see Appendix B for press releases published in December 2024, January 2025, and April 2025). I worked directly with Mike Brown, the editor, and made sure to meet his monthly deadlines so that upcoming events were promoted in a timely manner. I also created flyers that the Nation posted on its official Facebook page (again see Appendix B for the flyers posted for the first and second public event). These materials, also approved through the OU IRB, helped reach both local and out-of-state tribal members. Although these flyers and press releases were primarily intended to promote the public events the Sac and Fox Business Committee, Elders Advisory Board and I hosted around the project, they also invited community members to reach out directly to me if they had stories about the school they wished to share.

I organized two public events as part of recruitment for this project. I held the first event on December 11, 2024, at the Sac and Fox Elders and Veterans Building in Stroud, Oklahoma

and hosted it in collaboration with the Sac and Fox Business Committee and Elders Advisory Board (Figure 11). I opened the event with a short presentation and discussion of my archival findings to date. This included a collection of scanned photographs, excerpts from boarding school records, and an overview of the Sac and Fox Mission School's timeline. I shared these materials not only to give community members access to this information but also to promote community dialogue and memory-sharing. I invited attendees to examine the photos and speak about anything they recognized or remembered. People were also encouraged to bring personal items, such as family photographs or heirlooms, that related to the school or time period. This event was attended by roughly 30 people, mostly the elders we had targeted with our recruiting. The event provided the opportunity for informal conversations, some of which later led to interviews.



Figure 11: Cheyenne Widdecke and Lina Ortega at the first public event. Photo courtesy of Mike Brown, Editor of the Sac and Fox Newspaper.

I hosted the second public event on March 1, 2025, at the Sac and Fox Community Building in Stroud. The event was hosted in collaboration with the Sac and Fox Business Committee and Elders Advisory Board (Figure 12). Attendance was roughly the same as at the first public event. This time, I presented more details about family names that I had found while researching at OHS. As this information was shared, many community members came to realize they had family who once attended the Sac and Fox Mission School. Bobi Deere, the archaeologist with JDC who surveyed the school site and prepared the report, was present and helped present additional details. After the presentation, Ms. Deere led attendees on a walk of the Mission School site, offering further interpretation and answering questions (Figure 13). For many of the elders, this was their first time visiting the site. The walk was well received, as it gave participants a physical connection to the place and an opportunity to share stories in place. I listened carefully to participants' thoughts throughout the event, and several elders pulled me aside to share specific reflections and suggestions. The following day, I wrote notes reflecting on these conversations and on how the event unfolded. Overall, the events received positive feedback from attendees, who expressed appreciation that the history of the school was being researched and preserved with community input.



Figure 12: From left to right Bobi Deere, Sac and Fox Nation Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee, Lina Ortega, Cheyenne Widdecke, and Sac and Fox Nation Secretary Lana Butler at the second public event. Photo courtesy of Mike Brown, Editor of the Sac and Fox Newspaper.



Figure 13: Bobi Deere pointing out the cistern at the Sac and Fox Mission School to Sac and Fox tribal members Tony Tiger, Randy Tiger, and Liz Wolfstongue during the second public event. Photo courtesy of Mike Brown, Editor of the Sac and Fox Newspaper.

In the spirit of “archaeology of the heart,” Ms. Ortega organized a traditional meal after the site walk to care not only for participants’ mental well-being, but also their spiritual health. The intention of the feast was to ground everyone after an emotionally heavy experience, and to let their relatives know that we approached the work with care and respect. This meal gave participants space to reflect, process, and reconnect with each other. Being invited to take part in this offering was profoundly moving for me. It reminded me that healing work, especially in spaces marked by historical trauma, must be communal, embodied, and guided by cultural protocol. The feast was not an add-on to the research; it was part of the work.

Oral History Interviews

Building on the public events and informal conversations with community members, I invited individuals recommended by the Elders Advisory Committee and Ms. Ortega to participate in interviews. During meetings with leadership and public events, I emphasized that anyone connected to the school, regardless of how directly, should be welcomed and encouraged to share their family’s stories, no matter how small, as each account represents valuable received or inherited knowledge. Our concern for inclusivity shaped not only recruitment but also the interviews themselves. Many participants spoke about how geographically dispersed the Sac and Fox Nation has become over time, and how important it is that descendants living out of state be included in these conversations. They attributed this dispersal not only to earlier forced removals, but also to later factors such as federal relocation policies in the mid-20th century, intermarriage, military service, and the pursuit of educational and employment opportunities. Although most interviews resulted from direct invitations, one participant reached out after

seeing a flyer about the project, demonstrating the importance of having multiple avenues for engagement.

I recorded eight interviews using a Sony ICD-UX570 digital recorder. Interviews were conducted at locations most convenient for participants, typically the Bizzell Library's at the University of Oklahoma, the Sac and Fox Cultural Center, or in people's homes. Wherever they occurred, I ensured that the setting was quiet and comfortable. These spaces were usually a private collaboration room in the Bizzell Graduate Student Lounge, the conference room at the Cultural Center, or a quiet room within the participant's home. Each interview lasted between one and three hours, depending on the pace and the number of participants. Interviewees themselves represented a wide range of experiences, differing in age, gender, and roles within the community, which enriched the project by bringing diverse perspectives and voices to the story of the Sac and Fox Mission School.

Ms. Ortega was present at every interview. Her involvement helped make participants more comfortable with my presence as a non-community member and reflected her deep personal investment in the project. She will help steward these stories for future generations. As a Sac and Fox Nation citizen with family connections to many community members, her presence carried a sense of trust and continuity that was central to creating an open, conversational environment. She often helped begin interviews with personal introductions or small talk, which eased participants into sharing, and occasionally added clarifying questions or reflections that encouraged deeper storytelling. Her ability to relate to interviewees through shared community knowledge and familial ties helped transform each session from a formal interview into a dialogue grounded in care, familiarity, and mutual respect. She also ensured that

tissues were available and that water was offered before each interview, helping to create a respectful and supportive space.

I began each interview by reviewing the IRB disclosure statement approved by the University of Oklahoma, which explained the purpose of the study, how their information would be used, and their rights as participants. I emphasized that they were free to skip questions or decline to discuss anything they did not want recorded or included in the public record. Before beginning the formal interview, I shared the two short presentations on the Sac and Fox Mission School that I had previously given at public events (see public presentation slides in Appendix C & D). Since many participants had not attended those earlier presentations, this step provided important context and helped us prepare and center ourselves for the interview questions. The presentations, which were recorded as part of the interview, included archival photographs, historical documents, and contextual information I had gathered through my research. These moments were not one-sided. As we looked over the materials together, participants often added details I did not know, shared memories sparked by particular images or documents, and corrected or expanded on the information. Every interviewee expressed interest in learning more about the school's history, and this collaborative exchange helped ground our conversations, jog memories, and build trust.

Interview questions focused on participants' family relationships, memories, and reflections about the Sac and Fox Mission School. I asked nearly all of these questions in each interview, with the exception of two sessions in which Ms. Ortega and I collectively decided to use a more condensed version out of respect for personal circumstances, such as a participant's senior age or comfort level. The questions were developed collaboratively with Ms. Ortega and

were guided by my central research question: how community members want the Sac and Fox Mission School to be cared for, interpreted, and preserved. Our goal was to invite participants to share stories that reflected personal and familial connections to the school's history while centering the Nation's perspectives on stewardship and memory.

Many of the questions were initially phrased in a "yes or no" format (e.g., beginning with "Do you..."), reflecting my early effort to create structure and consistency across interviews for OU IRB approval. When I submitted my IRB application, I was required to include a complete list of interview questions and was not given the option to instead outline general themes or example prompts. As a result, I designed a structured list that could be approved and followed consistently. However, during my thesis defense, I learned that oral history protocols can instead describe the topics and examples the conversation will center around, allowing for a more flexible, open-ended approach. In any future work, I plan to adopt that model to allow participants greater freedom to guide the direction and tone of each conversation.

The following list reflects the core set of questions used across interviews, which served as a flexible framework for discussion rather than a rigid script:

- Do you have family members who attended the Sac and Fox Mission School/Agency School, or do you know of family members who attended it?
- Do you want to share what that family member was like?
- If they attended the school, do you know when they attended? The 1890s, 1910s, etc.? An estimate is okay as well.
- What kinds of things did your family members learn at the school?

- Do you know if your family would have lived nearby at the time? Would they have been separated by large distances from their family?
- Did you only have one family member who attended, or was it multiple?
- Did they attend other schools after the agency school? If so, would you like to share anything about that?
- Did they tell you about their experiences there?
- Did you hear anything about how their school experience affected their language? Was their first language Sauk?
- Did they speak about being discouraged from speaking their language?
- Do you know how they felt about their experiences there?
 - (Jogging questions: Did they talk about having friends or family members around? What teachers or school employees were like? What they ate? How they dressed? Whether they had to wear a uniform? What the school grounds looked like?)
- Have you been to the school grounds?
- Do you feel you are affected by their experiences there?
- If you are comfortable answering, did you attend a boarding school yourself? If you are comfortable sharing details about your experience, please do, as this is still relevant to the landscape of boarding schools across Oklahoma and the US.
- Do you know of any family photos of the school or objects you would like to discuss?

The final portion of each interview focused on participants' perspectives on preservation efforts surrounding the school; why they felt it was important, what forms it should take, and how future work could best serve the community. I asked these questions to better understand

community priorities and to ensure that any future preservation or interpretation work reflects their values and vision. The questions I asked included:

- What aspects of the Sac and Fox Mission School do you think should be preserved for future generations?
- If archaeological work were to take place at the site, what would you want to see investigated or recovered?
- What stories, traditions, or knowledge do you feel should be documented alongside any school material?
- How would you like to see the history of the school interpreted or shared with the community and the broader public?
- Are there concerns about excavation, preservation, or interpretation that you feel should be considered?

Lastly, as part of my commitment to care and reciprocity, each interview participant received a small thank-you gift. With guidance from Ms. Ortega, I selected enamelware bowls and bags of pecans, a traditional food, for each individual, along with a handwritten thank-you card. These tokens of appreciation were made possible through a student grant awarded by the Oklahoma Anthropological Society (OAS). OAS brings together amateur and professional archaeologists to promote the study of Oklahoma's past and to support research into both its pre-contact and post-contact periods. I received this grant in support of my thesis and the funding helped ensure that participants felt meaningfully recognized and honored for their contributions to this work.

Transcription

I began the transcription process by uploading each audio file into Sonix AI software. According to its privacy policy, Sonix does not sell, share, rent, or trade user data with third parties for commercial purposes, which made it an acceptable platform under IRB requirements. After Sonix generated the initial transcript, I personally reviewed each document, spending between three and five hours per interview removing filler words, correcting misheard phrases, and ensuring the accurate spelling of family and place names. Once I completed this first round of edits, I asked Ms. Ortega to review each transcript. Her feedback helped me identify unclear references and provided crucial context for familial or historical details that I might otherwise have missed.

After this internal review, I sent the transcript to the participant for final approval. At that stage, they could revise or clarify their words and request that anything they did not want preserved in my thesis or the archives be removed. In a few cases, participants also asked me to alter the audio itself. To honor those requests, I used Audacity, a free, open-source audio editing program, to remove background interruptions or comments they preferred not to include.

Ultimately, the oral history interviews were essential to addressing the central research question guiding this project: *What elements of the Sac and Fox Mission boarding school do citizens want recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations?* Through these conversations, community members shared what they felt should be remembered and protected, from family stories and experiences of the site itself to the broader meanings of resilience, language, and belonging. These interviews not only documented memories but also revealed how

the community defines preservation as an ongoing practice rooted in care, storytelling, and intergenerational responsibility.

Analysis

To analyze the oral histories, I followed an ethnographic process of thematic analysis that emphasized both rigor and community validation. I began by re-reading each transcript in full and taking detailed notes, often referred to in qualitative research as “memos,” which captured recurring concepts, striking phrases, and emotional cues such as pauses or silences. These memos helped me reflect not only on the words shared, but also on what was left unsaid, recognizing, as oral historians emphasize, that silence can carry as much meaning as speech (Portelli 1991).

From these memos, I generated a series of recurring ideas that I identified as codes. I carried out this process manually, which allowed me to stay closely engaged with the language, tone, and pacing of each transcript. Scholars emphasize that the act of coding is not just a technical step but an interpretive practice. The goal of manual coding, when undertaken carefully, is to ensure that the researcher remains attentive to nuance and context (Saldaña 2016). In this way, the process was not simply about categorizing data but about recognizing patterns in memory, emotion, and expression that might otherwise be overlooked. Early codes such as “silence,” “loss of language,” “revitalization,” “schooling,” “kinship,” and “continuity” appeared repeatedly across interviews, each reflecting key areas of meaning and concern voiced by community members. For instance, “silence” and “withheld stories” captured the presence of absence; “loss of language” and “revitalization” reflected grief and renewal; while “schooling,” “kinship,” and “continuity” pointed to the long arc of disconnection and resilience that shaped

community life. After establishing an initial set of codes, I returned to each transcript and systematically reviewed them, tracing where particular codes appeared across interviews and identifying especially strong or illustrative examples. This iterative and reflective process ensured that the themes that emerged were both grounded in participants' words and sensitive to the complexities of oral history.

This analysis was not conducted in isolation. As part of my commitment to care-centered and community-based research, I engaged in a process of member checking (Birt et al. 2016), asking community collaborators to review and comment on my emerging codes and themes before synthesizing them into broader categories. Code checking, as Birt et al. (2016) explain, is a crucial form of validation because it ensures that the researcher's interpretations do not stand alone but are tested against the perspectives of participants and community members who bring essential knowledge to the analysis.

In practice, I carried this out through what can be considered a form of double member checking. First, I asked Ms. Ortega, who was both academically tied to the project and a community member of the Sac and Fox Nation, to review my codes and help identify areas where I might have missed or misunderstood connections. Her dual role meant she could evaluate my interpretations with an eye toward both scholarly rigor and cultural grounding. Second, I sought feedback from her partner, Troy Shackelford, who, while also a community member, was not directly tied to the academic side of the project. This provided a different but equally valuable perspective, one that was less filtered through academic frameworks yet deeply informed by lived community knowledge. This double process not only strengthened the validity of the analysis but also aligned with the collaborative ethos of the project, making interpretation a shared and iterative act rather than a solitary academic exercise.

Finally, I synthesized these coded themes into broader interpretive categories, which I then developed into the *Findings & Interpretations* and *Discussion* chapters: Silences; Language Loss and Revitalization; and Schooling, Kinship, and Continuity. Early codes such as “silence,” “withheld stories,” and “archival gaps” informed Silences, where I examine how absence and restraint themselves communicate meaning. Codes like “loss of language,” “revitalization,” “intergenerational regret,” and “language as container” fed directly into Language Loss and Revitalization, highlighting how boarding school experiences disrupted transmission while current efforts work to repair it. Finally, codes including “schooling,” “separation from family,” “kinship practices,” “care,” and “ongoing removal” were brought together in Schooling, Kinship, and Continuity to show how education has long operated as a tool of dispersal, even as families and the Nation continue to rebuild relationships across distance. Drawing on ethnographic approaches that treat memory, emotion, and historical experience as intertwined, this synthesis made it possible to connect individual interviews to wider narratives of disruption and healing in the Sac and Fox community (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

Taken together, these themes illuminate how community members envision the future of the Sac and Fox Mission School and what they most wish to see recovered, interpreted, and preserved. In doing so, the analysis directly answers the central research question by showing that preservation, for the Sac and Fox Nation, encompasses far more than protecting physical remnants, it includes the care of stories, relationships, and responsibilities that continue to shape the community’s connection to this place.

Data Management

Responsible data management is a critical part of this project's methodology, particularly given the sensitive nature of the histories being shared and the importance of honoring community sovereignty over cultural materials. From the beginning, the project has been committed to ensuring that oral histories, photographs, and other collected materials are archived according to the protocols and preferences of the Sac and Fox Nation. I designed data management practices to prioritize consent, accessibility, and long-term stewardship by the community, rather than by the researcher.

As I mentioned, all oral history interviews were recorded using a Sony ICD-UX570 digital recorder, with participants' consent, and then deleted from the device as soon as I saved the file onto my computer. Photographs and documents collected during the research process, including items shared by community members and those located in archival repositories, were carefully documented, scanned, and cataloged. Copies of historic photographs provided by families were made with explicit permission and original materials remained with their owners.

Upon completion of this thesis, all materials, including audio recordings, interview transcripts, and signed consent forms, will be transferred in full to the Sac and Fox Business Committee and housed within the Sac and Fox Nation Archives. I will not retain any copies of these materials. Paper copies of transcripts will be preserved in the physical collections, and discussions are ongoing regarding the potential for select materials to be made accessible through a secure, password-protected online portal available exclusively to Sac and Fox tribal members. As with other materials in the Nation's archives, access will be limited and governed by internal protocols, ensuring that only authorized community members can view sensitive content. Due to this arrangement, transcripts are not included as appendices to this thesis. All

individuals were informed of and agreed to this data stewardship plan prior to participating in the project and no one opted out. While there have been preliminary discussions about also housing materials at the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma, any external archiving will occur only with the full approval and guidance of the Sac and Fox Nation and with the involvement of interview participants, who must be part of the decision-making process regarding where their stories are ultimately preserved.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS & INTERPRETATIONS

The chapter is titled *Findings & Interpretations* to reflect both the descriptive and interpretive dimensions of the work. On the one hand, it documents what happened: the archival records located, the public events held, and the interviews conducted. On the other hand, it acknowledges that while the research process itself is replicable, the results are not. As a non-community member and as an individual with my own background, training, and perspective, the themes that stand out to me are shaped by my interpretive lens. Another researcher, working with the same materials, might emphasize different patterns. Including “interpretations” in the title makes this transparency explicit and signals that my role as a researcher, my positionality, choices, and relationships, has shaped what is presented here. It is equally important to reiterate that I do not speak on behalf of the Sac and Fox Nation or any other Indigenous community. This research reflects the specific stories, conversations, and reflections that were generously shared with me, but I do not claim to speak for everyone.

This chapter presents the project’s findings, organized into three interconnected domains, archival materials, community events, and interviews. In total, the study draws on information gathered at two public community events, eight recorded oral histories across ages and genders, and materials from the WHC, OHS, and the Sac and Fox Nation Archives. Together, these sources revealed recurring themes of silence, cultural loss, emotional connection to place, and the enduring impact of boarding school history on the Sac and Fox community. In doing so, they directly addressed the research question. They directly addressed the research question: illuminating what the community wishes to recover, interpret, and preserve for future generations.

Archival Materials

Personal belongings from community members and interviewees that could be directly tied to the Sac and Fox Mission School were scarce in this project, which may reflect not only dispossession, dispersal, and the passage of time, but also the limited participation in this study and the possibility that some community members chose not to share items they have. By contrast, institutional artifacts survive in quantity and shape the evidentiary base for this study. Read across three repositories, the WHC, OHS, and the Sac and Fox Nation Archives, these materials document administrative priorities, daily routines, and the visual grammar through which officials sought to represent “progress,” even as they reproduce patterned silences around illness, punishment, and the affective realities of student life.

While these reports are inherently biased, intended to portray “progress” at each agency and school, they nonetheless provide a framework of dates, construction details, enrollment numbers, and other institutional data. Yet, as scholars like Annelise Riles (2006) and Ann Laura Stoler (2009) remind us, archives are not neutral repositories but active social artifacts that reflect the power structures and epistemologies of their creators. Riles characterizes documents as artifacts of modern knowledge, shaped by bureaucratic practices that give form to state rationality rather than to lived experience. Similarly, Stoler’s call to read along the archival grain invites us to attend not only to what the colonial archive records, but also to how it was structured to conceal, omit, or silence.

Applying these perspectives to the Sac and Fox Mission School records reframes them as products of assimilationist governance, texts that both document and perform colonial control. Their gaps, contradictions, and silences are not incidental; they reveal the moral and political

logics underpinning U.S. Indian policy. Reading these documents critically, in dialogue with oral histories and community interpretation, becomes a method of decolonizing the archive: shifting the analytic focus from bureaucratic recordkeeping to the lived realities that those records sought to manage and erase.

WHC

The WHC does not house many materials related to the Sac and Fox Mission School, but what exists is nonetheless meaningful. These include school ledgers listing community members as well as records of supplies ordered for the school, such as flour (Figure 14). As mentioned in the *Historical Context* chapter of my thesis, the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs are also held at the WHC. These reports, submitted by superintendents, were used by the U.S. government to track attendance, fluctuating enrollment numbers, and the perceived “progress” of the school. I reviewed all relevant collections and finding aids and can confirm that my search at the WHC was exhaustive.

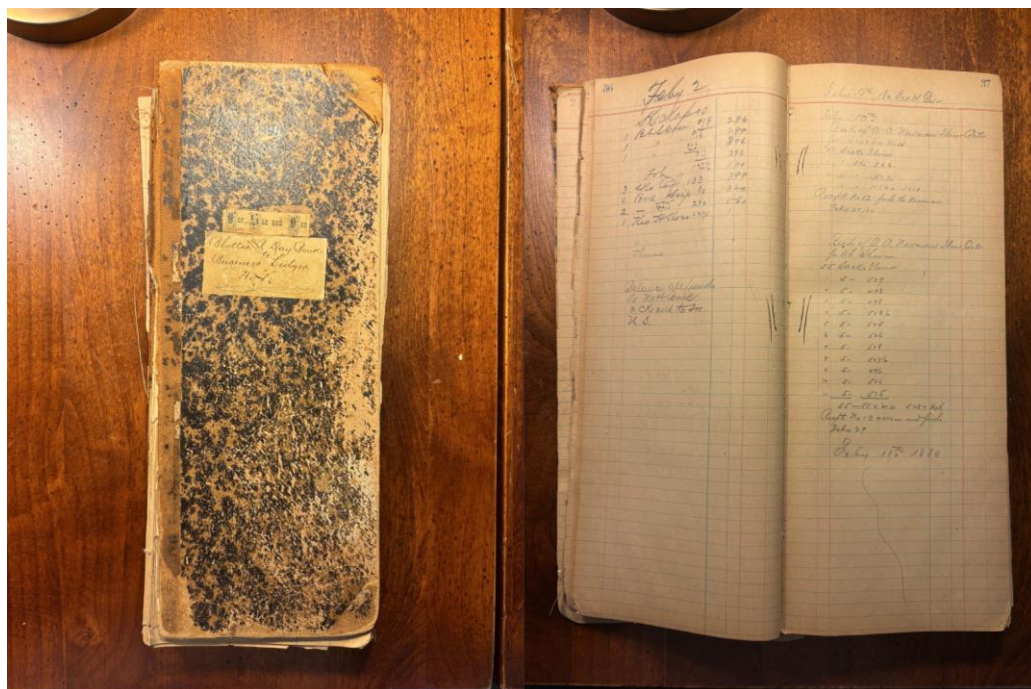


Figure 14: Sac and Fox Agency Ledger; open page shows sack flour that is being ordered for the school. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Indian Agency Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

In addition to such texts, there are also a limited number of photographs depicting the school itself as well as groups of students. Notably, two sets of group photographs include labels with student names, preserved thanks to the work of Jerry Whistler Snow, who donated her collection to the Western History Collections. Ms. Snow, a Sac and Fox elder and community historian, has spent decades gathering family histories and documenting kin connections. In an oral history interview I conducted with her on May 22, 2025, she shared stories about her uncles Don and Leo's brief time at the Mission School, her family's emphasis on education, and her own lifelong efforts to safeguard photographs and genealogical records. Unlike many donations where individuals go unidentified, Ms. Snow's family had recorded the students names long ago, demonstrating enduring community and kinship ties and making this collection especially valuable for linking names to faces and preserving individual histories.

Those identifications are especially critical because, when shared with families, the documents ceased to be static records and became living touchstones. In an April 25, 2025, oral history, Mary Frances McCormick, one of the oldest members of the Sac and Fox Nation at 93 years old, moved through the labeled group photographs and began identifying students by name and relation. Pausing over the 1880s group portrait (Figure 15), her first words were: “*My goodness, there’s Tom Morris and Stella.*” Recognition after recognition followed, each moment deeply touching. As she continued studying the students’ faces and reading through the list of transcribed names, she brightened again: “*My goodness. There’s Aunt Atta. Atta McLellan,*” immediately situating the recognition within family ties and continuing to link faces to kin across the print. Here the caption is not an end point but a starting point; the archive speaks fully only when someone who knows the people in the picture can say who they are to one another. The Snow Collection thus does more than preserve photographs: it reframes the evidence by reuniting images with those who can recognize and name them, and by showing how community knowledge can animate institutional holdings in ways that state and university records alone cannot.



Figure 15: Sac and Fox school children, 1880. Those who are identified are Albert Morris, Thomas Morris, Rosa Hurr, Stella Hauk, Marry Grant, Sadie Carter, Cora Battice, Martha Baker, George McClellan, and Atta Shaw. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Jerry Whistler Snow Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries.

Although limited in scope, these records frame educational “success” according to assimilationist criteria, valuing English use, religious instruction, and measurable forms of behavioral or cultural change. The ledgers’ neatly tabulated figures invite confidence while the Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs leave unexplained year-to-year swings in enrollment and capacity. Viewed as material culture rather than neutral instruments, the ledgers reveal how settler colonialists counted, sorted, and measured Indigenous families to meet policy aims. The WHC photographs reinforce this same logic from another angle, documenting the

expansion of buildings and the staging of students within institutional space, while revealing little of students' inner lives beyond what officials intended to be seen.

OHS

By contrast, the Oklahoma Historical Society holds a massive bulk of materials relating to the Sac and Fox Mission School, so extensive that I did not work through all of it. This unusually large collection exists because, through an agreement with the National Archives and the United States Congress in the 1930s, the OHS took possession of many records from Indian agencies in Oklahoma, records that would typically have been housed by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). From what I did have time to review; it is clear the collection has depth and breadth. Finding aids for these collections are often incomplete or lack the level of detail needed to know what is truly there, making in-person searching essential. Mountains upon mountains of correspondence lie in this archive, often naming specific students and showing how, or sometimes why, they were transferred from the Sac and Fox Mission School to others such as Chilocco Indian School. Letters documenting runaways, disciplinary interventions, and reassignments sit alongside notes and receipts that track the movement of Sac and Fox students among different boarding schools, marking the Mission School's entanglement in a wider system of transfer that redistributed children to satisfy administrative and assimilationist priorities.

The OHS collections also preserve detailed student enrollment lists and confirm that multiple generations of some families attended the Sac and Fox Mission School (Figure 16). Within the same body of materials are some of the most specific supply orders we located, ranging from types of fabric for making clothing to cattle that were kept at the school barn

(Figure 17). The collection also includes photographs, one of the most notable being an image of the school with two boys standing in front of it, framed by the oak trees that still stand today, a powerful tie to the land that I will discuss further in the community events section of this chapter (Figure 8).

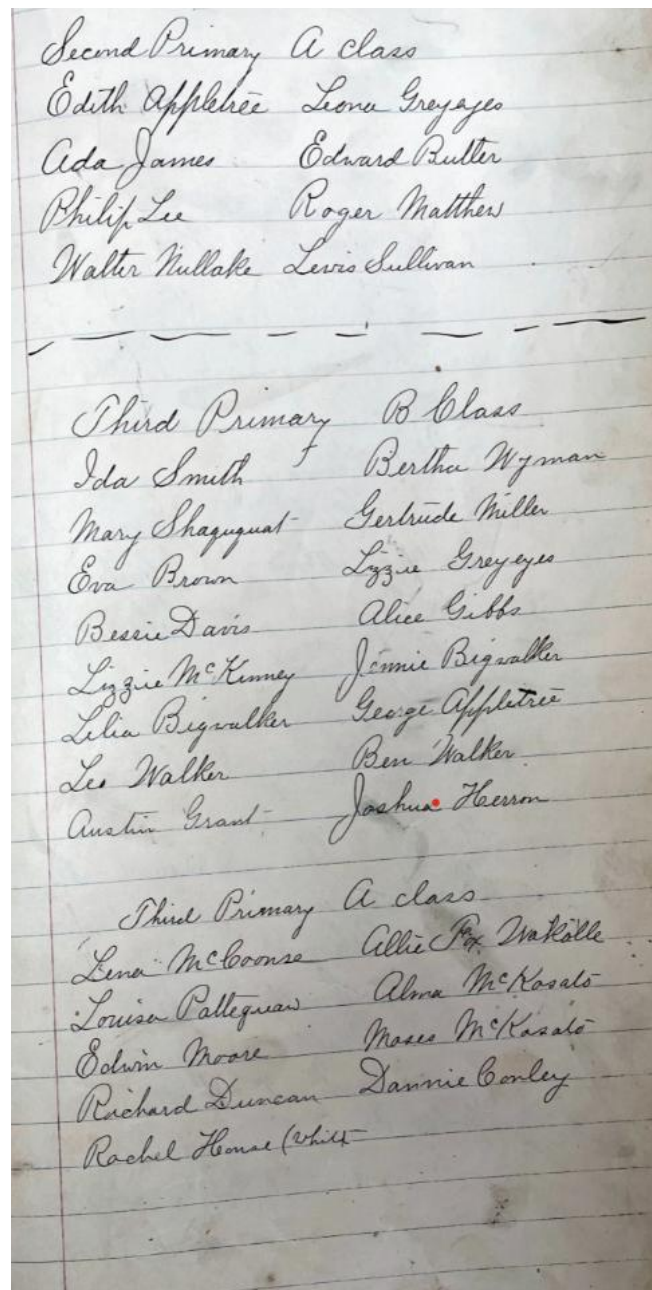


Figure 16: Student names found in ledger c.1894. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox-Shawnee Agency Records, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division.

h. 9" Copy

THIS FORM MUST BE EXCLUSIVELY USED FOR BEEF RECEIVED "UNDER CONTRACT."

U. S. INDIAN SERVICE.

Receipt for Beef and Beef-Cattle delivered under Contract.

Sac & Fox

RECEIVED at *Sac & Fox* Indian Agency, *Ind. Terr.*

March 3rd, 187*8* *Rawlin*

20 (6) steers & 10 (3) cows, mixed (9) head Beef cattle

head of Beef Cattle weighing 2000 and four hundred lbs each

(3460) lbs net (weight ascertained by *weighing two head of*

average weight weighing 1000 lbs under *this* contract

dated *August 20th*, 187*7*, for subsistence of Indians at the said Agency,

and for which I have signed receipts in *Indian*.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the beef here received for is fully equal to the requirements of the Contract above mentioned, and in this delivery and receipt each and every condition, provision, and stipulation of the Contract has been fully and honestly complied with, and that payment has not been made for the same.

[Signature]

[Signature] U. S. Indian Agent.

NOTES AND INSTRUCTIONS.

1. Address and date. Name of month should be stated, as June, October, &c.
2. State or Territory.
3. Date of receipt of Beef.
4. Numbers, weights, prices, and quantities must be stated in words.
5. If delivered on the block "net," strike out "head" and "cattle."
6. Write "net" or "gross," as the contract calls for.
7. State specifically how weight is ascertained. If gross weight is estimated by weighing dressed beef, state what percentage was allowed for "tare."
8. Persons signing for "Agent" or "Acting Agent" must show written authority for so doing.
9. Erasures, alterations, or interlineations must be noticed as having been made before signing, and explanation signed by Agent.
10. Persons receiving this receipt are enjoined to see that it is properly filled up and signed.
11. *Assignments* should be specifically made the same as drafts are transferred, or by general written assignment, filed in each office revising the accounts.
12. Payment of this receipt will be made only at the Office of Indian Affairs.
13. Payment will be refused on any other Form.

Figure 17: Receipt for cattle, 1877. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox-Shawnee Agency Records, Oklahoma Historical Society, Research Division.

These sources illustrate how seemingly routine paperwork, whether lists, receipts, or photographs, functioned as tools of administration but also left behind traces that scholars and community members can now reinterpret. Read as material culture, these bureaucratic files are not mere by-products; they are artifacts of a regime that made mobility, surveillance, and redistribution appear routine. The page shown in Figure 18, *Departures of Male Students, 1909*, makes this visible, translating children's lives into columns and destinations and normalizing circulation as an institutional solution.

The Sac and Fox Nation Archives preserve the only known interior photographs of the Mission School building. For example, Figure 19, *Students Inside the Sac and Fox Mission School Building* (no date), offers a rare view of the classroom interior otherwise unseen in the archival record. Figure 20, *Students Participating in a “Mock Wedding,” Sac and Fox Mission School Auditorium, 1897*, depicts a staged performance organized by teachers in which students acted out a Euro-American wedding ceremony. Events like this were common in mission and agency schools during the late nineteenth century; they reinforced assimilationist lessons about religion, marriage, gender roles, and decorum by transforming education into spectacle. When viewed alongside material evidence of domestic-style chore charts and oral histories shared during community gatherings, this photograph illustrates how students were taught to internalize Euro-American domestic ideals even within an environment of surveillance and control.



Figure 19: Students inside the Sac and Fox Mission School Building, no date. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.



Figure 20: Students participating in a “mock wedding”, Sac and Fox Mission School auditorium, 1897. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.

Like the WHC and OHS holdings, the Sac and Fox Nation Archives hold materials whose significance expands in community contexts, where interpretation draws on kinship knowledge and collective memory. Yet access remains uneven: limited cataloging, restricted materials, and reliance on personal networks can make navigation challenging. In a May 9, 2025, interview at the Sac and Fox Cultural Center, two generations of the Boyd family, Christopher Jo Boyd, Shanarae Boyd, and Tammy Louann Fields (Boyd), encountered a school photograph of their relative, Christine Franklin (Figure 21), preserved in the Sac and Fox Nation Archives. The image itself had been labeled through earlier community stewardship, yet for the Boyds it carried an unexpected weight. “We didn’t really grow up knowing that Franklin side of the family at all. I’ve never seen a picture of her,” Shanarae reflected, before the conversation broadened to everyday recollections of relatives like Edgar “Frog” Scott, fishing, teasing, living simply, and to the story of their father’s early childhood with his great-grandmother when Sauk was his first

language. The archival image did not merely confirm a name; it bridged gaps in memory with affect, place, and kin. At the same time, the fact that such a powerful moment of recognition unfolded only once the photograph was brought out of the archive underscores how questions of accessibility remain vital. Materials held within tribal archives may be invaluable, but their impact depends on whether families can encounter them.

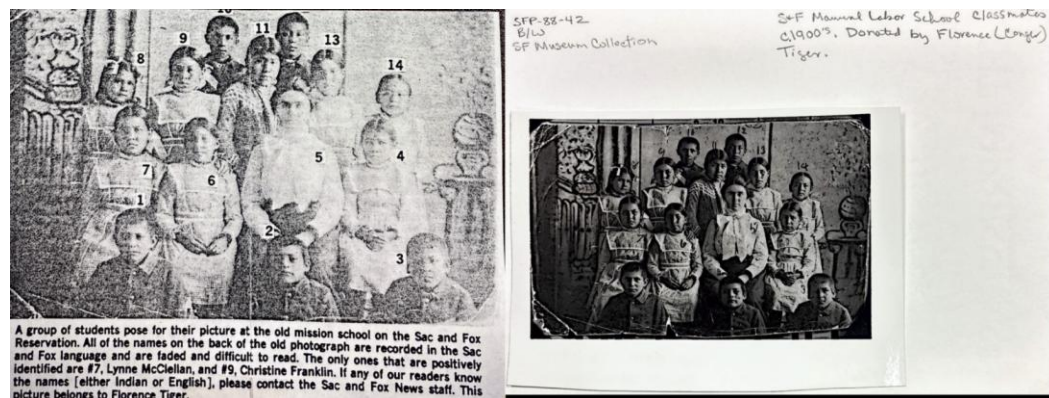


Figure 21: Newspaper clipping seeking to identify students, 1900's. Students identified: Lynne McClellan and Christine Franklin. Picture donated by Florence Tiger. Note. Adapted/Retrieved/Reprinted from the Sac and Fox Nation Archives.

When considered together, the WHC ledgers and labeled group photographs, the OHS correspondence and enrollment lists, and the Sac and Fox Nation's interior images and family-identified copies reveal the Mission School's documentary record to be both abundant and partial. It is abundant in its detailed enumeration of attendance, labor, and supplies, and in its vivid visual record of buildings, assembled students, and classroom scenes. Yet it is partial in what it omits, the absence of epidemics, punishments, and emotion, and the transformation of individual children into administrative categories or posed tableaux. These gaps are not the result of missing files within any one repository, but rather reflect the selective nature of what was historically recorded, making it necessary to read between the lines to understand the fuller story.

Reading these archival materials as material culture, rather than as neutral containers of fact, clarifies their double work: they constitute evidence of what was done and how it was made

to appear. The work programs and exterior views disclose the spatial and curricular frameworks through which students were seen; the classroom and auditorium interiors reveal curated environments in which they were arranged and observed; and the departures ledger literalizes a system of circulation that moved children across institutions as part of a broader assimilation policy.

For this project, the importance of these records lies not only in what they document but in how they can be activated today. Bringing photographs and documents back to relatives allows families to reconnect with individuals who might otherwise remain faceless in the archive. Displaying selected materials at public events enables community members to share memories, offer corrections, and voice new interpretations that reframe the record. As I stated in my Methodology chapter, I created an initial catalog of the specific locations of relevant holdings at WHC and OHS. I also took note of where materials tied to the Sac and Fox Mission School are located within the Sac and Fox Nation Archives. These records can now be more easily identified, formally requested, repatriated, or reproduced for the Nation's own archive if desired. I also advocate for this cataloging to continue, ideally as an ongoing, collaborative process between the Nation and the institutions that hold these materials, so that the archive remains accessible, accountable, and responsive to community priorities.

At the same time, the sanitized and depersonalized character of these records, their silence about children's feelings, daily struggles, relationships with one another or acts of resistance, underscores why oral histories were essential to this project. Archival traces reduce students to numbers, categories, or posed images, but they do not capture lived experiences. In archaeology, such background research is indispensable for context, but it cannot stand on its own as a proxy for the human stories that make meaning of the past. Oral histories with Sac and

Fox citizens therefore extend beyond the limits of the written record, restoring voice, memory, and humanity where institutional documentation erases or flattens it.

Community Events

I designed two public events in Stroud in December 2024 and March 2025 in collaboration with the Elders Advisory Board and the Business Committee. I designed these events to share materials with the community, to invite correction and guidance, and to create space for shared interpretation of the Sac and Fox Mission School. Simply put, the gatherings created opportunities for people to begin talking together about the school together. They also emphasized relationship-building and trust, underscoring that records gain meaning in the presence of those who can recognize people, places, and stories within the materials.

December 11, 2024, Event

The December event introduced a set of materials drawn primarily from the Western History Collections, supplemented by a single photograph from the Oklahoma Historical Society (See appendix C for the public presentation slides). Rather than attempting a comprehensive overview, I focused the presentation on photographs of the school complex and its buildings, alongside names and images of children who attended. To help connect the archival record to the present-day landscape, I emphasized that the oak trees visible in many of the early photographs still stand today, and I pointed to the water tower, which still sticks out above the trees and is often recognized by community members even if they have never been to the school site itself. These touchstones offered a way to ground memory and conversation in something tangible and familiar.

To make the materials easier to engage with, I also printed out every image shown on screen so people could hold them in their hands, pass them around, and look more closely (Figure 22). This was especially important for elders or those with limited eyesight. Many attendees wanted to keep these prints, and so we let them take them home to share with family or keep as part of their own connection to the history.



Figure 22: Elders at the first public event. Photo courtesy of Mike Brown, Editor of the Sac and Fox Newspaper.

Materials were displayed for unhurried browsing rather than formal lecture. Attendees circulated among tables, pointing out surnames, debating spellings, and comparing features in photographs to memory. Several attendees discovered for the first time that their relatives had attended the school, recognizing family names or faces in the records and photographs on display, while others shared stories that had never been written down, memories tied to the water tower, accounts of who left early or transferred, and explanations of why a particular photograph carried meaning within a household. Many of the most substantive exchanges occurred informally, standing shoulder to shoulder over a print or ledger page, with some participants

choosing to share insights without being recorded. The atmosphere balanced the weight of the topic with care and hospitality so that people could step in and out of difficult conversations as needed.

March 1, 2025, Event

For the March public event, I built on the December gathering by organizing a second event that introduced a broader set of records, primarily from the Oklahoma Historical Society and the Sac and Fox Tribal Archives (see Appendix D for presentation slides). Designed for elders, it brought together many of the same participants along with several new attendees. Working with Ms. Ortega, I selected materials featuring family surnames of those expected to attend so the presentation would hold personal relevance. The records included building and classroom photographs, student portraits, and administrative documents such as supply receipts, superintendent's reports, and school ledgers listing arrivals, departures, transfers, and runaway students. These materials deepened the process of recognition begun in December, as attendees identified family names and connections in the records, layering new discoveries onto earlier memories and stories.

Following the presentation, participants visited the Mission School site. For many, this was the first time they had set foot on the grounds. Today, very little of the original school complex remains. No intact buildings stand, and only low foundations, scattered stones, and subtle surface changes mark where structures once were. Yet these traces, together with familiar landmarks like the water tower still rising above the trees and the surviving oaks, helped orient participants and tie historic photographs to the physical landscape. As attendees located the cistern, well, and the footprints of outbuildings, the site became more than remnants; it made explicit what I describe in this thesis as the landscape as a living archive.

Participants did not simply look at foundations; they read the ground as a record that stores relations and memories. These observations come from my own reflections and from comments participants made as we walked the site together. The water tower functioned as an index and point of orientation across generations, while the alignment of the oak trees with early twentieth-century photographs allowed people to position images through the vegetation itself. Low rises and shallow depressions traced former circulation routes between buildings and work areas, setting chore charts and weekly duty schedules into the context of the school's physical layout. Walking distances and the presence or absence of shade became newly visible through this lens. The cistern and well especially drew attention, as people reflected on the necessity of water and the labor once required to manage it. The scarcity of standing structures made these features all the more meaningful; each trace invited acts of remembering, interpreting, and reimagining what had once been there.

Place was a strong throughline. The Sac and Fox Mission School site sits within the Sac and Fox Nation's tribal complex, surrounded by government and service buildings and near central gathering spaces, yet it is tucked within a wooded area and rarely entered. Participants treated the Mission School grounds as a living archive rather than a neutral backdrop, and their emotional responses to the site flowed from that understanding. Some described the grounds as heavy or sacred, others as a place of connection to relatives who once stood there. Some experienced it as both at once.

This sense of connection was echoed in an interview with Janice Edmiston, a Sac and Fox community member and descendant of the Longshore and McKinney families, several of whom attended and even worked at the Sac and Fox Mission School. Although our conversation did not take place on site, Ms. Edmiston spoke movingly about how ties to place are also ties to

kin: “The minute you touch something that somebody you love has touched, you feel a connection, whether it's real or not, whether it's in your mind or not. It doesn't make any difference.” Her words reflect the same understanding many participants described during the site walk, that the landscape itself carries memory and presence across generations. Ms. Edmiston’s reflection underscores how material traces, whether buildings, objects, or the land itself, become conduits of belonging, bridging gaps left by silence in the written record.

Treating the landscape as an archive also changed how attendees evaluated the written and visual record. During the event, we discussed the archival materials both on site and afterward, when several elders looked through the presentation materials with me again. Photographs once read as architectural views became spatial evidence when set against the distances walked on site. In some cases, the ground helped adjudicate contradictory captions or building labels by anchoring photographs to fixed points. Crucially, this place-based reading was relational and embodied: people oriented themselves with reference to family stories of where someone worked, where a path cut across the yard, or which door a relative used to enter a dormitory.

Across both events, the appetite for knowledge was unmistakable. People asked question upon question, about dates and curricula, mealtimes and chores, the authority of particular superintendents, the use of specific buildings, the frequency and causes of transfers, the languages heard in classrooms, and the everyday rhythms that never appear in reports. This inquisitiveness is itself a finding: it demonstrates the depth of community investment in the school’s history and highlights the gaps produced by archival silences and intergenerational loss. The questions were not simply requests for information but acts of interpretation, framing what

mattered most to community members and directing attention to the details of daily life that have long gone unrecorded.

Taken together, the community events produced descriptive findings that are inseparable from the records themselves. They generated identifications and corrections, surfaced family knowledge that does not appear in any archive, articulated a place-based hermeneutic in which the school grounds serve as an active repository of memory, and revealed a sustained and detailed discourse that is itself part of the historical record. In this sense, the questions and insights voiced during these gatherings are findings, not only reshaping the research agenda but also expanding what counts as evidence. They set the terms for subsequent interviews and informed the preservation-focused questions taken up in the next section.

Oral History Interviews

This section draws on eight semi-structured oral histories conducted in spring 2025 with a range of participants of different ages and genders, women and men, younger adults through elders, identified within the community and interviewed at the Elders & Veterans Building, the Cultural Center, and in private homes. Voices include a multigenerational family, elders, an educator/linguist, artists and cultural workers, and community historians/knowledge-keepers. Quotations are presented verbatim, and the interpretations that follow reflect the diversity of perspectives represented across the eight interviews.

The interviews form the most personal layer of this project's evidence, directly addressing the research question of what elements of the Sac and Fox Mission School citizens want recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations. They illuminate how silences, cultural loss and persistence, and intergenerational connection and disconnection are not abstract

but lived experiences. In the final portion of each interview, I asked about preservation, why it matters, what forms it should take, and how future work could best serve the Nation, so that any archaeological or interpretive steps proposed here are grounded in community priorities. In practice, those questions invited reflections on what should be preserved for future generations; what, if anything, archaeological work ought to investigate or recover; what stories, traditions, or knowledge should be documented alongside any material remains; how the history should be interpreted for the community and broader public; and what concerns or cautions should shape any excavation, preservation, or interpretation.

The themes that follow and guide the discussion, silences, cultural loss, language, kinship, continuity, resilience, were not predetermined. They emerged through a process of close reading, memoing, and coding of the interviews, followed by careful synthesis and discussion with community collaborators Ms. Ortega and Mr. Shackelford. In other words, the following subsections are not simply organizational tools; they are interpretive categories shaped by what participants said, how they said it, and what they chose not to say. By organizing individual voices into thematic threads, the analysis reveals both shared concerns and distinct perspectives, remaining attentive to the complexity of lived experience. The discussion that follows stays close to participants' language while interpreting how their insights shape understandings of archaeology, preservation, and the continuing significance of the Sac and Fox Mission School.

Silences

It became quickly clear to me that silence was not incidental in the shared histories of the Sac and Fox Mission School, it was formative. Whether it took the shape of withheld stories, forgotten kin, or omissions in the archival record, silence itself became a kind of inheritance. Community members described not only what they remembered, but also what they could never

know, revealing how erasure worked across generations. The following testimonies illustrate how silence functioned as a strategy of survival, a marker of loss, and an enduring presence in family and community narratives.

Silences could take the form of unanswered questions. In his interview on February 26, 2025, artist and educator Tony A. Tiger described how, when he asked relatives about their boarding school experiences, he was often met with refusals to elaborate: “I remember having conversations about it and then sometimes not getting any answers...other than there was nothing ever positive said about it.” His words reflect a protective silence, a refusal to transmit memories too painful to recount, but also a way of signaling that the school was not a place of good experiences.

For others, silences appeared as ruptures in family knowledge. In the Boyd Family Oral History (May 9, 2025), Shanarae Boyd recalled encountering unknown names while reviewing records: “These are siblings that grandma never talked about. I was like, who’s Susie? Who’s Joseph? I didn’t know who these folks were.” Elsewhere she added, “We just don’t know our grandpa’s side at all...It’s just not something that we grew up knowing.” These silences illustrate how institutional disruption reverberated across generations, leaving descendants with fractured genealogies and unanswered questions about kinship.

Some silences were not only gaps but acknowledgments of what could not be known. In her interview on April 7, 2025, Peggy Big Eagle, granddaughter of Lucille (Lucy) Logan, Ta-shi-tha-quá, began by stating, “There’s a lot of questions I don’t have answers to.” By naming her grandmother and then emphasizing the limits of what she could recover, Ms. Big Eagle illustrated how the boarding school era left descendants both grasping for clarity and recognizing

the impossibility of fully reconstructing the past. Her testimony demonstrates how silence itself becomes part of the intergenerational record, shaping how families engage with history.

Still others were structural silences, enforced by the shape of the archival record. Official documents focused on attendance, crops, or infrastructure while omitting what Fogelson (1989) termed “nonevents”: emotional, social, or cultural disruptions that institutions fail to record. What is absent from the archival record, particularly the emotions, experiences, and voices of Sac and Fox people, is as revealing as what appears. One example, shared with me in informal conversations with Ms. Ortega, was that after the Sac and Fox Nation were removed to Oklahoma, their numbers had already been severely reduced by multiple disease outbreaks during the various removals. Further outbreaks occurred after their arrival in Indian Territory, including one, likely smallpox, in the 1890s, as alluded to in the Whistler letters in the Jerry Whistler Snow Collection housed at the WHC, which prevented the community from carrying out burial practices. So many people died, and the sick could not be touched, that the community was unable to conduct proper ceremonies. The number of deaths was so great that there were mass graves, compounding the trauma of loss with the pain of cultural disruption. This loss, and the emotional toll it carried, is entirely absent from official records.

For community members, however, the silence of the documents is not experienced as absence but as a troubling absence they actively think about. In his interview on May 15, 2025, Jacob Manatowa-Bailey, a specialist in indigenous language revitalization, reflected on this very point. He said, “I know that children had to have died at the school, but were they buried there? Did they take them over to the tribal cemetery?” By voicing these questions, Mr. Manatowa-Bailey shows how the lack of written evidence does not erase knowledge or suspicion within the community. Instead, it sharpens it. The fact that deaths are never mentioned in official records

becomes evidence, suggesting concealment or disregard. His reflections illustrate how structural silences can reverberate in the minds of descendants who are left to fill in what institutions refused to record.

These testimonies remind us that silence is not always simply the absence of words or records. It can be an active force, sometimes protective, sometimes imposed, sometimes mournful, that shapes what is remembered and what remains unsaid. For Mr. Tiger, silence marked a refusal to pass down memories too painful to recount. For the Boyd family, it appeared as fractured genealogies and unknown kin. For Ms. Big Eagle, it was the recognition that some questions cannot be answered. And for Dr. Manatowa-Bailey, it was the unsettling knowledge that the absence of death in the record does not mean children did not die, it only makes the questions about these deaths more urgent. Oral histories did not erase these silences, but they transformed how they were understood: turning gaps into testimony, suspicion into evidence, and loss into part of the historical record. In this way, silence itself is as a central legacy of the Sac and Fox Mission School, as consequential as any written report or remembered story.

Language Loss and Revitalization

A central theme in nearly all interviews was cultural loss, especially the loss of the Sac and Fox language, Sauk, alongside ongoing efforts to sustain and revive it. Participants described how their grandparents or great-grandparents often chose not to teach Sauk to their children or grandchildren, even though they continued speaking it among their own and older generations within the community. In many cases, this decision was not simply a matter of forgetting, but a response to the boarding school experience, where children were forbidden to speak Sauk and were forced to use English instead. The rupture was compounded by the lack of safe or supported opportunities to pass the language on. The result, as many described, was a profound absence

that settled over families, a silence rooted in both trauma and protection. Every interview acknowledged language loss in some form. Some expressed frustration at not being able to learn Sauk from older relatives. Reflecting on his own childhood, Mr. Tiger remembered asking his grandmother to teach him and his cousins: “Our first language was English. I had asked her, ‘Hey, teach us some Native language.’ [Our grandma] began to talk a little bit and for kids at that age, we must have been like, what, 6 or 7 years old? Some of the words sounded a little funny, I know that upset her and she just said, nope, can’t teach you guys just like that one day. She never did try to teach us again.” His memory illustrates how fragile language transmission can be, how quickly one moment of embarrassment or pain, itself rooted in the boarding school legacy, could close off an entire pathway of learning. What might appear as a minor interaction between children and grandmother instead speaks to the enduring emotional barriers that kept Sauk from being passed down.

Other interviewees reflected on why parents or grandparents felt there was no benefit in teaching the language under assimilationist pressures. As Ms. Ortega explained, her grandmother believed “there was just no point...to be successful in this society...her children needed to focus on their education, public schools, and on learning the skills that they needed to survive in mainstream American society.” Such reasoning underscores how the boarding school legacy reshaped family priorities, turning language into something perceived as a liability rather than a resource.

For some, the silence around language was so deep that they did not even know their own parents spoke Sauk. Ms. Snow remembered her surprise upon hearing her father speak it among other tribal members: “I was unaware that he spoke Sauk until one day sitting at Mack’s house...he was visiting with other tribal members, and he was speaking Sauk. I thought,

‘Where’d this come from, Daddy?’” Her words capture how language could exist quietly, withheld even within families, until moments of unexpected recognition revealed both its persistence and the barriers that kept it hidden.

Still others wrestled with the emotional complexity of these choices and the regrets that followed. Recalling his great-grandfather, Dr. Manatowa-Bailey shared: “They (Dr. Manatowa-Bailey’s family) said Elmer came out of mission school...he could still speak it, but it was broken, right? And he didn't speak very often...one of my grandpa Joe's sisters, Maxine Pequano...she says we all regret not having asked our dad to teach us Sauk when we were kids. There's a confusion there, right? There's a confusion that he made a choice. That he made a decision. As opposed to that, he had a traumatic experience that...led to certain things getting chopped off or broken (his ability and confidence to speak Sauk, damaged by the trauma of being punished for using it at school). Then the regret. Her regret. Right? Her experience of, well, it's our fault that we don't know.” His reflection highlights how silence around language was not only the product of external pressures, but also of internalized trauma, misinterpretation, and intergenerational guilt.

Yet alongside loss interviewees also revealed a powerful sense of continuity and determination. Ms. Ortega pointed to the importance of present-day language revitalization programs, from tribal education efforts to Sauk language classes, as spaces where healing and teaching come together. For her, these initiatives are part of repairing what the Mission School disrupted, creating opportunities the older generations did not have. Echoing this commitment, Dr. Manatowa-Bailey described language as a container, one that holds philosophy, stories, worldview, and cosmology, with so much carried and expressed through it. His words shift the frame from language as simply identity to language as a vessel that sustains whole ways of

being. Together, their insights show that while the Mission School fractured intergenerational transmission, today's community members are actively working to ensure the Sauk language endures, driven by both memory and care.

Schooling, Kinship, and Continuity

Across interviews, participants described schooling as a powerful force in shaping community life, one that was deeply tied to assimilation, but also necessary for navigating the present. For many interviewees' relatives who attended Mission School, education was remembered not only as time spent in classrooms but as a system that intentionally removed children from the relationships that defined them. Dr. Manatowa-Bailey explained that this pattern has never truly ended: "It's still happening. We're still going to boarding schools. Right now, we call it public school. The relationship is different. It's less violent, but you're removed from your family to go learn knowledge about another way of being." His words highlight the continuity of removal, showing how the separation from kin, once enforced by mission schools, remains embedded in contemporary forms of schooling. Dr. Manatowa-Bailey went further, arguing that this was not incidental but systemic, noting that "the removing of people from intimate family, clan and community bonds in order to learn is still happening. That has been the role of education since Columbus brought the first missionaries...to replace one way of living and one set of beliefs with another."

This emphasis on separation resonated across families who lived with the legacies of the Sac and Fox Mission School. Members of the Boyd family recalled that even when relatives were at the same institution, at another boarding school, they were deliberately kept apart. Tammy Louann Fields (Boyd) remembered, "There was a fence...between the boys and the girl's dorm...being separated from his mom and not being able to be with his sister. That was a lot of

trauma.” The trauma lay not only in the physical fence, but in the context: children were placed in an unfamiliar environment, surrounded by strangers, expected to follow new routines and practices and then, on top of that, they were separated from their siblings, their closest sources of comfort and care. Such physical and emotional barriers disrupted the everyday routines of kinship, fragmenting bonds that would normally sustain children in times of hardship. Shanarae Boyd drew the connection between those enforced separations and broader patterns of dispersal: “Assimilation worked wonders on Sac and Fox Nation because they spread us so far apart.” For her, the boarding school era was not only about individual separation, but about an entire Nation being forced into disconnection. Spread across institutions and distances that fractured the networks of kinship holding people together.

Yet experiences of schooling were not uniform. Some descendants recalled positive aspects, or at least reasons why their relatives felt grateful for the time spent in boarding schools. Shanarae Boyd explained that for her mother and uncle, attending school provided structure and escape from the challenges of home life: “Her and my uncle both say it probably saved their life...my uncle says, ‘Hell, I’d have probably been a drunk and, on the streets...if I hadn’t gone to boarding school.’” Their reflections complicate the narrative, showing that while schools were tools of assimilation, individuals could also experience them as spaces of stability, or opportunity. This duality underscores the tension that runs throughout these stories: boarding school education was both a source of harm and, in some cases, a survival strategy in an environment of cultural disruption and loss.

The long-term impacts of these institutions often carried into later generations, reshaping family life in ways that were subtle but profound. Ms. Edmiston shared that her mother, who was “third generation boarding school,” often questioned her own ability to nurture: “She used to say

she was scared to have children because she didn't know if she could nurture them because she wasn't nurtured." Here, the lessons of institutional life, school discipline and detachment, bled into family relationships, affecting not only those who attended but also their descendants. These patterns reflect how the design of schooling sought to sever bonds of care and create individuals shaped by institutions rather than kin networks.

Despite these ruptures, continuity and resilience were equally evident in the interviews. Families worked to maintain connections to one another and to the broader Sac and Fox community, affirming belonging even in the face of dislocation. Mr. Tiger recalled large family gatherings around his grandmother, describing how the experience of being together with dozens of cousins created a powerful sense of identity: "We were just children, you know, we were enjoying that time period of knowing who our relatives were." For him, family remained the primary site of education, not in the sense of formal instruction, but in learning how to belong to a community.

Taken together, these testimonies portray schooling as an experience marked by both disruption and endurance. The Mission School, other boarding schools, and later public education systems fractured kinship ties and imposed distance from community and new forms of discipline, leaving intergenerational scars. Yet families sustained continuity through care, gatherings, and shared memory. In doing so, their stories directly speak to the research question, revealing that what community members wish to preserve is not only the history of separation, but also the relationships, traditions, and acts of care that made survival possible. Education thus emerges here not as a single theme, but as a lived condition, one that shaped both the wounds and the strengths the Sac and Fox Nation carries forward today.

Preservation as Responsibility

Many conversations organically turned toward what should happen now. Community members asked, sometimes directly, sometimes through reflection, “Now that we have this information, what do we do?” This question sits at the heart of my research: What elements of the Sac and Fox Mission boarding school do citizens want recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations? The interviews provide clear answers. Participants emphasized priorities such as creating interpretive signage on the grounds, pursuing Nation-led research into material remains and the possibility of unmarked burials, and developing educational materials for both Sac and Fox youth and the broader public. Several descendants noted that preservation is not only about protecting a physical site but also about ensuring the school’s history continues to circulate, through books, stories, teaching, and care. Others stressed the importance of engaging with the physical remains of the school and considering how the space itself can be honored going forward. Many also called for opportunities for archaeological learning within a community context and for intergenerational storytelling initiatives or Nation-led land stewardship efforts. Using these findings for advocacy, for survivors, for attendees, for descendants, and for those whose stories have yet to be fully heard, remains central to the work ahead.

In the Boyd family interview, Mr. Boyd spoke to the importance of planting “little seeds here and there with the younger ones,” explaining that “it’s just planting the seed of our history and who we are with those younger ones [that] goes a long way, because all of us went to school not learning anything about Sac and Fox people...They didn’t know who Black Hawk was or that there was a whole war that we had...We were right here in Stroud, Oklahoma.” His

reflection underscores the urgency of reclaiming and teaching Sac and Fox history in ways that are still absent from public education locally, statewide, and nationally.

Similarly, Dr. Manatowa-Bailey emphasized that such knowledge cannot be outsourced to formal schooling alone: “You cannot go to school and learn about how to be a Sauk. That is not a thing yet.” His words affirm the need for community-led and culturally grounded education that speaks to identity as well as history.

As Ms. Snow put it, “I think some of the history can be published in books and distributed to schools. I hate to see the books just on a shelf in a library, and that’s the end of it...so, I would like to see the books, whatever you write, distributed. If enough people write about the Sac and Fox, eventually we’ll have a complete history.” Her comments underscore the desire not only for preservation, but for circulation, for this history to be active, engaged with, and made part of broader public understanding.

Concerns about unmarked graves were among the most frequent and emotionally charged responses across interviews. Mr. Tiger emphasized that this was not speculation but a reality that must guide all preservation work: “Probably the main one (question) is, are there graves out there?...I think it's important we do recognize that there were graves out there, and I'm sure that there were. You can't come together with that many people and not see death...Let's just mark it off and be respectful.” His words highlight how even the possibility of burials transforms the site into sacred ground requiring care. Ms. Edmiston echoed this perspective, noting that other boarding schools like Chilocco have unmarked burials and cautioning, “If there’s any on the property of Sac and Fox, I would suspect there’s more than what’s marked...I would like to see those acknowledged in some way.” Together, these reflections underscore that acknowledgment

of graves, whether confirmed or rumored, is essential to honoring the past, shaping how the land must be treated, and ensuring that any preservation effort begins from respect for ancestors.

Beyond graves, participants also spoke about how they wanted the school's history interpreted and shared. Mr. Tiger emphasized the importance of marking the landscape in ways that allow people to physically connect with it: "I think it's important to preserve as much as we can...Some type of marking would be great. If there was a walking path that our people can go and walk on...and just get an idea. I think there's a real interesting connection. Native people and really all races have a connection to Earth. Our Native people definitely appreciate that." His reflections tie preservation not only to memory but also to embodied experience of the land.

Mr. Boyd envisioned interactive approaches, stressing the importance of making space for ongoing storytelling: "If you do like the kiosk thing and do a QR code...so there's a way for people to share their own personal stories, whether it's from their parents or grandparents. Another way to catch some stories would be to leave a little space for that. It just seems like such a gateway to so many good things." His vision highlights the importance of interpretation that is dynamic, participatory, and future-oriented.

For Mrs. McCormick, the priority was clarity about the physical site itself: "I presume it took a big space, you know, and a little sign that here is this spot. You've shown us pictures, but we still don't know the spot. I'd like to know where that water cistern is." Her comments remind us that preservation is not only about memory but also about knowing the landscape as a living space, complete with mundane features.

Together, these perspectives articulate a broad vision of preservation that extends beyond protecting the physical remains of the site. Preservation also means teaching, publishing,

marking the land, and creating opportunities for youth to engage with their history. Whether through books, signage, classrooms, or archaeology, participants consistently emphasized that the story of the Sac and Fox Mission School should not remain hidden or static. It should be told, retold, and carried forward, ensuring that the pain, resilience, and lessons embedded in the site are never forgotten. In this sense, preservation is not only about keeping the past intact, but also about fulfilling a responsibility, empowering the present generation, and ensuring that future ones inherit both the knowledge and the care required to protect it.

Conditions of Asking

Finally, the interviews also made visible the conditions of asking themselves. These were not simply matters of method, but findings in their own right. The act of writing and asking questions revealed the difficulties of language, how to phrase things in ways that were both sensitive and precise, without reducing lived experiences to labels or euphemisms. Some community members were uncomfortable with phrasing like “do you feel you are affected by their experiences [at the Sac and Fox Mission School]?” because they did not want to be labeled as survivors or defined by trauma. Others felt that questions like “was your family discouraged from speaking Sauk?” were too sanitized, failing to capture the violence of cultural suppression. I do not know that I always got the wording right, but this process taught me that questions are never neutral and that striking a respectful balance requires a willingness to be corrected.

These challenges pointed to a larger truth: the act of asking is never just about wording, but about timing, readiness, and trust. Ms. Ortega, Dr. King, and I reflected on why some people may have declined to participate in interviews, even if they had a connection to the school. Some community members may have needed time to process what the school was, what it meant for their family, or how this history still affects them. The act of being asked to recall or share can be

difficult, especially when someone is still grappling with silence or grief handed down across generations. Others may have been hesitant to share out of a need or desire to protect themselves, their families, or the Nation. As Mr. Shackelford noted, there is a general cautiousness and reserve in the community, rooted in a long history of shielding knowledge and painful histories from misuse or extraction (pers. comm. 2025). Even if they are well-intentioned and careful, researchers can trigger trauma or exhaustion.

There were also practical reasons for declining to be interviewed: uncertainty about one's own knowledge, worry about saying something inaccurate, going on record, or discomfort with vulnerability, especially with someone from outside the community. Not everyone wants to, or can, unpack painful histories with a stranger. This underscores the importance of relationship-building and honoring each person's readiness, capacity, and choice. Indeed, some of the most meaningful reflections did not come from formal interviews at all, but through unstructured conversations at community events, where people shared what they were ready to share on their own terms.

Many community members who chose not to have their oral histories recorded still attended the events, engaging in discussion and shaping the project's direction through their presence, questions, and observations. In a perfect world, I would have had the time and space to meet with interviewees multiple times and sustain conversations before and after recording; however, within the two-year master's timeline, and with only about one year available for the actual research, this was not always possible. I was fortunate to have Ms. Ortega as a close collaborator. As a trusted community member, she helped determine when someone might be ready to be approached or when it might be best to hold off. In some cases, we chose not to request interviews, not because a person's story lacked value, but because we worried the

experience might be too distressing or confusing given health, trauma, or other factors. That kind of discernment matters; it is part of the evidentiary record of this project. At the same time, I recognize that this discernment also carries a potential downside: it risks sliding into a form of gatekeeping, where decisions about who speaks are mediated by others and not left to individuals themselves. While care and caution were my guiding principles, this tension between protecting participants and possibly limiting their voices is a reminder that no method is free of trade-offs.

Circling back to my primary research question, the interviews identify priorities that speak directly to archaeology. They define research questions, such as identifying and protecting any burial contexts as well as mapping and interpreting standing features and subsurface remains that structure memory, articulate protocols for how work should be carried out, and reframe what counts as “data,” including photographs and rosters as tools for kinship repair, refusals and silences as guideposts, and stewardship labor as forms of preservation in action. Read alongside the archives and community events, these findings ground interpretation in relationships and obligations: to family, to the landscape, and to a community setting the terms for how its history is told and how future work proceeds.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter revisits the guiding question that shaped this research from its beginning: *how do community members of the Sac and Fox Nation want the history of the Mission School to be recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations?* It draws together the threads of archival work, oral histories, and community collaboration to consider what the findings mean beyond documentation alone. The goal here is not to restate results, but to examine how they illuminate broader questions about colonial education, memory, and stewardship.

Through reflection on the voices and perspectives shared, this chapter explores three interrelated dimensions of the project. First, it considers how oral histories challenge and expand conventional historical and archaeological interpretation, asserting the centrality of community memory as evidence. Second, it examines how accessibility and stewardship shape who can engage with the past and under what conditions. Finally, it reflects on how these insights collectively respond to the research question, revealing that recovery, interpretation, and preservation are not discrete tasks but overlapping, relational processes rooted in truth-telling, care, and sovereignty.

The Power of Oral Histories

Throughout this project, I occasionally encountered questions that were sometimes implicit and sometimes direct, about whether the perspectives of descendants, particularly those who hold only fragments of memory, can meaningfully contribute to understanding the Sac and Fox Mission School. I assert that these contributions are not only meaningful, but essential. Oral histories, including those built on partial memory or intergenerational transmission, are powerful tools for reclaiming and reshaping historical narratives. The presence of fragmentary knowledge

is not a shortcoming; it is a condition shared by all historical research, which inevitably works with incomplete traces of the past. In this case, however, fragmentation is itself evidence of the damage inflicted by boarding schools, institutions that deliberately severed kinship ties, disrupted cultural transmission, and buried collective trauma.

These so-called fragments are lived histories. They reveal the long-term effects of the school system on familial relationships, language loss, and emotional well-being, while also illuminating how individuals and families are actively reconstructing what was once out of view, reestablishing connections, and reasserting identity through memory work. When a descendant discovers a grandmother's name in a ledger for the first time or recognizes a face in a school photograph, that recognition is not anecdotal, it is a moment of historical knowledge being produced and authenticated in community, a moment of connection and of healing.

The power of oral history lies not only in the stories told, but also in the silences, hesitations, and emotional tenor that surround them, each illuminating how memory, protection, and sovereignty are intertwined in the ongoing process of healing and reclamation. In a project grounded in community collaboration, such knowledge is not supplemental to the archives; it is foundational.

Why Archaeology Needs Oral Histories

For archaeology specifically, oral histories are not ancillary context; they are decision-making data in any community-engaged research effort. They set the research questions and the limits: community testimony identifies what should be documented and, just as importantly, what should not, especially where graves or other sensitive places may be involved. This shifts

archaeology from a discovery model to a care model, in which scope, method, and pace are defined by obligations to living kin and to the dead (Supernant et al. 2020).

Oral histories also reframe the evidentiary value of features and materials. Memories of paths, work routines, water access, or building use convert foundations, cisterns, and surface traces from generic “features” into elements of a lived landscape. That interpretive specificity cannot be recovered from the material record alone; it requires people who know how the place was moved through and felt.

In the same vein, oral histories make otherwise invisible phenomena legible as evidence. They surface nonevents, illness, fear, refusal, language suppression, that bureaucratic records omit, and they help archaeologists read absence in the material record as a historical product rather than as a negative finding (Fogelson 1989). In practice, this recognition can reshape archaeological approaches: influencing where sampling occurs, how gaps or silences are interpreted, and what counts as meaningful evidence in the first place.

Finally, oral histories anchor heritage stewardship and significance. They define why a place matters, to whom, and under what terms knowledge should circulate. That grounding is indispensable for interpretation, for the ethics of curation and display, and for any formal designation process that must weigh values beyond the strictly architectural or artifactual.

Taken together, oral histories do what the material record cannot: they restore relation, motive, and obligation to the archaeological past, ensuring that inquiry is accountable to those who inherit its consequences.

Barriers to Access and the Question of Stewardship

My time working with these materials revealed significant barriers that affect how community members might engage with their own history. Archival institutions typically operate within limited weekday hours, making it hard for people with full-time jobs, caregiving responsibilities, or those living at a distance to visit. Even for those who can make the trip, finding relevant materials is not straightforward. At the Oklahoma Historical Society, for instance, a search of the online database for “Sac and Fox Mission School” returns a box titled “*SAC AND FOX SCHOOL, 1896–1898*” with no further description. Inside, however, are ledgers containing the names of students, records that descendants would find invaluable, but that are invisible from the box description and cannot be searched by family name. Archives can be disorganized, poorly described, or require familiarity with institutional jargon and digital catalog systems that are difficult to navigate without training.

These challenges are not just logistical; they are structural. They reflect the broader inaccessibility of historical knowledge to those outside academic or professional circles. When school records contain misspelled or omitted names, it becomes even harder for descendants to trace familial connections. The community’s knowledge of its own past is often fragmented not because of disinterest, but because access is limited, unclear, and uninviting.

The physical site of the school is similarly out of reach to most. Overgrown and unmarked, it is difficult to locate or visit without guidance. This inaccessibility functions as both a form of protection, sheltering the site from unwanted intrusion, and a form of exclusion, limiting community members’ ability to visit and connect with the place. What’s clear, however, is that access to both material and place is deeply tied to questions of belonging, stewardship, and historical responsibility.

Repositories and researchers should take active steps to address these barriers, not simply through digitization or public release, but by collaborating with tribal nations to ensure materials are shared in ways that are culturally appropriate, clearly described, and actually accessible to the people to whom they matter most. In this framing, stewardship is inseparable from sovereignty. Description, custody, and interpretation should be led or co-led by the Nation so that records and places return to, and remain with, the communities they document.

Answering the Research Question

The findings of this project illuminate how the Sac and Fox Nation defines meaningful recovery, interpretation, and preservation of the Sac and Fox Mission School. Across interviews, archival work, and community gatherings, participants emphasized that the goal is not simply to document what happened, but to determine how the story of the school should live on and under whose authority. These conversations give shape to the guiding question that has framed this research from the beginning: *how do community members of the Sac and Fox Nation want the history of the Mission School to be recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations?*

For the community, recovery begins with truth-telling; making visible what has been hidden or distorted in official records. Bringing forward names, faces, and stories long buried in archives is a form of restoration, not only of information but of relationship. Recovery also involves acknowledging the school's lasting effects on kinship, language, and emotion, and doing so in a way that allows families to reclaim and reconnect rather than be retraumatized.

Interpretation, in turn, must be community-authored. Participants expressed that the story of the Mission School should be told through the voices of those whose families lived its consequences, not solely through institutional frameworks or academic language. Whether in

exhibits, public signage, or curriculum, interpretation should teach in ways that honor lived experience, support healing, and build understanding across generations. In this sense, interpretation is both historical and pedagogical, it educates while repairing.

Preservation, finally, extends beyond protecting the physical remains of the school. Community members defined preservation as an active, relational practice: maintaining the site, marking paths, caring for potential burials, sharing stories, and involving younger generations in stewardship. These acts are not maintenance alone; they are continuations of kinship and care. Through them, the site remains a living archive, sustained by the people to whom it belongs.

These perspectives demonstrate that the Sac and Fox Nation envision the future of the Mission School not as a static historic property but as a place of ongoing responsibility. Recovery, interpretation, and preservation are inseparable processes that together ensure the story remains alive, relevant, and community led. This understanding reframes what archaeological and archival “findings” mean: the work is not complete when records are digitized or ruins are mapped, but when knowledge is returned, relationships are strengthened, and stewardship continues on community terms.

In this sense, the research question is answered not through a single outcome but through a set of principles: truth-telling, respect for sovereignty, and care for place. These principles now guide how the Sac and Fox Nation, and those who collaborate with it, carry the story of the Mission School forward.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION & REFLECTIONS

The previous chapter examined how archival evidence, oral histories, and community collaboration together answered the guiding question of this research: *how do community members of the Sac and Fox Nation want the history of the Mission School to be recovered, interpreted, and preserved for future generations?* It explored what those findings mean, how stories, silences, and acts of care redefine preservation and challenge colonial frameworks of education and heritage.

This final chapter turns from interpretation to synthesis. It brings the project full circle, reflecting on what was learned through both the process and the relationships that shaped it. Here, I summarize the study's major takeaways, articulate its contributions to archaeology and heritage scholarship, and reflect on the ethics and emotional labor of collaboration. Finally, I outline next steps for protecting and interpreting the Sac and Fox Mission School, emphasizing that this work continues beyond the thesis itself, through community leadership, care, and ongoing stewardship.

Contributions to scholarship

This thesis advances community-engaged archaeology by articulating an archaeology of care grounded in community priorities. Here, community testimony did not supplement the material record, it defined the questions, the limits, and the pace of research.

It also contributes to landscape archaeology and Indigenous heritage management by showing that community memory transforms how places are interpreted. Physical traces gain meaning only when understood through those who have lived histories with the land; this shifts archaeological attention from collecting artifacts to recognizing ongoing relationships of stewardship.

Finally, it contributes to boarding-school historiography by integrating place-based and oral-history methods to show how legacies of colonial education continue to shape language, kinship, and emotion in the present. Community responses, whether refusal, caution, or readiness, emerge here as valid forms of evidence that guide research direction. In practice, this approach aligns with Indigenous data sovereignty, ensuring that the Sac and Fox Nation retain authority over custody, description, and interpretation of its materials

Reflections on Collaboration

This research was not only about knowledge, it was about care. The emotional weight of the stories shared required that I, as a researcher, show up not just with questions but with humility and compassion. The project embraced the principles of the archaeology of the heart, which prioritizes affect, collaboration, and community accountability. It required moments of pause, of grief, of feasting and gratitude. As Ms. Ortega and I reflected, healing and research are not mutually exclusive; they can happen together if approached with care. This was evident in moments like our feast following the site walk, where we honored both the living and the ones who have passed on. These were not afterthoughts; they were part of the research itself, acknowledgments that this work is emotional and that healing is an ongoing process.

I did not anticipate how emotionally difficult this project would be for me personally. In the early stages, I was focused on IRB approval and logistics and underestimated how heavy the work would become. I often left interviews feeling deeply affected by what had been shared, and I had to learn how to take care of myself in order to keep showing up for the community. I reached out to other oral history professionals as well as to Ms. Ortega, who offered suggestions for boundaries, grounding activities, and ways to hold space for others without losing myself in the process. For me, this translated into concrete practices: taking intentional pauses after

interviews before returning to other tasks, writing field notes that included not only content but also how I was feeling, and seeking out conversations with trusted mentors to process the weight of the stories. I also learned to step away when needed, going for walks, spending time outside, or giving my brain a break with simple activities unrelated to research. These practices helped me continue the work without burning out. That kind of emotional care was not something I had been taught in research methods courses, but it became essential for continuing this project responsibly.

The emotional burden for interviewees was also real, for many reasons. One of the main reasons this work was so emotionally weighty is that the school is not an individual isolated story. It forces people to think about the entire system: broken treaties, forced assimilation, genocide. That's hard to talk about. These are not distant histories; they are lived experiences or the experiences of close relatives, and that makes them harder or impossible to compartmentalize. On top of that, people were often reflecting on family members who have passed away, or on losses that were never fully spoken about before. The accumulation of memory, grief, and silence made the process emotionally demanding. Ms. Big Eagle shared a story about taking her grandmother to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.: "When my grandma was 80 years old, which is my age now, she came on a plane for the first time to Washington, D.C., where I lived and worked...we visited the Smithsonian...looked at cradleboards and stuff, but she saw some pictures of people signing treaties and she cried...it made her feel so sad that we didn't go back the next day. So, even that far after treaty time, it wasn't far at all for her. It was something she couldn't handle. Just the thought of losing so much." Mr. Tiger also spoke about this entanglement between memory, land, and injustice: "I read old treaties. One line that I read is, early on it talks about friendship and protection. It's a real slap in the face...that

relationship and understanding, what was taken. It still affects many people today. It affects me because a lot of my work deals with that idea of our past [and] our history, how do we move forward as a community?” These reflections illustrate that even when historical trauma is no longer actively spoken about, it remains close, held in landscapes and family memory. Attending to that emotional and ethical terrain points directly to how next steps must be organized.

These reflections show that collaboration is not simply about gathering information but about navigating an emotional and ethical landscape shaped by trauma and perseverance. For interviewees, recalling histories of loss and injustice carried profound weight; for me, listening and holding those stories required its own practices of care. What made this project possible was not detachment but the willingness to share in that weight, to pause, to grieve, and to honor moments of recognition and silence alongside words. In this sense, the research itself became part of the broader work of healing, not a replacement for it, but a companion to it. Collaboration here meant showing up with humility, sustaining relationships, and recognizing that knowledge and care are inseparable. That, ultimately, is the lesson I will carry forward from this work.

Next Steps

Formal recognition of the Sac and Fox Mission School site must be pursued alongside with community-authored interpretation, ensuring that any signage, exhibits, or public materials reflect the Nation’s own narratives and priorities. Future archaeological or historical investigation into the site’s material traces, including potential areas of concern such as unmarked burials, must proceed only under tribal oversight and within established Sac and Fox cultural protocols. Community members emphasized that preservation should not rely solely on formal documentation or designation but should also include living forms of stewardship.

Participants envisioned learning tools that remain within the community's care: curriculum materials for local schools, opportunities for hands-on learning about archaeology that respect and protect the site, and pathways for intergenerational storytelling. These activities, along with everyday acts of care, marking hazards, clearing paths, guiding visitors, and tending to the grounds, constitute what I describe as stewardship labor: the ongoing, community-led work of maintaining, teaching about, and protecting the site. Such care practices are preservation in themselves, embodying relationships of responsibility and respect that extend far beyond the formal boundaries of heritage management. Going forward, the work of protecting and interpreting the Sac and Fox Mission School will depend not only on policy or recognition, but on sustaining relationships of trust, care, and knowledge-sharing across generations.

As my own recommendation moving forward, I believe the Sac and Fox Mission School site should be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. While I did not discuss the nomination process in detail, I did speak with several community members about the idea of formal recognition, and many interview participants expressed a desire for the site to be acknowledged and protected. Formal recognition carries weight: it affirms the school's significance, creates protections against further disturbance, and ensures that the history of the site is recognized at a national level. Just as importantly, such recognition can strengthen ongoing efforts for community-led interpretation, preservation, and education.

Because of the deep concern community members expressed about the possibility of graves, I also recommend that non-invasive archaeological techniques, such as ground-penetrating radar, be employed at the site in collaboration with the Nation. The use of non-invasive technologies was also discussed during interviews, reflecting community interest in approaches that could provide answers without disturbance. This work should not be rushed but

undertaken carefully and respectfully, with the aim of addressing community questions while protecting the integrity of the site. Together, national recognition and careful, non-invasive investigation can help safeguard the place, honor those connected to it, and support the broader process of healing and reclamation.

Closing

This work reported in this thesis is a beginning, not an end. The Sac and Fox Mission School cannot be understood through archives alone, or through archaeology alone, but only by reading records, landscapes, and oral histories together and under the direction of the Sac and Fox Nation. This project has shown that care and memory are inseparable from scholarship, and that healing and research can move forward together when approached with humility and respect.

The next steps need to continue to be defined by the Nation, according to its priorities and protocols. My hope is that the work presented here contributes not only to historical understanding but also to the longer process of reclamation, teaching, and healing already underway.

Ultimately, this research underscores a simple but profound truth: the history of the Sac and Fox Mission School is not only a story of loss but also of persistence, kinship, and care. To honor that truth, archaeology must remain relational and accountable, so that knowledge returns to the people it concerns and the land it comes from. Preservation, in this sense, is not only about safeguarding physical remnants of the past but about sustaining the relationships that give those places meaning. Acts of care, clearing paths, visiting the site, sharing stories, or teaching the next generation, are themselves forms of ongoing archaeology. They maintain connection, reveal continuities of place, and extend the life of the school's memory through community practice. When archaeology centers kinship and care as guiding principles, it moves beyond documenting

what has been lost to supporting what endures, living histories of relation, responsibility, and survivance.

While this thesis provides only a glimpse into the broader boarding school system and its long shadows, it demonstrates the value of collaborative, community-led approaches. By listening deeply, sharing authority, and centering care, research can become a tool for healing rather than harm. I am deeply grateful to the Sac and Fox Nation, to employees, community members, and interviewees, for trusting me with your stories and your time. To Ms. Ortega, for guiding every step of this work with generosity and wisdom. To everyone who sat down with me, whether in interviews, events, or site visits, your words and presence shaped every part of this project. I want this thesis to be yours as much as it is mine.

APPENDIX A

Letter of support from the Sac and Fox Business Committee

Sac and Fox Nation

920963 S. Hwy. 99 • Stroud, OK 74079

Principal Chief RANDLE CARTER
Second Chief AUDREY ROSE LEE
Secretary LANA J. BUTLER
Treasurer CARLA J. WALLACE
Committee Member ROBERT E. WILLIAMSON



November 19, 2024

Dear University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board,

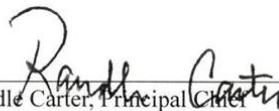
The Sac and Fox Nation Business Committee is pleased to provide this letter of support for Cheyenne Widdecke and her thesis project as part of her master's program in anthropology at the University of Oklahoma.

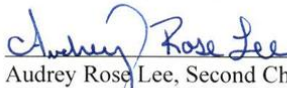
Cheyenne's project focuses on documenting the history of the Sac and Fox Nation's Mission School through community engagement and collaboration with the Sac and Fox Nation. As part of her work, she will collect oral histories from our community members, which will contribute to preserving and sharing our collective knowledge and experiences. These oral histories will be incorporated into her thesis, which will be published in OU's ShareOK repository, ensuring that our voices and stories are represented with respect and accuracy.

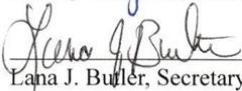
The Sac and Fox Nation values Cheyenne's commitment to working closely with our community, respecting cultural protocols, and prioritizing the preservation of historical materials for future generations. We are confident that her project will honor our heritage and provide meaningful insights into the history of the Sac and Fox Nation's Mission School.

We look forward to supporting Cheyenne in her research and believe this project will make a valuable contribution to both our community and the broader understanding of boarding school histories.

Sincerely,


Randle Carter, Principal Chief


Audrey Rose Lee, Second Chief


Lana J. Butler, Secretary


Carla J. Wallace, Treasurer


Robert E. Williamson, Committee Member

APPENDIX B

Public outreach and recruitment materials

SHARE YOUR FAMILY STORIES: SAC AND FOX MISSION SCHOOL

WEDNESDAY
DECEMBER 11TH
10AM

TRUMAN A. CARTER CENTER (ELDERS
AND VETERANS BUILDING IN STROUD,
OKLA.)



HELP PRESERVE SAC AND FOX
HISTORY! JOIN THE ELDERS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND OU
STUDENT CHEYENNE WIDDECKE TO
**SHARE FAMILY MEMORIES, STORIES,
OR ITEMS** RELATED TO THE SAC
AND FOX MISSION SCHOOL.

- Presentation on the school's history
- Share family stories and items
- Contribute to a community archive

FREE AND OPEN TO ALL!!

For more info or to schedule an interview:

587-679-5133 Cheyenne Widdecke cwiddecke@ou.edu

SHARE YOUR FAMILY STORIES: SAC AND FOX MISSION SCHOOL

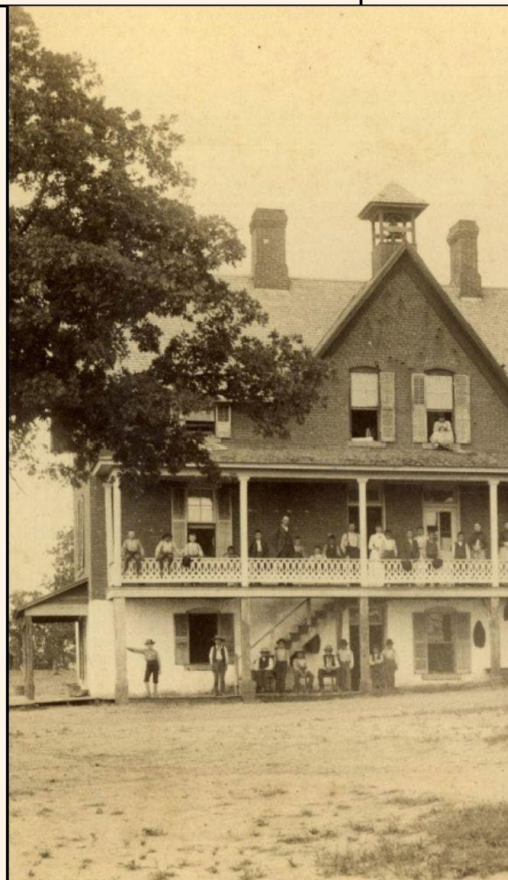
MARCH 1, 2025 @ 2PM

SAC AND FOX COMMUNITY BUILDING

HELP PRESERVE SAC AND FOX HISTORY! JOIN THE ELDERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND OU STUDENT CHEYENNE WIDDECKE TO SHARE FAMILY MEMORIES, STORIES, OR ITEMS RELATED TO THE SAC AND FOX MISSION SCHOOL.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

- PRESENTATION
- SCHOOL SITE VISIT
- SHARE STORIES AND ITEMS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY ARCHIVE
- REFRESHMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED BY THE SAC AND FOX BUSINESS COMMITTEE



FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
FOR MORE INFO CONTACT
CHEYENNE WIDDECKE
CWIDDECKE@OU.EDU
587-679-5133



CHEYENNE WIDDECKE

MASTER'S STUDENT,
ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT,
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

SHARE YOUR STORY!

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS FAMILY MEMORIES OR MATERIALS RELATED TO THE SAC AND FOX MISSION SCHOOL, I'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU. BE PART OF PRESERVING THE HISTORY OF THE SAC AND FOX COMMUNITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

CONTACT

cheyenne.l.widdecke-1@ou.edu
587-679-5133

Newspaper clippings from *Sac and Fox News* related to the project, such as press releases, event coverage, and photos edited and published by editor Mike Brown. All clippings are courtesy of the *Sac and Fox News*.

Community Members Invited to Dec. 11 SFN Mission School Oral History Event

In collaboration with the Sac and Fox Nation's Elders Advisory Committee, University of Oklahoma anthropology student Cheyenne Widdecke will host a public event on December 11, 2024, inviting community members to share family memories and stories about the Sac and Fox Mission School.

The event will take place at the Truman A. Carter Center (Elders and Veterans Building in Stroud, Okla.), starting at 10 a.m. It will include a presentation on the history of the mission school by Widdecke, featuring photographs from the University of Oklahoma's Western History Collections.

This gathering is part of an oral histories project for Widdecke's thesis, which has been supported by the tribe's Business Committee. The stories collected will be preserved in the Sac and Fox Nation's archives, creating a lasting record for future generations. These oral histories also have the potential to support larger projects as Widdecke progresses to her PhD, provided the community finds value in continuing this work.

Community members are encouraged to bring materials, photographs, or objects related to the school to show off. Those who wish to share stories about their items will have the chance to be photographed with them, contributing to this meaningful

Share Family Memories, Stories, Photos, Objects

archive. Widdecke can be contacted to schedule interviews at a more convenient time for those unable to attend the event, including those who do not live nearby.

"This collaboration with the Elders Advisory Committee is a meaningful way to honor the voices and experiences of the Sac and Fox community," said Widdecke. "We invite every-

one with family memories or artifacts related to the school to share in this preservation effort, creating a record that respects and protects Sac and Fox heritage."

The event is free and open to all community members, offering a chance to contribute, learn, and support the preservation of Sac and Fox community history.

For more information, contact: Cheyenne Widdecke, Master's Student, Anthropology Department, University of Oklahoma. Phone: 587-679-5133. Email: cwiddecke@ou.edu



December 2024, pg. 1

OU Anthropology Student Presents Oral History, Photos of SFN Mission School

University of Oklahoma anthropology student Cheyenne Widdelcke extends her heartfelt thanks to everyone who participated in the December 11th community event at the Truman A. Carter Center (Elders and Veterans Building in Stroud, Okla.).

Widdelcke also expresses her deep gratitude to the Sac and Fox Nation's Elders Advisory Committee, as well as the Sac and Fox Business Committee for their guidance and support

Visit to the School Site Coming in February

The gathering brought together community members to share family stories, archival photographs, and objects related to the Sac and Fox Mission School, creating a meaningful space for preserving the collective memory of this important site in Sac and Fox history. The graduate research assistant presented a series of photos of the

mission school campus that was in operation from approximately 1872 to 1917.

The gathering is part of an oral histories project for Widdelcke's thesis, which has been supported by the tribe's Business Committee. The stories collected will be preserved in the Sac and Fox Nation's archives, creating a lasting record for future generations.

These oral histories also have the potential to support larger projects as Widdelcke progresses to her PhD, provided the community finds value in continuing this work.

Upcoming Event in February
Looking ahead, Widdelcke and the Elders Advisory Committee are planning a follow-up event in February. Participants will have the opportunity to share more family stories and visit the Sac and Fox Mission School site. This event will focus on connecting with the site's history to ensure these stories and lessons are passed on to future generations.

Stay Connected and Share Your Family's Stories

There is still an opportunity for those unable to attend the December event to participate. Widdelcke strongly encourages community members to reach out if they are willing to set up a time to share their family sto-

able to preserving the community's heritage. Interviews can be conducted in person or via Zoom to accommodate participants' availability and location," said Widdelcke.



University of Oklahoma Dept. of Anthropology Graduate Research Assistant Cheyenne Widdelcke displays a photo from 1886 of the Sac and Fox Mission School building with additions and bell tower. (All Photos by Mike Brown)



Graduate Research Assistant Cheyenne Widdelcke displays a photo of the original Sac and Fox Nation Mission School building, approximately 1872.



Cheyenne Widdelcke presented a brief history of the Sac and Fox Mission School's Girls Dormitory at the program hosted by the Sac and Fox Nation Elders Advisory Committee.



University of Oklahoma Dept. of Anthropology Graduate Research Assistant Cheyenne Widdelcke and Sac and Fox Nation tribal member Lina Ortega, who serves as Native American Studies librarian and associate curator with the University of Oklahoma Libraries, Western History Collections, are pictured Dec. 11 in the Truman A. Carter Center where Widdelcke presented an oral history program on the Sac and Fox Mission School, approximately 1872-1917.



Cheyenne Widdelcke shows a slide show photo of the Sac and Fox Mission School campus, 1872-1917.

See Dates to Remember and More 2025 Elections Information on Page 14.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee Represents SFN Dec. 9 At Tribal Summit in Washington, D.C.

A message from Audrey Rose Lee, Second Chief:

"I was honored to represent our Nation by attending the Tribal Summit in Washington D.C. on December 9, 2024. The Summit brings together the President of the United States, their Cabinet, federal executive agency heads, and leaders invited from all federally recognized tribes for direct government-to-government dialogue of the federal government's Indian Country policy priorities and to hear from tribes their own priorities in order to develop Indian Country agendas for the future. I also had the privilege to meet United States Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, shake President Joe Biden's hand, and meet with tribal leaders across the United States."



Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee is pictured at left with Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland while attending the 2024 Tribal Summit in Washington, D.C. (Photo Provided)

Archaeologist Visits for Group Field Trip to Site of Early-Day Sac and Fox Mission School

University of Oklahoma anthropology student Cheyenne Widdecke sincerely thanks everyone who attended the second public event of her master's degree project held on March 1, 2025 at the Sac and Fox Community Building. The University of Oklahoma student extends a special "thank you" to the Sac and Fox Nation's Elders Advisory Committee and the Sac and Fox Business Committee for their continued support in making these gatherings possible.

The March 1 event featured a presentation on the history of the Sac and Fox Mission School, followed by a mean-

ingful visit to the school site led by archaeologist Bobi Deere. A few years ago, Deere was contracted to survey the site by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Rock foundations, a water well, tower and cistern remain at the school campus location. The school served Sac and Fox students and those from other area tribes from approximately 1872 to 1917.

This experience allowed community members to connect with the site's history firsthand, sparking important conversations about its past and significance to the Nation. Widdecke commented, "A Traditional Feast (Continued on Page 7)



Pictured from left in the Sac and Fox Community Building are: Archaeologist Bobi Deere of Joe Deere Consulting, LLC; SFN Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee; SFN tribal member Lina Ortega of the University of Oklahoma Libraries; OU Anthropology Graduate Research Assistant Cheyenne Widdecke and SFN Secretary Lana Butler. (All Photos by Mike Brown)



Archaeologist Bobi Deere, who has previously surveyed the Sac and Fox Mission (Agency) School site, speaks during a March 1 public event in the SFN Community Building.



Archaeologist Bobi Deere points to sewage cistern that was part of the early-day sewage system that served the SFN Mission School campus, 1872-1917. See more on Page 7.

Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee Presents Priorities, Budget Requests to Agencies

Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend a Feb. 25 Fiscal Year 2026 House Committee Appropriations hearing to give an oral and written testimony of priorities and federal budget requests on behalf of the Sac and Fox Nation.

Following is written testimony the Second Chief submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies on the Fiscal Year 2026 Budgets for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Services, Bureau of Indian Education, and the Environmental Protection Agency:

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE AUDREY ROSE LEE, SECOND CHIEF SAC AND FOX NATION SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES ON THE FY 2026 BUDGETS FOR THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE, BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION, AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

February 25, 2025

On behalf of Principal Chief Randle Carter and the Citizens of the Sac and Fox Nation (Nation), home of Jim Thorpe, Olympic Gold Medalist for the 1912 Penathlon and Decathlon medals, it is a privilege to stand before you today and submit our Tribal priorities for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Indian Health Service (IHS), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) budgets. The unique political status between the United States (U.S.) and sovereign Tribal Nations is solely based on the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations in the development of the U.S. Constitution and to reaffirm the continuing government-to-government relationship between Indian Tribes and the U.S. as established in the Constitution.

TRIBAL SPECIFIC REQUESTS

1. + \$6.52 Million Dollars to Fully Fund Operations and Maintenance of the Sac and Fox Nation Juvenile Detention Center (SFNJC) - Public Safety and Justice - Office of Justice Services - Detention/Corrections Facility Operations and Maintenance Account - BIA.
2. + \$3 Million Dollars to Fund Tribal General Assistance Program (GAP), EPA
3. Increase funding for the National Environmental Performance Partnership System (NEPPS), EPA to support Tribal Solid Waste and Recycling Programs

NATIONAL BUDGET REQUESTS

1. Reclusivity Discretionary Spending for Section 105(f) Leases and Contract Support Costs (CSC) to Mandatory - BIA and IHS
2. Advance Appropriations for Tribal Programs and Services (BIA, IHS, BIE)
3. Support Increase for Special Diabetes Program for Indians but not moving from Mandatory Spending to Discretionary Account - IHS

In 2025, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Indian Self-Determination and Edu-

At Meeting in Washington, D.C.

ation Assistance Act (P.L. 93-638, ISDEAA) of 1975, signed by President Richard Nixon, the first acknowledgment by the United States government that Tribes were capable of managing Federal funds and programs. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan issued an "Indian Policy Statement" which reaffirmed the government-to-government relationship between the U.S. and Federally recognized Tribes. The Policy emphasized Trib-

al Self-Governance and local control over reservation affairs, while pledging to assist Tribes in strengthening their governments by removing Federal impediments to Tribal Self-Determination; essentially promoting a policy of Self-Governance for Tribes without the threat of termination.

In 1988, President George H.W. Bush, signed P.L. 100-472 which broadened the scope of the ISDEAA allowing Tribes more flexibility to determine our own priorities and allocated Federal resources where they were needed the most - at the (Continued on Page 11)



SFN Second Chief Audrey Rose Lee is recently pictured in Washington, D.C. where she presented tribal priorities and FY 2026 budget requests to the House Appropriations Subcommittee. (Photo Provided)

'Winter Hunt: With Memories of Jim Thorpe'



On March 2, 2025, the First Indian Baptist Church of Cushing, Okla. welcomed Sac and Fox tribal members and the public to a special event. The Megehee family hosted the gathering styled "Winter Hunt", as a portion of the great Sac and Fox Nation shared a meal and enjoyed games and conversation. A feature of the afternoon was a "Living History" portrayal of the late, great Jim Thorpe by Tribal Member Mark Megehee. Attired in baseball uniform (provided by the Fort Sill Museum), Mr. Megehee recalled episodes in the life of the World's Greatest Athlete. Crowning the event were members of the Thorpe Family, Anita and Burke Thorpe (sharing photos and memories), plus visiting royalty from the Pawnee Nation and Oklahoma City Powwow Club Princess. (Photo Provided)

APPENDIX C

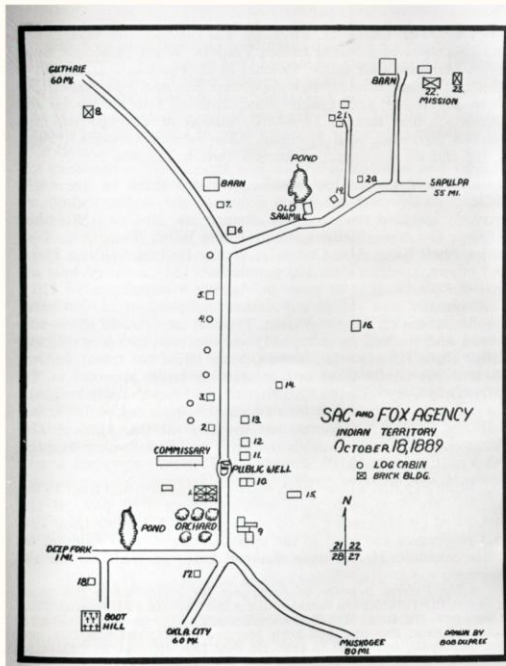
First Public Event Presentation Slides (December 11th, 2024)

Sac and Fox Mission School

Or Agency School

Where will these stories be stored?

- In the Sac and Fox Nations Archives
- A quick thank you to Katie Thompson for her support



SAC AND FOX AGENCY, 1889 MAP

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Agent's home and barn. | 13. Captain Indian Police's home |
| 2. Blacksmith's home. | 14. Calaboose. |
| 3. Physician's home. | 15. Tribal blacksmith shop. |
| 4. Rev. Wm. Hurr's home. | 16. Isaac McCoy's two-story home. |
| 5. "The Only Way" Church. | 17. Leo Whistler's home. |
| 6. Keokuk's original store. | 18. Laura Keokuk's home. |
| 7. Keokuk's home and barns. | 19. George Power's home. |
| 8. Keokuk's brick ranch house. | 20. Fred Kirtley's home. |
| 9. Licensed Trader's store & home. | 21. Fannie Whistler's home & barns. |
| 10. Agent's office & Council House. | 22. Mission Boarding School. |
| 11. Goodell's Boarding House. | 23. Mission Brick Schoolhouse. |
| 12. Vocational Farmer's home. | |

Overview of Sac and Fox Mission school campus, ca. 1910



Original school
building ca. 1875



Original school building
between 1875 and 1891
(before addition)



Original school building connected to new building addition on right of photo, reportedly containing the photo of Jim Thorpe (and presumably Charlie Thorpe) as a young child 5-7 years old, taken between 1893 and 1895



Girls dormitory, ca. 1892



Original Mission
building, ca. 1875,



Mission building ca. 1886 with
addition and bell tower



Sac and Fox
school children,
1880

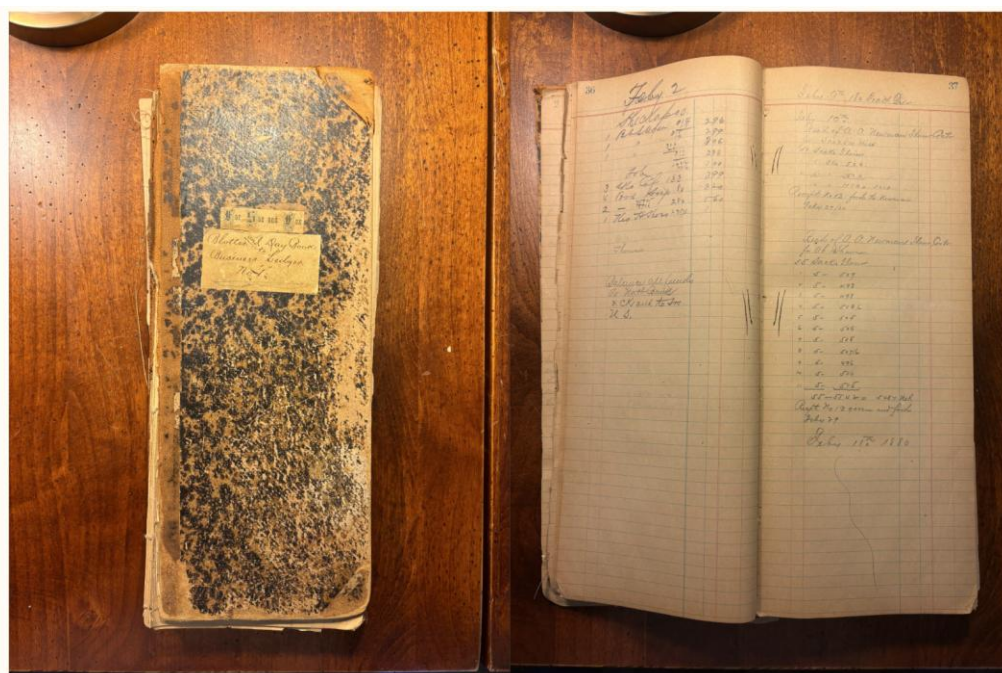


Albert Morris
Thomas Morris
Rosa Hurr
Stella Hauk
Marry Grant
Sadie Carter
Cora Battice
Martha Baker
George McClellan
Atta Shaw

Sac and Fox
school children,
1890



Harvey Madison
Mamie Scott
Rundall Franklin
Christine Franklin
Ida Mansur
Sadie Ingalls
Grover Morris
Allen Thurman
Bertha Manatowa
Clara Ellis
Lizze McClellan
Asther Bigwalker
Tom Brown
Mamie Mortor (Morton?)





Thank you for coming!

I have my recorder with me and can meet at one of the offices today if you'd like to share family stories about the Sac and Fox Mission School. Your memories are invaluable!

Appendix D

Second Public Event Presentation Slides (March 1st, 2025)

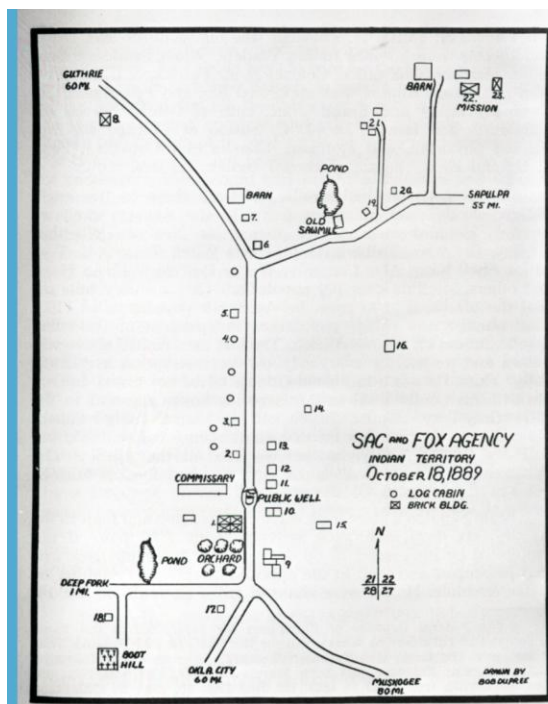
Sac and Fox Mission School (or Agency School)

Introduction

- Cheyenne Widdecke, MA, OU
- Thesis work supported by the Sac and Fox Business Committee and the Elders Advisory Board
- Thank you to Katie Thompson and Boyd Cummings

Where will these stories be stored?

- In the Sac and Fox Nations Archives



SAC AND FOX AGENCY, 1889 MAP

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Agent's home and barn. | 13. Captain Indian Police's home |
| 2. Blacksmith's home. | 14. Calaboose. |
| 3. Physician's home. | 15. Tribal blacksmith shop. |
| 4. Rev. Wm. Hurr's home. | 16. Isaac McCoy's two-story home. |
| 5. "The Only Way" Church. | 17. Leo Whistler's home. |
| 6. Keokuk's original store. | 18. Laura Keokuk's home. |
| 7. Keokuk's home and barns. | 19. George Power's home. |
| 8. Keokuk's brick ranch house. | 20. Fred Kirtley's home. |
| 9. Licensed Trader's store & home. | 21. Fannie Whistler's home & barns. |
| 10. Agent's office & Council House. | 22. Mission Boarding School. |
| 11. Goodell's Boarding House. | 23. Mission Brick Schoolhouse. |
| 12. Vocational Farmer's home. | |



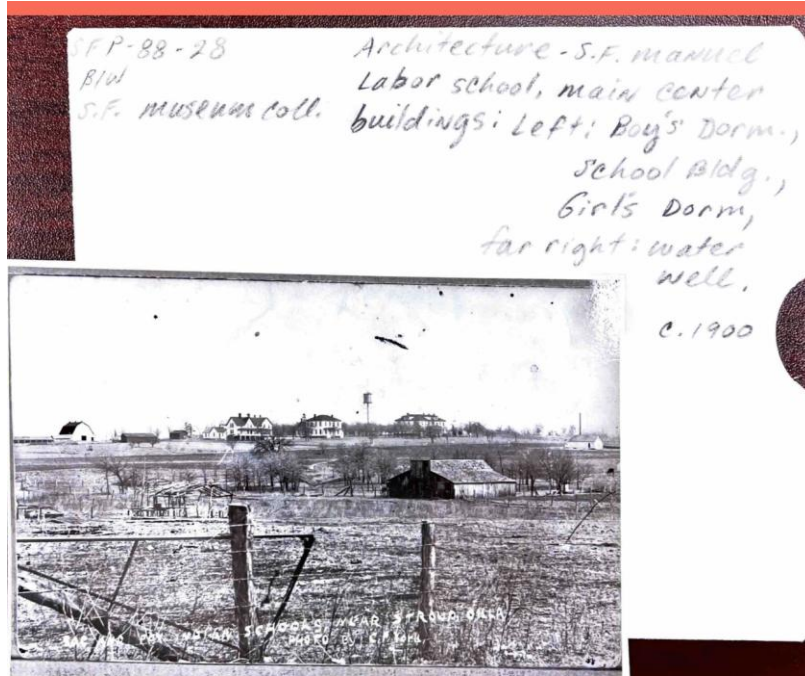
**Sac and
Fox Tribal
Archive**

1904

**Sac and
Fox
Trading
Company
at the
Agency**

- Opened: 1872
- Closed: 1917

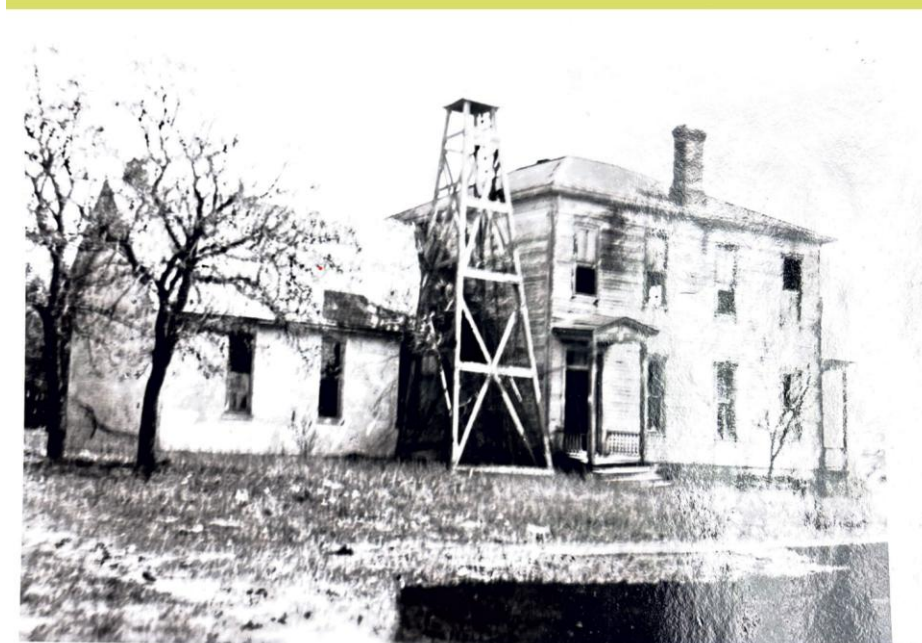
The site has been bulldozed, leaving only the foundations, a cistern, a well, and the water tower. However, the same oak trees visible in the historical photos we'll be sharing still stand today.



Sac and Fox Tribal Archive

1900

Landscape
view of the
school
grounds



Sac and Fox Tribal Archive

No date



Sac and Fox Tribal Archive

No date

Barn on the
school
grounds

No. 9 Copy

THIS FORM MUST BE EXCLUSIVELY USED FOR BEEF RECEIVED "UNDER CONTRACT,"

U. S. INDIAN SERVICE.

Receipt for Beef and Beef-Cattle delivered under Contract.

Sac & Fox School, Sac & Fox P. O. March 16, 1877.

RECEIVED at *Sac & Fox* Indian Agency, *Ind. Territory*

March 2, 1877, 1877, *Rawlin & Johnson*

2461 lbs. (3) cows, 1111 (8) head Beef-cattle

(3461) lbs. net (weight ascertained by *Shawlin & Johnson*) under *their* contract dated *August 20*, 1877, for subsistence of Indians at the said Agency, and for which I have signed receipts in *1877*.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the beef here receipted for is fully equal to the requirements of the Contract above mentioned, and in this delivery and receipt each and every condition, provision, and stipulation of the Contract has been fully and honestly complied with, and that payment has not been made for the same.

CC

U. S. Indian Agent.

NOTES AND INSTRUCTIONS.

1. Address and date. Name of month should be stated, as June, October, etc.
2. State or Territory.
3. Date of receipt of Beef.
4. Numbers, weights, prices, and quantities must be stated in words, if followed in the blank "net" or "gross" "beef" and "cattle".
5. Write "net" or "gross" as the contract calls for.
6. State specifically how weight is ascertained. If gross weight is returned by weighing dressed beef, state what percentage was allowed for "loss".
7. Persons signing the "Agent" or "Assist. Agent" must show written authority for so doing.
8. Enclose, alterations, or interferences must be noted as having been made before signing, and explanation signed by Agent.
9. Persons receiving this receipt are required to see that it is properly filled up and signed.
10. Drawings should be specifically made the same as drafts are transferred, or to general system assignment, filed in each office receiving the accounts.
11. Payment of this receipt will be made only at the Office of Indian Affairs.
12. Payment will be refused on any other Form.

OHS

1877

Receipt for cattle

Department of the Interior,
U. S. INDIAN SERVICE,
REPORT OF SUPERINTENDENT OF SAC & FOX OF MISSISSIPPI
INDIAN SCHOOL.

Sac & Fox Agency, Okla. Ter.

July 8th, 1896.

Sir: I have the honor herewith to submit my first annual report of this school, having taken charge August 20th, 1895.

History. This school has been in continuous operation about twenty-three years. At first the buildings were small, affording accommodations for only about forty children; later, additions were built increasing the capacity to sixty; and four years ago three handsome new buildings were erected, since which time the school has offered accommodations to one hundred and twenty boarding pupils.

- 2 -

First Quarter,	Enrolled	58,	Average	37.5-
Second " ,	"	84,	"	72.-
Third " ,	"	84,	"	72.-
Fourth " ,	"	94,	"	85.

Average for May and June, 89.

Highest number present at any one time, 91.

The Sac & Fox tribe is divided into two bands one of which, the "Kansas Sacs," is violently opposed to any sort of civilization, and have never patronized the school. The progressives are favorable to education and send nearly all their children, but they have not enough to fill the school.

Compulsory attendance has never been enforced and, until the past year, never attempted. During the latter part of the year, through your efforts, the Indian Council advised, and the Department granted authority to bring in the stubborn element by police force. The long distance to the Indian villages, the close proximity to that "harbor of refuge"-the Creek country, and the reluctance of Indian policemen to offending their people have rendered the enforcement of the order very difficult.

Attendance. This is the knotty question at this school. Since the capacity was doubled four years ago, the school has never been filled.

Following is a summary of the enrollment and average attendance during the past year:

Our buildings have been thoroughly repaired, painted inside and outside, and all the private rooms papered. The barn has been enlarged by building a cattle shed and an implement shed. A fowl house has been erected and a stock of poultry purchased. A large well has been dug which furnishes an inexhaustible supply of the best water. The sewerage system has been completed by laying pipe to the boy's building and to the laundry. Last, but not least, those of our horses which were old and worthless have been sold and new ones purchased, so that we now have three teams—two draft and one driving—which are a credit to the school.

Industrial. The Sac & Fox Indians get so much annuity money that they do not have to work much at home, and they

dislike for the children to be required to do so at school. However, with the boys we have cultivated seventy acres of land, including garden and orchard, besides caring for the school stock and assisting very materially with the general improvements.

The girls have been regularly detailed to all the household departments, and have done their work creditably.

3-31-1878

Traspar No 1 to Abstract of Property Returns.
List of substances sent to school, used
for expended in the support of the Soc & the
M. L. School, during the quarter ending March
31st 1878

Articles	Number of Expenditures
75 Apples Dried, Lbs	on table use
4 Antimoniales	from out
6 Baking Pils Lbs	used in cooking
1400 Beef Lbs	on table use
7 Browsers	from out
1/4 Books Spelling, Dg.	
3/4 Browsers, Dg.	
2 Buttons for	Put on childrens clothing
6 Cops	from out
450 Candles, yd.	
2 Candles, Dg.	
60 Coffee Lbs	on table use
1 Coffee Mill	from out
20 Coal Oil Gal	on Lighting Mission
200 Corn, Bk.	Put in stock
1/2 Corn, Dg.	from out
3 Cotton Spool, Dg.	on mending & making clothing
40 Cottons, yd.	from out
3 Cots	
5 Cords, Green, yd.	
1 Cuffs, For Dg.	
14 Drilling, yds	

Soc and Fox School Reports, Correspondence and Administrative Records Box 492

OHS

List of supplies purchased for the school 1878

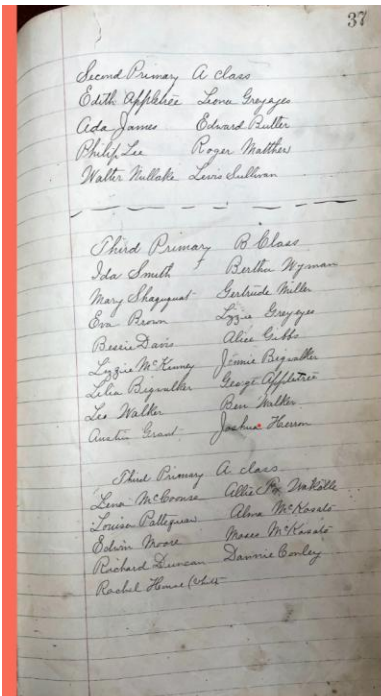
Page 109

A report of the number of garments made for Soc & the Mission for the Quarter ending March 31st 1878

Boys	
Shirts 33	(Wheeler 50 yds, Hickory 25 " Flannel 12 ")
Coats 3	(Jeans 9 " Linsey 9 ")
Pants 17 (Perhaps cassimere)	51 "
Girls	
Aprons 30	(Denim 25 yds, Gingham 40 " Calico 10 ")
Dresses 19	(Flannel 48 " Linsey 24 ")
Shirts 10	" 25 "
Underwear 60	(Muslin 54 " Hickory 40 ")
	M. H. G.

OHS

List of garments purchased for the school 1878



OHS - Student Names Found In Ledger c.1894

Second Primary A Class

Edith Appletree
Leona Greyeyes
Ada James
Edward Butler
Philip Lee
Roger Matthews
Walter Nullake
Lewis Sullivan

Third Primary B Class

Ida Smith
Bertha Wyman
Mary Shaguequat
Gertrude Miller
Eva Brown
Lizzie Greyeyes
Bessie Davis
Alice Gibbs
Lizzie McKinney
Jennie Bigwalker
Leila Bigwalker
George Appletree
Leo Walker
Ben Walker
Austin Grant
Joshua Herron

Third Primary A Class

Lena McCoonse
Allie Fox Wakolle
Louisa Pattequaw
Alma McKosato
Edwin Moore
Moses McKosato
Richard Duncan
Dannie Conley
Rachel Horne (White)

Memorandum of the Secretary
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, D.C.
September 1, 1909

VOUCHER FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF TRAVELING EXPENSES
(For persons not employees of the Department)

MEMORANDUM.

To: Walter Battico, Dr.

Address: Sac and Fox Agency, Oklahoma.

For REIMBURSEMENT of traveling expenses, as per itemized statement forming a part of this account, incurred in the discharge of official duty from September 15, 1909, to September 24, 1909, under written authorization from Indian Office, dated Sec. 1909, Reg. 100, 4-10-1909, for the purpose of Returning pupils to school, after vacation. Three trips.

DATE	ITEMS	AMOUNT	DOLLARS	CENTS
Sept. 9.	See extra sheets (Form 1-1013), if necessary, and being held in this check.			
Sept. 15	To dinner and feed for team,	1	.65	
Sept. 16	" lodging and breakfast,	2	.50	
Sept. 21	" feeding team Sept. 15 and Sept. 21,	3	1.20	
Sept. 21	" dinner for self and 3 children,	4	1.00	
Sept. 24	" supper & breakfast - self & Austin Grant,	5	1.00	
Sept. 24	" feeding team, supper and breakfast,	6	.76	
Sept. 24	" dinner, self, Austin Grant & 3 children,	7	1.25	
Sept. 24	" dinner for team,	8	.40	
	1st Trip Sept. 15-16; 2d Trip Sept. 21; 3d trip Sept. 23-24.			
	AMOUNT CLAIMED		6.76	

A true copy of original voucher, except as to affidavit and certificate.

Filed by Check No. 730464, dated September 28, 1909, for \$ 6.75 Asst. Treas. U.S. St. Louis

OHS

Traveling to
retrieve students
after vacation
break

1909

ARRIVALS.									
WEEK	DATE	NAME	THRU	FROM	TO	AGE	SEX	REMARKS	
Sept	24	37	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	
	17	6	Bryan Mack	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	21	37	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	
	7		James Jones						
	9		James Jones						
	9		James Jones						
	6		James Jones						
	6		James Jones						
	6		James Jones						
	31	17	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	
	24	37	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	
	6		James Jones						
	8		James Jones						
	8		James Jones						
	7		James Jones						
	30		James Jones						
	21		James Jones						
	17	6	James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	20		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	20		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	13	35	James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	27		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	20		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	13	35	James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	6		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	13	35	James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	6		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	13	35	James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	17	6	James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	11		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	11		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	10		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	20		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	20		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	11		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	
	6		James Jones	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	11	M	

OHS Arrivals of male students 1909

Scott Barker (Sac & Fox)
 Mark Burgess (Iowa)
 Fryor Brown (Sac & Fox)
 John Crane
 Frank B. Davis
 Harry Davis
 Green Foster
 Roy Foster
 John Falls
 George Franklin
 Lee Givens
 Fred Grant
 Frank Harrison
 Hembrow Harrison
 Henry Ingalls
 Solomon Kent (Iowa)

Oscar W. Lasley (Sac & Fox)
 Jack S. Lincoln (Iowa)
 Arthur Mack (Sac & Fox)
 Edward Mack
 Benjamin H. Mansur
 Thomas McClellan
 Edward McClellan
 Hoke S. McKosito
 David N. Pennock
 James Roubideaux
 Edgar L. Scott
 Edward Thorp
 John Tohee
 Arthur Wakolle
 Harry Wakolle
 Horace Wakolle
 William Walker
 Evans Walker
 Ione Bass
 Mamie Buffalohorn

DEPARTURES.									
WEEK	DATE	NAME	THRU	FROM	TO	AGE	SEX	REMARKS	
Sept	17	37	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	
	24	37	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	
	24	37	Charles Little	San Jose	Cushing	San Diego	13	M	

OHS

Departures of male students

1909

Hoke S. McKosito (Sac and Fox) Runaway
 Jack S. Lincoln (Iowa) Runaway
 George Foster (Sac and Fox) Chilocco

Arrivals

WEEK	DATE	NAME	TRIBE	FROM	TO	AGE	REMARKS
Sept	6	Buffalohorn, Mollie	Sac & Fox			1	
	7	Butler, Olive				6	
21	31	Conger, Pearl		Cooking	San Francisco	13	20
	6	Falke, Jennie				10	
	7	Foster, Edna				6	
	7	Grant, Bessie				10	
	7	Grant, Mary				8	
11		Grass, Florence				7	
	11	Kakaque, Maud				11	
30		Kent, Phoebe	Iowa			9	
	6	Logan, Thresa	Sac & Fox			13	
	6	Logan, Lucy	Sac & Fox			7	
	7	Moore, Ella				9	
	7	Moore, Hattie				7	
19	6	Murray, Pearl	Iowa	Cottingham School	San Francisco	9	11
17	6	Murray, Vestina				7	11
	6	Murray, Mary	Sac & Fox			11	
	6	Rice, Susie				7	
	6	Rice, Cora				6	
24	37	Rice, Kate		Cooking	San Francisco	16	20
17	6	Small, Mary	Iowa	Cottingham School		13	11
24		Springer, Mary				7	
13	35	Thorp, Adaline	Sac & Fox	Callumont	San Francisco	13	20
17	6	Tohee, Harriett	Iowa	Cottingham School		11	11
11		Wakolle, Bessie	Sac & Fox			13	

OHS

Arrivals of female students

1909

Mollie Buffalohorn (Sac and Fox)
 Olive Butler
 Pearl Conger
 Jennie Falke
 Edna Foster
 Bessie Grant
 Mary Grant
 Florence Grass
 Maud Kakaque
 Phoebe Kent (Iowa)
 Thresa Logan (Sac and Fox)
 Lucy Logan (Sac and Fox)
 Ella Moore
 Hattie Moore
 Pearl Murray (Iowa)
 Vestina Murray
 Mary McKosito (Sac and Fox)
 Susie Rice
 Cora Rice
 Kate Shaquequot
 Mary Small
 Mary Springer
 Adaline Thorp (Sac and Fox)
 Harriett Tohee (Iowa)
 Bessie Wakolle (Sac and Fox)

Sac and Fox school children, 1880



Albert Morris
 Thomas Morris
 Rosa Hurr
 Stella Hauk
 Marry Grant
 Sadie Carter
 Cora Battice
 Martha Baker
 George McClellan
 Atta Shaw

Sac and Fox school children, 1890



Harvey Madison
Mamie Scott
Rundall Franklin
Christine Franklin
Ida Mansur
Sadie Ingalls
Grover Morris
Allen Thurman
Bertha Manatowa
Clara Ellis
Lizze McClellan
Asther Bigwalker
Tom Brown
Mamie Mortor (Morton?)



A group of students pose for their picture at the old mission school on the Sac and Fox Reservation. All of the names on the back of the old photograph are recorded in the Sac and Fox language and are faded and difficult to read. The only ones that are positively identified are #7, Lynne McClellan, and #9, Christine Franklin. If any of our readers know the names (either Indian or English), please contact the Sac and Fox News staff. This picture belongs to Florence Tiger.

SFP-88-42
B/W
SF Museum Collection

S&F Manual Labor School Classmates
c.1900's. Donated by Florence (Long)
Tiger.



Sac and Fox Tribal Archive

1900's

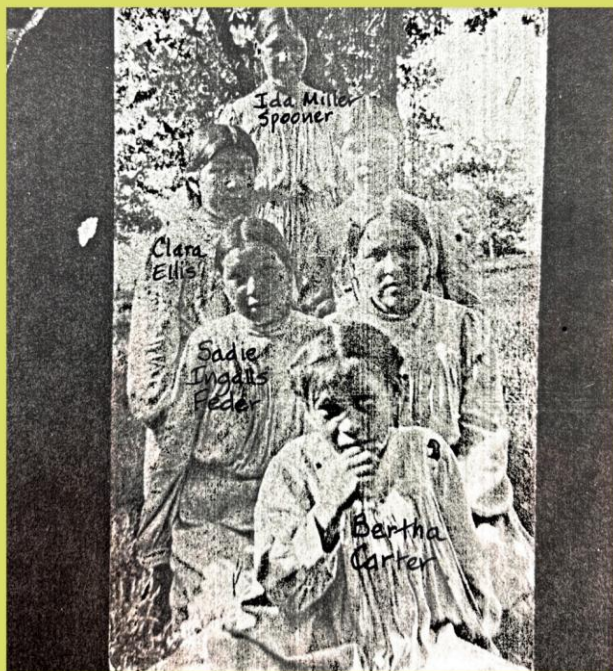
**Students identified: Lynne
McClellan and Christine Franklin**

Picture donated by Florence Tiger

SFP-88-41
Blw
SF Museum Coll.

People-
Sac & Fox School
Girls Class

Sac and Fox Tribal Archive



Sac and Fox Tribal Archive

Students identified:

Bertha Carter

Sadie Ingalls Feder

Clara Ellis

Ida Miller Spooner

**Thank you for coming out
today!**

**Please contact me if you have
family stories to share:
cwiddecke@ou.edu
587-679-5133**

APPENDIX E

OU IRB approved interview materials.



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: November 20, 2024

IRB#: 17899

Principal Investigator: Cheyenne L Widdecke

Approval Date: 11/20/2024

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Cheyenne Widdecke's MA thesis. Analyzing the boarding school landscape in Oklahoma, with a specific focus on the Sac and Fox Mission School

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Interview Questions

Do you have family members who attended the Sac and Fox Mission School/Agency School, or do you know of family members who attended it?

Do you want to share what that family member was like?

If they attended the school, do you know when they attended? The 1890s, 1910s, etc. An estimate is okay as well.

What kinds of things did your family members learn at the school?

Do you know if your family would have lived nearby at the time? Would they have been separated by large distances from their family?

Did you only have one family member who attended, or was it multiple?

Did they attend other schools after the agency school? If so, would you like to share anything about that?

Did they tell you about their experiences there?

Did you hear anything about how their school experience affected their language? Was their first language Sauk? Did they speak about being discouraged from speaking their language?

Do you know how they felt about their experiences there? (Jogging questions: Did they talk about having friends or family members around? Did they talk about what teachers or school employees were like? Did they talk about what they ate? Did they talk about how they dressed? Do you know if they had to wear a uniform? Did they talk about the school grounds? What they looked like?)

Have you been to the school grounds?

Do you feel you are affected by their experiences there?

If you are comfortable answering, did you attend a boarding school yourself? If you are comfortable sharing details about your experience, please do, as this is still relevant to the landscape of boarding schools across Oklahoma and the US.

Do you know of any family photos of the school or objects you would like to discuss?

I also want to note that to jog the interviewees' memories, we will show a few archival photographs from OU's Western History Collections of the school grounds and students with names recorded, which may lead to more informal, less structured questions.

What aspects of the Sac and Fox Mission School do you think should be preserved for future generations?

If archaeological work were to take place at the site, what would you want to see investigated or recovered?

What stories, traditions, or knowledge do you feel should be documented alongside any school material?

How would you like to see the history of the school interpreted or shared with the community and the broader public?

Are there concerns about excavation, preservation, or interpretation that you feel should be considered?



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Specific Material Based Questions (if they come with one)

Where did you get the object?

How is it connected to the school?

How are you connected to the object?



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IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/31/2025

Consent to Participate in Research

University of Oklahoma

You are invited to participate in research about preserving the stories and experiences of people who attended the Sac and Fox Mission School. The purpose of this research is to gather and document these oral histories to help the Sac and Fox Nation preserve its cultural heritage and share these stories with future generations.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to share your family's memories and experiences related to the Sac and Fox Mission School through a one-on-one interview. The interview will take place either in person or via Zoom, depending on your location, and will last about an hour and a half. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy and may be used in my thesis. The recordings and transcripts will be stored at the Sac and Fox Nation archives and possibly the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma for long-term preservation.

You may experience these risks by participating in this research:

Data collected online or by a device and transmitted electronically:

If you participate in the interview via Zoom, there is a risk that the platform may retain data or your IP address, which could potentially be used to identify you. While I will make every effort to ensure your privacy, I cannot guarantee that external platforms, such as Zoom, will not have access to your data. Zoom has its own privacy and security policies to keep your information confidential.

Research involving the elderly or other vulnerable populations:

If you are an elderly participant, the research team may ask you personal questions about your past experiences. If you disclose any instances of abuse or neglect, such as harm or mistreatment from family members, I am legally obligated to report this to the appropriate authorities.

Questions that could be emotionally distressing:

Some of the questions in this research may bring up strong emotions or memories that are distressing. If any of these questions make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer, or you can stop the interview at any time. If I notice that you seem distressed, I will pause and check if you would like to continue. Support resources are available to you at any time, such as

The 24/7 Native American Crisis Hotline

- Phone: 1-877-209-1266
- A national helpline specifically for Indigenous communities, providing crisis counseling and support.

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS)

- Website: <https://www.oklahoma.gov/odmhsas>
- Provides a variety of services for mental health, substance abuse, and wellness across Oklahoma.

Oklahoma Suicide Prevention Hotline

- Phone: 1-800-273-8255 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24/7)
- Text: 988 (National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, available 24/7)

Crisis Text Line

- Text HOME to 741741 for free, 24/7 support via text.



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IRB APPROVAL DATE: 01/

Audio recorded data collection:

Since the interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy, there is a risk that recordings could be accidentally released, exposing your identity and personal statements to others outside the research team. To minimize this risk, I will ensure that the data is securely transferred to and stored on a platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office.

Collection of demographic or geographic location data that could lead to deductive re-identification:

I will ask you to provide some demographic information, and if the interview takes place in person, we may also gather information about your location. If personal and location information is combined, it may be possible for someone to guess your identity. To minimize this risk, I will not combine identifiable demographic or location details, and I will avoid reporting or analyzing results for small, specific groups that could make identification possible.

Documents or records shared with the researcher:

If you share any personal documents, images, or other materials with me, there is a small risk that someone outside the research team could gain access during the transfer process. To reduce this risk, I will provide secure instructions for submitting any materials. Once I receive your data, I will transfer and store it on a secure platform approved by the University's Information Technology Office to ensure confidentiality.

Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be:

Confidential. The information you provide will only be used for this research project. Your identity will be protected, and if you wish, a pseudonym can be used in place of your real name. The data will be stored securely, and access will be limited to the research team. If your stories are shared, they will be done so with your permission, and your identity will only be revealed if you consent to it. The transcripts may be stored permanently in the Sac and Fox Nation archives or the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma, depending on the Nation's decision.

Can we include your name with any quotes? ☐ Yes ☐ No

The research data (in the form of transcripts and quotes) will be uploaded to an online data repository platform as part of a thesis requirement and will be publicly available for anyone interested in using it. If you give permission, your name and quotes will be included in my thesis, which will also be publicly available. If you prefer to remain anonymous, your quotes will be used without identifying information. The thesis, with or without identifiable information, will be accessible to the public.

I will be asking some questions to find out how you want me to report your ideas. You can refuse any that you do not like without any penalty.

Do you agree for data records to include identifiable information? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree to be quoted directly, without the use of your name? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree to have your name reported with quoted material? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you agree for your data to be archived for scholarly and public access? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you consent to audio recording? ☐ Yes ☐ No

I may want to take photos of you to include in my research. Do you agree? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Your photographs and audio or video records may be used in University research reports

unless you tell me not to do this.

May I contact you to gather additional data or recruit you for new research? ____ Yes ____ No

Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop at any time and for any reason. You will also have the chance to review your audio recording and transcript and to redact any information you would not like to have published.

If you have questions about this research, please contact:

Cheyenne Widdecke, 587-679-5133, cheyenne.l.widdecke-1@ou.edu for Principal Investigator (PI) or Faculty Advisor, Bonnie Pitblado, bonnie.pitblado@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or if you don't want to talk to the researcher.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

I agree to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

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