

Dear Committee,

My name is Cheryl Lawrence and my great grandmother, Lida Ogden was a white teacher at the Montana Industrial School for Indians. *“The Montana Industrial School for Indians was established in October, 1886, by the American Unitarian Association. Founded by the Rev. Henry F. Bond and his wife, Pamela, the school, also known as Bond’s Mission, was located on the Crow Indian Reservation near Custer Station on the Big Horn River. Fifty Indian children at a time lived at the school, which taught farming, mechanics, and the domestic sciences. The school closed after a decade when the federal government withdrew the \$109 per pupil annual subsidy.*

Lida Ogden taught at the school for 2 years. I never met my great grandmother and I do not know any relevant family stories of her teaching experiences at Bond’s Mission but my research has revealed some of the terrible history that led to the formation and purpose of the school. I believe the intent of the founders of the school was genuinely to “help” the Native Americans, but the over-riding method and goal was assimilation by separating the children from their families and culture, and “educating” them. Most of the information I have been able to obtain comes from a book called ‘A Worthy Work in a Needy Time’ The Montana Industrial School For Indians (Bond’s Mission) 1887-1897. Written by Margery Pease. Published October 1, 1986. Margery Pease married into the Crow tribe in 1948 and did extensive research sparked by an interest to learn her children’s genealogy. According to Pease, the school was built in the time after the buffalo had been slaughtered and the tribe had been forced onto smaller and smaller reservations. The Crow people were starving and desperate that their children would survive. They did not want to be separated from their children but were coerced through hunger and loss of land. The children at the school were given new “Anglo” names.

I enthusiastically support H.R. 5444, The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools Policy Act. As a white descendant I do not feel guilty for things that happened before I was born and even before my grandparents were born; however, I feel strongly that it is my responsibility to know this history and to know the devastating impacts it had and continues to have on Native American communities and culture. It is time for all of us to hear the stories, acknowledge what really happened and support a healing process so needed by all of us.

I believe it is urgent that that The Truth and Healing Commission be passed as soon as possible in order to obtain the most accurate and first-hand knowledge of what happened during the boarding school era.

Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for the opportunity to write to you and be heard.

Thank you,

Cheryl Lawrence