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Article Title: The Indian Who Never Got Home: The Burial of Sergeant John R Rice

Full Citation: William L Hewitt, “The Indian Who Never Got Home: The Burial of Sergeant John R Rice,” *Nebraska History* 77 (1996): 12-20.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1996IndianBurial.pdf>

Date: 11/19/2010

Article Summary: Sergeant John R Rice, Winnebago, Nebraska, died in the Korean War. His interment in a private Sioux City, Iowa, cemetery was underway when an official there, learning that Rice was Native American, invoked a “Caucasians only” clause in the cemetery’s bylaws. When President Harry Truman learned of the cemetery’s refusal to bury a war hero, he offered the family a plot at Arlington National Cemetery, where Rice was buried a few days later.

Cataloging Information:

Names: John R Rice, Evelyn Rice, Henry Rice, Harry S Truman

Place Names: Sioux City, Iowa; Pusan, South Korea; Winnebago, Nebraska; Genoa, Nebraska; Arlington, Virginia

Keywords: “Native American” “Memorial Cemetery [Sioux City, Iowa]” “Winnebago Reservation” “Indian boarding school [Genoa, Nebraska]” “World War II” “Purple Heart” “Korea” “discrimination” “Arlington National Cemetery”

Photographs / Images: John R Rice; Sergeant Rice’s brother Henry and his mother Fannie Davis; White House telegram to the Rice family; Sergeant Rice’s cousin Sam Tebo, member of the Winnebago American Legion Post, standing guard over Rice’s casket; American Legion escort with Rice’s casket before it was put on a train to Washington, DC; presentation of casket flag to Evelyn Rice; burial procession at Arlington

"THE INDIAN WHO NEVER GOT HOME"

The Burial of Sergeant John R. Rice

By William L. Hewitt

The sunny day of August 28, 1951, made tearful eyes squint as Sgt. John R. Rice's funeral cortege crossed the Missouri River bridge separating South Sioux City, Nebraska, from Sioux City, Iowa. The sunshine underscored the reversal in the fortunes of war from the bleak days a year earlier when Rice, a Winnebago Indian from Nebraska, was killed in Korea.

Early on the morning of June 25, 1950, the North Korean Army crossed the Thirty-eighth Parallel and invaded South Korea. The ill-prepared South Korean army, supported by a skeleton force of five hundred Americans, collapsed under the onslaught. Within a week the United Nations Security Council demanded North Korea's withdrawal; President Harry S. Truman ordered U.S. troops to South Korea; Seoul, the capital of South Korea, fell; and another UN resolution called for member nations to provide military support to repel the invasion. The American and South Korean forces retreated to a last defensive perimeter around Pusan, apparently on the verge of an ignominious Dunkirk-like withdrawal. It was there on the Pusan perimeter near the village of Tabu-Dong that Sergeant Rice was killed on September 6, 1950.¹

John R. Rice was born on April 25, 1914, a descendant of Henry Rice, United States senator from Minnesota during the Civil War. His widow, Evelyn Rice, who was Caucasian, recalled that her husband's life had been shaped both by his Native American heritage



John R. Rice. Pamela Rice Goodwin

and by the culture of white society. Rice's Indian name was "Kay-La-Che-Manika," meaning "Walking in the Blue Sky." He grew to adulthood on the Winnebago Reservation and attended the Indian boarding school at Genoa, Nebraska. He farmed and fought for a reputation as an amateur boxer, but military service suited him best. John became acquainted with Evelyn through his older brother, Henry, who had married Evelyn's sister, Thelma. John and Evelyn were married on February 15, 1945, and subsequently had three children: Pamela, Jean Marie, and Timothy.²

Rice enlisted in the army in December 1941, shortly after the bombing of

Pearl Harbor. He was assigned to the Thirty-second (Red Arrow) Division, which appealed to him because of its nickname, according to his grandniece, Elaine Rice. Rice represented a long tradition of Winnebago participation in the armed forces of the United States in every conflict from World War I to Vietnam. As Rice's sister, Ann Big Bear, observed, it was "the thing for them to do."³

Many Native Americans saw military service as "their last opportunity to prove themselves as warriors." Twenty-five thousand served during World War II, approximately 22,000 on the front lines. Reacting to the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in June 1950, Native Americans again joined the service in large numbers. By December 27, 1950, more than 2,500 had enlisted.⁴

Despite their patriotism, Native Americans were not always welcomed by their fellow servicemen. As historian Donald Fixico points out, "In the barracks, other servicemen ridiculed the Indian G.I. with name calling. 'Chief,' 'Geronimo,' or just 'Hey Indian' labeled the Native American serviceman, sometimes with derogatory intent." Combat tended to erase racial distinctions, however, because Indians were effective fighters and endured the privations of wartime conditions—coarse food, long hours, filthy conditions—which for many was no hardship after reservation life.⁵

Rice's Thirty-second Red Arrow Division fought in campaigns for New Guinea and the Philippines during World War II. Rice served as an infantry scout for more than three years, one of

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John R. Rice

the most perilous of army jobs. He had scars on his back from shrapnel wounds, for which he was awarded a Purple Heart. According to Evelyn, his wounds "didn't bother him nearly so much as the malaria he picked up, though." While recuperating in Australia Rice met his cousin, Ed Snowball. They instructed a cook in the making of Indian fry bread, which at the time provided the rallying point for an Indian celebration.⁶

After his discharge in 1945, the newly married Rice found no work to support his growing family, so he reenlisted in January 1946. He was stationed in Colorado Springs, Colorado; in Korea for fourteen months; and at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, for a two-year stint. For a while Rice served in a military funeral unit, escorting the bodies of American World War II casualties being brought back to the United States for burial. Evelyn Rice observed that there had never been any objection by the families of these soldiers to her husband's presence on the burial detail.⁷

Sergeant Rice returned to Korea with the First Cavalry Division a little over two weeks before his death. Following the North Korean breakthrough, six weeks of fierce fighting, known as the battle of the Pusan Perimeter, began on the night of July 31. During the battle, in a bleak, wet valley north of a town named Tabu-Dong, American troops "traded blood for time," trying to keep the North Koreans from overrunning the peninsula. But relief arrived too late for Sgt. John Rice. While leading a squad of riflemen against a desperate enemy assault on September 6, he became the target and was killed.⁸

Notification of Rice's family underscored the anguish endured by thousands of families back home. For Evelyn, the lack of information regarding the circumstances of her husband's death left her uneasy and uncertain. Almost a year later, word came that Rice's body was being sent home.⁹

When it arrived in California, Sgt. John Boles was assigned to accompany



Henry Rice, brother of Sgt. John Rice, and his mother, Fannie.
Omaha World-Herald, August 30, 1951

it to Rice's childhood home at Winnebago, Thurston County, Nebraska. Prior to Boles's arrival, Evelyn Rice began to make arrangements for a military funeral. She selected the Memorial Park, a private Sioux City, Iowa, cemetery, "because of its beautiful, well-cared for grounds" and its convenient location near her family and her husband's Indian relatives on the Winnebago Reservation. She purchased a cemetery lot on August 17, making a \$100 deposit.¹⁰

The night before the funeral, Evelyn, Rice's mother, two brothers, four sisters, three children, and a few friends met in the home of his brother, Henry, on the reservation to remember and pray for him. The next day, American Legion

Post No. 363 (Native American) and Post 174 (Caucasian), both of Winnebago, were in attendance. Neil McCluhan, Thurston County Veteran's Officer and a veteran himself, was in charge of the military escort. Lt. Edward J. Krischel represented the Nebraska Military District.¹¹

Ben Willey, the Memorial Park representative who sold the lot to Evelyn Rice, tarried in the office on the day of the funeral to answer inquiries about cemetery lots. On his way out of the cemetery, Funeral Director Dalton Boyd stopped to talk to Willey about a plaque for Rice's grave. During their conversation, Willey remarked on the large number of Indians who were at Rice's graveside ceremonies. Boyd replied by

asking rhetorically if Willey knew "that Sergeant Rice had been an Indian"? Willey replied that this was impossible because Indians were not allowed to be buried in the cemetery; there was a "Caucasian only" rule in its bylaws.¹²

Later, a cemetery official maintained that Rice's racial background became the issue only after members of the funeral party insisted that Rice was "more white than Indian."

Sam Tebo, Rice's cousin, asserted at the time that John "was three-eighths Indian and five-eighths white," while Evelyn Rice subsequently said she understood her husband was about "half white." Nevertheless, she maintained that she had not noticed the "Caucasian only" clause in the contract. "Even if I had, I wouldn't have thought anything about it," she said. "When these men are in the

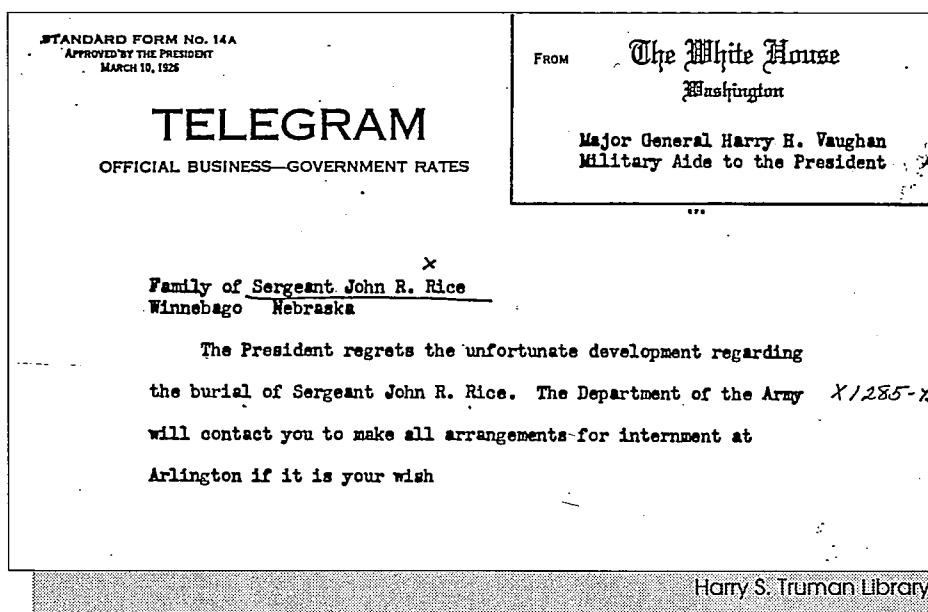
army, they are all equal and the same. I certainly thought they would be the same after death, especially in a military section of the cemetery."¹³

The cemetery's representatives staunchly set out to protect the bylaws. Willey and J. M. Gunnell, secretary-treasurer of the cemetery association, formulated a solution. Gunnell later avowed that he had no racial prejudice. "I am just trying to carry out my job," he protested, "I am caught in a trap."¹⁴

Cemetery officials held a tense meeting with Evelyn Rice, who had left the cemetery assuming that the interment would be completed. Willey tried to return Mrs. Rice's \$100 deposit check, which she refused to accept. He then tried a subterfuge. If Evelyn Rice would sign an affidavit saying her husband was

"Caucasian," the cemetery would allow the burial to be completed. She refused. Willey then reverted to another strategy. If the army's representative would sign a statement that Rice was a Caucasian, the burial could proceed. The lieutenant also declined. Evelyn said she would never have made an issue of the clause in the cemetery lot contract prohibiting burial of non-Caucasians, but

Vaughan, to offer burial space for Sgt. Rice in Arlington National Cemetery. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Dillon S. Myer issued the administration's official response. Myer called the refusal to bury Rice "most deplorable," adding, "Any cemetery in America should be proud to honor one of our first Americans who died in the service of his country."¹⁵



Harry S. Truman Library

her probity turned to bitterness.¹⁵

Henry Rice, John's brother, termed the cemetery's action a "raw deal." Sergeant Boles and Lt. Krischel, outraged by the incident at the grave site, notified army officials that the burial had been rudely interrupted. McCluhan, who had commanded the American Legion Honor Guard, notified the Sioux City newspapers, which wrote an account of the interrupted funeral of a war hero and put it on the wire service.¹⁶

President Harry S. Truman took swift action after being apprised of the Rice incident. On August 29, the day after Rice was scheduled to be buried, Truman was asked to comment on the incident at his press conference. Once he learned what had happened, he directed his military aide, Gen. Harry H.

ket, which had been returned to the funeral home in Winnebago. Every member of the posts vied for the opportunity to show their respect in this way.¹⁸

An overcast sky on September 2 added to the solemnity of Sgt. Rice's second funeral cortege. His family once again rode with him, but this time they passed crowds of spectators lining the route from Winnebago to Sioux City. Indians from the "South Bottoms" in Sioux City, where workers in the meatpacking plants lived, believed that they should show solidarity, and some of them admonished their fellow Indians that "everybody better be there when he leaves Winnebago. You belong there."¹⁹

State and local dignitaries responded as well. Guy N. Henninger, commanding general of the Nebraska National

John R. Rice

Guard represented Nebraska Governor Val Peterson. At the Missouri River bridge, Iowa officials, highway patrolmen, American Legion honor guards, and marching bands created an almost festive air. Rice's body went to the Chicago, St. Paul, Milwaukee and Pacific Railroad station, where it began the journey to Washington, D.C., accompanied by his mother, Fannie Davis. The rest of the family was flown to Washington at government expense.²⁰

Rice's Arlington funeral became a media event. Six gray horses pulled the caisson on which the flag-draped coffin was borne to the grave. Newsreels and television recorded the proceedings. President Truman, on a flight from San Francisco at the time of the burial, sent a bouquet of pink and yellow gladioli. Senators Guy Gillette of Iowa and Hugh Butler of Nebraska shifted their weight from foot to foot as they stood silently nearby. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Dillon S. Myer represented the administration. Eight men fired rifle volleys. The army band played "Just As I Am Without One Plea." There was no sermon. Rice's former commander in Korea, Maj. Gen. Charles B. Palmer, accentuated the silence with a terse, five-word eulogy: "He was a good soldier." There was no mention of race discrimination during the Arlington ceremony. Rice was buried next to Cpl. Edward Ryan Cassidy, a World War I veteran from New York, and not far from Gen. Walton H. Walker, commander of the Eighth Army in which the sergeant fought in Korea.²¹

Considerable resentment lingered among many Sioux City-area Indians. Charles LaMere, a member of the Winnebago tribal council, observed, "We feel that this is a case of discrimination. At the same time, we feel that some good might result. This brings out into the open conditions we know has [sic] existed for a long time."²²

Local Native Americans had a keen awareness that subtle "polite racism," as well as not so subtle forms of discrimination, existed in Sioux City. Rice's niece, Annie Rice, remembered, "It was



Sam Tebo of the LaMere Green Crow American Legion Post 363 of Winnebago stands guard over Sgt. Rice's flag-draped casket. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 30, 1951



An American Legion escort stands at parade rest as the body of Sgt. Rice leaves Sioux City for burial in Arlington National Cemetery. The Rev. Daniel Madian of Winnebago (back turned at end of guard rank) prays over the casket. *Lincoln Journal-Star*, September 3, 1951

Nebraska History - Spring 1996

worse then, though, because if Indians went into a dime store-type place like Kresge's, they were treated OK. But if they went into a more expensive store, they would get looked at arrogantly." Annie also remembered walking with her grandmother, who was wearing a long Indian-style dress. Young white men would drive by in cars and start drumming on their doors, "war-whooping," and hollering "Squaw," Annie recalled. "Most Indians felt that they were not supposed to say anything back, and we were just told to take it."²³

Opinion makers and advertisers still followed a long tradition of depicting Sioux City as a happy Indian warrior in editorial cartoon caricatures adorning the front page of the *Sioux City Journal*, and by naming local businesses after a corruption of "Sioux" such as the "Soo" Restaurant.²⁴ City officials now worried about the city's tarnished image. As one indignant correspondent observed in a letter to President Truman, "It is a bit ironical [sic] that an American city bearing an INDIAN name should deny one of its honored sons (whose only fault is his INDIAN ancestry) the privilege of final sanctuary, after giving his life defending the privileges on which America was founded."²⁵

The major industry in Sioux City—meatpacking—exerted tremendous local influence, so when the Sioux City metropolitan council of the United Packinghouse Workers of America adopted a resolution condemning the cemetery, it drew attention. The packinghouse workers urged the city to prohibit future "display of the American flag on such an un-American piece of land."²⁶

In order to clarify and explain the cemetery's actions, the management of Memorial Park produced a four-page fact sheet in early October 1951 entitled "The Truth About the Sgt. Rice Incident." Memorial Park officials justified their restrained reaction to the furor raised by their refusal to allow Rice's burial:

We have had many inquiries as to why we

did not publicly defend our position during the height of the publicity that was given to this incident. Our failure to do so was in deference to the request of many business men [sic] and citizens of Sioux City who wished to end the publicity as quickly as possible, and also to our knowledge of the fact that under this mob hysteria, any statements made by us, as had been demonstrated, would not be fairly reported.²⁷

Countering the "false statements that have been published about this incident," officials hastened to affirm that "the present Owners and Officers of the Park have no racial prejudice and were not responsible for the restriction to only members of the Caucasian Race." The fact sheet went on to offer evidence to support the obvious and undisputed fact that Rice was not a Caucasian. It cited as authorities Dr. R. S. McNeish of the National Museum at Ottawa, Canada, and other Canadian archaeologists, who "reported definite proof that American Indians are descended from Wild Mongolian Nomads that came to North America from Asia by way of Alaska. In other words, the American Indian is not of Caucasian descent, to the best of our available information."²⁸

Memorial Park officials tried to justify the "Caucasians only" policy by pointing out that many other cemeteries imposed burial restrictions:

The restriction to members of the Caucasian Race is almost as old as the cemetery business and has come down with the development of the cemetery business. This restriction is in probably 90 per cent of the private cemeteries in the United States including Forest Lawn in California and Graceland Park in Sioux City. Private cemeteries have always had a right to be operated for a particular group such as Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran, Negro, Chinese, etc., not because of any prejudice against any race, but because people, like animals, prefer to be with their own kind.²⁹

The pamphlet also suggested a certain hypocrisy on the part of the federal government: "It was only in 1947 that racial discrimination was removed from Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C. (even privates could not be buried next to officers) and yet we understand that

Sgt. Rice is one of the first known Indians to be buried there."³⁰

Acting Sioux City Mayor Clem Evans (Mayor Dan J. Conley was vacationing) tried to distance the city from the controversy when he "explained to the senders of indignant telegrams and letters that the burial incident happened outside the city limits in a cemetery privately owned. We do not concur in the shameful action and join in denouncing it. There is not discrimination in city-operated cemeteries," which included the one-hundred-acre Logan Park and forty-five-acre Floyd Cemeteries. When the *Sioux City Journal* investigated the city-owned cemeteries, Drew Fletcher, superintendent of parks and public property, affirmed that "there is no discrimination in city-owned cemeteries."³¹

During the flurry of indignant reaction to the incident, Oliver LaFarge, the Association of American Indian Affairs spokesman whose novel of an Indian youth, *Laughing Boy*, won a Pulitzer Prize, sent a telegram to Mayor Conley urging him to take the lead in denouncing the episode and demanding a public apology from the cemetery. Whether responding to LaFarge specifically or not, Mayor Conley made a statement by telephone on August 30 endorsing a city council resolution expressing sympathy to the family of Sergeant Rice. The resolution went on to explain that Sioux City officials felt "the most sincere regret that the burial of this deceased veteran was not permitted, and the assurance that the people of the City of Sioux City would have been proud to have had the honor of having Sergeant John R. Rice buried in any cemetery within the City of Sioux City." Conley later traveled to Winnebago, where he apologized at the meeting of the two American Legion posts.³²

President Truman was genuinely affected by the sacrifices of veterans. That Rice was a Native American made the situation all the more poignant. In the more than four hundred telegrams and letters received by the White House, 1,166 people signed their names in sup-

John R. Rice



Capt. John F. Orzel (right), chaplain, gives the casket flag to Evelyn Rice after the Arlington ceremony. Rice's mother (left foreground) and Henry and Thelma Rice, his brother and sister-in-law, are seated with Evelyn Rice. *Lincoln Journal-Star*, September 6, 1951

port of Truman's actions or expressed indignation toward Sioux City. More people responded from east of the Mississippi River (63.3 percent) than west of it (36.7 percent). More respondents were concerned with the racial issue (36.8 percent) than with Rice's status as a war hero (16 percent). Women and men considered race and Rice's

military service equally significant, but women (4 percent) considered military service alone much less important than men did (12 percent). The Truman administration was also well aware of the political ramifications of civil rights issues such as those raised by the Rice case. Someone on Truman's staff penciled in the population of many commu-

nities from which letters had been received.³³

An incident similar to the Rice affair had occurred in 1949 when the only funeral parlor in the south Texas town of Three Rivers had refused to bury Felix Longoria, a Mexican-American soldier killed in the Philippines during World War II. After Senator Lyndon B. Johnson arranged for Longoria to be interred in Arlington, the senator received favorable recognition in the *New York Times* for righting a wrong against a Hispanic war hero.³⁴

Praise for Truman's action in the Rice case often bubbled with hyperbole such as "Lincoln could have done no better." Barney Silverstein of Compton, California, wrote: "Carrying on your fight for the civil rights program in the face of the Old Guard Southern Democrats took courage. Breaking down race segregation in the armed forces took courage. Carrying on day after day under the vicious sniping of McCarthy and his ilk has taken unbelievable courage."³⁵

Mary McLeod Bethune, former director of the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration and former president of the National Council of Negro Women, wrote Truman, "Your 'stock' with the masses has definitely 'gone up!'"³⁶

Truman's intervention on behalf of Rice's family coincidentally helped soothe some of the irritation southerners felt because of the president's stand on civil rights. Specifically referring to whites, Miss Pearl Elder wrote from Pascagoula, Mississippi,

Living way down here is [sic] Dixiecrat country I have never hear [sic] many nice remarks about you. Not until today. Every Southerner—every American who has the right to be called an American—should say and mean the nice remarks I have heard about you when we learned how you slapped down those Un-American cemetery officials who refused to allow an Indian Hero to be laid at rest in their "Superior graveyard."³⁷

Some critics of the cemetery looked to the recent struggle against Fascism as their point of reference. Mr. A. E.

Nebraska History - Spring 1996

Diefendorf, vice president of the Farmers State Bank at Irene, South Dakota, wrote that the incident is

a dark blot on the record of Sioux City and the United States. Any cemetery anywhere in the United States ought to be proud to contain the remains of a soldier killed in the defense and service of his country regardless of race, color, or creed. Hitler earned the condemnation of the world because he instigated the persecution and killing of Jews. Do we, in this supposedly free and enlightened country, have some men who aspire to be Hitlers?³⁸

More than 7 percent of those writing the president linked the Rice incident to America's newly perceived antagonist, Joseph Stalin, and to the Soviet Union. Arnold Benjamin Davidson said, "To be sure, the Coughlins, the Gerald K. Smiths and the Stalinites here and abroad will probably suffer heart attacks." An Etchareottene Indian from California suggested that "this cemetery ship some of its dirt behind the Iron Curtain then any of my people killed defending America could be sent there for burial."³⁹

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, through its Iowa state chairman, David Singer, termed the Rice incident a "crying shame." He expressed a theme also used to argue for African American civil rights: it was a "slap in the face for our statesmen who are trying to sell democracy to the world. Can you picture the grin over Stalin's face as he reads the headlines in the American newspapers?"⁴⁰

Iowan Mrs. Don Hudek suggested that Truman's actions prevented "nations wavering on the brink of communism" from going over the edge, because they could "be assured of our own sincere belief in democratic ideals." Truman could reach out and help an individual, while "our 'friend' in Moscow [Stalin] does not have such talents. That one factor is his loss and our gain in this wordy tug-of-war."⁴¹ A New Yorker, Catherine Hogg, contended, "But does not the most shameful act which occurred in Sioux City this week

smack of communism—to deny burial in a certain cemetery because a noble person, who had made the supreme sacrifice, was not of the Caucasian race?"⁴²

Politicians nearer to Sioux City expressed similar opinions. Nebraska Governor Val Peterson praised Truman for the "good sense and alacrity" with which he moved to alleviate a "disgraceful situation. . . . You couldn't manufacture better ammunition for the communists if you sat up all night and tried," the governor continued. "It is hard to understand how some Americans want to be Stalin's unwitting assistants."⁴³

Some Indians saw Truman's actions in the Rice affair as an affirmation of Native American rights, while still viewing the president in a traditional, paternalistic role. An Oklahoma Cherokee medicine man, Dr. Orange Starr, contended,

We older Indians at home in Oklahoma and the younger ones in the service of the 45th division appreciate what you did in the sad case about the burial of Sgt. Rice a Winnebago Indian at Sioux City, Iowa. Okla[homa] has only 2 statues in the Hall of Fame in Washington DC both are Indians Sequoya and Will Rogers." [sic]⁴⁴

In a telegram to Truman from the League of Nations of North American Indians on the reservation in Irving, New York, Chairman Art Wakolee observed, "You have proved [sic] to the Indian that you are truly [the] Great White Father." The Intertribal Council of the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribes of Oklahoma found Truman's response appropriate. "I'm sure all America joins our Indians in thanking their Great White Father in this act of justice."⁴⁵

In early 1952 Evelyn Rice's attorney, Neil McCluhan, and her brother-in-law, Henry Rice, filed a lawsuit in Evelyn's name, asking \$180,000 in damages for Memorial Park's refusal to bury her husband's body. Her petition named the cemetery association and officers F. K. Lyle and J. M. Gunnell, as defendants. The widow's petition claimed that the cemetery's action was willful and malicious and in direct violation of the Iowa and United States constitutions. She

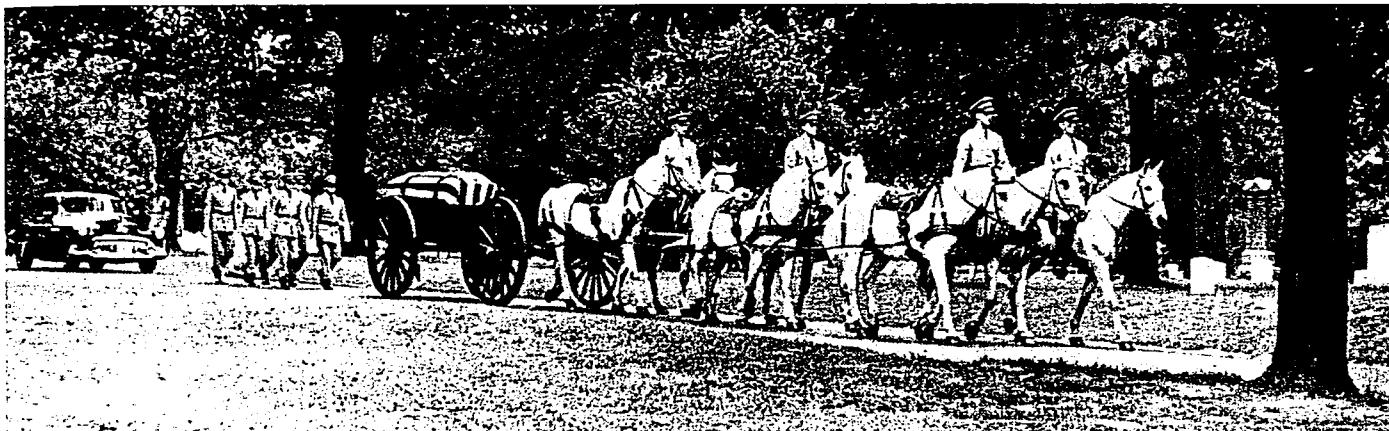
contended that it subjected her to humiliation and held her up to public ridicule. The suit was later dropped because Evelyn Rice had grown tired of publicity and wanted only to forget her ordeal.⁴⁶

Evelyn Rice looked to the future, anticipating that public interest in the John Rice affair would quickly fade. Three months after the funeral, plans for a new, non-denominational high school at Winnebago, estimated to cost \$300,000, were announced by the Reverend Frank Hulsman, director of Indian Children's Village, also known as St. Augustine's Mission, at Winnebago. Mrs. Rice, who was present at the press conference and gave her tepid approval to the project while trying to shun the lime-light, said her husband "had long wanted to do something about race prejudice." Several prominent individuals agreed to be members of an honorary committee in the drive to raise funds for the memorial high school.⁴⁷

In a letter to the *Lincoln Star*, Father Hulsman expressed confidence that people would "respond generously to the proposal to construct a Sergeant John R. Rice memorial High School at the mission." But Hulsman carried the legacy idea too far. He proposed that Evelyn's son, Timothy, live permanently at the mission, as John Rice had done in his youth. Evelyn refused, and her resolve to completely eschew publicity stiffened. According to her daughter, Pamela Rice Goodwin, the lawsuit and the memorial high school never materialized because her mother "wanted to get on with life and forget about it."⁴⁸

While Truman's response to the Rice incident reflected the president's genuine concern for the civil rights of minorities, the incident may have helped those who were calling for a restructuring of federal Indian policy. Critics of the New Deal policies of the 1930s and 1940s, including Commissioner of Indian Affairs Myer and western senators and congressmen, argued for the elimination of the special status of Indian tribes and a reduction in federal supervision over

John R. Rice



A caisson drawn by six gray horses bore the body of Sgt. John R. Rice to its final resting place in Arlington National Cemetery. *The Trumpet Call*, May 1952

Indian affairs. They particularly disliked the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, which had sought to promote tribal self-determination, protect the reservation land base, and maintain Native American cultural identity.⁴⁹

Instead, Myer and others felt the goal of federal Indian policy should be the complete assimilation of Indians into mainstream society through the "termination" of tribal status and the existing trust relationship with the government. Increased public awareness of Indians' contributions in World War II and Korea, in part due to the Rice incident, reinforced the assimilationist arguments.

Public reference to the Rice incident quickly diminished, perhaps because it caused considerable embarrassment for the Sioux City community. Unfortunately, the lesson it taught also faded. Racial prejudice against Indians continued in communities near the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Omaha, and Winnebago reservations. For many Indians, however, the Rice incident remained symbolic of the ambivalence with which society regarded Native Americans. Oral traditions kept his story alive. When Indian activists arrived in Washington, D.C. in 1972 at the culmination of the "Trail of Broken Treaties" caravan, American Indian Movement leaders Dennis Banks and Vernon Bellecourt were denied permission to

hold "a memorial service for two Indian war heroes (Ira Hays and John Rice) at Arlington National Cemetery." Court action subsequently opened the way for the service, but by then AIM had occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs building.⁵⁰

The acknowledgment of Native American military contributions resonated as part of what Richard C. Schroeder, *Editorial Research Reports* reporter, termed white society's "rediscovery" of the Indian. Part of this rediscovery was the role of Indians in the U.S. armed forces, exemplified by the case of Sgt. John R. Rice.

Notes

¹ Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1987), 84-98; *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 29, 1951; obituary of John R. Rice, *Winnebago Chieftain/Walthill Citizen*, Aug. 30, 1951.

² *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 29, 30, 1951; *Winnebago Recorder*, Feb. 23, 1945.

³ *The Winnebago Recorder*, Dec. 19, 1941, noted the enlistment of Rice and his cousin, Ed Snowball. Ann Big Bear with Elaine Rice to author, Sept. 9, 1993.

⁴ Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 4, 57. See also, Alison Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman/London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 35, 40.

⁵ Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*, 6.

⁶ *Walthill Citizen*, Aug. 2, 1945; *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951; Ann Big Bear with Elaine Rice to author, Sept. 9, 1993.

⁷ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 31, 1951; *Winnebago Chieftain/Walthill Citizen*, Aug. 30, 1951; Ann Big Bear with Elaine Rice to author, Sept. 9, 1993.

⁸ "Twenty Indian Soldiers Killed in Korea," news release, Dec. 27, 1950, Dept. of the Interior, Box 43, White House File, Philleo Nash papers; Maj. Gen. H. Feldman, Quartermaster General, to Harry S. Truman, Sept. 31, 1951, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo. (hereafter, HSTL); *Winnebago Chieftain/Walthill Citizen*, Sept. 28, 1950; Aug. 30, 1951. Harry Ross, comp., "The Indian Who Never Got Home," UAW-CIO Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department (Detroit: Solidarity House, 1952), 3, 15.

⁹ Ann Big Bear with Elaine Rice to author, Sept. 9, 1993; *Winnebago Chieftain/Walthill Citizen*, Aug. 16, 1951.

¹⁰ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 29, 30, 1951.

¹¹ Ibid.; "The Indian Who Never Got Home," 5; *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 31, 1951.

¹² "The Indian Who Never Got Home," 5; *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951; *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 29, 1951; *The Trumpet Call*, St. Augustine's Indian School, Winnebago, Nebr., 7 (Oct. 1951).

¹³ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 29, 30, 1951.

¹⁴ Ibid., Aug. 30, 1951.

¹⁵ Ibid.; "The Indian Who Never Got Home," 7-8. The officer was probably Lt. Edward J. Krischel of the Nebraska Military District. See "Burial Stopped after Grave Rites," *Norfolk Daily News*, Aug. 29, 1951.

¹⁶ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951; "The Indian Who Never Got Home," 8.

¹⁷ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 31, 1951; "Commis-

Nebraska History - Spring 1996

sioner Myer Condemns Action by Cemetery Officials," news release, n.d., Dept. of the Interior, Box 43, Nash Papers, HSTL. Similar accounts, distributed by the Associated Press, appeared in newspapers around the country. Ann Big Bear commented in 1993, "If the Sioux get the Black Hills back, [we will] bury him there. To an Indian, Arlington's not necessarily the highest honor." Ann Big Bear with Elaine Rice to author, Nov. 9, 1993.

¹⁸ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951; *The Trumpet Call* 7 (Dec. 1951). Evelyn Rice was grateful for the president's swift action: "Please excuse the delay in expressing my gratitude to Mr. Truman for the great honor he bestowed upon my husband, Sgt. 1/c John R. Rice. He would be very proud." Evelyn Rice to Harry H. Vaughn, Aug. 30, 1951, HSTL.

¹⁹ Ann Big Bear with Elaine Rice to author, Nov. 9, 1993.

²⁰ *Lincoln Star*, Sept. 3, 1951

²¹ Ibid., Sept. 6, 1951. See also *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 1951; *Washington Post*, Sept. 5, 6, 1951.

²² *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951.

²³ Annie Rice with Elaine Rice to author, Nov. 9, 1993. For a description of "polite racism," see William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 8.

²⁴ See, for example, *Sioux City Journal*, Dec. 25, 1905; May 19, 1909; Mar. 29, 1910; Jan. 11, 1942; May 15, 1943.

²⁵ Mrs. Pauline F. Paul to Harry S. Truman, Sept. 9, 1951, HSTL.

²⁶ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951.

²⁷ "The Truth About the Sgt. Rice Incident," privately printed, The Memorial Park, Sioux City, IA [1951], HSTL.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 31, 1951.

³² Ibid.; *Winnebago Chieftain/Walthill Citizen*, Sept. 20, 1951.

³³ Interpretive statistical statement compiled from letters and telegrams the White House received about the Rice affair. On a letter from Frank J. Grimes, Dover, N.H., Sept. 30, 1951, someone had pencilled "14,500," evidently indicating the Dover population. HSTL.

³⁴ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 369.

³⁵ Barney Silverstein to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 30, 1951, HSTL.

³⁶ Mary McLeod Bethune to Harry S. Truman, Sept. 10, 1951, HSTL.

³⁷ Pearl Elder to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 29, 1951, HSTL.

³⁸ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 31, 1951.

³⁹ Arnold Benjamin Davidson to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 30, 1951; Ted Davis (Silent Dawn) to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 30, 1951, HSTL.

⁴⁰ *Sioux City Journal*, Aug. 30, 1951.

⁴¹ Mrs. Don Hudek to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 30, 1951, HSTL.

⁴² Miss Catherine Hogg to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 30, 1951. For similar quotes see Nathan Hendon to Truman, Aug. 31, 1951, and Ruth Tillinghast to Truman, Aug. 30, 1951, HSTL. Claude Barnett, director of the Associated Negro Press, Inc., sent Truman a two-page recounting of the Rice incident Barnett hoped would be syndicated in "newspapers all over the country." Barnett to Truman, Sept. 4, 1951, HSTL.

⁴³ *Lincoln Star*, Aug. 31, 1951.

⁴⁴ Dr. Orange Starr to Harry S. Truman, Aug. 30, 1951, HSTL.

⁴⁵ Art Wakolee to Harry S. Truman, Sept. 11, 1951; Mrs. Inez D. Fraze to Truman, Aug. 31, 1951, both HSTL.

⁴⁶ *Lincoln Star*, Dec. 13, 1951. Pamela Rice Goodwin to author, Nov. 10, 1994.

⁴⁷ *Lincoln Star*, Dec. 12, 1951; Jan. 11, 1952.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Jan. 4, 1952. Pamela Rice Goodwin, telephone interview with author, Mar. 19, 1995.

⁴⁹ See Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*.

⁵⁰ *Omaha World-Herald*, Nov. 6, 1972; *Newsweek*, Nov. 20, 1972, 37.