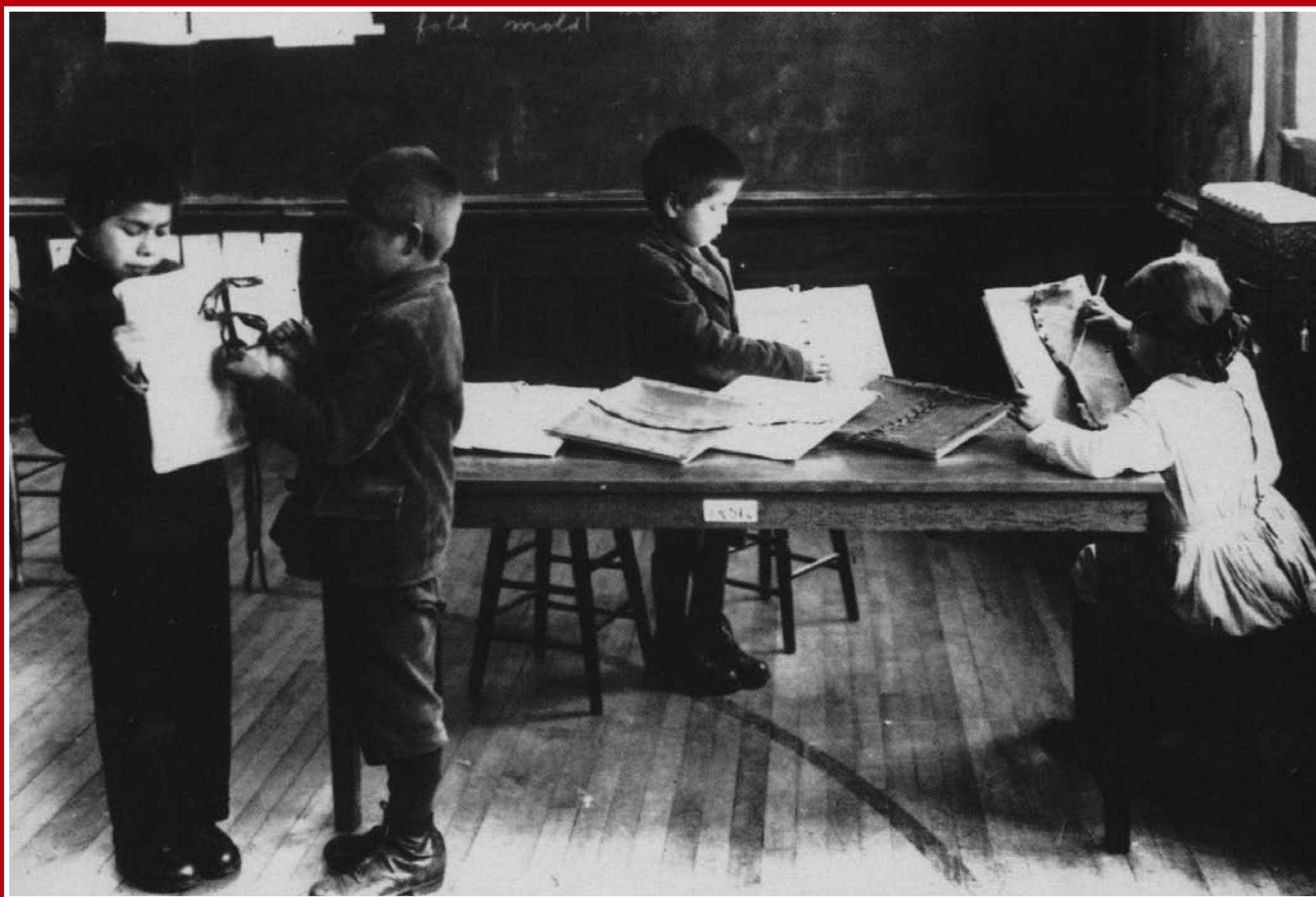


Between Two Worlds:

Experiences at the Tulalip Indian Boarding School

1905 - 1932



Assimilation

Through

Education

By Carolyn J. Marr

In the winter of 1855, Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens traveled among the tribes and bands of western Washington to negotiate treaties that would facilitate white settlement. The ten Stevens treaties called for the Indians to relinquish all claims to traditional territories in exchange for reservations and the right to hunt and fish at usual and accustomed places. In addition, the Treaty of Point Elliott, signed by eighty-two representatives of tribes living in the central and northern Puget Sound areas, promised a large agricultural and industrial school to accommodate students from throughout the western part of the Territory, to be established “within a year.”

That pledge was not fulfilled because the government failed to provide money to support it. Instead missionaries assumed the major responsibilities for education on many reservations. At Priest’s Point near Tulalip Reverend E. C. Chirouse, O.M.I., opened a school in 1857 for six boys and five girls. By 1860 he had 15 pupils whom he supervised in the plating of gardens and in a boy’s band which provided entertainment at mill towns and earned money to support the school. Father Chirouse combined academic and religious training, using pictures, statues, the “Catholic Ladder,” hymns, prayers, and storytelling. Typical of missionaries at this time, Chirouse exhorted his students to forgo all their traditional religious practices, calling them “the Devil’s work.”

The mission school at Tulalip began receiving meager government support beginning in 1861, when a boys’ dormitory and a teachers’s house was constructed on Tulalip Bay, but not until the close of the Civil War could a school for girls be established. The Sisters of Providence arrived in 1868 and until 1901 they operated the Tulalip Mission School of Our Lady of Seven Dolours, which was the first Indian contract school in the United States. The government provided annual funds to maintain the buildings, while the Church furnished books, clothing, housing, and medical care. In 1896, Congress objected to federal support of sectarian schools and reduced its funds by 20 percent per year. In the winter of 1901, the government assumed possession of the school buildings and began to conduct its own program. This renovated school was destroyed by fire on March

20, 1902. On January 23, 1905, fifty years after the signing of the Point Elliott Treaty, a new and larger school opened along the shores of Tulalip Bay.

The Tulalip Indian Boarding School opened under the supervision of Charles Milton Buchanan. The first year it had only one dormitory, but by 1907 both girls’ and boys’ buildings were completed and the school had a capacity enrollment of 200 students. Many of these were recruited from the reservation day schools and some came from off reservation communities.

The Tulalip Indian School was part of a national system of Indian education both on and off the reservation. As early as 1862, James G. Swan opened a day school at Neah Bay, and other government-supported schools came and went at Quileute, Port Madison, Swinomish, Lummi, and elsewhere. Day schools provided a minimal education. One of their problems was the great distances that many pupils traveled to and from their homes each day, especially in inclement weather. Boarding schools were established on other reservations, including the Skokomish and Makah, but the federal government closed both of these in 1896.

In addition to Tulalip, the boarding schools available to pupils in western Washington at the beginning of the century were Cushman in Puyallup; Chemawa near Salem, Oregon; and St. George’s in Tacoma. Tulalip ended at the eighth-grade level, while Chemawa offered more advanced training. A few students went to Haskell Institute in Kansas and the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania.

The underlying goal of Indian education from the 1880s through the early twentieth century was to assimilate the Indians into the melting pot of America. The twenty-five off-reservation boarding schools operating in the United States sought to “bring the Indian to civilization and keep him there,” immersing children in white ways far from the influences of traditional Indian life. Reservation boarding schools like Tulalip tried to achieve the same goal by restricting contact between students and their families.

Cover: *Young children learning how to sew and tie in the Montessori method.*

Photo by J.A. Juleen, courtesy of Everett Public Library

“I went to Tulalip. I was six years old. Mother didn't like it very well, but she said it just had to be done. I felt bad when we was going. Heck along come a boat, a big motor boat, and picked us up. Like little cows, we got in and away we went. We didn't even know where Tulalip was.”

—Woody Loughrey, Suquamish Tribal Archives



The Tulalip Indian School opened in 1905 and soon held a capacity enrollment of 100 boys and 100 girls, who lived in separate dormitories. Photo by Ferdinand Brady, courtesy of Museum of History and Industry, Seattle.

The first step toward assimilation, authorities felt, was mastery of the English language. There was no concept of bilingualism in Indian education; other languages were to be forgotten. Students were prohibited from speaking their native languages even among themselves in conversation. A student who was heard “speaking Indian” was punished.

The school ran on a military regimen. Students were awakened early and followed a strict routine throughout the day, their schedule punctuated by ringing bells. Everyone was required to march from one place to another, and to line up for daily and weekly inspections.

The method of instruction was in direct contrast to that of traditional Northwest Coast societies, in which much of the learning came first from observation and then from actual practice. As Lawrence Webster put it, “There was no schooling as we know it today. What they taught'em was how to survive.”

In addition to trying the “civilize” Indian children by eliminating all vestiges of their traditional cultures, the federal government aimed to make them self-supporting in a new way of life. Half of each school day was devoted to work, the other half to classroom learning. The new curriculum emphasized skills that would promote self-sufficiency on the white world’s terms—cooking, sewing, and laundry work for the girls, and carpentry and farming for the boys. That Northwest Coast Indians were not traditionally farming cultures and that their reservations contained little arable land was irrelevant to the government. Farmers they would become!

A few critics feared that job training at rudimentary levels would condemn the Indians to permanent inequality. But few government officials thought that Indians were capable of more. Also, much of the work performed by students at the school was necessary to maintain the institution. The meat, vegetables, and milk served in the dining room came from the livestock and gardens kept by the students. The young engineers kept the boilers operating to heat the school buildings, and they cut all the firewood. The girls made all the clothes and prepared

meals. Without student labor, the government never could have afforded to operate the school.

In 1893, Congress passed legislation that would require all Indian children to attend school. Many parents feared having their children taken to boarding schools because they knew that diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza had taken the lives of many students. Besides, once the youngsters were enrolled in a distant school, parents lost control over decisions that affected their children’s future. But once the law was passed, parents who did not send their children to school faced various forms of punishment.

By the 1920s the Bureau of Indian Affairs had changed its opinion about boarding schools, responding to complaints that the schools were too expensive and they encouraged dependency more than self-sufficiency. In 1923, the majority of Indian children nationwide attended public schools. A report on Indian education issued in 1928 stated deficiencies in the boarding schools, including poor diet, overcrowding, below-standard medical service, excessive labor on the part of the students (without much distraction between work to maintain the schools and vocational training), and substandard teachers. Nowhere did the report attack the underlying assumption of the schools, however, which was still to eradicate traditional cultures in favor of assimilation into a single homogeneous society.

The 1930s witnessed many changes in federal Indian policy, among which was a shift in educational philosophy in favor of courses that were more appropriate to the diversity of cultures. States assumed more control over Indian education as more and more children enrolled in public schools. The Tulalip Indian School closed in 1932. Cushman School in Puyallup had closed in 1920, leaving Chemawa the sole government boarding school in the Pacific Northwest. Two Tulalip School buildings are currently used as offices for The Tulalip Tribes.

“You marched everywhere, you were governed by the bell and bugle, you were told when to go to bed and when to get up, your whole life was governed. As a result, you didn’t learn how to become an independent thinker.”

–Arnold McKay, Lummi



Basketball players from left to right: Blanch Thompson (Duwamish), Rose Simmons (mud Bay), Clara Jones (Tulalip), Isabella Luke, and Ella Libby (Tulalip), with matron Mrs. Andrews.

“That kind of bonding is something that I think each of us when we look at each other feel. Well, we were in Tulalip together. We were part of that world at one time.”

–Vi Hilbert, Upper Skagit

We

Were

Lost

By Andy Fernando

My mother called the other day, and asked how to say the Skagit Indian word for “salmon.” My mother, Violet Lyle Fernando, is a half-blood Upper Skagit Indian. As a young girl, she paddled her own solid cedar canoe on the Skagit River. She shouldered her own packboard on hikes from the valley floor through the North Cascade Mountain passes on centuries-old trading routes. She trekked the alpine meadows ridgetop to ridgetop where our ancestors had always gathered huckleberries and medicinal plants.

Now, embarrassed and apologizing, my mother asks me to recall for her the simplest Indian words she can't remember. And I feel embarrassed for her, for I have learned my Skagit language not at my mother's knee, nor from the teaching of my grandparents, but in a college classroom. It makes both of us sad, and me more than a little angry.

Why? Because my mother, like hundreds of Indians from throughout the north Puget Sound who were sent to the Tulalip boarding school—more than a generation of people—had

“The only time I like to eat was when they made clam chowder... we got a lot of corn bread, and yellow split pea soup, oh, my!”

-Helma Ward,
Makah



Boys sat on one side of the dining room and girls on the other, while a few girls served as waitresses to bring the food to the table and clear the dishes. Photo by Ferdinand Brady, courtesy of the Museum of History and Industry, Seattle

My mother spent much of her early years with her grandparents, who spoke only Skagit Lushootseed, a dialect of the Salish Indian language common to most of eastern Puget Sound from the Nisqually to the Skagit rivers. At age six, my mother spoke almost no English, only Skagit. Then, she spent three years at the Indian boarding school at Tulalip, run by the federal government.

drummed out of them the essence of what made them Indians. Indian children were punished for even acting Indian, not just at Tulalip, but at government schools throughout the Northwest. Under a federal policy started in the 1800s, the “Americanization” of Indians wasn't subtle indoctrination but an explicit program often backed by a swift hand.

It saddens me to think that because my mother was taught to block out her Indian-ness, my whole family has lost a piece of our cultural history. Saddest of all is that my mother was representative of most of the same generation of Upper Skagit children, nearly all of the people who now are the elders of our tribe. They have lost the ability to teach us younger Skagits our language, our traditions, our past, in large part due to the government schools.

As my mother says now, “I blocked it (Skagit language) out so much, they said because we got in an awful lot of trouble if we were caught talking Indian. I think it left you with the idea that you tried not to be Indian, you tried not to do things that were Indian. I guess, like my one uncle put it, he said, you were lost.”

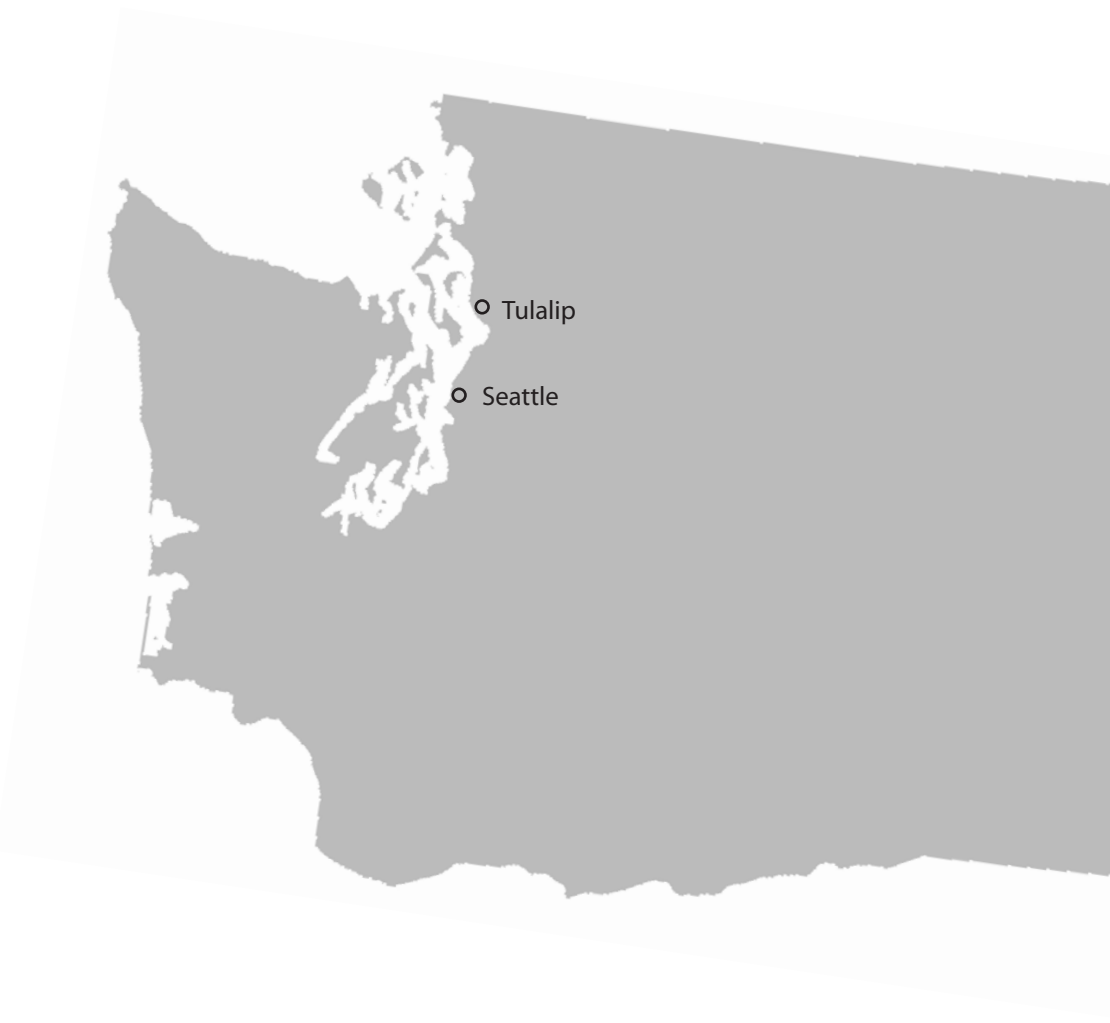
So who will teach us? Who will show us younger generations how to be Skagits? What will we have to share with our children? How will we recognize the right medicines, make cedar canoes, find spirit power? How will we know how to say “salmon” in Lushootseed?

After years of being lost, of blocking out, my mother is trying to piece her childhood together again. She called to ask the Skagit Indian word to tell my little nephews—her grandchildren—so they could recite their Skagit Lushootseed proudly at public school.

“Soo-la-dwh”, (sʷuladx^w) I helped her recall, is the word for all salmon. And as she asked, I gently reminded my mother that “yo-buch” (yubəč) is king salmon, “s-thloob” (ʃx^wayʷ) is chum salmon, “s-kutch’-kus” (sk^wəx^wic) is silver salmon, and “kaʰohwh” (qiʰwʃ) is steelhead.

I smiled and reminded my mother, who at seventy-one is trying to re-teach her tongue to form the sounds cloaked deep in her childhood, that when she can’t understand an elder speaking Lushootseed, a useful stock phrase is always: “whee gwudses-lacahl-boot ah tee lu-shoot-seed-ub. ba-ileed ah tee pa-sted-oot-seed ub,” (x^wiʷ g^wədsʷəsləqalbut ʷal ti dx^wləʃucidəb. bəʷilid ʷal ti pastəducidəb) which means: “I don’t understand (that) in Skagit Indian Language. Please say it again in white man’s speech.”

** Please note that in parentheses is Snohomish Lushootseed*



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Decoration Day at Tulalip, with Marguerite Le Claire and Laura Wilbur