

SAINT LABRE INDIAN SCHOOL • ASHLAND, MONTANA

In 1897, a young girl sent a letter to "The Sun," a great New York Newspaper, asking whether there was a Santa. The editors of this paper responded with the most famous editorial ever written "Is There A Santa Claus." The following is a paraphrased version of that editorial:

IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS

"Virginia, your little friends are wrong when they say there is no Santa Claus. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's are little.

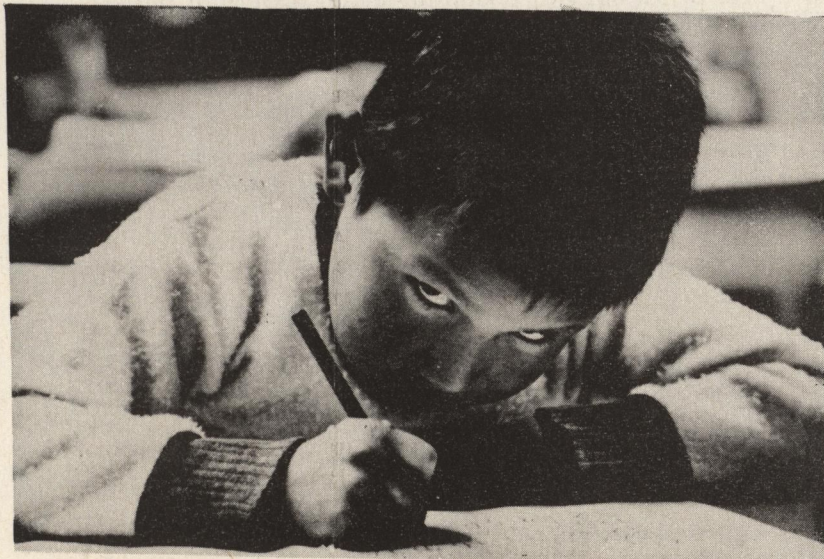
Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no love, no beauty. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus? You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the Chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith can push aside that curtain and view and picture the eternal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."

Please make glad the hearts of the Children of the Race of Sorrows!



Is there a Santa Claus?

WE TAKE CARE OF ALL

St. Labre Indian School is conducted by the Capuchin priests and Franciscan nuns. Our doors and our help however are open to all who need and want it. Our only limitation is space and financial resources. Poverty and suffering respect neither age, nor sex, nor color nor creed.

We are supported entirely by the generosity of friends like you. Will you help us to continue our work of alleviating the utterly cruel poverty in which so many of the Children of the Race of Sorrows do live?

St. Labre Indian School - Ashland, Montana

Dear Benefactor:

"Is there a Santa?" Children the world over are asking their parents this question. Jimmy, too, is wondering whether there is a Santa as he writes his note. But Jimmy is not sending that note to his parents. It is sent to me — to you.

Unlike other children Jimmy asks and expects nothing for himself. He wants to be Santa to his mother, and has asked me to get a gift for her, because she has never known the joy of receiving a Christmas present. He has asked me for more — for a job for his father so that he can support his family without the humiliation of charity.

"Is there a Santa? Will he visit us this year?" Billy is wondering about that as he lies on the dilapidated bed in the miserable shack called home. "Will he visit us this year?" That is a rather strange question since Santa is expected to visit all children during this holiday season. Truly, Santa has been generous to the Northern Cheyenne in the past few years. But the bitter memory of some Christmases past always makes me fearful that Santa may overlook us. I can never forget my first Christmas at St. Labre, when upon returning to the school after spending the day visiting families with gifts of food and clothing, I found a group of children rummaging through the garbage cans looking for something to eat. There have been other tragic experiences also on Christmases past. But your generosity has eliminated those things in recent years, and I know that with your help I will again be able to give every family on the reservation a Christmas dinner and so gladden the hearts of the children and their parents.

But this year Santa has a bigger job to do than ever before. Each day as the children walk from the dormitories to the cafeteria and on to the old buildings housing the makeshift, inadequate classrooms, they see a building slowly rising, half-way complete. This is the new school which they hope to occupy next fall.

It will be their school and the school for the other boys and girls who could not find room at St. Labre this year. Progress has been slow in recent weeks, and often the children ask me: "Will the school be ready for us next fall?" I assure them that it will be ready, even though I am thankful that the cold weather has slowed the progress. The fact is the money that was contributed for the new school has been disbursed, payments are due and I am stalling for time. Santa somehow must supply the money needed to complete the school.

Will Santa — will you help me? Can I truthfully tell the children that progress on the building will continue as soon as it becomes warmer? Will you be the Santa who has not only made Christmas Day happy, but has provided the children with a Christmas every day by completing their new school?

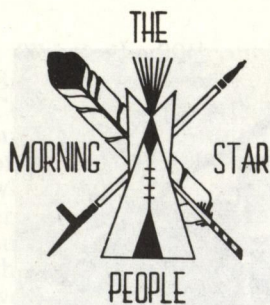
May God bless you for your kindness and sacrifices for the Indian children. Your Christmas will be happy for having given so generously to these first Americans.

Your beggar,

Rev Emmett Hoffmann
Director



Will he visit us this year?



St. Labre Indian School, Ashland, Montana

Dear Friend:

When the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs was sworn into office, in a nationally televised ceremony, President Johnson said that 90% of the Indians were among the poorest clothed, fed, housed and educated people in this country. How true! Especially of the Northern Cheyenne Indians!

St. Labre has been working among these people for 82 years, helping them to progress. Improvement has been achieved, so much so that a people, once called the Race of Sorrows by an historian, now want to be called the Morningstar People. But many problems and pockets of dire poverty still exist. An editor, who recently visited this Reservation, gives his impression of present conditions on the center pages of this letter.

Education is St. Labre's primary purpose. Nearly 400 Indian children are enrolled in the elementary, high, trade and commercial schools. Most of these eat and sleep here from Monday morning until Friday night.

St. Labre, however, is more than just a school. It is an informal welfare agency. The Cheyenne come to us for food, for clothing, for help in all their many and varied tribulations. Ten requests a day for aid are not unusual and there are times when a line forms outside my door. The very young, the very old, and all those in between, look upon St. Labre Indian School as a refuge in their need. They come by day and by night, whenever, and however they need assistance. None are turned away.

Problems, present needs, must be cared for as they arise. It is the aim of St. Labre to eradicate these eventually. That can only be accomplished by helping these people to become self-supporting.

In cooperation, therefore, with the Tribal Council and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a factory has been started on the reservation. Here the Indian novelties, costume jewelry, and other items are assembled. This employment project helps the Indians to become self-supporting.

Work opportunities are not only quite limited, but very new to many of the Cheyenne. There are problems and human failures, but the Cheyenne want to work, and given the opportunity, many become steady and efficient workers. The assembly of Indian novelties like the enclosed, is giving the Cheyenne Indians an opportunity to emerge from their chronic unemployed condition.

The Indian souvenir which we are sending you is a GIFT. Please consider it as such. We hope that you assist us in our work, but please keep the gift even if you cannot or prefer not to help us at the present time. There is no obligation to return it and we do not send reminders.

St. Labre needs friends, many friends to continue its work among the Northern Cheyenne who are now among the poorest people in this country. Will you help?

God bless you!

Gratefully your beggar,

Rev. Emmett Hoffmann

Rev. Emmett Hoffmann
Director

A VISIT REMEMBERED

by

Herbert Keppler

Editor & Publisher

MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY

About 125 miles southeast of Billings, Montana, live nearly 3000 Cheyenne Indians on 444,000 acres of semi-arid wasteland fit primarily for growing sparse clumps of sagebrush. Twenty acres of it will just about support one cow. A little over 2,500 acres of it are cultivatable—provided the crops don't fall prey to the golf-ball sized hailstones which were falling when I was there. What was I, an Easterner, doing in Montana at a Cheyenne reservation? Satisfying an intense desire to discover the exact plight of the Cheyenne Indians and to see what I as an editor and photographer could do to help.

How real is the need? For years, like many of you, I had read of the Cheyenne Indians in the bulletins and letters put out by Reverend Hoffmann of the St. Labre Mission. I had read of the shacks which served as housing for five or more people—often in one room. I had been alarmed at the lack of sanitary facilities described, the hunger, the poverty, and left ashamed—ashamed that so few “new” Americans were stretching out a hand to help the old real Americans. Our own U. S. Army records and narratives from early settlers plus accounts by leading ethnologists list devastating facts of unparalleled barbarism—not by Indians against white settlers, but by U. S. Army troops against Indians. For forty years, from 1850 to 1890, the plains Indians suffered broken treaties, had their lands wrested from them by force, went without promised compensation, were butchered, men, women and children, while peaceful and unarmed, were decimated by white men's diseases, were exiled from their own lands to some of the unhealthiest spots on the face of the continent, and in the case of the Cheyenne were finally settled on a strip of land 40 miles long and 20 miles wide principally because the land was so poor that no settlers wanted it.

I confess I knew little of the Cheyenne history when Reverend Hoffmann's appeals started to appear in my mailbox. Then I began to read all the books I could get my hands on, especially the excellent ones published by the University of Oklahoma and University of Nebraska presses. I did not want to believe the past horrors I read about. Every American should force himself to do so.

But what of the present horrors? Were they real or imaginary? In the St. Labre appeals I had read of the Mission's Indian School located within the reservation. Here nearly 400 grade school children enjoy a full week of schooling, are housed, fed, clothed before going back to their parents for the weekend and for summer vacations. The cost is \$2.35 per child per day. But I had also read some newspaper reports that quoted officials as saying that the Cheyenne Indians were not so badly off—that reports of malnutrition, poor housing, low income were exaggerated. The reports always seemed to emanate from individuals who had not visited the reservation. There was only one way to get at the truth. My cameras would not lie and my words would fill in whatever could not be photographed. I had to go—and I went.



Charlie and Clara Big Head stand in front of their shack near Busby. On relief, they get \$42.00 per month, must try to keep their little home warm in temperatures that creep 40° below zero!



Eleanor Two Bulls is visited by her sister Julia Firecrow in her tiny Ashland shack with its limited daylight and no electricity. Barely 100 yards away is the town dumping area, ever encroaching on the small home.



Florence Sitting Man is ill but refused to remain lying down when her picture was to be taken. The flag and picture of her sailor son on the wall need no words to convey her pride in country and family.

**FROM
HOMES
SUCH
AS
THESE ...**

This is the 90th anniversary of the Battle of Little Bighorn. On June 25, 1876, Colonel George Armstrong Custer led five companies of troops of the U. S. Seventh Cavalry to annihilation along the dusty ridges of the Little Bighorn River at the hands of an overwhelming force of Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. Readers of American Indian history will learn to their surprise that the Indians had every right to be where they were, the troops had no right to be where they were and that it was the troops who picked the fight with the Indians and not the other way around.

The Custer battlefield is today a well kept national monument visited by thousands each year. But the thousands should visit the four Cheyenne reservation towns just 26 miles from the Custer battlefield. Here, in Birney, Ashland, Busby and Lame Deer, are the Cheyenne Indian descendants of those who fought the Custer battle—but they live in no well kept national park. I visited each town—if you can call a cluster of mud chinked shacks, abandoned cars, packing board houses without plumbing and many with no electricity, a town! The best looking is Lame Deer since, like the showplace town in an underprivileged country, it is the one most frequently seen from the main highway. But I also visited Birney with its mud streets resembling a pig wallow in which automobile tires become quickly mired even in the so called dry season. I saw three generations of Cheyenne living in one room, I saw thin dried beef strung on the clothesline next to the clothes. I did see the new houses and trailers. But I also noted that many were not being lived in—they were houses sold without connection to water, with propane stoves which would cost a family \$40 a month to use with Cheyenne families living on \$42 per month relief checks. I saw cracked foundations laid over rough ground, nails rusting through the roofs of ceilings, chimney pipes pulling loose from walls. While many of you may wonder why the housing plight should be any worse here than in some other underprivileged regions of the U. S., remember that the temperature in Lame Deer or Birney reaches 40° below zero in winter!

What of the children? What is here for them? Not once did I see an outside swing, a slide. There are no playgrounds. There are no movie theaters. There is only the TV set in the house of those lucky enough to have scraped together the money for it and its upkeep—on it the Cheyenne can see how the rest of the Americans live.

The one bright spot in the area is the St. Labre Indian School, on a 200-acre campus built and supported by all of us over the years. You would be pleased at the solid brick buildings with their tasteful Indian wigwam motif, at the spacious cafeteria, the neat grounds with flowers blooming.

But the brightest blooms are the children. Without prior warning I entered and visited dormitories, classrooms, shops. Here were nearly 400 of the neatest, smilingest, best behaved children I have ever seen. In class they were being taught by teachers who obviously love teaching and loved the children. I met the Mission nurse who came to see and stayed to run the one-nurse clinic at no salary. I met many other dedicated teachers who also served for love and the need that they saw when they first arrived. The children only appeared sad when on Friday night they packed their small shabby suitcases with their belongings for the journey to their reservation homes to spend the

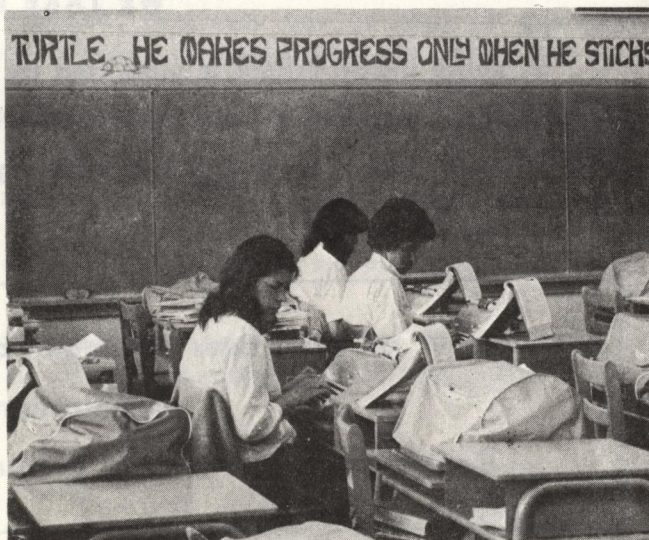
YOUNG MINDS AND BODIES COME TO ST. LABRE FOR FOOD.



In the girls' cherry, brightly lit dormitory, three pajama clad Cheyenne get in a quick game of hopscotch on the play floor before the St. Labre housemother calls them all to come to bed.



Not only food for minds, but wholesome meals are provided three times a day by St. Labre. Over 1000 meals are served daily in a clean, spacious cafeteria thanks to St. Labre's friends who donated the money.



Boys are taught shop skills as well as standard high school subjects and girls learn typing and steno. Not only turtles but students progress when they stick their necks out.

weekend. No matter how kind the parents and understanding the children, it is hard to trade the clean white sheets, excellent cafeteria meals, indoor and outdoor recreational facilities for a one-room windowless house where the child may have to leave the dinner table hungry and sleep in the same bed with two or three other brothers and sisters.

St. Labre Mission's energetic 40-year-old director, Reverend Emmett Hoffmann, supervises the entire Mission complex during his usual 14-hour or more work day, gives immediate aid to all Indians who need food and clothing, shuttles them to and from the nearest hospital—at the Crow Indian agency 40 miles away, plans sponsoring a low rental housing project, dreams of a 40-bed hospital with doctors staff in attendance right at the Mission to serve all the Cheyenne regardless of creed, as the Mission always has. He must plan what novelties can be made at the St. Labre Division of the Guild Arts and Crafts, an assembly factory where 160 Cheyenne are employed. Reverend Hoffmann, realizing the great need of the Cheyenne for employment, encouraged an Eastern plastic manufacturing company to establish this assembly plant at the Mission. This plant is still the only permanent employer of Cheyenne anywhere near the reservation. A brief visit to the large well lit factory quickly showed that employed Cheyenne were happy and industrious Cheyenne when given the chance. The big problem: how to encourage other industries to establish similar plants so that these proud and industrious people would be able to secure permanent jobs.

Your dollars and cents are well spent. Conditions on the reservation and at the Mission have improved immeasurably in the past 12 years—thanks to all of you who have helped. But this work can continue only

as long as you do help, since you and I and all of us are the only means of support St. Labre has.

There is much more to do. Many classrooms in converted non-school buildings are still in nearly airless basements. Classrooms are overcrowded. A new elementary school building is planned. The hospital and doctor are sorely needed. But St. Labre, unlike many of us, must have every cent in the bank before contracting to put one stone atop another—that is the rule laid down by Reverend Hoffmann's superiors. So every day's donations are counted to see what can be done, when, and if at all.

I hope you all get a chance sooner or later to visit St. Labre and the reservation. I haven't told you about Sister Agnelda, the jolliest, best cook any group of children could ever have. You haven't met Reverend Clarence who teaches the children beekeeping and provides the Mission with honey. And on the reservation, there are Mary Standing Elk, Eleanor Two Bulls, Julia Firecrow, Willie and Clara Red Eagle, Charles and Florence Sitting Man, Hubert Fighting Bear, Charlie and Clara Bighead—all Americans you should know and who need your help.

If you are a doctor, a nurse, a dentist, carpenter, plumber, if you have ten thumbs but can and will wield a hammer, why not visit St. Labre, see for yourself and put your shoulder as well as your dollars to the wheel? Meanwhile; let's all of us do what we can in our own way to keep those children at St. Labre smiling and let more sunlight into those reservations homes.—THE END

P.S. Mr. Keppler visited St. Labre in May. Since his visit construction had started on a new classroom building even though funds were not on hand to meet the full cost. We are confident that our friends—new and old—will continue to help us.

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St. Labre does not employ any professional fund raising organization or individual.

Contributions to St. Labre are an allowable income tax deduction.

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