

## Revisiting the Hopi Boarding School Experience at Sherman Institute and the Process of Making Research Meaningful to Community

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In the early 1900s, U.S. government officials began sending Hopi pupils from northeastern Arizona to Sherman Institute, an off-reservation Indian boarding school in Riverside, California. At Sherman, the Hopi pupils received instruction in several disciplines and occupations, including language arts, math, industrial work, and domestic training. While the author of this essay has published extensively on Hopis at Sherman in the past, he uses this opportunity to revisit the topic by describing the path he took to study this history in graduate school. Relying on personal recollections, secondary sources, historical newspaper accounts, and interviews he conducted with former Hopi students, the author highlights the ways his research moved beyond the archive and into village communities to create a history that was both useful and meaningful for his people.

**W**HEN I ENTERED GRADUATE SCHOOL at the University of California, Riverside (UCR), I had planned to embark on a long career teaching early modern European history. Prior to this, I had spent time as an unofficial MA student in history at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), taking courses from noted German historian Michael Meyer. Meyer introduced me to German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and his writings on education and German nationalism in the early 1800s. In one of the classes that I took from him, I became familiar with Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, where he called for a new education for all German people (Fichte, 1968). The topic fascinated me, and I decided to pursue this interest in graduate school under Randy Head in the History Department at UCR.

Before the start of the school year, the department's graduate advisor and faculty member Clifford (Cliff) E. Trafzer invited me to campus

to talk about my future in the program. I did not know much about him, except that he taught and wrote on American Indian history. We talked about classes that I needed to take, including courses in German so that I could pass my language proficiency exam, and we created a detailed plan for me to graduate with a PhD in early modern European history. As we neared the end of our time together, however, the conversation turned unexpectedly. “You’re Native American?” he asked me. “Yes, I’m Hopi,” I replied. “Have you ever thought about writing a dissertation on Hopis who went to Sherman Institute?” he inquired. “No,” I responded, eager to hear more. Trafzer explained that while his former student Jean Keller had published a book on student health at Sherman (Keller, 2002), nobody had written a dissertation about Hopi students who attended the school.

I was familiar with the school Sherman Institute. As a kid growing up in the mountain community of Flagstaff, Arizona, my grandmother, Ethel, told me and my siblings stories about my great-grandfather Victor Sakiestewa, originally of Orayvi, and how he once attended the school. I do not have many memories of Grandpa Victor. When I was a child, Grandpa was an old man. He had lived a long and full life, and spent most of his time tending to his small garden at his home at Munqapi. Often when my family and I would drive from Flagstaff to visit him and my uncle Moe, Grandpa was outside pruning his grape vines or harvesting his peach trees. After spending hours in the sun gardening, he would retreat indoors to rest. He did not say much, and I never had an opportunity to ask him about his school days. But now and then my grandmother, his daughter, would mention how he had gone to an Indian school in Riverside, and how he was one of the first Hopis to leave the reservation to attend a federal institute such as Sherman. His time at the school in the early 1900s had made a great impression on his life, my grandmother once told me, and he encouraged his children to receive an education beyond the mesas.

Although I did not know it at the time, the phrase “beyond the mesas” would prove extremely important to me as a scholar of Hopi education history. Since my father was and still is a professor of education at Northern Arizona University, I did not grow up living on the Hopi Reservation. I lived in cities beyond the mesas including Albuquerque, New Mexico; Yuma, Arizona; and Flagstaff. Unlike other Hopi scholars such as the late Emory Sekaquaptewa, Sheilah E. Nicholas, or Justin Hongeva (Hongeva, 2014), I have not lived among my people. I am, and always have been, an “off Rez Hopi,” and throughout my career my scholarship has reflected this positionality. Whether I am writing about

the Hopi boarding school experience at Sherman, or Hopi long distance runners who competed across the United States (Sakiestewa Gilbert, M., 2012a), I have sought to examine and better understand how Hopis, such as myself, have navigated their lives beyond the mesas. Why did they leave their ancestral lands? Where did they go? What did they experience on their journeys? And what knowledge and skills did they bring back with them to their village communities?

While this essay seeks to answer these and related questions about Hopis at Sherman, it also reflects on my experience as a Native graduate student and professor, and describes how the process of becoming a scholar taught me to produce research that is meaningful to my community. My research has resulted in articles, a book (Sakiestewa Gilbert, M., 2010), and an interview I conducted with a relative named Marsah Balenquah (Tallasytewa), which became part of a documentary film I co-produced. In the present essay I return to this interview as an established scholar of Indian boarding school studies. I interpret the interview, not as a film producer, but as a trained historian who relies on his people's history, along with recent scholarship, to analyze and contextualize her story. Similar to approaches used by other Native historians such as Malinda Maynor Lowery (Lowery, 2010), Jennifer Nez Denetdale (Denetdale, 2007), and William J. Bauer, Jr. (Bauer, 2012), I emphasize the *process* of my research, not just the findings. I connect my research to the early training I received at UCR, reexamine my familial ties and collaborations with others back home, and demonstrate the importance of oral histories and their meaning for Native communities.

### **Research and the Process of Writing**

When I started graduate school at UCR, I had limited knowledge of Hopi history or the American Indian boarding school experience. Even though I grew up in a Hopi family, and knew about our culture and ways of thinking, I had not taken the time to become familiar with much of our past. Although my teachers in grade school, high school, and college highlighted aspects of Native American history, they never taught about the Indian boarding school experience. In graduate school, however, I looked for opportunities to become more knowledgeable about both. One of these opportunities took place in a course taught by Rebecca "Monte" Kugel about Natives and 20th-century American history. In this course, Kugel required students to analyze a scholarly book on Native history from a predetermined list. I chose *Deliberate Acts*, by anthropologist Peter M. Whiteley on a Hopi conflict in the early 1900s that

caused great division in the village of Orayvi (Whiteley, 1988). Whiteley mentioned that U.S. government officials sent a Hopi chief named Tawaquaptewa from Orayvi to Sherman Institute in November 1906, with a group of Hopi youth, including my grandfather. I was intrigued, and I wanted to learn more about Tawaquaptewa and the youth who went to school with him. But I was also eager to learn about those Hopis who came after them—those who eventually followed in their footsteps.

Like any aspiring historian, I immersed myself in archival documents at the Sherman Indian Museum, and began piecing together this little-known story about this oft-written-about chief. I learned that while government officials sent him to Sherman to appreciate American ways and values, and to implement those ideals back on the reservation after his term at the school expired, Tawaquaptewa had his own agenda. Prior to coming to Sherman, he served as the Kikmongwi, or village chief, of Orayvi, and when he arrived at school he continued in this capacity. Tawaquaptewa always wanted the best for the Hopi pupils under his care. He encouraged them to listen to their teachers, to work diligently in their classrooms, and to get as much out of their time at Sherman as possible (*Sherman Bulletin*, 1907, p. 3). He knew that their success in life, and the success of the Hopis who came after them, depended on their knowledge of the so-called White man's world, and their ability to navigate that world as educated and informed Hopi individuals. He encouraged them to practice a well-rehearsed strategy Hartman Lomawaima once referred to as "Hopification," where Hopis adopted or adapted certain aspects of western society so they could preserve their culture and survive as a people (Lomawaima, H., 1989, p. 98).

My research culminated in the first paper I wrote at UCR for a Public History seminar taught by Cliff. I was proud of my paper and confident in my writing ability. But when Cliff returned my essay with his comments, I questioned whether I had the skills or even the right to be in graduate school. I had never received this quality or degree of feedback from a professor on my writing. On each page, Cliff challenged my assumptions, corrected my poor grammar, and offered ways for me to strengthen my arguments and conclusions. He chastised me on the margins—"STOP THIS!"—for my constant use of the passive voice, explaining the importance of the active voice, which rarely leaves the reader guessing "who is doing what?" Cliff's comments were difficult for me to process. For two days, I was depressed and embarrassed by my writing. Did Cliff regret encouraging me to work with him? Did he still see potential in me as a Native historian? My wife, Kylene, finally pulled me out of this pathetic state: "If Cliff didn't see potential in you, he

wouldn't have spent so much time offering feedback on your paper," she said. Her words found their mark, they made sense, and I began to understand that Cliff was not slamming my work or questioning my skills as a historian. He was helping me to become a better writer and scholar.

I spent the next several weeks addressing Cliff's comments, carefully following his suggestions. Recognizing my diligence, Cliff organized a writer's workshop so others could comment on my work. The group included faculty members Michelle Raheja, Robert Perez, Monte Kugel, and a small number of graduate students. Although I do not recall their exact comments, I do remember leaving the gathering with a renewed sense of confidence, and a realization that my research was telling a unique and special story. "Perhaps I could get it published," I thought to myself, "and share this story with a wider audience?" My hope was realized when I published "The Hopi Followers: Chief Tawaquaptewa and Hopi Student Advancement at Sherman Institute, 1906–1909" in the *Journal of American Indian Education /JAIE* (Sakiestewa Gilbert, M., 2005).

The *JAIE* article was my first scholarly publication. I chose *JAIE* over history or Native studies journals for two reasons. First, my father had published an article in *JAIE* on the Nizhoni Academy, a program to prepare disadvantaged Navajo and Hopi high school students for college (Sakiestewa Gilbert, W., 2000). Set on following my father's example, and encouraged by positive feedback from his colleague Jon Reyhner, I sent the essay to *JAIE* editor Denis Viri for his consideration. Second, I wanted to reach educators with my scholarship. I wanted my work to benefit people who taught Native students. I envisioned Native and non-Native teachers reading my article and retelling the stories about Tawaquaptewa and his followers to their Indian students, while highlighting their positive examples. I also hoped that kids and adults on the mesas would appreciate and value a history on Hopi education that was written by one of their own. To accomplish this, I knew that I needed input from people back home. I knew that I needed guidance from members of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office (HCPO) on ways I could make my work meaningful to my community.

Established in the 1980s, the HCPO exists to protect Hopi intellectual property and to create and enforce protocols for those wishing to perform research on the Hopi Reservation. Prior to publishing in *JAIE*, I contacted Leigh J. Kuwanwisiwma, director of the HCPO, and expressed my desire to do research back home. After I provided Leigh with information on the nature of my project, we continued our email dialogue and we made arrangements to meet. In addition to Leigh and myself, Stewart B. Koyiyumptewa, Archivist for The Hopi Tribe, and

Dawa Taylor, director of the Hopi Language Institute, met at the Hopi Tribe government building in Kiiqòtsmovi village. A week before the meeting, at Leigh's request, I sent a preliminary proposal outlining my research. Although at the meeting I talked at length about the purpose and goals of my project, I listened carefully to Leigh as he spoke about the interests, needs, and desires of the Hopi Tribe. Leigh stated that a research project dedicated to the history of several generations of Hopi students at Sherman Institute, many of whom are still alive today, would be of great interest to the Hopi Tribe. This "living history," as Leigh described it, would be very valuable to our people.

Leigh's description of the Hopi boarding school experience as a "living history" is important for several reasons. For the Hopi, their boarding school experience has never been a thing of the distant past. Many Hopis who attended schools such as Sherman or the Indian schools in Albuquerque or Phoenix are still with us today. They live and work in our communities, both on and off the reservation. We are related to each other. They are our grandparents, uncles, and aunts. Every Hopi today has been affected by this legacy, whether it is good or bad. My great-grandfather Victor's experience at Sherman instilled in him an appreciation for receiving an education beyond the mesas. He knew the value of learning to read and write, becoming proficient in industrial trades, and navigating in what some describe as the White man's world. These appreciations carried on with my grandmother, his daughter, who attended the Ganado Mission School in Arizona, worked as an elementary school teacher on both the Navajo and Hopi reservations, and eventually received a master's degree in education at Northern Arizona University. But the boarding school legacy is not all positive, and it did not always have a positive outcome for our people. Being away for long periods of time, Hopis attending boarding schools did so without the guidance or care of their parents or other community members. School officials, including teachers and matrons, took on parental roles and attempted to raise pupils under their authority according to Western customs, which often conflicted with Hopi values. "Being raised in the boarding school really did not teach us parenting," former Phoenix Indian School student Ivan Sidney from Kiiqòtsmovi once told me, "and some of that is carried on when we became parents."

### **Interviewing and Filming the Hopi**

Wanting to learn more about this "living history," and the challenges that Hopis such as Sidney encountered, my research on my people's

boarding school experience soon moved beyond traditional archives and on to Hopi lands. In July 2004, with the support of the HCPO, I interviewed two former students, Samuel Shingoitewa of Upper Munqapi and Bessie Humetewa of Paaqavi. Both were advanced in age and had attended Sherman in the 1920s. When I arrived at their homes, I brought them bags of oranges from the city of Riverside as gifts. Hopis of their generation who attended Sherman in the early 1900s often referred to the Riverside area as the “land of oranges.” They described seeing oranges by the “wagon load,” and recalled eating the fruit in abundance. In *Me and Mine*, Louise Udall retold the story of Hopi pupil Emory Sekaquaptewa who attended Sherman with my grandfather Victor. She noted that for Emory and the other Hopi boys the “oranges growing on the trees seemed out of this world . . . They would lie around all day eating as many oranges as they could,” she explained, “and then carry some back to stash away to eat later” (Udall, 1991, p. 33, 34). I hoped the smell and taste of the oranges would spark memories of their school days, and perhaps pleasant experiences of life beyond the mesas.

My experience interviewing Samuel and Bessie helped prepare me for an unexpected opportunity. Shortly before I was scheduled to graduate from UCR, I received an email from a film producer, Eric Jerstad, who worked with 716 Productions in Santa Monica, California. Eric explained that he was in the process of producing a film on the Hopi boarding school experience. He told me that he and a small group from 716 Productions, including the film’s director Allan Holzman, had recently met with officials at the HCPO to seek permission to interview former Hopi students on the reservation. While supportive of the project, HCPO had two requirements. They insisted that 716 Productions designate me as one of the film’s executive producers, and they wanted me to accompany the crew to the reservation to interview and film. Pleased to know that Eric had been working with HCPO, I accepted their invitation to coproduce the film. Shortly thereafter we made arrangements for Allan, Eric, one other crewmember, and myself to rendezvous at the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport before heading north to Hopi land.

We spent nearly a week at Hopi meeting individuals and talking with former boarding school students. Although we interviewed a number of people during that trip, an interview with Marsah Balenquah will always remain special to me. We had been interviewing Eileen Randolph from the village of Paaqavi, and her granddaughter, Leslie Robledo. We spoke at length about Eileen’s mother, Bessie Humetewa, and her experience at Sherman during the 1920s (two years earlier, I interviewed

Bessie, but shortly before this second visit she passed away). During their interview, Eileen and Leslie kept referring to a woman named Marsah Balenquah from the same village, who attended Sherman with Bessie. Even though my grandmother once told me about Marsah, and how we are related, I had never met her. "She lives right across the road," Eileen said to me, "you should interview *her!*" With their help, we made plans to visit Marsah at her home the next day.

When we arrived at the house, an elderly woman wearing an apron greeted me at the door, somewhat bewildered why I was standing on her porch. After telling her my name, I told her the reason for my unannounced visit. I explained that Eileen and Leslie had suggested that I interview her for my film on the Hopi boarding school experience. "Oh," she said to me, "come in, come in." She gestured for me to sit down on the couch, while she quickly prepared traditional Hopi tea for us called Hohoyisi on her gas stove. As we waited for the tea to brew, I told her that my So'o (grandmother) Ethel from Upper Munqapi had sent her greetings. "I know Ethel" she exclaimed, "we are related to each other!" "Yes," I said to her, glad and relieved that in determining Marsah's familial connection to my grandmother, my family and clan connection to Marsah had also been established.

When our tea was ready, Marsah sat down next to me on the couch and immediately began telling about her school days at Sherman Institute. We must have talked for thirty minutes, all the while the film crew waited patiently outside. At one point in our conversation, Marsah recalled the first time she felt an earthquake. She explained that it was a frightening experience for all the Hopi kids at Sherman, and she described how the walls in her dorm swayed back and forth until the quake stopped. "Marsah," I said to her, "I want to hear more about this and your other experiences at Sherman, but I need for you to tell me these stories on camera. We cannot include your stories in our film if we are not able to record them." The moment I said, "camera," Marsah's countenance and behavior changed. "I don't want to do it," she said to me, "I don't want to be on camera."

Marsah lived in a small village community. Perhaps worried about village gossip, or bashful of her story, she was reluctant to draw unnecessary attention to herself. I did not know how to respond. The last thing I wanted to do was make her feel uncomfortable. I respected her wishes, and her right to privacy, but maybe there was something I could say that would ease her mind? Perhaps I could help her see the situation and opportunity from a different, less threatening perspective? I continued thinking about this as we finished our conversation, but no

words or persuasive arguments came to mind. After we finished our tea, I collected my notes and headed toward the front door. Feeling somewhat hopeless and disappointed, I turned and asked one last question. "Have you ever told your children or grandchildren these stories about your school days?" She did not respond. "If you allow us to film you," I said to her, "your family will have these stories forever." She took five or so seconds to consider my words, and then she said, "Okay, I'll do it."

### **Marsah's Story**

With the film crew standing behind me, I began my interview asking Marsah to describe her childhood, and to talk about her life growing up in the village. "In my childhood days," she said to me, "we were just little kids running around, happy kids." She recalled that during the early 1910s, few Pahaanas, or White people, visited the village, and when they did, the children were "usually afraid of them." But over time, their fear of the White visitors subsided as the kids "got used to them." "They would give us candy," she remembered, and "we would follow them." For Marsah and the other children of the village, candy "was something else," as their parents did not "get money easily" and therefore could not afford to buy them such sugary treats.

When Marsah was a young child, she, and several others from her village, went to the Bacavi Day School. In his book on the Pueblo experience at the Santa Fe and Albuquerque Indian schools, historian John Gram observed that day schools often served as feeders for on and off-reservation Indian boarding schools (Gram, 2016, p. 4). After spending a few years at the school, Marsah's teachers informed her and other Hopi children that the U.S. government planned to send them away to a different school. The idea of going to a school in some distant land was "all new to us," she described, for "we had to leave our village, our people, and go regardless" if the new school "wanted us," or "whether my mother wanted me to go." But if her mother and father felt any reservation about sending Marsah away to school, they did not express those thoughts or feelings to their daughter. "They didn't say anything about me not going," she recalled, "they didn't hold me back."

By the early 1920s, few Hopi parents resisted the U.S. government's desire for Hopi children to receive an education at one of several off-reservation Indian boarding schools in the United States. At this time, Hopi parents and village members had grown accustomed to the ebb and flow of Hopi children leaving for and returning from schools such as the Phoenix Indian School in Arizona, the Albuquerque Indian School

in New Mexico, and Sherman Institute in California. Many of these former students returned to the reservation with newly acquired industrial skills. While some worked as farmers and ranchers, others started businesses, and a select number of female students became nurses or teachers in the federal Indian Service (Cahill, 2012). By the time Marsah received word that she was being sent away “to some other place to go to school,” her parents had seen the benefits of receiving an education beyond the Hopi mesas, and they likely wanted their daughter to have the skills necessary to excel in life. Perhaps most importantly, Marsah’s parents already had an older daughter at Sherman, and probably felt assured that the two girls would look after each other.

And so, at the young age of ten, Marsah, along with a group of girls and boys from her village and the surrounding villages, prepared to leave their homes and families. “We were taken to Winslow on a truck, a big truck,” Marsah recalled. After traveling nearly sixty miles on a dirt road, they reached the dusty town of Winslow and spent the night in a railroad cart. The next morning, government officials loaded the children in the passenger section of the train, and headed west toward Flagstaff. Although Marsah did not comment on seeing the sacred Hopi mountain called Nuvatukya’ovi, or the San Francisco Peaks, when she passed through Flagstaff, other Hopi students en route to boarding schools on the West coast made special note of it.

One of these individuals was Polingaysi Qoyawayma, from the village of Orayvi, who was among the first group of Hopis to attend Sherman in the early 1900s. In her autobiography, an “as told to” narrative by newspaper writer Vada F. Carlson, Qoyawayma recalled that when she and her schoolmates neared Flagstaff, a Hopi boy on the train drew her attention to the presence of their sacred mountain: “‘Look!’ he whispered, indicating the direction by pursing his lips and pointing with his chin. ‘Nu-va-da-ka-o-vi!’” (Qoyawayma, 1964 p. 56). For Qoyawayma, and other Hopi students, “Nu-va-da-ka-o-vi” was more than just a beautiful mountain. It was the home of their katsina spirits.

When Marsah arrived at Sherman, the first thing she noticed was the large buildings made in the Spanish mission style, and all the many Indian kids walking around. “We were lost,” she recalled, “we didn’t know yes or no, we were all talking Hopi.” Although she mentioned that some of her Hopi peers may have been able to understand and speak a little English, she did not know “anything about that, about the English language.” But prior to arriving at Sherman, Marsah attended the Bacavi Day School, and most likely knew more about the English language than she gave herself credit for in our interview. In his

foundational work on the off-reservation Indian boarding school system, historian David Wallace Adams observed that government officials placed a high priority on providing the “Indian child with the rudiments of an academic education, including the ability to read, write, and speak the English language” (Adams, 1995, p. 21). Although Marsah and her peers may not have had a strong grasp of English when they arrived at the school, it did not take long for them to become more competent in the language.

In the initial weeks of arriving at the school, Marsah and others from her community became homesick. They thought about home, their parents, and imagined what they would be doing if they were back on the Hopi mesas. Some of them contemplated running away, but as Marsah explained: “We can’t run away. We can’t turn which way is home!” But there were things at Sherman that made the transition to the school a little easier for Marsah. In our interview, Marsah spoke about a school matron who took care of her and the other Hopi children. “She was really nice in her voice,” she remembered, “but we could tell that in her action she was something else.” While the matron provided some comfort and structure for Marsah, it was her sister who most gave her the love and affection that she needed. “I had a big sister who was down there,” Marsah recalled, “so she took me down and took care of me until I got used to it.”

By the 1920s, it was not uncommon for new Hopi students arriving at Sherman, and a host of other off-reservation Indian boarding schools, to already have older siblings at the school. Government officials, including school superintendents at Sherman Institute, wanted Hopi pupils to encourage their siblings to attend the same school. While Marsah benefited from having her sister close by, her sister’s term at Sherman came to a close at the end of the school year. “Within a year’s time it was her time to come home, but then I was alright . . . after all, you get to know so many children down there, and you get friends, you make friends with them and it’s just like home.” Marsah practiced “turning the power,” a term Cliff often talked about, and she learned to use her experience at Sherman, and the knowledge and friendships that she received there, to help her navigate the off-reservation Indian boarding school system (Dixon & Trafzer, 2006, p. 237).

Without the presence of their siblings, Hopi children at Sherman relied on written communication to remain connected with family members on the reservation. At Sherman, Marsah and the other children had several opportunities to write their parents or siblings to let them know how they were getting along at the school. Teachers at Sherman

routinely instructed their students in reading and grammar, and required them to practice their skills with letter writing. Beginning in the early 1900s, school officials required each student to write a letter to their parents or other members of their family on the last school day of each month. Often teachers encouraged students to provide depth to their letters, telling them that brief or pointless correspondence would surely disappoint their families (*Sherman Bulletin*, 1908, p. 1). While Hopi children learned English and the craft of writing a letter, Hopi parents, with little to no familiarity with the English language, depended on bilingual Christian missionaries to write on their behalf. “My mother,” Marsah described, “just goes and talk with the missionary lady . . . [and] she would write a letter for her to me, that way I could correspond back and forth.”

One of the things that Hopi and other Indian children informed their parents about through letter writing was their experience working on campus or in the school’s Outing Program. At off-reservation Indian boarding schools, government officials trained Indian pupils in industrial trades including blacksmithing, agriculture, and various forms of domestic work. “Young men from the school built dormitories for students and employees,” historian Kevin Whalen describes, “a hospital, vocational workshops, farm buildings, and an auditorium” (Whalen, 2016, p. 4). Seeing an opportunity to also bring in revenue for the school’s operations, Sherman Institute superintendent Harwood Hall sent male students to work for local ranchers, and he outsourced female students to cook and clean for white-owned households in the greater Los Angeles area. “If you’re old enough,” Marsah explained, “they would send us out to each Pahaana family to work for them during the summer time.” “That way we made a little money for the coming year,” she further recalled, “and it seemed like the Pahaanas would prefer a Hopi girl for the house work.”

Hopis such as Marsah had come from close, tight-knit communities that instilled in them respect for elders and a strong work ethic. In his autobiography, *Sun Chief*, Don C. Talayesva, a Hopi student from Orayvi who attended Sherman with my grandpa Victor in the early 1900s, once commented that he and other Hopi kids “followed [their] fathers to the fields and helped plant and weed” (Talayesva, 2013, p. 55). Marsah also had her own stories of working in the fields as a child. At “planting time,” she remembered, “we [tried] to help out any way that we can.” “Early in the morning,” she noted, “our father would wake us up and say ‘come on, we gonna have to go hoe.’” Not wanting to disappoint her father, Marsah and her siblings did whatever he asked of them, whether

it involved their field or help with the family sheep. While they worked long hours alongside their father, they reaped the benefits of their labors at harvest time. Noting it as one of the happiest experiences of her childhood, Marsah recalled that the harvest always brought many people of the community together. "People would come and we would have a big feast after we clean[ed] the corn," she remarked, "and ladies would come and string them [up]."

When Hopi youth arrived at Sherman Institute in the 1920s, they also brought with them knowledge of planting and other agricultural skills that they learned from their fathers, grandfathers, and uncles back home. In this regard, Hopis such as Marsah and Don Talayesva arrived at Sherman ready to work. The "Pueblos of New Mexico and the Hopis of Arizona," George Law of the *Los Angeles Times* once observed, "display the most natural talent and the readiness skill in the agricultural arts." Describing a group of Hopi youth "weeding the carrot patch" with "methods acquired" from their "fathers and grandfathers," Law noted that farming in Southern California was nevertheless "far different" than what the Hopis experienced back home on their mesas (Law, 1922, p. 162). Hopi students at Sherman had to learn to adapt to farming in a new climate, use modern tools and machinery, while drawing on the instruction they first received on the fields surrounding their village communities.

Although Hopi and other Indian students often worked "beyond school walls," especially during the summer months, they more frequently worked in various occupations at the school itself (Whalen, 2016). At federal off-reservation Indian boarding schools such as Sherman, officials depended on student labor to maintain the school grounds, prepare meals, and clean dormitories and other facilities, to name a few. Although student labor allowed the school to keep its costs down, it also provided students with skills that would be useful for them when they returned to their communities or relocated to nearby towns. Marsah recalled that school officials at Sherman taught the girls a "lot about housekeeping," cooking, and sewing. Some of the girls wanted to become professional cooks, and so school officials had them work in the school kitchen where they prepared large quantities of food for their peers, teachers, and other administrators. "They did a lot of cooking for the employees," she remembered, and they cooked throughout the year, including during the "holidays" or whenever they had "extra time."

In addition to encountering new kinds of foods at Sherman, Hopi students of this period often recalled the military structure of the school, and the clothes and western styles of fashion that accompanied it. "During my school year there," Marsah remembered, "we were all in military

uniform, especially on Sundays.” At Sherman, school officials required students to walk in formation and adhere to strict rules intended to foster discipline and order. From a Western perspective, Hopi children such as Marsah had come from a society that did not value discipline, where parents had or enforced few rules and instead gave them freedom to explore and play. However, the military feel of the school reflected nothing of that, as Creek historian Donald L. Fixico explains: “At many schools, students wore cadet wool uniforms, marching to class at the ringing of a bell or at a teacher’s command like the Citadel or U.S. Military Academy at West Point” (Fixico, 2013, p. 56). At Sherman, “The boys wear military uniforms of blue,” the *Los Angeles Times* once observed, “and the girls white middies and skirts” (“*School for Americans*,” 1923). Similar to practices found in the U.S. military, male students at Sherman also held various ranks according to their seniority and past accomplishments. Many Hopi students such as Samuel Shingoitewa took great pride in their “stripes,” but he and others realized that an infraction of the rules could result in demerits or a demotion of rank.

This happened to Samuel toward the end of his time at Sherman in the 1920s. According to a conversation I had with his daughter, Gayle Shingoitewa-Honanie, Samuel had gotten himself into trouble at the school and officials separated him from the other students for a period of time. When Sherman officials determined that Samuel was guilty of breaking one or more of the school policies, they planned to punish him by “taking away his stripes.” Samuel had worked hard to earn his rank, and he was heartbroken to learn of the school’s intentions. Not wanting to be humiliated in front of his peers or teachers, and upset by what he believed to be unfair and harsh treatment, Samuel decided to leave. Demonstrating great agency, and a determination to set his own course in life, Samuel found his way to the nearby town of San Bernardino and waited. Once there, he studied which trains arrived and departed, and when the time was right he hitched a ride as a stowaway and headed east, eventually making his way back home. Recalling runaways at Sherman, Marsah noted that few if any Hopi girls ran away during her time at the school. But the “boys,” she remembered, “would run away . . . and they would get a whipping a lot, a bad whipping.” Of course, Hopi boys were not the only ones to run away from an Indian school. As Ojibwe historian Brenda J. Child once observed: “For many Indian children who lived and worked at boarding schools, often enduring many unhappy years before they saw their homes and families, running away became a common occurrence, indeed even a universal

threat that united boarding school students throughout the decades” (Child, 2000, p. 6).

While I was listening to Marsah talk about Hopi runaways, I thought about my early research on Tawaquaptewa and those Hopi youth who went to Sherman with him beginning in 1906. During this time, Tawaquaptewa continued in his role as Kikmongwi over the other Hopi students. He was their elder in residence, and he regularly encouraged them to do their best and make the most of their time away from home. Hopi students never wavered in respect toward their kikmongwi. They looked to him for guidance and would not disrespect his presence or role as an elder by fleeing the school. As a result, none of the nearly seventy Hopi students at the school attempted to run away. But when he returned to Orayvi after his term expired, Tawaquaptewa took a large source of Hopi accountability with him. In the absence of this authority, Hopi students’ commitment to the school lessened, and some Hopi youth began leaving Sherman without permission. This resulted in administrators referring to them as “deserters,” a derogatory term U.S. officials used to describe soldiers who abandoned their military posts (Child, 2000, p. 7).

While reflecting the regimented feel of the nation’s military bases (Coleman, 1993, pp. 87–88), the school incorporated other aspects of military structure that had more positive appeal to Marsah and the other Hopi students. One of these aspects included the school’s marching band. Music historian Melissa D. Parkhurst once observed that administrators initially used marching bands at off-reservation Indian boarding schools to “bring order and discipline to the seemingly chaotic, undisciplined lives of their young charges” (Parkhurst, 2014, p. 34). In the 1920s, officials at Sherman regularly called on the school band to provide music for all kinds of occasions, including sporting events, convocation services, and the ritual Sunday morning roll call. Remembering these roll calls, and the music and marching that accompanied them, Marsah remarked, “It’s the marching that really was impressing,” she said. Marsah never forgot about how much she enjoyed listening to the school’s marching band. Years after returning home from Sherman, Marsah purchased for her husband vinyl records of the U.S. military band. The recordings brought her back to her school days. “Now . . . I have the army songs that they used to march to,” she noted, “and one of [the records] were Sherman [songs] that the band would play.” Recalling one of her Hopi peers at Sherman who played in the marching band, Marsah remarked: “he played the flute and one of the march pieces

has that little flute [trill in it]. . . . There's a lot of things that I like to hear again, but oh, those pieces are so priceless!"

Marsah's appreciation for music went beyond simply listening to the school's marching band. While at Sherman, she joined the girls' choir and performed for her school and the larger Riverside community. "We had a big choir," she recalled, and a smaller one known as the 'Quartet Girls.'" Officials at Sherman used both choirs to showcase the school, and to highlight the musical abilities of their students. Marsah remembered singing on Easter and Christmas Day at local Protestant churches and other venues. When the choir sang at churches, they regularly traveled with at least some members of the school orchestra. For example, in May 1924, Reverend Otto S. Russell of the First Baptist Church in Santa Ana, California, hosted the school's choir and orchestra for an evening service on Mother's Day. "Twenty or more students from Sherman Institute will be in our evening service," an announcement read in the *Santa Ana Register*, "and will give us a fine program" (First Baptist Church, 1924).

Although choir teachers at Sherman often emphasized Christian or sacred music, they also encouraged the girls to learn and sing so-called Indian songs that would appeal to and garner praise from predominantly white audiences. One of these songs was a children's poem put to music called "Little Papoose." Written in 1894 by N. T. Kell, "Little Papoose" had become popular in Southern California beginning in 1906 when the Empire City Quartet debuted the song at the Orpheum Theater in Burbank, California (Press club plans, 1906). Nearly twenty years later, "Little Papoose" remained popular in the region and students at Sherman eagerly performed this song at various venues in the Riverside area: "We had an Indian song that our music teacher had given us," Marsah noted, "that we sang at [a] big [movie] theater in Riverside." In her history on Sherman Institute and Sherman Indian High School, Diana Meyers Bahr once remarked that as the "public became more aware" of Sherman, "the relationship between the Riverside community and the school grew stronger" (Bahr, 2014, p. 19). Few things could have bonded the relationship between students and the community more than music and the performances that accompanied it.

### **Film Screenings**

Not long after I visited Marsah, the producers returned to California and began editing her interview for the film. By November 2006, Allan Holzman and the film producers completed a first cut of the documen-

tary, which I titled *Beyond the Mesas*. We thought it was important and appropriate to have the first screening out at Hopi. That same month, with the help of HCPO, we screened the film at the Bacavi Day School on a Tuesday night. Fifty or so people showed up. At times during the showing, people pointed at some of the Sherman yearbook photographs that we included in the film. When the screening was over, the crowd was silent. After some prodding by Stewart Koyiyumtewa, people began to talk. They commented mostly about the old photographs. Some recognized their grandmothers or grandfathers in the pictures, while others recognized themselves.

The next evening, Hopi historian Lomayumtewa C. Ishii and the Applied Indigenous Studies Department at Northern Arizona University hosted a large screening in the Cline Library Assembly Hall. Marsah and other members of the Balenquah family made the trip to attend the event. After the film had finished, a panel of Hopi individuals, myself included, offered brief comments about the film and answered questions from the audience. A well-known Navajo photographer, Sam Minkler, appreciated how the producers worked with the HCPO and the Hopi community in their use of photographs. A Hopi woman inquired why there were no women represented on the panel. And a graduate student asked why we did not include younger Hopis in the documentary, but instead chose to feature Hopis of an older generation. His question was important. When the producers conducted interviews on the reservation, we had a limited budget and a short period of time to film. We wanted to capture the stories of Hopis of an older generation who may not be with us in the near future.

A day after the screening, Marsah invited me back to Paaqavi to show the film at her home. She also invited several members of her family and made a nice dinner of traditional Hopi food. We tacked a white bed sheet on a wall for a screen, and as I set up my computer and projector, people gathered in the living room to wait for the film to start. Marsah made popcorn for the showing, which made everyone happy, especially her great grandchildren who munched on the savory snack with delight. As the documentary played, I occasionally looked back at Marsah to see her response. She seemed very pleased with the film, and her family beamed with pride every time their beloved So'o (grandmother) appeared on the "big screen." Over the years, I screened this film at universities across the United States, and it has been aired regularly on PBS. But the showing at Marsah's home will always remain special to me, for I had helped to create something meaningful to her family and for many other people back home.

## Conclusion

Although I have often referred to Marsah as the “star” of our film, the majority of her interview never made it into the documentary. I also did not include much of it in my dissertation at UCR. I often wonder why this was so. As a young history graduate student, I immersed myself in archival documents, spending considerable time at the Sherman Indian Museum and the National Archives in Laguna Niguel, California. I was comfortable and confident in how I used and analyzed written sources, such as student records and newspaper clippings, but I think I was less comfortable with oral histories. I frequently pulled a quote or two from the interviews to support a claim, but I did not analyze them in any significant way. This, however, was not an entirely negative outcome.

Sometimes interviews are best left untouched for a while, until a young researcher has a more informed perspective on life and his or her field of study. Even though I published very little scholarship using the interviews, I find opportunities to use them in other ways. Occasionally, I show the interview to my students. It always inspires discussions about Marsah’s experiences, the role of interviews in historical projects, and the importance of the Native voice. Some students have remarked about Marsah’s resilience in life, how she seemed to have such positive memories of her school experience, while others have commented on her inner strength and grateful attitude. “My life was [a] happy life,” Marsah says at the end of the interview, “the good Lord had given me a long life [and] so I’m really glad.”

Hopi students such as Marsah learned to adapt at off-reservation Indian boarding schools. They learned to navigate life beyond their mesas in ways that ultimately proved useful to them and their village communities. Beginning with those Hopi youth who accompanied Tawaquaptewa to Sherman in 1906, the Hopi travelers of the 1920s and early 1930s set out on an adventure that had various layers of meaning for the Hopi people. For some Hopi students such as Marsah and Grandpa Victor, their time at Sherman allowed them to experience a different way of living in the “land of oranges,” while others learned to embrace and overcome their apprehensions and fears to create a new experience far from home. As Creek scholar K. Tsianina Lomawaima keenly observes: “Many students, interacting with each other and with school staff, created and sustained something new, a school culture that students imbued with meaning, and which in turn gave meaning back to generations of students” (Lomawaima, K., 1994, p. 164).

My journey in learning about the Hopi boarding school experience has been “imbued with meaning” for me. It has been several years since I first talked with Cliff in his office at UCR. Now and then I wonder where I would be in life if I had not accepted his offer to study with him. Would I be teaching somewhere at a university or college on Fichte and German nationalism? Would my work be meaningful to people back home? I think I know the answer to this question, and it is one that reminds me of the importance of providing research that is useful for tribal communities. I feel a responsibility to my own people, to use my formal education and current position to help the next generation of Hopis as they pursue college and graduate school off the reservation. My journey on this path, however, began long before I went to college or had that initial conversation with Cliff. It started when I was a child, when my grandmother first told me stories about her father, and about his experiences at the Indian school in Riverside. Her stories became the foundation that I would build my career upon, and the lens through which I would understand my people’s history and make it meaningful to my family and the larger Hopi community.

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#### NOTE

At the University of Illinois, faculty are fortunate to work with students as part of the University Housing Research Initiative Program. A special thanks to my undergraduate research assistants Logan Mullins and Deonte Harris for their help on this essay. I also thank M. Lydia Khuri, coordinator of the Research Initiative Program, for making faculty-student collaborations possible. I am grateful for helpful feedback from Brianna Theobald, Clifford E. Trafzer, Kevin Whalen, John McKinn, four anonymous external reviewers, and the *JAIE* editors. Finally, I extend a heartfelt “Kwakwhá” to Marsah Balenquah and her family for welcoming me into their home and talking with me about their school days.

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