

Potawatomi Schooling in Iowa and Kansas before 1848

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Potawatomi students attended four schools in Kansas and Iowa, as well as the Choctaw Academy, prior to being relocated to a shared reservation along the Kansas River in 1848 and consolidation into two schools. This talk explores how those four local schools were opened, operated, and funded.

The Potawatomi began to be moved West in the early 1830s. In the 1830s some Potawatomi in present day Kansas sent their children to the Shawnee Methodist School. In 1838 the Baptist started a school along the Potawatomi Creek on the Osage River reservation. Meanwhile, in 1837 some Potawatomi on the Council Bluffs reservation in present day Iowa began to send their children to St. Joseph Catholic School. The school closed and moved to the Osage River reservation along Potawatomi Creek in 1838 and then Sugar Creek in 1840 (boys school) and 1841 (girls school).

Most Potawatomi, who were favorable to schooling, wanted their children schooled locally, and catholic schools were set up to bring Potawatomi children home from the Choctaw Academy (Stephen Cooper to Secretary of War). Interestingly, funding for local schools was hard to obtain. The St. Joseph Catholic School was permitted to be opened but not funded. Similarly, funds requested for a catholic school along the Yellow River in Indiana were withheld during this time. The issue was that the US Government wanted the Potawatomi removed even farther west. It was not until 1839 when Potawatomi had been moved out of Missouri (and Indiana) and onto the Osage River reservation in Kansas that catholic schools could obtain funding. However, this funding was not substantial nor regular like what went to the Choctaw Academy. “The Choctaw Academy got \$9,000 dollars last year, but the sisters of Sacred Heart who are conducting a large school got zero” (Harvey to Crawford, February 1845).

Linguistic pluralism was present in these local schools. For example, during this period, Jonathan Lykins and Robert Simerwell, who ran the Baptist School, translated the Gospel According to Matthew and the Acts of the Apostles into Potawatomi (Lykins 1844), promoted literacy in Potawatomi using the “New System”, and employed Potawatomi teachers who instructed in Potawatomi. Several Council Bluffs chiefs expressed a desire for English *and French* instruction (Chiefs to Secretary of War, August 5, 1837), and later a desire for instruction in English, French, *and Potawatomi*. Napoleon Bourassa translated for the Sacred Heart sisters and John Tipton *taught the Potawatomi language* at the Sugar Creek School on the Osage River reservation. This stood in contrast to the Choctaw Academy which was increasingly taking an English only approach to instruction per the Secretary of War.

The 1848 Potawatomi Treaty at Council Bluffs and the Osage River reservations codified the desire of the Potawatomi communities to have local schools. However, even though the amount of treaty money for schooling did not change with the 1848 Treaty, the local schools were not funded at the same rate as the Choctaw Academy had been. It was \$50 per pupil at St Mary's Catholic Mission School while it was \$225 per pupil at the Choctaw Academy. This talk ends by providing a balance sheet of how much money was spent to run these four local schools.