

Tom Torlino, Ziewie, and the Student Experience

1. Photographic Evidence: These two pictures are of Tom Torlino and Ziewie, Navajo teenagers brought to a boarding school. The picture at left shows Tom how he arrived in the 1880's. The picture at right shows Ziewie at her arrival to school. Flip this page over to see how Tom and Ziewie looked after a few months at school.

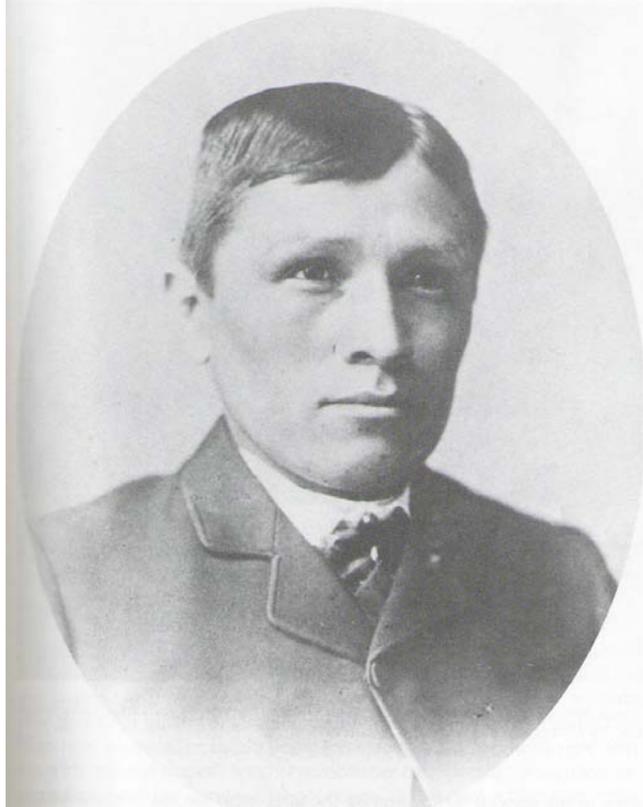


2. A young male student recounts his first experience with White styles of clothing:

“How proud we were with clothes that had pockets and boots that squeaked! We walked the floor nearly all that night. Many of the boys even went to bed with their clothes all on. But in the morning, the boys who had taken off their pants had a most terrible time. They did not know whether they were to button up in front or behind. Some of the boys said the open part went in front; others said, ‘No, it goes at the back.’ There is where the boys who had kept all their clothes on came in handy to look at. They showed the others that the pants buttoned up in front and not at the back.”

3. A young Native American student recounts his first experience with White table manners:

“One of the problems we faced...was that we did not know how to eat at a table. We had to be told how to use a knife, fork and spoons. And when we started eating, we were so used to eating with our fingers that we wanted to do it that way at school, and we had to be taught. Although we had things to eat with, like a fork, we had never used them at home, so we did not know what they were or how to use them; so we always wanted to stick our fingers in our food. Of course, it took some time before we got used to how we were to conduct ourselves with these different things.”



Parents and Families

1. A group of Navajo parents issued a statement concerning a school for their children:

“We are glad the Chas H Burke School at Fort Wingate is being built for the Navajos. We will be glad to send our children to that school. We hope and ask that the school be made, as far as it can be, a industrial school where our children can be taught trades which will be useful to them and help them to make a living as workmen, and also help them in the raising of stock and the making of homes and farms.”

2. A student from the Hopi tribe was confronted by her uncle when she visited home about how she had changed while at school:

“You proud and stubborn girl! Why are you straying from the Hopi way of life? Don’t you know it is not good for a Hopi to be proud? Haven’t I told you a Hopi must not pretend to hold himself above his people? Why do you keep trying to be a white man? You are a Hopi. Go home. Marry in the Hopi way. Have children...Leave these white people who are leading you away from your own beliefs.”



3. Photographic Evidence: A Native American father visiting his two sons at a school in Arizona with his young daughter.

Teachers and School Officials

1. It was difficult to maintain attendance year after year at boarding schools. Often, the children were forced from their families to attend school:

“Everything in the way of persuasion and argument having failed, it became necessary to visit the camps unexpectedly with police, and seize such children as were [school age] and take them away to school, willing or unwilling. Some [parents] hurried their off to the mountains or hid them away in camp, and the police had to chase and capture them like so many wild rabbits. This unusual proceeding created quite an outcry. The men were sullen and muttering, the women loud in their [crying] and the children almost out of their wits with fright.”

2. A white woman who worked in many boarding schools explains the problem with attendance, and also changes the students experienced at school:

“In the fall the government stockmen, farmers, and other employees go out into the back country with trucks and bring in the children to school. Many [children] apparently come willingly and gladly; but the wild Navajos, far back in the mountains, hide their children at the sound of a truck. So stockmen, Indian police, and other mounted men are sent ahead to round them up. The children are caught, often roped like cattle, and take away from their parents, many times never to return. They are transferred from school to school, given white people’s names, forbidden to speak their own [language], and when sent to distant schools are not taken home for three years.”

3. Of all the changes students were forced to undergo at school, giving haircuts to the boys was one of the most difficult. In Native culture, long hair was a proud thing for young men. A student, Luther Standing Bear, explains his experience:

One day we had a strange experience. We were all called together by the interpreter and told that we were to have our hair cut off. We listened to what he had to say, but we did not reply. This was something that would require some thought, so that evening the big boys held a council, and I recall very distinctly that Nakpa Kesela, or Robert American Horse, made a serious speech. Said he, "If I am to learn the ways of the white people, I can do it just as well with my hair on." To this we all exclaimed "Hau!"-meaning that we agreed with him. In spite of this meeting, a few days later we saw some white men come inside the school grounds carrying big chairs. The interpreter told us these were the men who had come to cut our hair. We did not watch to see where the chairs were carried, as it was school time, and we went to our classroom. One of the big boys named Ya Slo, or Whistler, was missing. In a short time he came in with his hair cut off. Then they called another boy out, and when he returned, he also wore short hair. In this way we were called out one by one.

Life in a Boarding School



1. Physical discipline was used by teachers at most boarding schools. It was common for a student to be punished for speaking their native language. Here, a young student describes an example of this:

“One time I was given enough demerits so I had to miss two movies in a row for speaking my native Lakota language...Missing two movies was bad enough, but this [teacher] also made me bite down on a large rubber band, and then he stretched the rubber band to its limit, and let it snap back against my lips. It was very painful. All of this punishment for speaking my Lakota language.”

2. A young Navajo student a boarding school in Arizona explains many of the problems with his school experience:

“Conditions at the school were terrible...Food and other supplies were not too plentiful. We were underfed; so we were constantly hungry. Clothing was not good, and in winter months, there were epidemics of sickness. Sometimes students died, and the school would close the rest of the term.

It was run in a military fashion, and rules were very strict. A typical day went like this:

Early in the morning at 6 o'clock we rose at the sound of bugles. We washed and dressed; then we lined up in military formation and drilled in the yard. For breakfast, companies formed, and we marched to the dining room, where we all stood at attention with long tables before us. We recited grace aloud, and, after being seated, we proceeded with our meal...”



3. Photographic Evidence: The above photo shows male and female students performing drills in the courtyard of a boarding school. Note the similarities between military photos you have seen.

The photo at left shows female students in laundry class at the Sherman Institute school in 1910.