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## Authors
Schroedel, Jean Reith
Rogers, Melissa
Headington, Edward

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# Indian Boarding Schools for the Gain of White Settlers:
## Case Study of Rapid City Indian School

*Jean Reith Schroedel, Melissa Rogers, and Edward Headington*

Over the past thirty years, there has been a growing body of research on Indian boarding schools. Researchers using the settler colonial framework as developed by Wolfe and others[1] have shown that the primary purpose of the federal government's Indian boarding school policy was not to provide education to Native children,[2] but to facilitate the dispossession of Native lands.[3] The goal was for reservation lands to become "surplus" as tribal members adopted the Euro-American methods of farming taught in Indian schools.[4] As part of that effort, the boarding schools were required to teach children that the 1887 Dawes Act, its amendments, and the allotment of tribal lands—a policy that resulted in a massive transfer of land to white settlers—was a benefit to their communities.[5] Scholars have focused on giving voice to the Native perspective on boarding schools. Drawing upon archived oral histories, interviews with former students, and student-parent letters, these researchers highlight Native agency, resistance, and community building.[6]

Although nearly all the 417 federally supported boarding schools were established on tribal lands, there was a short stretch of time starting in the 1880s when the federal government switched to building off-reservation boarding schools in settler communities whose residents had only recently been engaged in bloody warfare against Native nations. The creation and continuing presence of government-run Indian boarding schools in those communities is a paradox: what led white settlers to allow this type of Native presence in their communities? This case study of the Rapid City Indian School is the first in-depth examination of the reasons why white business and political elites in the region led a concerted campaign to gain an Indian school, supported it for decades, then fought against efforts to close the school and, finally, found ways for non-Native entities to benefit from its closure through land transfers. We chronicle those developments from 1886 to the present period. The extended time coverage is appropriate because, as scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn notes, "Settler colonialism

should be seen not as an event but as an ongoing structure. The logic, tenets, and identities engendered by settler colonialism persist and continue to shape gender, class, and sexual formations to the present."[7]

The number of government-run boarding schools expanded dramatically between 1880 and 1900. According to Department of the Interior figures, there were 227 federally funded Indian boarding schools, serving more than 20,000 students in 1900.[8] The largest number of schools was in Oklahoma, which had many schools dating back to the Indian relocation era in the 1830s. The second largest number (twenty-five) was in South Dakota, most of which were opened in the 1880s and 1890s with students primarily drawn from the Oceti Sakowin Nation.[9] While most of these schools were located on reservations, the US Indian Service (now known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs) also supported the creation of off-reservation schools, with the largest expansion of off-reservation schools occurring under Thomas Morgan, who became Indian affairs commissioner in 1889.[10]

## A Case Study of Rapid City

Founded in 1898, the Rapid City Indian School (RCIS) was one of four off-reservation schools in South Dakota and among twenty-seven government-run off-reservation boarding schools. These institutions occupied an intermediate space—less tied to Native communities than reservation schools, yet not as distant as places like the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania—so Native students and families were visible within Rapid City. The only academic study of the RCIS is Scott Riney's book, which is explicitly modeled on Lomawaima's thematic study of the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School.[11] Our case study differs in that its focus is solely on the political economy of the RCIS and traces this aspect of the school over a long historical period, showing how the long arc of settler colonialism stretches from 1886 to 2025. As such, it contributes to existing settler colonialism accounts of Indian boarding schools.

We use a focused case study to explain the "how" and "why" of events in an underexplored context and to generate hypotheses.[12] In the RCIS case, local leaders pursued the school for financial gain, a motive that shaped decisions from siting to the later disposal of its lands. Those decisions were enabled by white economic and political elites, often with support from Indian affairs officials. Although centered on one community, the pattern is broader: western settler towns commonly courted off-reservation schools, and disputes over Indian land recur across US history.[13]

Our analysis draws on primary and secondary sources, especially newspaper archives from the mid-1880s that reveal elite priorities, trace the business community's role in establishing RCIS and selecting its site, and show how economic aims, including postclosure land transfers, were advanced through congressional politics.

### *The Historical Context*

Established soon after the end of armed conflict with the Lakota and their Cheyenne allies, the Rapid City Indian School stood on former lands of the Lakota. The 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie had recognized extensive Lakota territory, including the Black

Hills. After gold was found there in 1874, the United States demanded cession; the Lakota refused. Although the Seventh Cavalry suffered a major defeat at the Battle of Greasy Grass/Little Bighorn,[14] the US ultimately prevailed by destroying the bison herds that sustained Plains peoples.[15] Many mark the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre as the end of the Indian Wars.[16] In this period, South Dakota newspapers even ran editorials calling for extermination.[17]

The end of the Indian Wars ushered in the late period of homesteading, when government land policy was aimed at the permanent dispossession of Indigenous lands by recruiting an influx of settlers to claim public land that had been gained through legally questionable means.[18] The seizure of the Black Hills region was an early case of the federal government using extremely dubious means to gain control of the land and making it a fait accompli by granting title to the overwhelming numbers of white settlers occupying it.[19] The taking of the Black Hills and the forced removal of Native people was accomplished through legally suspect means, but its effect, as Riney noted, was "trainloads of non-Indian settlers, most of them white, pour[ing] into the region to take advantage of land offerings. For these people, South Dakota's west river country was 'the last great frontier.'"[20]

## Bringing an Indian School to Rapid City

Most histories of the RCIS begin with federal land purchases in 1896–97 or the school's 1898 opening, but the story starts earlier.[21] Despite Rapid City's reputation as "Racist City," local leaders, officials, and the press spent more than a decade—beginning soon after Little Bighorn—in a proschool campaign, even in a community that venerated Custer. They saw an Indian boarding school as an engine of growth and a hedge against downturns, and economic gain drove decisions about school lands—from acquisition to use to divestment.

Founded in 1876 by "discouraged gold prospectors" on Rapid Creek, Rapid City quickly branded itself the "Gateway to the Black Hills," supplying mining camps.[22] Recognizing mining's boom–bust cycle and facing poor agricultural prospects due to limited water, poor soil, and rough terrain,[23] city elites sought diversification through education—establishing the Dakota School of Mines in 1885 and pursuing an Indian school.[24]

The business community's campaign for an Indian boarding school can be traced through an abundance of articles in the two local newspapers.[25] There are no records identifying the exact date when the Board of Trade decided to pursue an Indian boarding school, but on May 28, 1886, identical and unsigned articles appeared in the *Rapid City Daily Journal* (page 2) and the *Black Hills Weekly Journal* (page 1), stating the following:

> There is a prospect that, by extending a little encouragement, Rapid City may secure the establishment of an Indian school at this place. A gentleman will visit Rapid City with this end in view later in the season. There is a growing impression that the Indians should not be sent east to be educated. The location of Rapid City commends it as the site of such an educational institution, and we have no doubt

her people will not be slow to do whatever is reasonable and proper to secure it when the time for action in that direction arrives.

In 1888, Rapid City papers ran forty-three favorable pieces (twenty-six in the *Daily Journal*, seventeen in the *Weekly Journal*) on city and Board of Trade efforts to secure an Episcopal boarding school. Three April front-page stories reported Bishop William Hobart Hare's interest, contingent on $3,000 in local support.[26] By June, he had chosen a site with "commanding views."[27] By late August, the funds were raised.[28] Construction was estimated at $15,000, with two-thirds of contracts expected locally; seventy-two articles tracked the project. By October 1890, the building was ready—but it never opened.

There are three interconnected reasons involving both bureaucratic and local politics that explain why the just-completed three-story building was never used as an Indian school. First, the Indian Service stopped giving out contracts to churches for Indian education.[29] A second and related reason was that the Indian Service decided Indian schools needed to emphasize "practical education."[30] According to O. H. Parker, supervisor of Indian education for the Department of the Interior, the Rapid City site was suitable for "denominational education," but an industrial school needed to have at least another 160 acres for farm and craft work.[31] Finally, people living nearby were opposed to having the school in their neighborhood.[32]

## *The Campaign for a Government School*

Over the next several years, the business community shifted their focus toward getting a government-run school. A committee appointed by the Board of Trade evaluated potential industrial school sites, including a tract that O. H. Parker favored.[33] There was extensive positive coverage in the local press (fifty favorable articles in 1893 alone). Economic benefits to the city were listed as including "employment to a large number of mechanics and trade for the local merchants"[34] as well as the teachers and their families becoming "a welcome addition to society."[35]

After South Dakota gained statehood in 1889, its members of Congress vigorously pursued Indian school funding. Senator Richard F. Pettigrew introduced his first bill (S. 697) to build Indian schools in Rapid City and Chamberlain on December 4, 1891. While the newspaper articles stressed that the congressional delegation wanted an Indian school for economic reasons, Senator Pettigrew made a different argument when speaking to his Senate colleagues. In his capacity as a reporting member of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Senator Pettigrew stated the following:

> [T]here are 1,400 Indian children in South Dakota residing upon reservations for which no school facilities have been furnished, yet these Indians by act of Congress will soon become citizens of the United States and voters in the State of South Dakota. For this reason, Congress owes it to the people of South Dakota to provide a means for educating every Indian child.[36]

After S. 697 passed in 1892 with $40,000 appropriated for the Rapid City school, Senator Pettigrew grew increasingly upset with Secretary of the Interior John Willock Noble's failure to secure a site.[37] Representative John A. Pickler, in a telegram to the head of the Board of Trade, urged "more hard work on the part of all to offset the manifest opposition of some of the heads of the bureaus of the department to the establishment of new schools in the western country."[38] Representative William V. Lucas reported Indian Service opponents had "pigeonholed" the matter.[39] One week later, the *Black Hills Weekly Journal* stated that

> Steps should be taken by the people of this city to urge the Indian bureau to take up the matter of the Indian school in this place. . . . It is hoped that Congressman Lucas will be able to get the matter attended to so that work may begin in the near future. There is no good reason why it should not receive attention at once.[40]

In December, Mayor Chauncey L. Wood, Representative Lucas, and Senator Pettigrew lobbied the administration without success.[41] In 1894, Congress passed an appropriations bill that instructed the secretary of the interior to move forward with the building of Indian schools in Rapid City and Chamberlain.[42] But things continued to drag on until June 7, 1897, when Congress appropriated funds "for support and education [of] 100 Indian pupils, Rapid City, South Dakota. . . ."[43] This delay was likely due to Commissioner of Indian Affairs William A. Jones' opposition to off-reservation boarding schools.[44]

In early fall, Representative Robert J. Gamble visited the site that O. H. Parker vetted in 1893.[45] The 160-acre site was in a rural area, approximately 2.5 miles west of Rapid City and adjacent to Pennington County's "poor farm," which ensured NIMBYism would not be a factor. The land belonged to George P. Bennett, a local merchant, dairyman, and Republican Party stalwart.[46] Roughly two-thirds of the original Rapid City Indian School campus was land purchased from Bennett.[47]

## *Informing the Public of Benefits*

Throughout 1897 and 1898, the newspapers kept readers well informed—thirty-seven articles in 1897 and fifty-nine articles in 1898—about the steps being taken to build the Indian school, emphasizing local gains. Although an Iowa firm was hired to be the general contractor, most of the contracts for materials, excavation, masonry, and irrigation went to local firms. As noted in a *Rapid City Daily Journal* article, "It will thus be seen that Rapid City contractors have been most fortunate in securing all the contracts thus far. . . ."[48] Coverage also touted longer-term benefits: merchants were projected to gain $50,000 from reservation families visiting students, and 518 identical booster pieces linked the school to investment and growth.[49] Prior to the 1898 election, the Republican Party ran campaign articles, citing their support for the Indian school and claiming that fusion candidates (alliances between Populist and Democratic parties) had done nothing to bring the school to Rapid City.[50]

When the first students, Oscar, ten, and Nora Ammiott, twelve, arrived in September 1898, the school consisted of four brick buildings: a three-story building

that included school rooms, dining room, workrooms, and sleeping rooms—8,640 square feet in total—and a hospital, barn, and workshop. The total cost of construction was $35,000, much of which went to local businesses. The projected enrollment was eighty students with a staff of ten.[51] Across hundreds of articles, the message was clear: the school promised contracts, jobs, and expanded markets—appealing in a state hard hit by the 1893 downturn, where farmers carried the highest mortgage debt rate in the country.[52]

While it is important to consider what was covered in the newspapers, it is also worth considering what was not deemed worth mentioning. During the entire 1886–98 period, only one article pointed out a potential downside to having an Indian school—the brief mention of neighborhood opposition to the (never opened) Episcopal school. Their lobbying contributed to the school being established outside of the city and adjacent to the poor farm. This meant that two "undesirable" populations (i.e., poor folks and Indians) were clustered together and segregated from the city center.[53] Also, not a single story mentioned the ways that an Indian school might benefit Native children, nor was there any referencing Pettigrew's point to Congress about educating Native children so they can take their places as citizens and voters in South Dakota.

## The Political Economy of the Rapid City Indian School, 1898–1934

The Rapid City Indian School was in near continuous operation from September 1898 to June 1934. Throughout most of its history, the school operated at close to capacity and occasionally overcapacity.[54] At the time of its opening, the federal government allocated $167 per annum for each student.[55] Despite students generally having very little money, Rapid City Indian School (RCIS) students spent more than $12,000 annually at local businesses.[56] Every year, the school spent roughly $30,000 on purchases of groceries, fuel, and light from local businesses, and staff members spent much of their pay—roughly $50,000 per year—in Rapid City.[57]

The school was initially designed to have an enrollment of approximately 100 students, but the enrollment was allowed to grow, reaching nearly 350 just prior to its closure. In general, student enrollment growth led to increases in the number of employees. There were only ten staff members when the school opened, but that number had increased slightly to twelve in 1901. By 1904, the school's enrollment had ticked up to nearly 250, and the staff had grown to twenty-five.[58] Twenty years later, the enrollment had reached 325, and the staff had grown to thirty-seven.[59]

The school provided many tangible economic benefits to Rapid City businesses. Over the twenty-year period from 1899 to 1919, construction contracts and subcontracts were described almost every year in the local newspapers. Some contracts were relatively small, such as those for providing hardware, stone, masonry, and sidewalks, but others were for major construction projects—building dormitories, laundry, gymnasium, barn, and an industrial building, and putting in a new water system,

plumbing, gas works, and central heating.[60] There were also contracts for remodeling and repairing existing buildings, and contracts for wood and coal.[61]

Although the school's professional staff members were civil service employees hired by the Indian Service, there were many help-wanted advertisements in the *Rapid City Daily Journal* for cooks, bakers, "girls for housework," laundresses, dining room girls, and painters. Even though low-skilled women wage earners typically earned $6.00 per week or approximately $300 per year,[62] the RCIS was advertising to hire a cook for $500 per year in 1903.[63] Smaller businesses also did RCIS-related advertising. By 1903, local businesses had started advertising silver souvenir Indian school spoons and plaques with pictures of the RCIS.[64] Advertisements for transport, initially via hacks and later by taxi to the Indian school, began to appear in 1907.[65]

By 1910, the Black Hills had become a tourist attraction. Much of the marketing to tourists touted the nearby Indian school as an important attraction, building off the popularity of Wild West shows.[66] Efforts by the Commercial Club in 1915 and 1916 culminated in Pennington County making major improvements to the road between Rapid City and the Indian school to make it more accessible for tourists.[67] In 1922, the county commissioners and the Commercial Club began raising funds to resurface the road between the RCIS and the Tourist Park, with improvements completed in 1923.[68] Women's clubs from across the country traveled to Rapid City to tour the RCIS in the 1920s and early 1930s.[69] In 1931, Corinna Smith of the Indian Welfare Department of the General Federation of Women's Clubs toured the RCIS and then met with members of the Rapid City Indian Welfare Association.[70]

Throughout the entire history of the RCIS, political candidates from both political parties sought to highlight their support for the RCIS when running for election. While this activity was most pronounced during the long drive to establish the school, it continued to be viewed as an important campaign issue. In 1908, the *Rapid City Daily Journal* published an editorial endorsing the reelection of Senator Alfred B. Kittredge because of his support for the school.[71] In 1922, Senator Peter Norbeck and Representative William Williamson ran political advertising touting their effectiveness in getting funds for a new dormitory. Williamson again touted his support in his 1924 and 1930 reelection campaigns.[72] After the school was scheduled to be closed, Republicans ran a piece in the newspaper criticizing Democratic representative Theo Werner for his failure to prevent the closure.[73]

## The Push for a Tuberculosis Sanitarium

The RCIS had been an extremely successful school from the perspective of the Indian Service, which made the Indian affairs commissioner's decision in 1928 to close the school surprising. The business community and political leaders fought to keep the school open.[74] Senator William McMaster offered an amendment worth $300,000 to the Department of the Interior appropriation bill to build a tuberculosis sanitarium for Native children.[75] His intent was to expand the RCIS to include facilities for the tubercular children, not for the existing school to be replaced.[76] The Chamber of Commerce immediately mobilized to stop the conversion, citing the school's high level

of support among Indian parents.[77] They sent telegrams to the South Dakota congressional delegation, asking them to pressure Indian Affairs to halt the closure.[78]

## *The Chamber of Commerce and Native Leaders Mobilize*

An inspector from the Bureau of Indian Affairs assured the Chamber of Commerce that a proposed sanitarium would be "three times larger" than the school, but the chamber remained opposed.[79] RCIS leaders formed a citizens' committee whose favorable evaluation drew praise from the bureau, yet three weeks later, they announced the school would close at year's end.[80] The chamber rallied South Dakota's congressional delegation and tribal leaders, but a planned meeting with the interior secretary was abruptly canceled. With closure set for July 1, Senators Norbeck and McMaster and Representative Williamson pressed the (Republican-led) Bureau of Indian Affairs to reverse course and prepared legislation.[81]

The Council of the Seven Great Sioux Tribes had communicated their strong support for the school to remain open and were angered by the decision to close the school. Chairman Robert High Eagle stated, "If the government wants a sanitarium, let it build one here. There is plenty of room, but the Indian school is a necessity. . . ."[82] The support from some within the Native community is understandable, given that many families, facing extreme poverty during the Great Depression, preferred to have their children at the RCIS because they were provided with adequate food, shelter, and clothing.[83] At this time, roughly two-thirds of Native people in the country were either landless or had land that could not provide subsistence.[84] The RCIS was still closed. South Dakota's delegation then succeeded in getting a bill passed that mandated restoration; the school reopened in September 1930 with 270 students.[85]

## *The Closure of the Rapid City Indian School*

The next couple of years at the Indian school were successful ones in terms of enrollment, but Idaho representative Burton L. French, chair of the Subcommittee on Interior Appropriations, continued to push for the RCIS to be closed: "We are recommending the elimination of the Rapid City school . . . because we believe the children can be more economically and better cared for in the reservation schools or in the public schools near their homes. It is part of a program to reduce the overhead of the Indian Service."[86]

In early 1933, rumors of Indian school closures began circulating in Rapid City.[87] The newly appointed commissioner of Indian affairs, John Collier, announced in May 1933 that RCIS would close at the end of the academic year, with students transferred to local public schools.[88] At the meeting of the Great Plains Congress in March 1934, Collier reiterated his support for reservation schools and the need for cost savings, stating that in the upcoming year, the Indian bureau's budget would be $12 million lower than the previous year.[89] According to the *Rapid City Daily Journal*, Lakota delegates told Collier that they were opposed to the closure of the school, but there is no record of this in the official minutes of the meeting, which suggests a private communication.[90]

In May, Collier argued the closure would generate significant cost savings and reduce racial segregation in education. The Chamber of Commerce argued that the negative impact on Rapid City outweighed the benefits accruing to the federal government. Their argument had three parts—the closure would undermine local businesses, deprive the city of an important asset, and deny education to students.[91]

Most of the public discussion focused on problems associated with the transfer of Native students to public schools. The financial cost, according to Commissioner Collier, would be offset by federal government subsidies, so opponents focused on the purported inability of Native children to compete with white students.[92] Representative Theo Werner stated that distance and poor road quality would make it impossible for many Native children to attend local public schools.[93] Newly elected Democratic governor Tom Berry, along with Democratic senator William Bulow and Representative Werner, met with Collier to reverse the decision.[94] While Democratic elected officials opposed the closure, Republican senator Peter Norbeck, who had a long history of citing support for the Indian school in his election campaigns, did not fight the closure; instead, he lobbied for federal dollars to be transferred into building a tuberculosis sanitarium in the city.[95] In March 1934, delegates from twenty tribes arrived in Rapid City for the Great Plains Congress, where they met with Commissioner Collier and reiterated their opposition to the closure of the school.[96] Regardless, the school shut down on July 1, 1934.[97]

## The Allocation of Indian School Land

There had been very little change to the school grounds since 1909, but two proposed reductions to the school's 1,370 acres merit examination because they show the willingness of the Indian Service to accede to non-Native groups. In 1911, city leaders accompanied the head of a military school on a visit to RCIS. The military school wished to purchase a twenty-acre site to establish a Rapid City branch on the RCIS land. Superintendent Jesse F. House thought the Indian Service would respond favorably to such a request from city leaders.[98] The military school land deal fell through, but it foreshadowed a land swap in 1932–33.

In 1924, the National Guard began conducting its yearly summer training on a forty-acre tract of Indian school land.[99] The National Guard generated $50,000 to $100,000 worth of business annually.[100] In 1932, local officials and the National Guard proposed a deal that would allow the Guard to gain title to a section of school land for a permanent facility. The proposal was for RCIS to exchange the 84.4 acres wanted by the National Guard for thirty-eight acres of land belonging to the Pennington County poor farm. Representative William Williamson introduced legislation instructing the Department of the Interior to allow the trading of RCIS land for land from the poor farm.[101] The bill passed, and the secretary of the interior approved the exchange in 1933.[102] Local economic and political elites showed their willingness to dispose of RCIS land without factoring into their calculations the needs of Indigenous people.

## *The Early Postclosure Years, 1934–47*

After the school's closure, there were many proposals for how to use the land adjacent to the tuberculosis sanitarium.[103] Grazing land was quickly leased out.[104] Many of the existing buildings were used by state and federal government relief agencies and housing for Civilian Conservation Corps members.[105] Government relief agencies also built plants for canning beef and vegetables, which employed hundreds, and canned food for people on relief.[106] The regional headquarters of the federal soil conservation agency was moved to an Indian school building,[107] and the West River Historical Society created a temporary museum.[108]

In late 1935, $375,000 was appropriated for construction costs associated with remodeling existing buildings and constructing new ones for the sanitarium,[109] which was touted to help businesses make up for the economic losses incurred by the closure.[110] The Indian Service sent the construction plans to the Chamber of Commerce.[111] A substantial amount of the work went to Rapid City businesses.[112] During the mid-1930s, the surrounding area was undergoing an upgrade with a new sewer line and at least seventeen housing developments.[113]

At every juncture, the interests of Native residents were ignored. In June 1936, five delegates from the Black Hills Indian Council, a group mostly representing Native residents of Rapid City, were slated to meet with Indian affairs commissioner Collier, but he sent a lawyer instead of attending the meeting. The group presented their request that portions of the Indian school land be set aside for housing for local Indians, but got no response.[114] Later in the fall, leaders from the Rosebud, Pine Ridge, Lower Brule, Cheyenne, Crow Creek, Oglala, and Standing Rock tribes passed a resolution calling for the Indian school to be reopened.[115]

In 1938, further discussions took place among city leaders and the Indian Service about longer-term plans for the land. The Sioux Sanitarium superintendent opened bidding for the leases of two additional tracts of land that totaled 440 acres and 160 acres, respectively.[116] City officials also began working on a plan to gain title to land for a recreation park with a golf course, tennis courts, and a swimming pool.[117]

In 1946, Representative Francis Case held two meetings about Indian school land, one with Rapid City elites at the Cosmos Club and a second with the Rapid City Indian Council. At the Cosmos Club meeting, Case stated, "Rapid City has a responsibility to the Indians who are part of our population and a labor source," before saying that finding a place for local Indians to live with appropriate amenities and services was "the right thing to do."[118] At the Rapid City Indian Council meeting, Case reiterated his support for decent places for the local Native population to live, but stopped short of endorsing that Indian school lands be used for this purpose.[119]

## *The Campaign to Gain Title to Land*

In January 1948, E. H. Lighter, president of the Chamber of Commerce, met with Representative Case and Senator Chan Gurney to discuss potential deals, since leases on roughly 1,200 acres of grazing land were expiring. Case and Gurney arranged for

Lighter to meet with Commissioner of Indian Affairs William Zimmerman, who expressed support for Indian school land being made available for public purposes.[120]

On February 2, 1948, city commissioners adopted a resolution that had been crafted by the Chamber of Commerce and called for the city to secure 300 acres of Indian school land for a park. Parties interested in obtaining other sections of land were told to contact the Chamber of Commerce. After consulting with Sioux Sanitarium superintendent B. Sedlacek, city officials, school district officials, Catholic Church leaders, and the National Guard, Lighter prepared a master map laying out the proposed distribution of land.[121] Nothing was included for Native residents. Land for Indian housing was dismissed in a *Rapid City Daily Journal* article that stated the Rapid City Indian School "was never tribal land. . . ."[122]

In March, Representative Case introduced a bill (H.R. 5651) giving the secretary of the interior authority to dispose of RCIS lands. Speaking in favor of the bill, Case stated, "This land is no longer needed for the Indian Service. It is within the city limits of Rapid City or adjacent thereto. . . . This bill provides for its transfer to the city, to the school district, and to the National Guard for public purposes, while protecting the rights of the Indians to a portion of the area for rehabilitation."[123] Senator Gurney was the lead in getting support in the Senate for a companion bill (S. 2238). With slight revisions, the legislation was passed and signed by President Truman. Public Law 80-543 reads as follows:

> **Sec. 1.** That the secretary of the interior is authorized in his discretion to convey without compensation any lands contained in the Sioux Sanitarium Farm at Rapid City, South Dakota, not necessary for the administration and operation of the Sioux Indian Sanitarium, to the city of Rapid City for municipal purposes, or to any public school district for education purposes, or to the State of South Dakota for use of the South Dakota National Guard: provided, that the title to any lands so conveyed shall revert to the United States of America when the land is no longer used for the purposes for which such lands were initially conveyed. The secretary may also in his discretion convey to any church organization for religious purposes, upon receipt of the reasonable value of such lands, any of such lands not conveyed for any of the purposes above named.
>
> **Sec. 2.** The secretary of the interior is also authorized in his discretion to utilize any of the said lands for the rehabilitation of needy Indians, and to exchange any of such lands in or near Rapid City more suitable for this purpose.

The law provided a mechanism for public entities—the city, school district, and the National Guard—to gain at no cost title to Indian school lands, and to hold the lands for as long as the stated public purposes were being carried out. If that was no longer true, the title was to revert to the federal government. The secretary of the interior was also allowed to transfer title of lands to churches to use for "religious purposes" after receiving "reasonable value" payments. There is no reversion clause in the section about church lands, which suggests those properties were not subject to the reversion if properties stopped being used for "religious purposes." The secretary also

could use lands for the "rehabilitation of needy Indians" or approve a land exchange if other lands were better suited for this purpose.

Land for "needy Indians" was not included in the master map laying out the disbursement of lands, shown in figure 1. Aside from Sioux Sanitarium land, the master plan allocated 1,200 acres to different groups. The biggest beneficiaries were the National Guard, with 900 acres, and the city, with 175 acres for parkland. The school district was allocated fifteen acres. Sections were retained for purchase by other churches and religious organizations.[124]

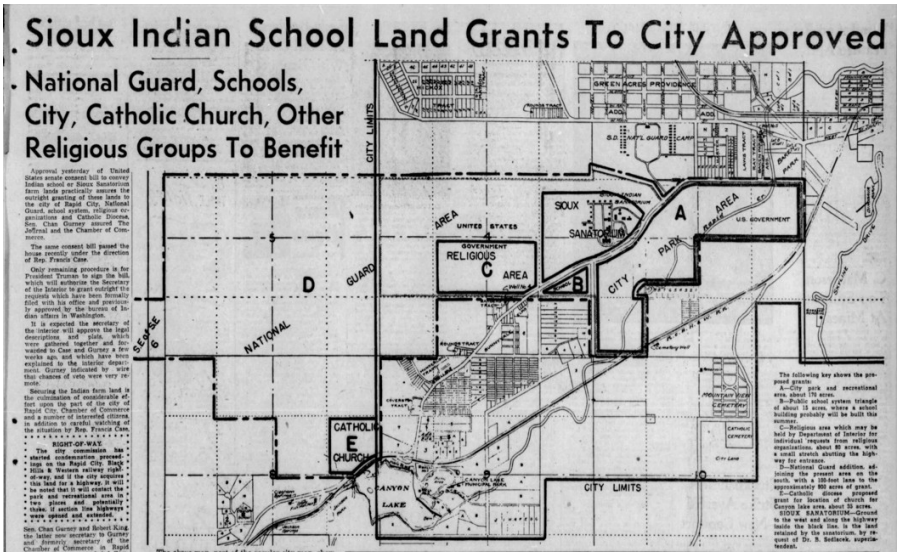


**Figure 1.** *The master map of Indian school land grants.*[125]

The no-fee land transfers allowed the South Dakota National Guard to establish Camp Rapid, the city to build Sioux Park, and the school district to build Canyon Lake Elementary School, West Middle School, and Stevens High School.[126] The Catholic Church's purchase on July 11, 1949 was the first by a religious organization, but within a decade a total of 13 tracts, totaling 183 acres, had been sold to churches.[127]

The requirement that churches make a "reasonable value" payment for properties was not enforced for purchases made before November 29, 1954, when the Department of the Interior sent a letter requiring that prices reflect "fair market value."[128] The per-acre price for the tracts purchased prior to the letter was $24 to $39 per acre, while subsequent purchases had much higher prices, including one that went for $1,076 per acre.[129] But even the higher prices paid after the 1954 ruling were well below market value. We compiled a data set comprising all real estate ads with list prices in the *Rapid City Daily Journal* in 1953. Within the city, which included nearly all the Rapid City Indian School land, the price for lots ranged from $350 to $995 for building lots, and the only commercial lot was priced at $2,750.[130]

Table 1 shows the churches, number of plots, and what occurred with the tracts of land. The total price for the church properties purchased between 1949 and 1958 was $30,500, or an average of $167 per acre.[131] Only the Catholic Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Canyon Lake Methodist Church retained their properties, while the other six sold all or parts of their allotted land.[132]

Table 1. Indian School Land Acquisition by Churches[133]

| Religious Group | Size of Tracts | Current Use of Land |
|---|---|---|
| Catholic Church | 2 plots<br>34.85 acres | Religious purposes |
| Canyon Lake Methodist | 1 plot<br>9.45 acres | Religious purposes |
| Latter-day Saints | 1 plot<br>1.84 acres | Religious purposes |
| Dakota Conference of Wesleyan Methodists | 2 plots<br>22.48 acres | Housing subdivision<br>Church summer camp |
| Wesleyan Methodists Sturgis | 1 plot<br>40 acres | Church summer camp |
| Board of Charities Evangelical Lutheran | 1 plot<br>7.94 acres | Housing subdivision and townhouses |
| Synod of South Dakota Presbyterian | 2 plots<br>12.17 acres | Religious purposes<br>Housing and offices |
| Black Hills Bible School | 1 plot<br>34.1 acres | Housing subdivision, apartments and college |
| American Indian Mission | 2 plots<br>8.42 acres | Housing subdivision |

Most of the churches did not conform to the "religious purposes" stipulation, but the lack of a reversion requirement rendered the stipulation unenforceable. The Lutheran Church, which was worried that the reversionary clause might apply to them, went to court to ensure that they had a clean title and could sell the land.[134] While a substantial portion of church land was eventually turned into housing, none of the religious groups allocated land for Indian housing or for assisting "needy Indians."

It would be hard to imagine that the churches, which sold land for housing subdivisions, did not reap significant profits from the sales, given there was a huge construction boom triggered by the tripling of the city's population between 1940 and 1960.[135] Further evidence of churches using Rapid City Indian School (RCIS) land to make a profit can be found in a 1982 letter from Eva Nichols of the Intertribal American Indian Association to Jerry Jaeger, the area director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Nichols stated that churches "would immediately sell such parcels of land and set up a realty business to make money for their churches."[136]

## Land and Housing for "Needy Indians"

In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, the Black Hills Indian Council advocated for Indian school lands to be used for the construction of low-income housing for the local Native population, many of whom were living in campsites lacking basic amenities. The council passed a resolution in 1948 requesting that the Department of the Interior allocate forty acres of RCIS land for Indian housing.[137] After hearing nothing, the council sent a second request in 1949. The BIA contacted city officials, who said they were willing to negotiate but only after the different Native groups had resolved their internal differences.[138]

According to the Rapid City Historical Preservation Commission, "an early, informal agreement provided that the Native community would receive land for a housing development near what is now West Middle School." However, a group of neighborhood residents petitioned the city and threatened a legal injunction if plans for Native housing in the area moved forward. As a result, none of the more than 1,200 acres of former boarding school land went to support "needy Indians."[139] In the late 1940s, the city expanded its borders to include much of the former Indian school land.[140] White property owners lobbied against Native housing adjacent to their homes. Sioux Sanitarium officials also opposed the use of Indian school land for low-income Native housing.[141]

### *Indian Camps*

Starting in the 1890s, Native families whose children had been forcibly taken to school began camping along Rapid Creek to be near to their children.[142] Runaways from the school would hide in the Indian camps before trying to return to reservation homes.[143] In the 1920s and 1930s, the camps became semipermanent, with people living in shacks, tents, and old boxcars.[144] The biggest "Indian Camp" was Osh Kosh Camp on land owned by the Warren Lamb Lumber Company. The rent per family was three dollars per month. Many residents held low-wage jobs at the lumber company.[145] In early 1953, the company agreed to sell the property to a firm to build an industrial park.[146]

According to Senator Case, the city took on an obligation to aid needy Indians when it accepted the no-fee Indian school land for public purposes. He suggested that some unallocated land west of the sanitarium should be used for housing or sold to provide funds for Indian housing. The area director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) said 230 acres could be used, agreeing to raise this as a possible solution with officials in Washington, DC.[147] A month later, the Mayor's Committee on Human Rights requested that the BIA make forty-one acres of "useless land" west of the sanitarium available for assisting "needy Indians."[148] Within a few weeks, the city withdrew the plan due to public opposition. They proposed that a more distant 160-acre tract be developed or sold for the project,[149] but this was rejected by the BIA.[150]

City leaders and the BIA came up with an alternative plan. The city had sold twenty-seven acres of its Indian school land, in violation of Public Law 80-543's reversion clause. The property had an appraised value of $87,300 at the time of the sale. The BIA suggested that money from the sale be used to support "needy Indians." There

had been an earlier plan for $15,000 from the sale to be used to support housing for "needy Indians," so this was not an entirely new proposal.[151] The Mayor's Committee on Human Rights was tasked with finding land outside of the city that could be used, but the available amount of money had shrunk to $2,000. Neighborhood opposition derailed six attempts to purchase tracts, but eventually a twenty-acre site located one mile north of the city boundaries was found for the "Sioux Addition."[152]

The families that moved to Sioux Addition were without water, sewer, and garbage services.[153] More important to consider, this area was also much farther from the central city than the RCIS land had been. They could purchase a 60-by-100-foot lot for $150, or seven dollars per month—more than twice what they paid at Osh Kosh Camp.[154] Because the property was privately owned, neither the federal government nor the city government were responsible for providing services. Many residents failed to pay property taxes because they thought their lots, like tribal and government lands, were not taxed.[155]

In 1957, the Black Hills Council of American Indians described conditions at Sioux Addition as "a living example of the twentieth-century injustice to the American Indian."[156] The council requested 120 acres of Indian school land to be used for building low-income housing that would be open to all races but giving priority to "needy Indians." Senator Case said the land had likely been declared "surplus" and given over to the General Services Administration, which requires that properties go to the highest bidder.[157]

Rapid City did not get low-income housing until 1970, when the Lakota Homes project opened. It is located just south of Sioux Addition and outside city limits. During the initial registration period, residents of Sioux Addition received preference. The project had support from the Sioux Addition Civic Association and the BIA, Federal Housing Authority, and Representative E. Y. Berry, who assisted with the financing.[158]

## A Multigenerational Struggle

In a 1974 meeting of the Rapid City Service Council, Charles Poor Thunder Jr. suggested that Indian school land deeded to the city, which had been used for the Rapid City Regional Hospital West and the Sioux Park Stadium, did not satisfy the "municipal purposes" clause of Public Law 80-543, and the plots were subject to reversion. After the city attorney argued that they had followed the law, the field representative for Senator James Abourezk chastised Poor Thunder and the council for continuing to bring up old land dispossession issues.[159] Yet the issues remained. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the Winona Club and the Working Indian Civic Association Leadership Council pushed for land return.[160]

Starting in the early 2010s, another push for the return of land was initiated.[161] The impetus came from a group of elders who requested help in locating the graves of children who died at the RCIS.[162] While searching for unmarked gravesites, researchers uncovered more about the dispossession of RCIS lands.[163] Articles by Karin Eagle and Heather Dawn Thompson in *Native Sun News* laid out the winners and losers in the allotment of Indian school lands.[164]

Researchers discovered the titles to three parcels of land should have reverted to the federal government because the land was no longer being used for designated public purposes.[165] The city had titles to two of the parcels, leased out to the Rapid City Regional Hospital and a senior living community, but the third parcel had been transferred by the Rapid City Area School District to the activity center.[166]

In 2017 and 2018, the activist group Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors and Mayor Steve Allender cosponsored a series of well-attended public events titled "An Inconvenient Truth: The History behind Sioux San Land and West Rapid City." In 2019, the Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands Project held a series of meetings about the land transfers.[167] Mayor Allender asserted that "reconciliation is the goal."[168] City leaders worked with the Indian Boarding School Lands Project in crafting a resolution to exchange other land for the three parcels that have a $20 million value. A major sticking point was that some council members did not want the resolution to include the land dispossession history, but the Land Project saw it as essential for moving forward.[169]

In November 2020, Mayor Allender introduced Resolution No. 2020-084, which included the history, and called for the development of a plan to exchange the three tracts of land, subject to the reversion clause, for other land of equal value that could be used for building a Rapid City Native American Community Center and support a Rapid City Native American Development Corporation that would generate funds for the center.[170] The city council voted nine-to-one in favor of the resolution, with the only opposition coming from Alderman Patrick Jones from Ward 1, which covers the downtown area.[171] The significance of the action was summed up by Bill Means from the Sicangu Lakota Treaty Council: "It's a small step, but it's a giant leap in terms of fulfilling the prophecy and history of our people in terms of what belongs to us and in terms of reconciliation with the non-Indian community. . . . The return of land is something the people can feel, use, and see."[172]

After progress stalled, Native negotiators in 2021 sought support from the BIA, raising the possibility of the reversion clause being invoked for the three properties.[173] Mayor Allender tried to deflect litigation, saying, "Look at it from a different lens, to say what has been promised to the Native American population and how that promise has been broken. To me, it's clear the promise has been broken or not upheld."[174]

A mayor's committee, which included equal numbers of city officials and Native members, presented two options to the city council.[175] Each option included the city providing resources from the Vision Fund, along with the transfer of properties to reach the $20 million value of the three parcels of Indian school land.[176] A half-cent sales tax, approved in 1972, is the main source of money for Vision Fund projects.[177] In December 2021, the Vision Fund Committee recommended approval of a grant of $15 million to He Sapa Otipi/Indian Boarding Lands for the Native American Community Center and Community Development Corporation Plan.[178]

Mayor Allender (2025 interview) spent a substantial amount of his political capital pushing for the approval of the proposal, as an opportunity to "be fair" to the Native population in Rapid City and to avoid potential litigation over the three parcels of land. The city council voted seven-to-three to approve $9 million for the project: $2

million in 2022 and $7 million in 2023.[179] The votes against the resolution came from Alderman Jones from Ward 1, and Aldermen Jason Salamun and Greg Strommen, who are the two members from Ward 3 that covers the city's central and west side.[180] Ward 1 and Ward 3 have fewer Native residents than are found in Wards 2, 4, and 5.

This funding was less than half what had been discussed and included no land.[181] Also, the resolution included a contingency clause requiring Department of the Interior approval before the dispersal of funds. This was put in place to protect the city from potential litigation. According to Mayor Allender, design work would need to be completed and contractors assigned before funds could be disbursed.[182] Native activist Cante Heart described the status thus:

> There's definitely a Catch-22 here. We can't get our Vision Fund money without removing the contingency, but we can't remove the contingency without land. We're at a huge standstill right now. We're really trying hard to work with the city to make this happen. We thought this would be a great way to build the relationship we never had, yet we're losing a little bit of hope.[183]

In March 2023, at the end of his term in office, Allender sounded equally discouraged: "We tried; I feel like we got close to where it was in reach, and then things have started to fall apart. I don't think it went backward—I don't think all the work has been erased—but I think the progress has stopped."[184] Newly elected Mayor Jason Salamun was one of the three votes against providing Vision Fund money to the project.

One year later, the city council lifted the contingency after NDN Collective donated six acres in north Rapid City for the community center, clearing the project to proceed.[185] Legal efforts to force land reversion may still follow. In early 2025, He Sapa Otipi convened planning sessions with the team, architects, and community members and launched a $3 million campaign;[186] together with unallocated Vision Fund money, this would enable construction to begin in late 2026.[187]

## Discussion

This case study applies a political-economy lens to a consistent pattern: the *why* was local pursuit of economic gain; the *how* was Euro-American political power. While the settler colonial narrative focuses on the extraction of resources and land from Indigenous peoples, this study extends the research to show that settler communities can also use displacement and "civilizing" of Indigenous peoples to extract resources from the federal government. From Board of Trade efforts (1886–98) to bring an Indian school, through newspaper boosterism (1886–1934), to postclosure land dispersal, city elites—often with congressional backing—sought advantage. Despite the "needy Indians" clause in Public Law 80-543, Native people were largely excluded, even as Indigenous activists pressed their claims. Nonelite whites also exercised veto power to block Native neighbors, whether students or residents of low-income housing.

At times, white officials—most notably Francis Case and Steve Allender—treated Native people as constituents with legitimate claims, though rarely on equal footing with non-Native interests. Section 2's "needy Indians" clause in Public Law 80-543

acknowledged a claim but delivered lesser benefits; when invoked, politicians repeatedly narrowed land or monetary transfers, often with BIA complicity.

Recent Native-led campaigns about Indian school lands and children who never returned made it impossible for local officials to claim ignorance. When some council members sought to omit this history from a land resolution, activists resisted a whitewash. City leaders then pursued partial redress without disrupting non-Native users of land subject to reversion, turning instead to the Vision Fund. NDN Collective's six-acre donation to He Sapa Otipi improved prospects for a community center, but a gap remains: the 2020 resolution envisioned $20 million; the Vision Fund has committed $9 million; He Sapa Otipi is raising $3 million toward a 2026 groundbreaking. Whether churches and other beneficiaries contribute—and whether the city makes up the balance—remains to be seen.


## *Acknowledgments*

While many individuals assisted with this project, we begin by thanking O. J. Semans, a widely respected Lakota elder from Rosebud and director of Four Directions Native Vote. In October 2024, O. J., whose mother had been a student at the Rapid City Indian School, suggested that we research the history and dispersal of RCIS land. We recognize that, as non-Native scholars, it is important that we not impinge on the work of Native scholars and activists who have been sharing the stories and experiences of the children. As such, we have tried to keep our research focused on land and economic motivations of the white settler population. We thank Heather Dawn Thompson, Eric Zimmer, and Bret Healy for their assistance in tracing land records.


## Notes

1. In contrast to classic colonialism, settler colonialism involves the removal of Indigenous populations from the land so that settlers can occupy the territory. See Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassell, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409; Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013).

2. David Rooks, whose 7-year old father was sent to the Rapid City Indian School in 1929, described those experiences: "Overriding every waking moment was the Rapid City Indian School's avowed purpose: bleach the Indian out of the child." David Rooks, "Return of the Brown Shirts World," *Rapid City Journal*, March 31, 2009, 10; Ruby Left Hand Bull described the long-term effects of boarding school, as "I lost my identity between the white world and the Lakota world. I have to walk that straight line. And I do it, but it's hard." US Department of Interior, "'The Road to Healing Tour,' Rosebud Sioux Tribe" (transcript of tribal consultation), Sinte Gleska University, Mission, South Dakota, October 15, 2022.

3. James R. Atkinson, *Splendid Land, Splendid People: The Chickasaw Indians to Removal* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

4. Bryan Newland, *Federal Indian Boarding School Investigation Report* (US Department of the Interior, May 2022), 21. The 1819 Indian Civilization Fund provided government funding to Protestant denominations to create Indian schools for the teaching of "habits and arts of civilization to Indians." By 1830, there were fifty-two Indian schools being supported by the Indian Civilization Fund; Native American Rights Fund, *Trigger Points: Current State of Research on History, Impacts, and Healing Related to the United States' Indian Industrial/Boarding School Policy* (November 1, 2019), 6.

5. Jon Reyhner, "American Indian Boarding Schools: What Went Wrong? What Is Going Right?" *Journal of American Indian Education* 57, no. 1 (2018): 58–78, 64.

6. The Department of the Interior's oral history project and their "Road to Healing" tour in 2022 and 2023 are important, not just as a means of ensuring that the stories of survivors are not lost, but also as a formal means of communicating those experiences to the federal government agencies responsible for the boarding schools. Academic research includes vital Native-centered accounts drawing upon the lived experiences of Native students and families as recounted in oral histories and other ethnographic materials. See, for example, early studies by Lomawaima (1987; 1993; 1994), Hyer (1990), Child (2000), and Keliiaa (2024) that capture the diversity of student experiences, showing both brutality and resistance. Many of the authors emphasize the resistance of girls, including many citing their resistance to the wearing of bloomers; K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "Oral Histories from the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School, 1920–1940" *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1987): 241–54; K. Tsianina Lomawaima, "Domesticity in the Federal Indian Schools: The Power of Authority over Mind and Body," *American* Ethnologist 20, no. 2 (1993): 227–40; K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of the Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Sally Hyer, *One House, One Voice, One Heart: Native American Education at the Santa Fe Indian School* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990); Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Families, 1900–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Caitlin Keliiaa, *Refusing Settler Domesticity: Native Women's Labor and Resistance in the Bay Area Outing Program* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2024). Interestingly, quite a bit of this research predates the criticism among feminist historians about the dearth of historical studies focusing on the experiences of women in the West; Margaret Jacobs, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?" *Western Historical Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2011): 297–304.

7. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of US Race and Gender Formation," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 54–74.

8. Bryan Newland, *Federal Indian Boarding School Investigation Report, Volume II* (US Department of the Interior, July 2024), Appendix.

9. By the early nineteenth century, the Oceti Sakowin Nation (People of the Seven Council Fires) had a territory that stretched from Minnesota through the Dakotas to the Yellowstone River and then into Nebraska. The largest group, the Lakota, were dominant in the west, while the Dakota were dominant in the east. Unlike the Lakota and Dakota, the numerically much smaller Nakota avoided military conflicts with the US military. The name *Sioux* is often applied to the Oceti Sakowin, but that term may have a derogatory meaning of "snake people," derived from the Ojibwe term *nadouessioux* or "little snakes" that French traders shortened to Sioux. There are two competing explanations of the origin of the term *Sioux*. Some say it might have been a misinterpretation of the word *natowessiwak*, which means "the people of the snake-like river" (e.g., people living near the Mississippi River). Another possible explanation is that *Sioux* is derived from the Ottawa word *na-towe-ssi*, which meant "foreigner." See Carol Chomsky, "The United States–Dakota Wars: A Study of Military Injustice," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 1 (1990): 13–98; Dominican University, "Tribe: Sioux" (Sioux, Native American and Indigenous Studies, Research Guides and Class Pages, Rebecca Crown Library, Dominican University), https://research.dom.edu/NAS/sioux; Native Hope (blog), "Sioux Native Americans: Their History, Culture, and Traditions," August 1, 2021, https://blog.nativehope.org/sioux-native-americans-their-history-culture-and-traditions.

10. Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School, 1898–1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 8–9.

11. Ibid., 16.

12. Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1989).

13. David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

14. Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 268–72.

15. Anton Treuer, *The Indian Wars: Battles, Bloodshed, and the Fight for Freedom on the American Frontier* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2017), 221.

16. Some of the early RCIS students were survivors of the Wounded Knee Massacre (US Department of the Interior, "'The Road to Healing' Tour").

17. L. Frank Baum, who wrote *The Wizard of Oz*, published two editorials in the *Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer* (December 20, 1890, and January 3, 1891) that called for genocide against Native people, using the following phrases: "total annihilation of the few remaining Indians" and "wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth." Ken Derry, "'Like You Could Read What Was Inside of Me': Genocide, Hermeneutics, and Religion in *The Wizard of Oz*," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 26, no. 3 (2014): 293–309.

18. Douglas W. Allen and Bryan Leonard, "Late Homesteading: Native Land Dispossession through Strategic Occupation," *American Political Science Review* 119, no. 1 (2025): 56–70.

19. The Supreme Court in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians* (1980) labeled the Black Hill land seizure an "unconstitutional taking" and went on to note, "A more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never, in all probability, be found in our history."

20. Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School*, 14.

21. Ibid.; Rapid City Historical Preservation Commission, "Rapid City Indian School/Sioux San Lands" (May 2021), https://www.rapidcityhpc.com/images/docs/Rapid-City-Indian-School_Sioux_San-Lands-Final.pdf.

22. Rapid City Public Library, "History of Rapid City," n.d., https://rapidcitylibrary.org/history-of-rapid-city.

23. Richard R. Chenoweth, "Francis Case: A Political Biography" (PhD diss., University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1977); Brian Sawers, "Tribal Land Corporations: Using Incorporation to Combat Fractionation," *Nebraska Law Review* 88, no. 2 (2009): 385–432.

24. *Rapid City Daily Journal* (August 19, 1888), 2.

25. For this project, we traced all references to Indian schools in the local newspapers and then narrowed the search to eliminate articles that did not deal with establishing a school in Rapid City. In 1886, two local newspapers, the *Rapid City Daily Journal* and the *Black Hills Weekly Journal* began publishing. The *Black Hills Weekly Journal* ceased operation in 1916, but the *Rapid City Journal* is still operating. Between 1886 and 2024, a total of 7,010 articles mentioned an Indian school in Rapid City. Most articles do not have bylines, and many do not have headlines, so our references will not include that information. We identify the newspaper, dates, and pages, unless we are aggregating the numbers of articles.

26. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 13, 1888; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 16, 1888; *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, April 13, 1888.

27. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, June 1, 1888: 3.

28. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, August 24, 1888: 3.

29. Congress, in the 1896 Indian Appropriation Act, banned the federal government from providing funding to church-run schools.

30. Instead of being aimed at assimilating students to become full participants in American society, the goal of "practical education" was to prepare them for subordinated roles within a white

supremacist political and economic system. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). As has been noted by subsequent authors, this system was also highly gendered, with boys trained to be farm laborers and girls trained to fulfill domestic roles (cooking, cleaning, and sewing) within both their future homes and as domestic labor within white homes (Lomawaima 1993; Child 2000; Keliiaa 2024). While keeping to the industrial model's division of half-day working and half-day schooling, Superintendent Jesse F. House for a stretch tried to provide RCIS students with stronger academics. From 1910 to 1917, he had the school follow the South Dakota state curriculum that prepared students to attend public high schools after completing eighth grade at the RCIS. Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School*, 85.

31. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 6, 1893, 2.

32. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 4, 1893, 1.

33. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, January 6, 1893, 3; *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, January 13, 1893, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 13, 1893, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 18, 1893, 3.

34. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 5, 1893, 4.

35. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 6, 1893, 2.

36. US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, "Indian Industrial School, Rapid City, South Dakota" (52nd Congress, First Session, Senate Report), February 18, 1892, 1. Four years later, Senator Pettigrew made a similar argument, stating, "I think the work of civilizing, educating, and preparing these children for self-supporting citizenship is accomplished much more quickly and satisfactorily through boarding schools than it is through day schools." US Senate, "Indian Schools in South Dakota," Senate Report 54-697, Government Printing Office, 1896. Also in 1896, Senator Pettigrew in a floor debate stated, "The government has no right to ask the people of South Dakota to take these people into their midst as citizens and voters without first having prepared them for the duties of citizenship." *Congressional Record* (54th Congress, First Session), Volume 28 (1896): 3788.

37. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 4, 1893, 1.

38. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, March 17, 1893, 4.

39. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, July 21, 1893, 1.

40. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, July 28, 1893, 2.

41. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, March 24, 1894, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 17, 1894, 2; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 29, 1894, 1.

42. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 14, 1895, 1.

43. Indian Department Appropriations Act, June 7, 1897 (Chapter 3, 55th Congress, First Session).

44. Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School*, 23. William A. Jones served as Indian affairs commissioner from 1897 to 1904. He was replaced by Francis E. Leupp, who served from 1905 to 1909. Leupp was even more opposed to off-reservation schools and banned recruiting trips, hoping that the off-reservation schools would close because of a lack of students. Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School*, 24.

45. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, September 13, 1895, 3.

46. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 18, 1928.

47. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 27, 1897, 1.

48. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 8, 1898, 1.

49. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 28, 1897, 3.

50. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, November 11, 1898, 1.

51. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, October 2, 1898, 1.

52. David O. Whitten, "The Depression of 1893" in *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples (August 14, 2001).

53. Similar logic in 1912 led the state government to decide to open a cement plant on property abutting the Indian school and the poor farm, thereby keeping all the "disamenities" in a single geographic area (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, August 27, 1912, 1).

54. Bryan Newland, *Federal Indian Boarding School Investigation Report, Volume II*.

55. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, March 31, 1899, 3. The per annum student allotment was slow to increase, only reaching $200 by 1925 (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 16, 1925, 1).

56. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 31, 1931, 7.

57. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 16, 1925, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 28, 1931, 1–2.

58. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, April 15, 1904, 1.

59. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 16, 1924, 8.

60. For example, there was a *Rapid City Daily Journal* article (August 13, 1911, 1) touting $30,000 would be spent on a new dormitory, central heat, and sidewalks.

61. A 1919 article (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 16, 1919, 1) lauded the success of Rapid City firms in getting contracts to execute $9,000 worth of repairs to the Indian school.

62. United States Department of Labor, *Summary of the Report on Condition of Women and Child Wage Earners in the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 21.

63. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 4, 1903, 1.

64. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, December 9, 1903, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 27, 1910, 8.

65. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 5, 1907, 1.

66. Boosters of the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, touted it would be a great tourist attraction, like popular "Wild West" shows. Nathan Gonzales, "Riverside, Tourism, and the Indian: Frank A. Miller and the Creation of the Sherman Institute," *Southern California Quarterly* 84, nos. 3 and 4 (2002): 193–222. Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School in Michigan was also a noted tourist attraction. Lindsay Elizabeth Doran, "'Pageantry and Showmanship': Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, the Rhetoric of Government Paternalism in Print Media, and Boarding School Tourism," *Settler Colonial Studies* (2025): 1–19.

67. *Black Hills Weekly Journal*, July 2, 1915, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 18, 1916, 1.

68. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 15, 1922, 5; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 23, 1923, 1.

69. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 30, 1922, 4; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, August 13, 1930, 3.

70. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 30, 1922, 4.

71. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 9, 1908, 1.

72. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, October 12, 1922, 4; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 20, 1924; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 3, 1930, 4.

73. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 2, 1933, 2.

74. While the economic benefits of the Indian school were the driving force in its creation and in the city's campaign to keep the school, it is important to acknowledge that the school had become an integral part of the city's culture. The local press published frequent positive articles about the students, ranging from their charitable contributions to the poor farm and assistance in battling wildfires to their prowess in sports, music, oratory contests, and award-winning produce at state fairs. The patriotism of students and the bravery of alumni serving in the military also was chronicled.

75. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, December 24, 1928, 1.

76. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 30, 1929, 1.

77. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, December 19, 1928, 1.

78. *Rapid City Daily Journal* December 20, 1928, 1.

79. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 5, 1929, 1.

80. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 21, 1929, 3.

81. Rapid City Daily Journal, June 14, 1929, 1.

82. Rapid City Daily Journal, July 26, 1929, 2; August 2, 1929, 1.

83. See Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School*, 19, 42-43, on parental poverty as one of the main reasons for the Native community joining efforts to keep the school open, but also some parents considered the RCIS to be a better school than most. It is worth noting that many speakers at the "'Road to Healing Tour' Rosebud Tribe" described abusive conditions at Catholic boarding schools in South Dakota, but no one mentioned the RCIS in their testimony. Other researchers have identified extreme destitution as a motivating factor in the placement of children in boarding schools. See Lomawaima (1994) and Child (2000).

84. Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian, 1887–1934* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

85. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 29, 1929, 1; August 27, 1930, 2.

86. Hearings before the Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations on Interior Department Appropriations Bill for 1934 (72nd Congress, Second Session, 1932): 782.

87. These rumors likely were triggered by the closure being listed in the "Interior Department Appropriations Bill for 1934" hearings (Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, January 1933).

88. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 29, 1933, 6.

89. "Minutes of the Great Plains Congress, Rapid City Indian School Rapid City, South Dakota, March 2–5, 1934," reprinted in *The Indian Reorganization Act: Congresses and Bills*, ed. Vine Deloria Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002).

90. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 3, 1934, 1.

91. *Rapid City Daily Journal*. May 29, 1933, 1.

92. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 31, 1933, 2.

93. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 30, 1933, 7.

94. The following is Norbeck's statement: "If the department finds that the school is no longer needed, the people of Rapid City are anxious that the plant be used for a sanitarium . . . to meet the desperate health needs of the Indians in that region." *Congressional Record* (72nd Congress, Second Session, 1933), Volume 76: 4452.

95. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 2, 1933, 2, 4.

96. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 1, 1934, 1.

97. Given the many stories of historical trauma associated with Indian schools, the Native support for keeping the RCIS was unexpected and merits exploration. Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School*, 19 and 42–43, says it might have offered a better education than alternative schools, or it might have been a way for children during the Depression to be clothed and fed.

98. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 22, 1911, 6.

99. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 24, 1926, 1.

100. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 10, 1927, 5; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 18, 1927, 4.

101. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 13, 1932, 1.

102. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 15, 1932, 6; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 28, 1933, 2.

103. In 1929, the property, which included fifty-nine buildings, had a valuation of $300,000 (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 26, 1929, 17).

104. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 8, 1934, 4.

105. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 28, 1934, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, October 6, 1936, 2.

106. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, August 6, 1934, 1; September 28, 1935, 2.

107. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 28, 1936, 1.

108. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 16, 1936, 10.

109. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, December 3, 1935, 1.

110. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 27, 1935, 6.

111. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 4, 1936, 8.

112. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 24, 1936, 6; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, December 23, 1936, 1.

113. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 10, 1937, 4; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 1936, 2.

114. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 23, 1936, 1; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 29, 1936, 3.

115. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 21, 1936, 1.

116. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 20, 1941, 3.

117. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, July 28, 1944, 2.

118. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, August 26, 1946, 2.

119. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 24, 1946, 2. Francis Case had a mixed history with respect to Native people. As a newspaperman, prior to entering politics, he gave generally positive coverage of the RCIS in the *Rapid City Daily Journal*. Case typically had a Native staff member to ensure that their constituency needs were addressed (Chenoweth 1977, 39–40). While in the House, he introduced legislation to compensate Indians whose horses had been taken by the military (Wilson 2024, 369), as well as a much more controversial measure in 1937, 1939, and 1946, to compensate families and survivors of the Wounded Knee Massacre (Chenoweth 1977, 53–54). On the other hand, Case was a major backer of bills that took tribal lands for the building of dams, most notably the Missouri River Flood Control Act of 1944. In the Senate, Case sponsored legislation reimbursing Crow Creek for land taken for the Fort Randall Dam Reservoir and he cosponsored legislation to pay for damages to Standing Rock for the Oahe Dam (Wilson 2024, 383). Stephen L. Wilson, *South Dakota's Crusader: Francis Case's Road to Congress* (Saint Paul: Joycliff Press, 2024).

120. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 11, 1948, 7.

121. Ibid.

122. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 18, 1948, 6. Archaeological sites in the Black Hills provide evidence that Indigenous people have lived in the region for 12,000 years or more. Also, the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie promised the land in perpetuity. Rapid City Historical Preservation Commission, "Diverse Rapid City: Indigenous Presence Deep History," November 20, 2020.

123. *Congressional Record* (80th Congress, Second Session, 1948), Volume 94: 4182.

124. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 11, 1948, 7.

125. Figure 1 was printed in the *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 11, 1948, 7.

126. Rapid City Historical Preservation Commission, 2021. Other less well-known beneficiaries of Indian land include the city's senior citizen center and the west side fire station (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 30, 1969, 14; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 18, 1974, 3).

127. Heather Dawn Thompson, "The Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands: Where Did It All Go?" Rapid City Human Relations, n.p.

128. US Department of the Interior, "Sales of Church Organization of Surplus Lands in the Sioux Sanitarium, Rapid City, South Dakota," M-36252, November 29, 1954, letter.

129. Heather Dawn Thompson, "Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands Received by Churches," *Native Sun News*, 2025. The four church bodies that purchased tracts prior to the "fair market value" letter were the Catholic dioceses (34.85 acres), Western District of Dakota Conference of the Methodist Church (2.48 acres), the Evangelical Church (7.94 acres), and the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Sturgis (10 acres). Heather Dawn Thompson, "Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands Received by Churches," *Native Sun News*, 2025.

130. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, September 11, 1953, 14; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 20, 1953, 14; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 23, 1953, 8.

131. Thompson, "The Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands: Where Did It All Go?" n.p.

132. Karin Eagle, "Churches Played Role in Sale of Indian School," *Native Sun News*, https://indianz.com/News/2014/06/05/native-sun-news-churches-playe.asp.

133. The information in table 1 was compiled by Heather Dawn Thompson, who noted that it was difficult to trace the histories of the land across time because "as the lots sold were broken down into over 100 smaller parcels." We cataloged the lot transfer history using records from the Pennington County Register of Deeds.

134. On August 22, 1973, the US District Court issued a decree striking down any federal "reversionary interest" and the title was cleared. The land was classified as "fee simple" (Case Civ. 73-5057). A month later, Lot 3, comprising 4.9 acres, sold to Knecht Industries Inc. The remaining church land, Lot 2, 3.04 acres, is where the Calvary Lutheran Church is located.

135. Eric Steven Zimmer, "At the Vertex of Water and Stone: Preserving Landscape and Memory in Rapid City," *South Dakota History* 51, no. 4 (2021): 319–49.

136. Heather Dawn Thompson provided us with a copy of the letter.

137. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 16, 1948, 2.

138. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 20, 1949, 13. The BIA had a policy of opposing off-reservation housing (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 2, 1952, 3). Thompson, "The Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands: Where Did It All Go?" n.p.

139. There were several petitions, but one petition opposing Native housing was signed by 165 residents (Eagle and Thompson 2014). See *Rapid City Daily Journal* (October 31, 1951) for the wording of the different petitions.

140. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, February 3, 2002, 9.

141. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, January 21, 1952, 3.

142. Zimmer, "At the Vertex of Water and Stone," 336.

143. Stephen R. Hausmann, "Erasing Indian Country, Urban Native Space, and the 1972 Rapid City Flood," *Western Historical Quarterly* (Summer 2021): 1–25.

144. Rapid City Historical Preservation Commission, "Diverse Rapid City: Indigenous Presence Deep History," November 20, 2020.

145. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 10, 1953.

146. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 10, 1953, 1.

147. *Rapid City Daily Journal*. April 23, 1953, 3.

148. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, May 24, 1953, 3.

149. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 1, 1953, 3.

150. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, June 28, 1953, 3.

151. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 25, 1952, 3.

152. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, July 6, 1953, 3.

153. According to Mary Wright, who was among the first group of people relocated to Sioux Addition, the city refused to extend water service, given that it was outside of the city limits. The BIA finally provided water by taking two springs into trust (*Rapid City Journal*, April 7, 2009, 11).

154. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, August 30, 1959, 3.

155. Karin Eagle and Heather D. Thompson, "Native Sun News: A Ripe and Rank Case of Theft of Rapid City Land," *Native Sun News*, 2014, https://indianz.com/News/2014/02/17/native-sun-news-a-ripe-and-ran.asp.

156. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, March 25, 1957, 3.

157. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, April 8, 1957, 3. In 1959, the lack of water and garbage service led to a large outbreak of impetigo and diarrhea. Nearly all of the Sioux Addition families signed a petition written by the Black Hills Council of American Indians calling for water and sewer services to be provided. It was sent to the Rapid City mayor, the governor, members of Congress, and the BIA (*Rapid City Daily Journal*, August 30, 1959, 3).

158. *Rapid City Journal*, September 9, 1969, 3; *Rapid City Journal*, December 3, 1969, 3.

159. *Rapid City Daily Journal*, November 26, 1974, 3.

160. *Rapid City Journal*, March 7, 1977, 10; *Rapid City Journal* October 5, 1983, 6.

161. The following is a list of some of the organizations involved in land return in the mid-to-late 2010s: Rapid City Lands Project, Unified Tribal Health Board, Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors, and Cheyenne River Youth Project (*Rapid City Journal*, May 10, 2018, A3). Other important groups include Remembering the Children, He Sapa Otipi, and NDN Collective.

162. The research team was headed by Heather Dawn Thompson and Eric Zimmer (*Rapid City Journal* October 20, 2019, A1 and A5). Rapid City Historical Preservation Commission, 2021.

163. *Rapid City Journal* October 20, 2019, A1 and A5.

164. Eagle, "Churches Played Role in Sale of Indian School"; Karin Eagle, "Taking of Boarding School Land Questioned," *Native Sun News*, February 10, 2014, https://indianz.com/News/2014/02/10/native-sun-news-taking-of-boar.asp; Eagle and Thompson 2014.

165. *Rapid City Journal*, October 20, 2019, A5.

166. *Rapid City Journal*, November 14, 2020, A1.

167. *Rapid City Journal*, September 30, 2019, A3; *Rapid City Journal* October 1, 2019, 12; *Rapid City Journal, October* 25, 2019, B10; *Rapid City Journal*, October 26, 2019, B10; *Rapid City Journal*, October 27, 2019, B12.

168. *Rapid City Journal*, October 20, 2019, A5.

169. *Rapid City Journal, November* 14, 2020, A3.

170. According to official figures, Native Americans comprise 11 percent of the city's population, but other estimates are much higher, as much as 25 percent if one considers people who live part-time in the city and move for work (Hausmann 2021, 5). The Rapid City Indian Boarding School Project sought community input on what projects had the greatest support through community meetings through in-person and on-line surveys. Three-quarters of respondents to the surveys identified a community center as either their first or second choice (*Rapid City Journal*, November 7, 2020, A3).

171. *Rapid City Journal*, November 17, 2020, A1 and A2; *Rapid City Journal*, November 28, 2020, B10.

172. "Historic Move by Rapid City Seeks to Resolve Decades-Long Dispute," *Lakota Times*, November 19, 2020.

173. Stewart Huntington, "Rapid City Community Asks Feds to Intervene in Land Dispute," *Indian Country Today*, August 24, 2022.

174. *Rapid City Journal*, June 12, 2021.

175. The committee members included Mayor Steve Allender, Interim Community Development Director Vicki Fisher, Representative Mike Derby, Tatewin Means, Cante Heart, and Valeriah Big Eagle.

176. *Rapid City Journal*, November 17, 2021, A1 and A3.

177. According to Allender (in a 2025 interview), the Vision Fund sales tax generates roughly $14 million annually, but that cannot be spent every year because the fund needs to be sustainable.

178. *Rapid City Journal*, December 11, 2021, A1 and A5.

179. *Rapid City Journal*, January 12, 2022, A1 and A7.

180. *Rapid City Journal*, January 22, 2022, B4.

181. The three "no" votes came from Pat Jones, Jason Salamun, and Greg Strommen.

182. *Rapid City Journal*, July 12, 2022, A3.

183. Stewart Huntington, "Rapid City Community Asks Feds to Intervene in Land Dispute."

184. *Rapid City Journal*, March 25, 2023, A3.

185. *Rapid City Journal*, December 7, 2023, A1, A3; March 21, 2024, A7.

186. *Rapid City Journal*, January 25, 2025, A1, A5.

187. *Rapid City Journal*, April 11, 2025, A1.