

*Indian Institute
University of Oklahoma*

M-32

Indian Problem in Blaine County;
White Attitudes toward Indians;
Exploitation of Indians; etc.

Notes taken during interview with
Bob Stegall, Visiting Coordinator
for Indian Education Division
of State Dept. of Education,
7-16-68

(Bob Stegall is a white man who has lived in Blaine County since 1921. He was in the Geary school system for 35 years as teacher, principal and coach. Now retired from the public schools but has held his present position since spring of 1967, having been asked to accept this by Overton James and another man with the Indian Education Department)

I've been here since 1930, a teacher here in Geary. At that time every Indian home was in the country. They had wagons, horses, houses, feed for their horses, etc. They would come to town to get their things. Before sundown they would go home with their wagon full of groceries, etc. There were no beer joints then. Oh, they drank a little, but it wasn't easy to drink then like it is now. Then the Negroes lived in shacks, dugouts, etc., shanties made of pieces of tin and scraps. There'd be a whole row of these along the railroad track. Now the situation is reversed. The Indians have lost their homes in the country--their horses, and everything. They've traded their horses in for cars--which they can't finance. Many of them are repossessed. Now the Indians have drifted into town and they're the ones living in the shacks and shanties and run-down houses.

Haven't you heard about the Johnson-O'Malley Act? It's very important act for our schools that have lots of Indians. Technically it applies to the children of Indians who live in the country or who live in communities of less than 500 population. It's not supposed to apply to Indian children in the larger towns. It's a lunch program. It was passed in 1936, Federal Government, and started in 1937. Through the Johnson-O'Malley Act, BIA funds are used to provide lunches for Indian children in the public schools. Through Johnson-O'Malley the schools get sixteen cents for each Indian child's lunch from BIA funds. The federal government also pays four cents on all children's lunches, whites and Indians, and all. As I said, this act was supposed to apply just to the lunches for Indian children living in the country or very small towns. But the kids in a town like Geary need it just as bad or worse than the ones that live outside the city limits. So the Bureau sort of goes along with the situation. They wink at including the Indian kids in the towns. Every now and then they start to crack down and I might have to take some town kids off for a month, but the next month I put 'em right back on. When I was principal here, I wanted the Indian kids to have lunches.

I've always felt that the Indian children are important in the school system and that they really pay their way. The state services to public schools are based on average daily attendance. A school in Oklahoma is permitted to have five teachers for the first 120 students--that is, average daily attendance, not just enrollment figures. And a school gets one more teacher for every 26 children after that (ADA). So the number of children that go to a school is important because the more there are that attend regularly, the more teachers and other services a school gets. Transportation and maintenance services are also dependant on ADA. So I think the Indian kids are an asset to a school, not a drawback.