

Eleanor Houk and Their Impact on Oregon History

Biography of an Indigenous Woman

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Abstract

Eleanor Houk made history in Oregon by becoming the first Indigenous woman to attend the University of Oregon. I will be using this thesis to explore how her culture and status as a minority could have affected her life through a combination of primary and secondary sources. I will be focusing on the different stages of her life and some of the different settings that would have affected her, specifically her time at two residential schools and her move halfway across the country as an orphan. I want to explore how this time impacted her later in life and her choice to become a teacher at the residential schools she was at for much of her childhood.

Through this research I hope to expand the online platform – Oregon Women’s Consortium – to which his project was originally posted. The purpose of the Oregon Women’s Consortium is to shed light on the history of Oregon women who have been either ignored or under-researched. My project will provide a more thorough exploration of Eleanor Houk’s life story as well as the experiences she had because of her heritage. This will aid in creating a more complete history of important women in Oregon’s history.

Introduction

Throughout the history of this country, many groups have experienced trauma and harm to pay for others in power. Indigenous people suffered as a result of colonization and the events from that experience. The US government created boarding schools to give Indigenous children a White education. These schools would lead to many deaths in the Indigenous community and the erasure of many different aspects of their traditions and languages. It is important to now acknowledge the wrongs of our past and to tell the stories of those who have been ignored.

Eleanor Houk was the first Indigenous woman to attend the University of Oregon (U of O) in 1920 in pursuit of a teaching degree. This created opportunities for other Indigenous women to enter higher education and get better jobs moving forward. She became a teacher at the Chemawa Indian School, a boarding school she had attended as a student. This showed her students an Indigenous woman was capable of attending college and getting a job as a teacher. She would have become a role model for her students to show what they could accomplish.

This thesis will begin with her tribal and family history with the Blackfeet Nation of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, to gain an understanding of her culture and beliefs and the circumstances leading to her boarding school stay. Going through her boarding school experience will help us to understand how this evolution could have changed her values and her outlook towards her

own culture before going into her life post education and how her experiences could have affected her for the rest of her life.

Literature Review

To truly understand a person and how different events would affect their life, it is important to gain an understanding of the culture they grew up in. *The Story of the Three Tribes* by George Bird Grinnell details his observations of the Blackfeet Nation during the early 1900s. The author walks through many different aspects of life in the Blackfeet Nation including their lifestyle, how the Nation was uniquely organized, and their religious beliefs. Grinnell had a strong relationship with the Blackfeet Nation that allowed him to write such a detailed story. He strove to promote their well-being while they were experiencing starvation, disease, corrupt agents, invasive stock raisers, and a steady onslaught of bad policies. He would even be adopted into the Blackfeet Nation.¹ Grinnell goes in depth to the struggles facing the Blackfeet Nation during this time of colonization to gain sympathy and support from the public.

Located in what is now Montana, the Nation depended on buffalo to survive; buffalo and many other animals disappeared from their territory since colonization due to overhunting. This was a common experience for many tribes who were dealing with the effects of expansion and colonization. Not only was their main resource for food no longer available, but they no longer had as much territory as they once had. The Blackfeet Nation was “crowded into a little corner

¹ John Taliaferro, “The Secret Life of George Grinnell, One of America’s Greatest Conservationists.” *Pacific Standard*. June 3, 2019: <https://psmag.com/books/the-secret-life-of-george-grinnell-one-of-americas-greatest-conservationists/>

of the great territory which they once dominated, and holding this corner by an uncertain tenure, a few Blackfeet still exist.” Grinnell expresses the uncertainty Indigenous people were facing at this time with much back and forth from the government regarding what land would be given to them on their reservation land. For instance, in 1873, President Grant took land away from the Blackfeet Nation to give the same land back in 1875 and again in 1880 the Blackfeet Nation lost the same land they were previously given back. The Blackfeet Nation was known as warlike people. Having the reputation of a warlike Nation would greatly affect how they would be seen by the public and how they were treated. The Blackfeet Nation may have had to face more discrimination from the White majority, making it more difficult to survive in the new society.²

Grinnell appealed to the public through the unique set up of the Nation and the strong relationship between the tribes. He was trying to show the public what the Blackfeet Nation is truly like instead of the reputation they had gained over time. The relationship between the different tribes made it easier to function and not be hindered by disagreements within the tribe. If a family disagreed with decisions in their current tribe, they would be able to go somewhere they agreed with.³

The perspective of the author plays an important role in shaping the view of the reader. Grinnell was an outsider to the Indigenous community and as a result

² G.B. Grinnell. *The Story of the Three Tribes*, in *Blackfoot Lodge Tales* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 177, 179-180, 242.

³ Grinnell *Three Tribes*, 208, 211.

could not relate to the community on a deeper level. However, an author such as Brenda Child who is an Indigenous historian researching and analyzing the history of her family and community can give a different perspective and relate on a deeper level. To understand the boarding school experience and what the Indigenous community experienced, it is important to listen to the Indigenous students and what they have to say about their time attending these schools.

Boarding School Seasons by Brenda Child reveals much of the students' everyday life. Her multiple award-winning books centered around Native American history make Child a well-renowned source of information for different time periods in Indigenous history ranging from more recent to past events in the community.

Boarding schools were created for students all over the country bringing all different traditions and beliefs from their tribes and homes to a blank slate at the beginning of these schools which is called “Pan-Indianism” by Child. This is unfortunately seen in the cemeteries present at these schools. The cemetery at Haskell boarding school is the resting place for children belonging to thirty-seven different tribes from all over the country. Students shared what they believed and what they celebrated from home, learned what others believed and celebrated, and brought it back to their tribe with them after their time at the school. By placing the Indigenous children in a concentrated location, they were able to build a new community despite the other hardships they would have been facing in the school.⁴

⁴ Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 4.

These connections would need to be formed in secret as students were punished harshly for speaking native languages. This would make students fear being caught if they were speaking in their native language and was effective in stopping many from continuing to speak in anything but English. With how many aspects of Indigenous culture have been lost over time the punishments and fear associated with it would have played a role in this loss of culture. Many students would be sent to these boarding schools because some in the community saw this as the only alternative to the hardships experienced on reservation land. Unfortunately, “government boarding schools neglected their pupils’ most basic needs, trained them only for employment as menial laborers, and strove to alienate them from the cultures of the families and tribes.”⁵ Many families and parents sending their children were only trying to do what was best and were promised by school officials their children would be cared for and given a proper education while they were attending. Unfortunately, that was proving to not be the case.

Child also details the general set up of the boarding schools the students had to learn to navigate. Students were supposed to be over thirteen years old, have completed some level of schooling, and be able to handle manual training away from their home.⁶ The outing program used by multiple schools allowed students to be sent out to White people’s homes in the attempt to further the civilization process and practice their trades. This became a source of cheap labor

⁵ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 27.

⁶ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 71, 73.

for many. Some students being enrolled in the school didn't meet these standards and were still being enrolled and put to work by the school leadership. This is not to mention the quality of education students were receiving from these schools as "at Flandreau, the students, who ranged in age from five to twenty-five received what must be regarded as an essentially elementary education in reading, writing, and arithmetic."⁷ Students were being overworked and given a lackluster education all while having to deal with the isolation of boarding school life.

Boarding School Blues offers different insights through a similar process to Brenda Child. One of the unique perspectives brought in this book is the upsides of boarding schools. The first chapter of the book, "Beyond Bleakness," is written by David Wallace Adams.⁸ Adams wasn't Indigenous himself but did work closely with the Indigenous community and worked on reservation land. Adams goes through six different reasons why students may have wanted to attend boarding school and why parents would have sent their children. The first reason was the schools were one way to escape from the economic hardships communities were facing on the reservation. Indigenous communities were having to learn how to live in a new system and economic structure, many struggled to survive. Boarding schools would have been an ideal way for children to be cared for and take the financial burden of providing for their child away. The second reason was by

⁷ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 73.

⁸ David Wallace Adams, "Beyond Bleakness: The Brighter Side of Indian Boarding Schools" in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Educational Experiences*, (Lincoln,: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 38-71.

attending these schools and learning the ways of White people it would give Indigenous children the option of better paying jobs in the future. An additional example of why children would want to attend boarding schools was a want to experience the world beyond reservation and expand their views and gain experience. As for reasons about the school itself, there were funny incidents throughout the day and the community formed in these schools. While there were strict policies in place in boarding schools, they still managed to have fun regardless and created a close-knit community as a result.⁹

Katrina A. Paxton has focused their research on gender dynamics in boarding schools. One aspect of assimilation in boarding schools was attempting to promote traditional gender roles as seen by the White majority. In the schools, teachers and other administrators would encourage Indigenous girls to accept the roles of women in a male dominant society and conform to their standards of being a homemaker and not entering the workforce or working as caretakers. The curriculum for Indigenous girls further promoted these ideas. Female students were trained to be “homemakers, in areas such as cooking, cleaning, health, and consumerism.” The curriculum for the girls and women in the program was a dead end, limiting the work they would be able to do after their time at school. Other programs would also encourage gender assimilation in school and out. The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the outing system became ways to

⁹ Adams, “Beyond Bleakness,” 38-71.

encourage and solidify gender assimilation. Now students were also being told by strangers to be homemakers and what they were learning was the correct way. When girls were going out into the real world through this system it was being further ingrained into them, this was what was right, and they weren't meant to do anything else.¹⁰

Among all the stories of students' experiences at these boarding schools it is important to understand the schools without the students and how they came to be and grew as well. *American Indian Education: A History*, written by Jon Allen Reyhner and Jeanne M. Oyawin Eder gives a detailed history of the education of Indigenous communities including how the Carlisle Indian School was established and the changes the schools would undergo later in time as well. Reyhner has focused most of his writing to supporting teachers of Indigenous students after teaching at a Navajo high school for a few years. Eder is a published author of children's and young adult books surrounding Indigenous history.

As Reyhner and Eder demonstrate, Richard Pratt's idea for boarding schools started in 1875 with his experiment. He was in charge of a group of Indigenous prisoners who wanted to learn how to live like White people. So, he found them jobs and found people to come and teach them English. Pratt's experiment was successful in assimilating the Indigenous prisoners. After his experiment, Pratt was given space at a boarding school originally meant for

¹⁰ Katrina A. Paxton, "Learning Gender: Females at the Sherman Institute, 1907-1925," in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Educational Experiences*, eds (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006, 191, 194, 197.

African American children with the same goal. He wanted to start his own school specifically for his Indigenous students for three reasons. He wanted complete control over the school, he didn't see the point of placing these two groups into a school if they weren't allowed to interact with each other, and he didn't want to combine the two groups in the eyes of the public because of the racism towards African Americans.¹¹

Pratt picked the Carlisle barracks in Pennsylvania to build his school as it was among racially tolerant groups such as Quakers and Mennonites, and far from frontier locals who hated Indigenous people. When students first arrived at the school, there were no beds and no food. While Pratt looked down on Indigenous people, he did work to get his students proper clothes and food. It's even stated that "Despite his ethnocentrism, which prevented him from seeing any good in Indian cultures, Pratt was credited in his own time and by later historians for his role in convincing both the federal government and the American public that Indians could and should be educated." Until Pratt, Indigenous education hadn't been encouraged or investigated seriously at a government level. Pratt would be removed from Carlisle school by President Roosevelt in 1897 due to comments he made regarding his presidency. Unfortunately, after Pratt left, the school's conditions started to deteriorate.¹²

¹¹ Jon Allan Reyhner and Jeanne M Oyawin Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, Second ed. (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 143-144.

¹² Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 144, 146, 155-156.

While boarding schools were able to get away with poor conditions and education for a long time, eventually some reform was made in attempts to improve the schools. The Meriam Report in 1928 reported on the quality of services provided by the Indian Office on the reservations and the protection of their land and property, but more importantly, the conditions at the schools. They found a lack of correlation between curriculum and the realities of their lives, and the care of students was also inadequate. This report brought negative aspects of Indigenous education to the public light which had been ignored and unknown to many for a long time. Now knowing what was happening in these schools, people were more outspoken and ready to criticize what was happening.¹³

A critical source to understanding the background of Oregon's Chemawa Indian School is the Oregon Encyclopedia's article written by Suann M. Reddick and Eva Guggemos. Suann Reddick has focused their research on the school and is the primary historian and researcher for the school having discovered many facets of the school and those who attended. Eva Guggemos is the Archivist for Pacific University and has experience and expertise in dealing with historical materials and discovering what story they have to tell. One of the remarkable aspects of this school is that it is still open. In the article, it is stated how the school has changed in their curriculum to be able to have survived as long as it has. The school now hosts Powwows and Indigenous history has a large place in the curriculum taught

¹³ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 221-225.

at the school. The school shifted from somewhere that was limiting Indigenous youth and keeping them as manual laborers, to a place that honors their culture and teaches them more useful skills such as STEM courses.¹⁴ Recently, there have been increased attempts in identifying burials and cemeteries to recognize the tragedy that occurred. This is answering the questions of many for what happened to their loved ones while they were away at boarding school.

¹⁴ Suann M. Reddick & Eva Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*, Oregon Encyclopedia, https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/chemawa_indian_boarding_school/, Accessed March 2024.

Community and Family Background

Eleanor Houk has been largely ignored for her impact on history like many other Indigenous women. As the first Indigenous woman to attend the University of Oregon, her upbringing and community played a large role in reaching such a goal. Her family members' experiences with assimilation and its effects would affect how Eleanor coped with assimilation during her life.

Eleanor Houk belonged to the Blackfeet Nation, more specifically the Piegan tribe. Like the other Indigenous tribes, pre-colonization they were able to move as needed and weren't restricted to certain areas of land. But in 1851, the Blackfeet Nation's territory was defined using the Musselshell, Missouri, and Yellowstone Rivers, as well as the Rocky Mountain Range.¹⁵ While U.S. officials negotiated for multiple Indigenous groups, the Blackfeet Nation wasn't present. It was unclear if this was due to the Blackfeet Nation not being invited to these negotiations, or if they chose not to attend. The addition of reservations would decrease the amount of land, hunting ground, and freedom the Indigenous communities previously had. While being given reservations to live on and continue their traditions, their land wasn't safe from being taken away from them. The Lame Bull Treaty in 1855 took some land away from the reservation to build

¹⁵ *Blackfeet Reservation Timeline*, Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2017, 1, <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Social%20Studies/K-12%20Resources/BlackfeetTimeline.pdf>, Accessed March 2024.

a railroad through the land.¹⁶ On one hand, this could create more job opportunities for Indigenous people as others may not want to commute to the reservation daily for work.

There is a long history of Indigenous peoples having their cultures taken away from them by the American government. An early example of this is the Indian Civilization Act. Congress continued the earlier efforts of missionaries to educate and “civilize” Indigenous people to live like the White majority. Lawmakers wished for the act to civilize and Christianize Indigenous communities.¹⁷ This marked the beginning of an era, pushing the assimilation of Indigenous communities and erasing their cultures and lifestyles having sustained them in favor of the colonizer’s ways of life.

Among other impacts of colonization, a main resource for the Blackfeet Nation, the buffalo, was no longer accessible to them. With colonization and the introduction of reservation land they were no longer able to hunt Buffalo like they had previously. This put pressure on the Nation to change how they live in this new era. A treaty would be drafted to take more land from the Blackfeet reservation, but it was never ratified. Regardless, White settlers moved on to the land anyway.¹⁸ This demonstrated not only did the settlers think it was

¹⁶ *Blackfeet Reservation Timeline*, 1.

¹⁷ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 13.

¹⁸ *Blackfeet Reservation Timeline*, 1.

unnecessary to honor what land was given to the Indigenous people, the government wasn't going to stop the colonizers from taking what they thought was theirs.

On top of the land insecurity Indigenous people were having to deal with at this time, they also had to deal with significant violence. In 1870 the Blackfeet Massacre occurred where American cavalry and infantry soldiers attacked and killed 217 people, mostly women and children. This was in response to the murder of a rancher, but the assumed killer wasn't staying in the attacked camp. The government took no disciplinary action in response to their military personnel's actions.¹⁹ This event solidified the government wasn't going to protect the Blackfeet people and didn't care about their wellbeing. Also, due to other similar events happening, the Indigenous population was continuing to decrease. With increased violence towards Indigenous people on the land they were granted, parents and children alike would want to remove their children from the area to keep them safe.

Despite increasing violence, Indigenous communities were still facing increasing concerns regarding their land. In 1873, President Grant took land away from the Blackfeet Nation, only to give the same land back in 1875. In 1880, the Blackfeet Nation would lose the same land they were previously given back. This

¹⁹ *Blackfeet Reservation Timeline*, 1-2.

land was taken away by President Hays who didn't later return the land.²⁰ What relief the members of the Nation may have had from when the land was originally returned was ripped away from them once again. Anything they had built and relied on in that area of land was now taken away from them once again and would have had to be restarted elsewhere on their limited reservation land.

These events would help with the creation of residential boarding schools. Boarding schools for Indigenous children were dreamed up by Richard Henry Pratt, someone who stopped going to school when they were only thirteen to join the military where he would learn a strict routine and lifestyle.²¹ Pratt was placed in charge of Indigenous students at a school originally designed for African American students-the Hampton Institute-with the same goal of assimilation before opening his own for Indigenous students. The main purpose of not only Pratt's boarding school, but the others who soon came to follow was to civilize and remove the "Indian problem" from the United States.²² This thought process shows the lack of respect the majority of the American population had towards the Indigenous community at the time.

Later in 1883 and continuing into 1884, the Blackfeet Nation experienced what was dubbed Starvation Winter. During this time, it was reported that 500

²⁰ *Blackfeet Reservation Timeline*, 2.

²¹ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 142.

²² Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 13.

Blackfeet people died and a quarter of the Piegan tribe died of starvation during this event.²³ This would have encouraged parents to send their children away to boarding schools. The schools were promising to feed and care for their children while they were attending and would have sounded much more promising than life on the reservation. These schools were seen as the only alternative by many family members and would provide better opportunities for their children compared to what they were going through on the reservations. While a difficult choice, many saw it to be the best option for their situation.²⁴ And at a time of increasing poverty, by sending a child to live at a boarding school, parents would also not have to have the financial burden of having to care for that child during their school year.

At the Carlisle Indian School, Richard Pratt had developed a program that would allow students to get real world experience through the outing program. The outing program sent students to live with and work for families. Pratt had many opinions on how his students should be compensated for participating in his outing program. Students were leaving the school environment and instead working out in the public. Pratt thought their hard work granted them enough compensation and money wasn't necessary. He wrote a letter in 1886 arguing to pay students only a couple of cents a day because they would be working as apprentices. This

²³ Grinnell, *Story of the Three Tribes*, 178-180, 289.

²⁴ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 16.

was more of a learning experience than a job despite the fact they were doing hard work for different families. He mentions his system wouldn't be an expense to the school as students would have to spend their earnings on supplies the school would have been required to supply them with regardless. Namely the uniforms they were required to wear. He then detailed the banking system he planned to set up to make the payments possible.²⁵

The U.S. government still sought to change the lifestyles of Indigenous communities through different policies. In 1887, the General Allotment Act or the Dawes Act was implemented. This took away the communal land system or forced reservations to privatize their land.²⁶ This method of living had sustained the communities for a long period of time, and they weren't able to rely on that anymore. This was to incentivize the Indigenous people to farm and change their lives to better fit the majority. In the same year, Carlisle was proving to become more popular for Indigenous students. The school had 617 students but was well below their capacity of 1,000 on campus students and 1,500 including the outing program.²⁷ Unlike many other schools, overcrowding wasn't an issue at the time making living conditions more bearable.

²⁵ Richard Henry Pratt, *Letter Regarding Student Pay*, 1886, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-documents/NARA_RG75_91_b0821_04520.pdf Accessed March 2023.

²⁶ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 88.

²⁷ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education* 147, 161.

The Houk family provides a case in point. Before Eleanor Houk attended boarding school, Eleanor's aunt, mother, and father attended Carlisle. Houk's aunt, Nellie Abbott was the first to enroll at Carlisle from her family in 1889. At sixteen, she was half Piegan and only had one living parent.²⁸ It was common for single parent households to send their children to boarding schools at this time.²⁹ She was enrolled for five years at the school. G.P. (George Pressly) Houk started attending Carlisle in 1890 at age twelve. He was enrolled for five years, and both of his parents were alive at the time he was admitted. He was also only half Blackfeet.³⁰ As both of his parents were alive, he already would have had a different experience than his future wife Maggie and her sister Nellie. Eleanor's mother Maggie Abbott would enroll at Carlisle at the same time as G.P. Houk. Maggie started attending the school at only eight years old.³¹ This would have made the adjustment period much more difficult for them as they would have been more dependent on their family back at home. Both girls left the school in August of the same year due to medical reasons. Their short stay at Carlisle would have led to a different impression on Maggie than it would have left on G.P. The

²⁸ *Nellie Abbott Student Records*, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, March 26, 1889 https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-ephemera/NARA_1329_b006_c00a_0003.pdf Accessed March 2023.

²⁹ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 1-2.

³⁰ *Pressly Houk Student History*, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, March 26, 1890 https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-ephemera/NARA_1327_b149_f5827.pdf Accessed March 2023.

³¹ *Maggie Abbott Student Record*, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, March 26, 1890 https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-ephemera/NARA_1329_b006_c00a_0002.pdf Accessed March 2023.

experience of being sick enough while at Carlisle to leave the school could have been traumatizing for someone so young. According to the Sanitary Health Report for August, two girls were sent home with consumption, and another was sent home with scrofula, a lymph node infection.³² Maggie and Nellie may have either both had consumption or one with consumption and the other scrofula.

Nellie's student record gives information about the quality of education Maggie and Nellie received at school. Nellie entered the school at a second-grade level, attended for a little over a year, and left the school at a second-grade level.³³ Students weren't receiving the highest quality education they were supposed to benefit from if they weren't moving forward in their education at all.

While attending Carlisle, G.P. Houk was a very active student despite his participation in the outing program, they were involved in many activities. An article from the school newspaper the *Indian Helper* from 1892 identified Houk as both a soloist for the glee club and a part of the baseball club



Football Team, 1894,
Cumberland County
Historical Society,
Carlisle Indian School
Digital Resource
Center, 1894.

³² *Monthly Sanitary Health Report*, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, August, 1890 https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-documents/NARA_RG75_91_b0656_27088.pdf, Accessed April 2023.

³³ *Nellie Abbott Student Records*.

and³⁴ part of the school's football team in 1894.³⁵ Sports like football brought more publicity to the school, showing students were excelling at American pastimes and they were being assimilated successfully. The image of this program at the school allows us to see what students looked like at the time and what was expected of them while at the school. In the photo you can see the students wearing a more formal uniform imitating typical clothing for the White majority. Houk was also part of the printing press at the school. Houk would have helped to produce the school paper.³⁶ G.P. Houk would eventually leave Carlisle in June of 1895 without graduating.³⁷

Eleanor was born in October of 1886 to G.P. and Maggie.³⁸ In 1910 the family moved to Lethbridge, Canada where the Blackfoot Nation is also located. While G.P. would return in 1911, there is no record of Maggie returning with him to Montana. In 1912, G.P. applied to have Eleanor attend Carlisle. When G.P. was making the decision to send Eleanor to Carlisle, he would have had memories of the school under Pratt, but conditions had deteriorated at the school after President

³⁴ "Pressly Houk Soloist", *Indian Helper*, April 1, 1892, 2-3 https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-publications/IndianHelper_v07n29.pdf Accessed March 2023.

³⁵ *Football Team*, 1894, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, 1894 <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/images/football-team-1894>, Accessed March 2023.

³⁶ *Printing Press*, 1894, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, 1894, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/images/twenty-three-male-student-printers-version-1-1894>, Accessed March 2023.

³⁷ *Pressly Houk Student History*.

³⁸ Find a Grave, *Eleanor Houk*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/715688/eleanor-h-grant>, Accessed May 2023.

Theodore Roosevelt removed Pratt from the leadership of Carlisle due to negative comments he had made about the government and the president.³⁹

At age 11, Eleanor was too young to be admitted, but G.P. explained that her mother was “dead?” and he was not able to raise Eleanor on his own while working.⁴⁰ It isn’t clear why he was unsure about the condition of her mother at the time and it is probable that he had no contact with her at the time regarding any matters. G.P., like many other single Indigenous parents, was unable to both provide and care for his daughter while making enough money for them to survive, so boarding school was the best option for them. Also, “mixed-bloods, who had often received a European or an American education, sought a similar opportunity for their children.”⁴¹ G.P. may have thought about how his education had benefited him and decided the same school and education would be best for Eleanor.

³⁹ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 147, 156.

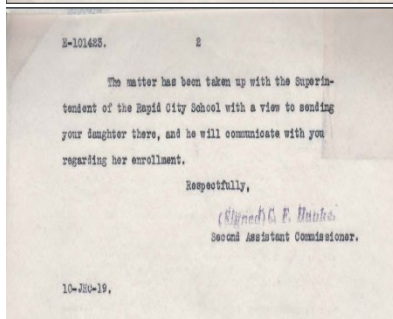
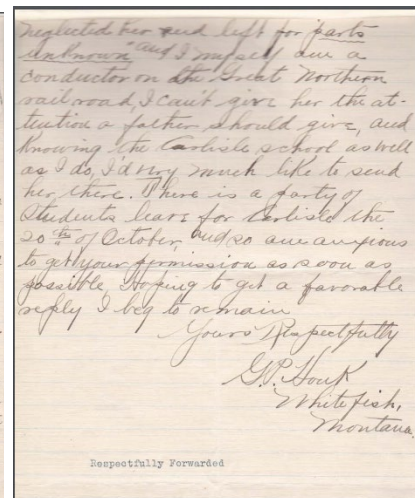
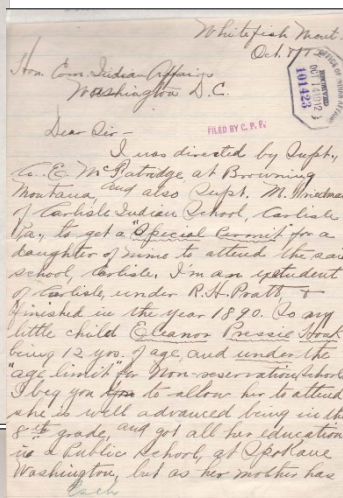
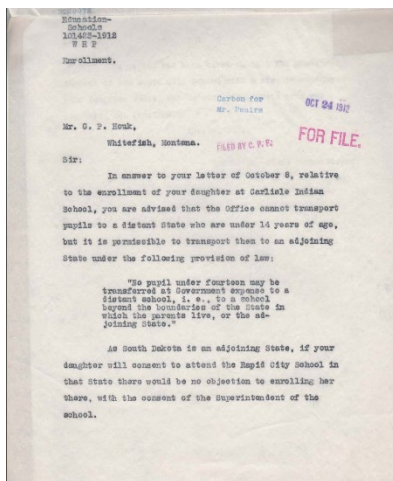
⁴⁰ Pressly Houk *Student History*

⁴¹ Margaret Connell Szasz, “Through a Wide-Angle Lens,” in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Educational Experiences*, 202-219, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 208.

Eleanor Houk: Education at Carlisle

G.P. Houk wrote a letter requesting special permission for his daughter to attend Carlisle. In response to his initial letter, Carlisle staff members told G.P. he should have her attend Rapid City Boarding School as it was in an adjoining state to Montana and they couldn't legally transport someone under fourteen all the way to Pennsylvania. After being told this G.P. kept requesting for her to go to Carlisle specifically because he couldn't raise her by himself. He did state she was already

at the 8th grade level at her current public school.⁴²



Request for enrollment for daughter of G.P. Houk,
National Records and Archives Administration,
Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center,
October 8-24, 1912.

⁴² Pressley Houk Student History.

Eleanor Houk was only eleven years old when she started to attend boarding school and as a result may not have been mentally ready to be separated from her father and participate in such a grueling environment.

Handwritten student record for Eleanor Houk from Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The form includes fields for Name, Indian name, Tribe, Agency, Father, Arrived, Departed, Class entered, Class left, Trade, Outing, Character, Married, Deceased, and Remarks. The record is dated October 29, 1912.

Eleanor entered the school at on October 29, 1912. Her school records list both parents as living despite her father's letter questioning that fact, she is one-quarter Indigenous, and her father uses a different name. Instead of saying his name is G.P. Houk, her father is listed as JS Galreath on one form but is listed as G.P. Houk on her student records.⁴³

Eleanor Houk Student History, *National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, October 29, 1912.

Through other Indigenous persons' retelling of events we are able to infer some of what Eleanor may have experienced a Carlisle.

Zitkala-sa was an Indigenous woman from the Yankton Indian Reservation and attended White's Indian Manual Labor Institute in 1884. She would later become a music teacher at Carlisle Indian School in 1899 until she was fired in 1901 when she wrote about the students' loss of identity at the school. Zitkala-sa remembers being excited and even begging to attend but as they were leaving for the school

⁴³ Eleanor Houk Student History, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, October 29, 1912, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-ephemera/NARA_1328_b002_c00h_0193.pdf, accessed March 2023.

feeling “suddenly weak, as if I (Zitkala-sa) would fall limp to the ground. I was in the hands of strangers whom my mother did not fully trust. I no longer felt free to be myself, or to voice my own feelings.” It is very possible that Eleanor could have felt this way leaving her home. But she may have also felt some sort of calmness as her father did seem to trust those employed at Carlisle, making her trust them as a result.

Other past students of Carlisle also detailed the “civilization” process they went through after arriving at the school. Starting with their clothes, students were not allowed to wear spiritual, traditional dress but were expected to dress like the White majority. Some students found the clothes to be very uncomfortable and wouldn’t want to wear the clothes willingly. The employees at the school would enforce the dress code saying it was to keep them safe and healthy from diseases. On top of the changes in dress, there was change in hair, cutting it to fit the White standards. It seemed to be a priority for the school to have students look the part of a White child before teaching them anything else. The students also had to adjust from the diets they had while living on reservations to the newer White food. As a result of all the changes, “in three years nearly one half of the children from the Plains were dead and through with all earthly schools. In the graveyard at Carlisle most of the graves are those of little ones.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Luther Standing Bear, “Luther Standing Bear (Lakota) Recalls His Experiences at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School,” in *Major Problems in American Indian History*, (Cengage Learning, 2014) 376-377.

Like many other students at boarding schools between 1900-1940, the transition may not have been smooth for Eleanor. Being separated from her family and community would have probably left her with homesickness and led to a difficult adjustment period to a hostile environment. However, some adapted and began to identify with their captors and stopped following Indigenous customs and ways of life.⁴⁵ Since Eleanor had already lost her mother, having to go through this separation again with what community she had left would probably be very difficult. There is no evidence of Eleanor having a more traditionally Indigenous name, but if she had had one, policy makers were making children abandon their names, as there were complaints the names were unpronounceable, pagan, and embarrassing.⁴⁶ Students were being told to disregard something not only important to their culture, but a name was a part of them. This would effectively create a separation between the children and their communities.

When students first arrived at the school, staff got creative to keep students in line. While Zitkala-sa was describing her first few days at the school, she was shown a picture of a devil and students were told “this terrible creature roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him.”⁴⁷ It is possible Eleanor and the other students were told

⁴⁵ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 180.

⁴⁶ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 27-29.

⁴⁷ Zitkala-Ša, *American Indian Stories*, 46.

something similar to maintain their discipline and their fear. This could make the students easier to control.

While students were separated from their communities, this allowed them the chance to create their own using Child's theory of Pan-Indianism. Tribes that wouldn't have had much interaction until this point would start to mix, sharing languages and traditions being brought home with students. At the end of their time at the school, graduates would marry into other tribes and summer celebrations became intertribal. Overall, in the schools attempt to separate students from their Indigenous cultures, they facilitated the Indigenous communities growing closer together and forming new alliances. Since Eleanor was attending school so far from home, there probably weren't many other Piegan or even Blackfeet students so she would have encountered many new traditions.

Opinions on how much students should be earning while working for others in the outing program hadn't changed. The low pay mixed with all the supplies the students were expected to pay for was leading to a difficult situation for students. Students like Eleanor were purchasing supplies of low quality, from food to rations. Due to the low quality, students would need to constantly purchase supplies.⁴⁸ This would lead students to go into debt just like Eleanor who by September of 1913, had -\$2.91 in her school savings account.⁴⁹ Not long after

⁴⁸ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 30-32.

⁴⁹ *Girls Spending Ledger*, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, 1910-1918, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/lists/ledgers-student-savings-accounts-girls-1908-1918>, Accessed June 2023.

starting at Carlisle, Eleanor participated in the outing program. According to the outing register, Eleanor was gone from Sept 10, 1913, to April 9, 1914. She originally started the program with Mrs. W. K. Kirkpatrick in Narberth, Pennsylvania but transferred to a different house in September 1913 to work for Hanna Haines in Moorestown, New Jersey until the end of her stay in the outing program.⁵⁰ Eleanor started in the outing program less than a year after starting school at Carlisle. It's possible she wasn't compatible with the first house, or her host changed their mind about having another person living there.

In 1900, the assistant superintendent of Carlisle praised the outing program saying "it gives a command of the English language, a knowledge of family life, of business methods, of farming, machinery, and stock, and above all the consciousness of ability to make a living in any civilized community...a valued member of society, and a factor in the labor market."⁵¹ Eleanor may have been excited to join the program due to the praise it received and since her father had also participated. As he had a job as a railroad conductor on the Blackfeet reservation, he would have been seen as a prime example of what someone can learn in the outing program. Eleanor would have heard about her dad's experience in the outing program which was bound to be very different from hers due to the gender assimilation present. Girls learned how to sew, cook, bake, do laundry,

⁵⁰ *Outing Register, 1910-1918*, National Records and Archives Administration, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, 1910-1918, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/lists/registers-outings-girls-1909-1918>, Accessed June 2023.

⁵¹ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 82.

housekeep, and nursing, which would help with the upkeep of the school.⁵² The skills they were expected to perform while in the program also wouldn't help them get very far after school because they were spending most of their time working rather than getting an education.

The main source of information about student life at Carlisle during Eleanor's time there was the school newspaper, the *Carlisle Arrow*. While the newspaper was strictly censored, the paper gives a detailed record of everyday life at the school and shows how the educators would interact with the students they were trying to get to conform.⁵³ Newspaper articles demonstrate how important it was for students to follow Christianity. Eleanor at fourteen years old would help to present the Christmas scripture lesson to the other students.⁵⁴ The school may have used students to help teach lessons to either save money or a new way to use the students as free labor.

The schedule students were expected to follow was long and difficult. An example schedule from a student at Flandreau boarding school shows just how strenuous it was. The day would start at 6:30 AM for breakfast. Students would have one class period before going to detail. After lunch this student worked in the welding shop for three hours before dinner. To end their day, they had club

⁵² Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 79.

⁵³ Jacqueline Fear-Segal, "The Man on the Bandstand at Carlisle Indian Industrial School," in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Educational Experiences*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 112.

⁵⁴ "The Sunday Evening Protestant Service," *Carlisle Arrow*, January 1, 1915, 2, Accessed May 2023.

meetings and a study hour before going to bed at 10:00 PM.⁵⁵ This may have been very similar to the schedule that Eleanor was expected to follow while she was attending the school. This difficult and demanding schedule didn't allow students to have free time to play, make friends, and explore activities outside of school. One very striking aspect of this schedule is there was only one class period. At boarding schools' students weren't "engaging in the normal classroom work found in public schools, Indian students spent long hours laboring in the school's farms and gardens." This does explain why a student like Eleanor's aunt could enter and leave the school at the same grade level. Schools chose to spend such little time on classes because these schools needed student labor to survive.⁵⁶ Labor classes such as welding, farming, sewing, and cooking would save the schools money by having to hire fewer employees.

Government boarding schools were promising to care for the children sent to them by providing a good education, food, and housing. In truth schools were neglecting student's "basic needs, trained them only for employment as menial laborers, and strove to alienate them from the cultures of their families and tribes." At Flandreau boarding school, students of all ages received an elementary education in literacy and arithmetic devoting the rest of the school day to vocational training.⁵⁷ The schools prioritized how the students could benefit them

⁵⁵ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 41.

⁵⁶ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 35-37.

⁵⁷ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 27, 73.

over how they could benefit the students. As Eleanor had gone up to the 8th grade in a public school as stated by her father's letters, she would have been more academically proficient than the other students at the school. She may not have been very challenged at Carlisle as a result.

With the schools trying to separate the students from their families and cultures, many experienced homesickness but it was very difficult for the younger students to cope. Eleanor would have been one of the younger students at the school, but she was one of the youngest to have traveled so far because of the need for special permission. This would further isolate her from the Blackfeet Nation entirely since there wouldn't have been very many from the Nation attending the school. The mental distress could sometimes impact students so deeply causing mental issues to turn physical. This would have added to the high number of ill students at the school and could have made students more vulnerable to disease. Overcrowding, poor food, and irregular medical care, and not separating sick students from healthy would also play a large role in the high number of sick students.⁵⁸ While there wasn't documentation to prove Eleanor was sick while at Carlisle, it would have been likely that she was ill throughout her time in boarding school.

⁵⁸ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 48-49, 56.



“Murder Follows Fight,” *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1915, 1.

Eleanor also had to deal with the murder of her father while she was at Carlisle. On March 29, 1915, G.P. Houk was murdered in Montana after witnessing a crime.⁵⁹ The murder was very gruesome with G.P. being almost decapitated by his attacker. Despite G.P. being Indigenous, someone was arrested immediately. It would be announced in the *Carlisle Arrow* stating

Eleanor’s father had died.⁶⁰ It was a short acknowledgement

considering he was an alumnus of the school, and she was currently attending. It is possible there was more acknowledgement in person. In May of the same year, her father’s murder was solved, and his attacker was sentenced to 40 years in jail. The article also mentions this was a plea deal, and the jury favored a life sentence.⁶¹ This was a favorable outcome for such a gruesome case and may have



“Guilty, Says Jury, 40 Years Penalty,” *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, May 22, 1915, 6.

⁵⁹ “Murder Follows Fight,” *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, March 3, 1915, 1.

⁶⁰ “Notes from Room No. 8,” *Carlisle Arrow*, V11, N31, April 9, 1915, 4.

⁶¹ “Guilty, Says Jury, 40 Years Penalty,” *Great Falls Daily Tribune*, May 22, 1915, 6.

provided some comfort to Eleanor knowing her father's attacker would be locked away for a long time.

While attending boarding school, it was very difficult for parents to get their students back home for any reason. In letters to the school, parents would report needing to bring their children home due to being sick and malnourished. Students wouldn't be able to go home even if relatives were sick, there was a death in the family, or simple longing.⁶² Due to this fact, Eleanor may not have been able to attend her father's funeral or visit any family she was still in contact with during this difficult time. Now that Eleanor had lost her father, there was the question of what would happen to her since she was an orphan. Orphans would be sent to boarding schools even in the early 1920s.⁶³ While Eleanor was already attending boarding school, this was her only option as she wasn't living with any family members.

Boarding schools were very strict with students. Students weren't allowed to speak tribal languages and were punished harshly if this rule was broken. Students were beaten, hit with rulers, washed their mouths with soap or lye, or locked in the school jail. In some cases, students were tasked with their peers' punishment.⁶⁴ Having students punish each other⁶⁵ could have broken down the

⁶² Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 34, 45.

⁶³ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 191.

⁶⁴ Child, *Boarding School Seasons*, 28.

⁶⁵ Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, Lorene Sisquoc, "Introduction: Origin and Development of the American Indian Boarding School System," in *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Educational Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 24.

community they had created and would further break down their morale. Another form of punishment students could face from speaking their native languages would be the Saturday ritual of naming and shaming students who had broken that rule.⁶⁶ This would shame students publicly so there was no hiding if they had broken the rule.

While at Carlisle, the *Carlisle Arrow* reported Eleanor and another student were subbing for their teacher while they were ill.⁶⁷ This was the first mention of Eleanor teaching in any capacity, and I was unable to find how common it was for students to be the substitutes or if they would be paid for taking on this role. This may have been one reason Eleanor wanted to be a teacher at a boarding school. There were reports on the quality of teachers the students were being exposed to. Zitkala-sa would describe their colleague as being an opium-eating pumpkin-colored creature with a mother to support. Even describing the doctor to be an “inebriated paleface.”⁶⁸

In the months before Carlisle would be permanently closed as a school, students were still participating in many activities. As shown in the *Carlisle Arrow* from June 1918, Eleanor would be participating in the school play about Columbus.⁶⁹ However, the day after this paper was published, she would be back

⁶⁶ Fear-Segal, “Man on the Bandstand,” 126.

⁶⁷ “Class Notes from Room 12,” *Carlisle Arrow*, 1918, 3, Accessed May 2023.

⁶⁸ Zitkala-sa, *American Indian Stories*, 72.

⁶⁹ “From Feudalism to Freedom,” *Carlisle Arrow*, June 7, 1918, 22, Accessed May 2023.

in the outing program where she would stay until the school's closure.⁷⁰ There were a few reasons given for the closure of the school, including World War 1 needing the site to return to a military base, and also the downhill direction of the school causing the government embarrassment.⁷¹ The final decision to shut the school was probably a culmination of the different reasons before the school closed in late 1918.

⁷⁰ *Eleanor Houk Student History*

⁷¹ Reyhner and Eder, *American Indian Education*, 191.

Eleanor Houk's Education in Oregon

After the closure of Carlisle, students were transferred either back to their home or to a different boarding school. Eleanor transferred to Chemawa Indian School in Oregon. After attending she would attend Salem High School and the University of Oregon to complete her education.

The Chemawa Indian School of Oregon was founded just months after Carlisle by Melville C. Wilkinson in Forest Grove, Oregon. The schools were similar from the beginning of their operations, being designed by similar people. Wilkinson shared the belief that the Indigenous population would be conquered best through education and religion instead of bullets.⁷² The two schools had almost identical philosophies to begin with.

The school was on four acres owned by Pacific University. It is interesting that land was owned by a college rather than being owned by the government, whether it be federal or state. Another parallel between the beginnings of Chemawa and Carlisle was the state of the school upon opening. There was only one building built before students arrived and the oldest students were tasked with building the rest.⁷³ When Chemawa first opened, there were 52 staff and 566 students enrolled with a capacity of only 550.⁷⁴ One reason the schools would choose enrollment over quality of care was because they were funded on a per

⁷² Reddick and Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*.

⁷³ Reddick and Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*.

⁷⁴ Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 143.

capita basis.⁷⁵ Not long after the Chemawa school opened, the superintendent attempted to create a larger campus. Permission to obtain more land was limited to land donated to the government or purchased through donations.⁷⁶ They wanted to expand the school to be able to fit even more students on campus and make more money in the long run.

The new campus would open W. V. Coffin on June 1, 1885 just outside of Salem. After the original donation of land, an additional 84 acres east of the train tracks would be purchased with funds earned by students picking hops in the valley.⁷⁷ Similarly to Carlisle and the original Forest Grove campus, students were moved in without any accommodations ready for them.

When Eleanor came to Chemawa in 1918 she had spent a significant time in her life in boarding schools. Apart from leaving for the outing program, Eleanor would have been at the school full time making it a very familiar place for her to be. Transitioning back to reservation life, without her family, could have been difficult for her and weighed heavily in the decision for her to stay in boarding schools.

Shortly after starting at Chemawa, Eleanor would be in the hospital sick. It wasn't stated what she was sick with or for how long. She had also recently

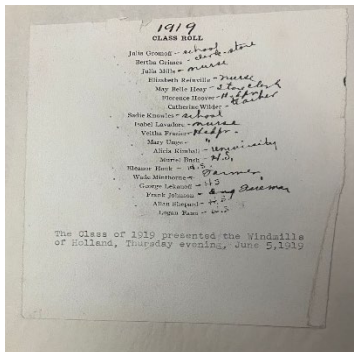
⁷⁵ Reddick and Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*.

⁷⁶ Reddick and Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*.

⁷⁷ Reddick and Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*.

participated in a declamation contest audition and had passed.⁷⁸ Having moved across the country and having recently lost her father, Eleanor would have been under a lot of mental distress and trauma leading to her being sick. In the annual report for Chemawa in 1919, 46 students died, and two had tuberculosis.⁷⁹

After returning to the school, Eleanor was participating in a teacher training class.⁸⁰ Participating in this program shows Eleanor was starting to show a true interest in teaching and going into the profession. Eleanor would graduate from Chemawa in 1919 from the 10th grade. Eleanor would only attend the school for approximately a year. While there were quite a few graduates listed, from many



Chemawa Class Role
1919.

different tribes, Eleanor was only one of three to not be from the West Coast or Alaska. It was also interesting to see the wide range of ages from 15 to 22 listed to be graduating from the same grade.⁸¹ Another class list found for 1919 showed what each person planned to do after graduation. Many were going straight to work,

mostly as nurses or store clerks. Others were going to either university or high

⁷⁸ "Senior Notes," *Chemawa American*, March 19, 1919, 3, Chemawa Indian School Research Collection, WUA 128, Willamette University Archives and Special Collections, Box 2 Folder 37, Accessed May 2023.

⁷⁹ *Chemawa Annual Report*, 1919, Chemawa Indian School Research Collection, WUA 128, Willamette University Archives and Special Collections, Box 1 Folder 36, Accessed May 2023.

⁸⁰ "Senior Notes," *Chemawa American* April 30 1919, 3, Chemawa Indian School Research Collection, WUA 128, Willamette University Archives and Special Collections, Box 2 Folder 37, Accessed May 2023.

⁸¹ *List of Graduates 1885-1949 Class of 1919*, Chemawa Indian School Research Collection, WUA 128, Willamette University Archives and Special Collections, Box 4 Folder 3, Accessed May 2023.

school. In Eleanor's case, she would be attending high school next.⁸² Chemawa had their graduation ceremony on June 11, 1919.⁸³ It's a wonder what she felt during this time, leaving a constant fixture in her life to attend a public school in an unfamiliar state without either of her parents to rely on.

Eleanor would have experienced a pan-Indian environment while at Carlisle but would have been much more evident while at Chemawa. As Eleanor would have been one of the few attending Chemawa from her region of the country she was familiar with. She was now interacting with people from tribes she would most likely not have interacted with before in a state she hadn't been in before. She would have seen many new traditions and brought many with her that could have combined and traded to create a new community.

After graduating, Eleanor participated in a Declamation, or public speaking, contest she had auditioned for earlier. The public was invited to see the contest, and Eleanor was competing in the humorous category.⁸⁴ After Eleanor's first year at Salem High school, Eleanor would be excluded from her class in the yearbook. The only place she was mentioned was discussing the competition where she took second place. And as shown, her name was spelled incorrectly.⁸⁵ This can show the lack of respect towards her community despite attending the school for a full

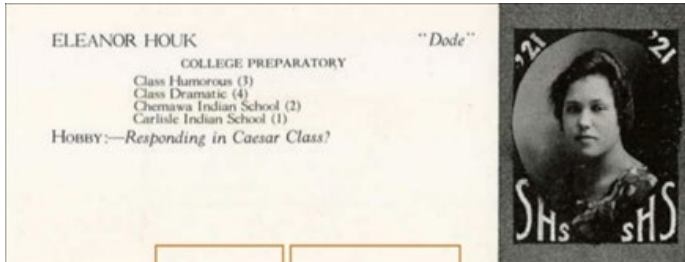
⁸² *Class Role 1919*, Chemawa Indian School Research Collection, WUA 128, Willamette, University Archives and Special Collections, Box 4 Folder 3, Accessed May 2023.

⁸³ "Commencement," *Chemawa American*, June 11 1919, 1-2,4, Chemawa Indian School Research Collection, WUA 128, Willamette University Archives and Special Collections, Box 2 Folder 37, Accessed May 2023.

⁸⁴ "Public is Invited to Contest Tonight," *Capitol Journal*, April 29, 1920, 10, Accessed May 2023.

⁸⁵ *The Capital*, Salem High school, June 1920, 125, Accessed March 2023.

year she was not given the same recognition as the other students or being given the respect of having their name spelled correctly.



Eleanor Houk, *The Capital*, Salem High School, June 1921, 41.

The next year, Eleanor would finally be acknowledged in the yearbook for her senior year.⁸⁶ She was given credits for her time at both Chemawa

and Carlisle Schools but also for class humorous and dramatic. While she was accurately acknowledged on this page of the yearbook, she was incorrectly listed in the overall list of seniors, not being listed as college preparatory like some of her peers.

After attending boarding schools and Salem High School, Eleanor enrolled at the University of Oregon in 1922. This was an historic accomplishment for Eleanor as Indigenous students “enrolling in mainstream colleges had a 90 percent attrition rate, some colleges wouldn't even accept Indian students.”⁸⁷ Eleanor would become the first Indigenous women to attend the university and as a result did receive some backlash from the community. One of the earliest instances of this was reported in the *Oregon Daily Emerald* in 1922. In an interview with Eleanor titled “First Indian Girl in School Can See Bit of War Paint” the reporter asked what she thinks of the other female students who wear makeup. and is

⁸⁶ Eleanor Houk, *The Capital*, Salem High School, June 1921, 41.

⁸⁷ Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 313.

presented in a judgmental manner for her thoughts that may have been taken out of context.⁸⁸ This shows many weren't happy with the school's decision to admit her to the school. Eleanor Houk would major in physical education while at the school, setting her up for a future as an educator.

With all the discrimination facing Indigenous peoples integrating into white society it can be easy to wonder why they would continue to go through with it. A Hopi woman who like Zitkala-sa and Eleanor would attend boarding school to later become a teacher and would describe her reasons for persevering.

"Polingaysi had wanted to be a white man. The white man had abundant supplies of food, good clothing, and opportunities to travel."⁸⁹ Eleanor could have had similar dreams and goals by assimilating into the white community. To gain the

privileges to which the White community had access to.

While attending college, Eleanor joined the Cosmopolitan Club. The club was made up of non-American students attending the school.⁹⁰

Eleanor did not have United States citizenship during this time because she was Indigenous. It wouldn't be until 1924 when the Indian



"Cosmopolitan Club",
Oregana, 1923, 279.

⁸⁸ "First Indian Girl in School Can See Bit of War Paint," *Oregon Daily Emerald*, October 29, 1922, 1.

⁸⁹ Polingaysi Qoyawayma, *No Turning Back ; A Hopi Indian Woman's Struggle to Live in Two Worlds*, (New Mexico: University of New Mexico, 1992), 49.

⁹⁰ "Cosmopolitan Club," *Oregana*, 1923, 279.

Citizenship Act passed that all U.S.-born Indigenous people became U.S. citizens.⁹¹ The Indigenous community was finally granted something many people born in the country take for granted and are automatically given. This would make the Indigenous community more equal to other groups at least politically if not socially. While taking a step in the right direction, it may have caused her to lose connection to the Cosmopolitan Club as she no longer fit the requirements. The act could have further isolated her from her peers.

There is a chance Polingaysi and Eleanor choose to distance themselves from their Indigenous past for a similar reason. Polingaysi expressed feeling condemned from the community for committing herself to a new way of life.⁹² It is possible Eleanor may have wanted to return to Blackfeet Nation but felt she was not welcome there and had to keep assimilating herself. This may have helped influence her decision to continue with her education and not return to an Indigenous community.

Eleanor lived in Hendricks Hall, a women's dormitory that had been built only a few years previously.⁹³ Living in the dorms with the other students could have made her feel isolated being the only Indigenous woman at the school and could have faced continued racism as a result. Zitkala-sa described her own experience living in a college dorm as an Indigenous woman. She recalls hiding in

⁹¹ Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 91.

⁹² Qoyawayma, *No Turning Back*, 26

⁹³ "Hendricks Hall," *Oregana*, 1924, 374.

her dorm from the scornful and curious students and she scarcely had a real friend.⁹⁴ It stands to reason Eleanor's experience could have been very similar and despite being surrounded by people, was very alone.

⁹⁴ Zitkala-sa, *American Indian Stories*, 57

Eleanor Houk Post Education

After graduation from the University of Oregon Eleanor became a teacher at Chemawa Indian School.⁹⁵ She went back to the only boarding school she had ties with to work for some time. At the time Eleanor graduated, teachers at boarding schools weren't required to have four-year college degrees.⁹⁶ Eleanor only attended college for roughly 2 school years, this may have been all she was able to attend due to cost of college and limited working opportunities.

Three years later Houk married William Grant on April 2, 1927. William was born in Oklahoma and was five years older than Eleanor, being thirty years old at the time of marriage.⁹⁷ Not long after the two were married Eleanor gave birth to their first son, William B. Grant Jr. on May 25, 1927.⁹⁸ Eleanor's pregnancy may have been a motivating factor for their marriage.

Eleanor would have her second son in January of 1929. While I am unsure of when Eleanor and her family would have moved to Oklahoma, they were listed on the 1930 census as Tulsa Oklahoma.⁹⁹ This is where the family would remain until their deaths. All family members would be buried in a military cemetery as they all served. Eleanor would pass in 1980 and her husband in 1984. Robert

⁹⁵ *Eleanor Houk*, Teacher, Chemawa, Salem and Marion City County Directory, 1924, 327.

⁹⁶ Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 168.

⁹⁷ Eleanor Houck, *Oregon Marriage License*, April 2, 1927, ancestry.com.

⁹⁸ William B Grant, *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/716180/william-b-grant>, Accessed May 2023.

⁹⁹ 1930 United States Federal Census for Eleanor H Grant and William Grant, Oklahoma Tulsa, Tulsa District 78 Sheet 14A ancestry.com

would pass not long after in 1986 and William Grant Jr. would pass in 2001 leaving behind a wife and children.¹⁰⁰

A large change in Indigenous schools was caused by the Meriam Report. This was an independent privately funded investigation of Indian affairs. The report condemned the allotment policy and the poor quality of services provided by the Department of the Interior's Indian Office. The report argued for more protections of Indigenous property and recommended they be allowed the freedom to manage their own affairs. The report also touched on the lack of correlation between the curriculum of Indigenous schools and the realities of their lives, making their education useless in the future. The report also revealed to many the care students were receiving was inadequate. This could have been eye opening to many who weren't aware of the situation in these schools.¹⁰¹

In Indigenous boarding schools, students were underrepresented in the school staff. While Eleanor Houk was working as a teacher at Chemawa only 30% of the staff was Indigenous. Students were slowly becoming more represented in the staff when in 1945 it was reported that about 65% of the staff was Indigenous.¹⁰² By having more Indigenous staff their education seemed more meaningful coming from someone like them, but also be more culturally relevant

¹⁰⁰ William Grant Jr., *Find a Grave*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/31287869/william-bernard-grant>, Accessed May 2023.

¹⁰¹ Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 221-225.

¹⁰² Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 243.

to the students.

Between 1928 and 1933 many boarding schools were shut down or converted leaving 23 boarding schools left in operation. Many politicians in western states didn't want to close their schools due to the revenue they brought in. Chemawa stayed open but it may have caused some uncertainty for the future for employees causing some employees to seek stability elsewhere or for employees to be pushed out of their positions at Chemawa by experienced employees from shut down schools. It was difficult for educated Indigenous people to find jobs due to prejudice among both Indigenous and white employees.¹⁰³ If Eleanor were to have lost her job they would have needed to move wherever the next opportunity presents itself. Or, if her husband had gotten a good job offer elsewhere, it would have been reason enough to move across the country. Also in 1930, the government started to question the cost and effectiveness of Indigenous boarding schools.¹⁰⁴ It is possible this led to an increase in job loss at these schools. Since Eleanor was an Indigenous woman, she may have lost her job this way.

¹⁰³ Reyhner and Oyawin, *American Indian Education*, 41, 208.

¹⁰⁴ Reddick and Guggemos, *Chemawa Indian School*.

Conclusion

In more recent years, many of the grave sites attached to these schools were unburied. While this adds to the many horrors previously known about these schools, it gives some closure with past relatives finally being given the honor and respect they deserved then. Chemawa was no longer used for burials after 1940 and grave markers were placed in 1960 based on a school map. Through the hard work of researchers like Suann Reddick and Eva Guggemos, and extensive list of all known deaths at the school since 1880 was created and released on Indigenous Peoples Day in 2021.¹⁰⁵

Eleanor Houk lived an eventful life during a pivotal time for the Indigenous community. Her family suffered many great tragedies because of assimilation and the fear of being different and managed to survive and thrive in the new society she was thrust into. She not only went to school but completed some higher education and gain a more respected job, showing other students who were like her that they are capable of more than manual labor.

It is important to tell the lives of people who have not only been lost to time, but also those who belong to a group of people that were actively erased from this country. Piecing together these smaller stories will help the whole story of what the Indigenous community had to endure in a clear and undeniable way to those who downplay what occurred during that time.

¹⁰⁵ Guggemos and Reddick, "Chemawa Indian School".

While there are many stories such as Eleanor's it is important all their voices and stories are told to show how detrimental this time in history was. While this does not make up for what has happened it is a small step in understanding what happened so this relationship can be more honest, and we can move forward together with a complete and accurate history.

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