

OVERVIEW

Wahpeton Indian School is, like the reservations, Federal trust property, but it is unlike the reservations in the manner of its establishment, and in the fact that it is not set aside for the use of a single group. Mary Jane Schneider, *North Dakota Indians: An Introduction* p. 155.

An Act of Congress created the Wahpeton Indian School in 1904. Senator Porter J. McCumber introduced Senate Bill Number 197, titled To Establish an Indian Agricultural School at or Near the City of Wahpeton, In the State of North Dakota. The bill provided for an appropriation of \$100,000, the purchase of a suitable site, farmland and livestock, and the erection of buildings. The senator also figured prominently in the "Ten-Cent Treaty" or McCumber Agreement of 1892, whereby the Turtle Mountain Indians were divested of some ten million acres of land for a mere ten cents an acre. Education was a treaty provision since early in the history of federal-Indian policy.

Wahpeton Indian School operated for many years as a year-round program, which emphasized farming, vocational, and domestic skills for boys and girls in grades one through nine. A half day instruction was provided with the remainder spent in chores to support the school. The Merriam Report in 1928 caused sweeping reforms in Indian Education and initiated the funding of day schools on the reservation so that children would not have to leave their families to go to school. In 1947, the school's dairy herd was transferred to other Bureau of Indian Affairs installations and a regular academic program replaced the agricultural program. In the next four decades, all but 50 of the school's original 300-plus acres were acquired by local concerns. College and high school sporting complexes and housing development now occupy the school's former fields and pastures. New construction replaced the school's original classroom, dormitories, dining hall, gymnasium and outbuildings from 1961 to 1971. By this time, reservation school systems were effectively serving most Native American children in their home communities. A large population of students continued to need boarding school placement, however.

The school at Wahpeton was the last government-established boarding school to open, and one of the last to remain in operation. The closure of Indian boarding schools in other parts of the country brought new populations of students from states as far away as Arizona and Utah.

In 1993 the Indian School converted to tribally-controlled grant status under Public Law 100-97 (Indian Education Act of 1988) and the new name Circle of Nations was adopted to acknowledge tribal diversity. The usual major change process was initiated with new administrations following the school's conversion to tribal grant status.

Ninety years after the Wahpeton Indian School was created, another Congressional Act designated it as a "therapeutic model demonstration project." This was basically an un-funded mandate which created misconceptions. (The school is funded for education program only--not medical or treatment needs.) Public Law 103-382 of 1994 simply recognized that typical students came to an Indian boarding school with special needs. Section 566 of the law stated its purpose as "to provide a program, based on an annual written plan, linking clinicians, counselors, and mental health professionals with academic program personnel in a culturally sensitive residential program tailored to the particular needs of Indian students." The law (Improving America's Schools) authorized programs, staffing, and services for a concept that had evolved in Indian education during the 1980's as a response to the changing student profile. Funding for the concept did not materialize until SY 2002-03, and it ended in 2005.

Circle of Nations School celebrated its Centennial year of operations in 2008. The school has had a positive impact on many tribal communities over the course of one hundred years. The campus has changed dramatically with new buildings and landscaping where the old buildings used to be. Many visitors have come by and made positive comments about the new campus. The newly-constructed Keeble Dormitory can house 152 students in beautiful modern two-bedroom suites. Each room has two beds and a shared bathroom. Honor Wing has additional incentives, comforts and conveniences. The school has been an important contributor to the civic structure, cultural heritage and economy of Wahpeton, North Dakota.

Also in 2008, the President of the United States awarded a posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor to Woodrow Wilson Keeble (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), an alumnus and employee of the Wahpeton Indian School. Keeble served in WWII and Korea "above and beyond the call of duty." He was twice recommended for the Medal of Honor but both times the paperwork was lost and the time limit expired. The Medal of Honor was finally awarded to Woody after many years of dedicated efforts by supporters, more than 20 years after his death. He was inducted into the North Dakota Roughrider Hall of Fame in the summer of 2008. His portrait and plaque can be seen at the state capitol building in Bismarck. You can see a video on the CNS website titled "Eagle Feather" which pays homage to a true American hero. We are proud to have named our new dormitory in his honor.