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### Article Title: Spending the Indians' Money: A Quantitative Case Study of Oto-Missouri Trust Fund Disbursements, 1855-1881

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Article Summary: Documentary and quantitative evidence provides reason to doubt whether the Oto-Missouri received the full benefit of the consideration paid to them for the 1854 cession of 1,700 square miles of prime Nebraska real estate. In fact, government disbursements of Oto-Missouri monies at times benefited white employees and entrepreneurs more than the Indians, and a significant portion of these shrinking funds was irretrievably squandered on unfounded assimilatory investments (education, farming, cattle raising, clapboard housing) that the Indians did not favor.

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Photographs / Images / Tables: Oto Agency school, 1875-76; Oto Agency and part of Oto village; Harragarra, Oto leader, 1870s; Table: Direct Payments to Indians; Table: Payroll Disbursements; Table: Agricultural Disbursements; Table: Educational Disbursements; Table: Building Disbursements; Table: Total Disbursements

# SPENDING THE INDIANS' MONEY: A QUANTITATIVE CASE STUDY OF OTO-MISSOURI TRUST FUND DISBURSEMENTS, 1855-1881

*By Daniel W. Overton*

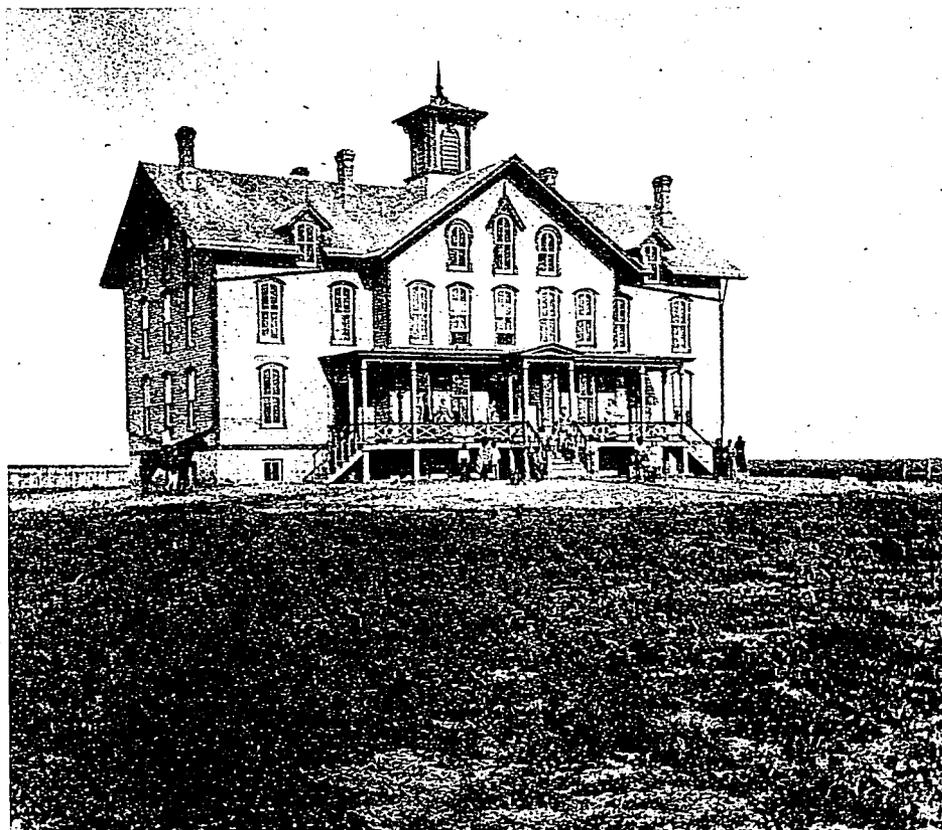
In March of 1854 the confederated Oto and Missouri tribes of Indians relinquished to the United States government all claim and title to their remaining tract of native lands below the Platte River in what is now eastern Nebraska. They had little practical choice; malnutrition, disease, alcohol abuse, and competition with neighboring and displaced Indian groups had

brought near ruin to the tribe – whose numbers, according to Indian Office estimates, declined from fifteen hundred in 1830 to six hundred in 1855.<sup>1</sup> The cession amounted to 1,087,829 acres, for which the Oto-Missouri received, in addition to a 162,000 acre reservation located some 100 miles to the south along the Big Blue River, a total consideration of

\$463,424.<sup>2</sup> Neglecting the offsetting value of the reservation, the amount received for their lands came to about forty-two cents per acre – a figure that should come as little surprise to most students; in fact, a recent study has determined that the collective Indian societies of the central Great Plains region (containing some 290 million acres) received, on average, a niggardly ten cents per acre for their ceded properties.<sup>3</sup>

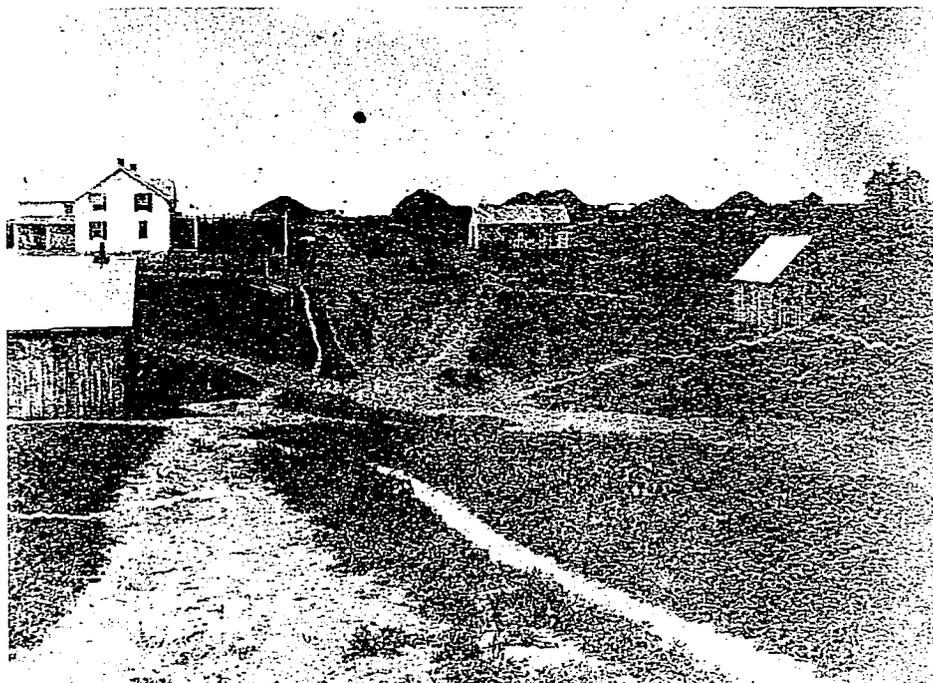
The Oto-Missouri moved to their new home in July of 1855. They would reside there for just over a quarter-century, before departing to Red Rock, Oklahoma, in the fall of 1881. Almost from the beginning it was clear that the Indians' chances of keeping their fertile, well-watered, well-timbered acres from the clutches of acquisitive whites were slim. By 1870 the region immediately surrounding the Oto-Missouri reservation was completely settled – indeed, by 1870 homestead opportunities in eastern Kansas and Nebraska no longer existed. In 1876 the tribe, whose shrinking annuity payments were grossly inadequate to their needs, consented to sell 120,000 acres off the west side of their reserve.

*Oto agency school, built about 1875-76. (NSHS-I395:2-2)*



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## Oto-Missouri Trust Fund



*Oto Agency depicting blacksmith shop, carpenter shop, agent's house, industrial school building, and part of the Oto village (NSHS-1395:2-1)*

However, payment for these lands, which had to be pried from politically savvy white settlers, came much too late to be of help at a time when the Oto-Missouri needed it the most.<sup>4</sup>

This paper has two goals: First, to present an overview of Indian-white relations as it pertained to a tribe of Plains Indians which, owing to its comparatively small population and non-threatening attitude towards invading whites, has received sparse historical attention. In particular, the aim is to examine selected aspects of the government's management of Oto-Missouri trust funds within the context of U.S. Indian reservation policy in the second half of the nineteenth century. An underlying question naturally arises: Of the paltry cents-per-acre considerations ostensibly paid to native Americans in general, and to the Oto-Missouri in particular, what proportion actually went into Indian pockets or stomachs? It is a sticky question, especially from a legal claims point of view, since the majority of nineteenth century Indian treaties and agreements explicitly provided the Chief

Executive with broad discretionary powers over the manner in which funds might be spent for the benefit of particular tribes.

The second goal is to demonstrate the research potential of a considerable body of quantitative data that has been routinely employed by claims lawyers and government employees, but rarely delved into by scholars of Indian-white relations: The detailed U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) Indian trust fund records (Record Group 217), presently housed at the National Archives Center in Suitland, Maryland.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of its judicial tenure, from 1948 to 1978, the Indian Claims Commission presided over some 610 docketed cases – of which the Oto-Missouri case was number eleven.<sup>6</sup> In instances where a plaintiff (the suing tribe) sought an accounting of government-managed Indian funds and properties, the defendant (the United States) was required to furnish a report, prepared from GAO records, describing the amounts expended and the manner of their disposal.<sup>7</sup> The graphed data presented below were

derived from a portion of the disbursement schedules contained in one such report.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of confining Indian tribes to greatly reduced tracts of land, where they could be compelled to abandon their "wild and roving ways" in favor of self-sufficient agricultural lifestyles (while at the same time accommodating the ever-mounting tide of land-hungry whites) can be traced, as a serious policy strategy, to the early 1850s.<sup>9</sup> The creation of the Oto-Missouri reservation represented one of the earliest attempts at implementing this scheme on the central Great Plains.<sup>10</sup> Three principal phases may be defined in tracing the development of nineteenth century reservation policy: The formative period (early 1850s to 1868); the Quaker reform period (1869 to 1876); and the bureaucratic counterreform period (culminating with the Dawes Indian Allotment Act of 1887). During their brief stay at the Big Blue reserve, the Oto-Missouri came under the direct tutelage of all three.

Recent historians characterize the formative period as being largely a time of marked neglect and, too frequently, callous abuse of Indian misfortune.<sup>11</sup> In the years leading up to the postbellum explosion in western land speculation, Washington oversight of Indian Office field operations was conspicuously lax. This was due, in part, to difficulties in communicating over vast distances in the pre-railroad Trans-Mississippi West. Chronic underfunding and understaffing of the Office of Indian Affairs were also significant factors. Additionally, appointees to Indian agent posts required presidential and congressional approval, with the inevitable result that honest competence often suffered at the hands of political and individual self-interest. Thus it was no rarity to



*Harragarra, Oto leader, 1870s.  
(NSHS-1395:4-5)*

encounter government officers allied with private traders in schemes to milk dependent reservation Indians for their already inadequate annuities.<sup>12</sup>

In 1865, for example, Oto-Missouri chiefs and headmen complained in a letter to the president that their agent, Major William Daily, forced them to purchase their goods from a trader whose rates were twice as high as those of competing operators. They claimed

as well that their agent was not loath to pocket tribal profits acquired through the grinding of settler grain on the Indians' own grist mill. Not surprisingly, Daily made no mention of the accusations (which may or may not have been legitimate) in his annual report, and nothing more was made of the issue. Such had not been the case four years previously, however, when the government was con-

strained to acknowledge employee misconduct upon discovering that the Oto-Missouri agent, William Dennison, had absconded with the tribe's entire annuity payment for 1861 - \$13,554 in cash. The ensuing winter proved to be a disastrous one for the Indians, who, besides being without an agent, were required to make do until the following spring with \$2,247 in rations.<sup>13</sup>

A more rigorous, and avowedly accountable, approach to Indian reservation policy emerged in 1869 with the inauguration of President Ulysses S. Grant's alternately benign and uncompromising strategy of "peace within, war without." The new administration (which had won by a landslide and would do so again in 1872) promised to treat honestly and fairly with Indians who accepted confinement within prescribed reservation boundaries, while militarily pursuing those who refused. As a means of purging the civilian Indian service of its reputation for "patronage and plunder," reservations of the Northern and Southern Superintendencies (Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma) were placed in the administrative hands of Quaker activists belonging to the Philadelphia-based Society of Friends.<sup>14</sup> This initiative coincided with Congress's establishment of an independent, unpaid Board of Indian Commissioners whose ten members - private citizens "eminent for their intelligence and philanthropy" - would work jointly with the secretary of the interior in directing the disbursement of congressional appropriations (reimbursable from Indian trust fund accounts) for Indian support.<sup>15</sup>

Quaker reformers, in concert with other mainstream humanitarians, believed that assimilation of the values of a "more provident white race" offered Indians their only viable alternative to eventual annihilation: It was an old refrain. Under Quaker tutelage, however, assimilation ideology would

receive its fullest practical testing. In essence, the plan was to: (1) protect Indian interests by locating reservations outside the main routes of white expansion; (2) provide all necessary education, tools, and agricultural implements; (3) break down tribal ties, political and social, seen as barring the path to "civilization"; and (4) allot lands in severalty to individual Indian households as a means of putting them on a comparable economic and cultural footing with their habitually covetous white neighbors.

Unfortunately, these simplistic and ethnocentrically myopic, if well-intentioned, objectives proved to be tragically unrealistic when put into practice.<sup>16</sup> Most Indian societies tenaciously resisted government efforts to deprive them of their ancient and accustomed cultural identities. Disbursements to the Indians, even when they were not less than promised and late in arriving, were inadequate for providing anything more than the barest level of subsistence.<sup>17</sup> Disease, drought, insects, and western landgrabbers (whose numbers and ambitions policy-makers had seriously underestimated) combined to quash any remaining hopes of converting America's impoverished native hunter-gardeners into thriving commercial agriculturalists.

The Oto-Missouri received the first of two Quaker agents, Albert Green, in the summer of 1869. In his first annual report, he described the Indians as being in a "disquieted" and malnourished state. Over the preceding three years their numbers had declined from 513 to 440.<sup>18</sup> The tribe was also politically split (and would remain so for decades to come) over the issue of moving to the Indian Territory. Months earlier, Oto-Missouri agent John Smith and Superintendent Hampton Denman had persuaded a delegation of chiefs to sell part or all of their lands, at \$1.25 an acre, to interested railroad companies. Green later contended that Smith had tried to talk him into backing the deal, promising that each would receive the Big Blue section (640 acres)

of his choice if the tribe could be compelled to sell. The new Quaker agent, however, would have none of it, and the railroad agreement was quietly dropped.<sup>19</sup>

From their correspondence and annual reports, it is apparent that Agent Green and his Quaker replacement, Jesse Griest, were genuinely devoted to the physical and "moral" advancement of the Indians, as well as to their inherent right to hold and keep private property. But it had been a losing battle from the start, fought upon internal and external fronts. Internally, the inherited tribal schism between lukewarm "progressives" and recalcitrant "traditionalists" continued to widen with every Quaker effort at directing Oto-Missouri independence by intervening in nearly every aspect of their political and personal lives. Externally, ground was steadily lost through grossly inadequate appropriations, and the ever-mounting agitation of greedy (if otherwise decent and hardworking) white neighbors – whose enthusiasm regarding federal assimilation policy was negligible indeed.

Following the Panic of 1873 and the close presidential election of 1876 (in which Rutherford B. Hayes won by a single electoral college vote), affairs within the Indian Office seemed once again to be ripe for reform. The Quaker experiment, it was contended, had proved to be a waste of "government" time and money. Accordingly, appropriations to the philanthropic Board of Indian Commissioners were abruptly pared to the bone.<sup>20</sup> Offices of the Northern and Southern Superintendencies were eliminated. Investigations into possible fraud or mismanagement within selected agencies were initiated, often on the basis of the testimony of Indian Office "spies" posing as agency employees. Early in 1877 Interior Secretary Carl Schurz, acting through his personally appointed Indian commissioner, Ezra Hayt, began replacing Quaker (and other denominational) agents with seasoned military officers and "competent" profes-

sional bureaucrats. By 1882, only one Quaker agent remained in office, Isaiah Lightner of the Santee Sioux agency.<sup>21</sup>

In May of 1880 the Office of Indian Affairs dispatched an investigator, William Pollock, to the Big Blue reserve to look into charges of "corruption" that had been anonymously laid against Jesse Griest. After inspecting the agency books, Pollock concluded that a replacement was in order on the grounds that Griest had improperly cared for and sold some twelve agency hogs and cattle.<sup>22</sup> Griest resigned his post two weeks later. In his absence, the annual report for 1880 was prepared by W. C. Boetler, agency physician, and Rees Pickering, agency clerk. It painted a distinctly, and predictably, negative portrait of Griest's performance, alleging that upon their arrival in 1879, "we found, instead of tribal unity and cooperation, schisms, jealousies, inconfidence, dissatisfaction, and pleasure manifested in revolutionary rather than in progressive tendencies."<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, they found the recent influence of Robert Gardner, temporary agent to the Oto-Missouri, to have been "productive of much good." Gardner, they averred, had properly "commended his spoiled children for good conduct, and censured them for bad; having introduced in a few weeks a course of social discipline heretofore unknown and such as will reflect in the future history of this tribe."<sup>24</sup>

Although humanitarian activists no longer directly managed the nation's Indian reservations after 1882, they nonetheless continued to exert a considerable influence on the evolution of Indian affairs.<sup>25</sup> Most important, they remained adamant in their insistence upon allotments in severalty – especially now that the frontier's end was clearly in sight and, increasingly, the only "cheap" lands remaining were perceived by acquisitive whites to be "lying idle" in Indian reserves. By the terms of the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887, 60 million acres of Indian lands (out of a total of 138 million) were

declared as being "surplus" to Indian needs and therefore suitable for white purchase.<sup>26</sup> In the end, the primary assumption underlying assimilation policy – that allotments alone could ensure Indian property rights – proved to be hollow. Individual allotments merely accelerated the erosion of tribal land bases as impoverished Indians promptly sold their properties as soon as the requisite twenty-five-year trust periods expired.<sup>27</sup>

By the terms set forth in Article 4 of the Treaty of March 15, 1854, the Oto-Missouri were to have received, commencing on January 1, 1855, fixed annuity payments totaling \$385,000 and disbursed on the following sliding scale: \$20,000 per annum for three years, \$13,000 for ten years, \$9,000 for fifteen years, and \$5,000 for a final twelve years. The treaty stipulated, however, and in language that was hardly unique to the agreement at hand, that the actual disbursement of these annuities would be subject to the "direction of the President of the United States, who may, from time to time, determine, at his discretion, what proportion . . . shall be paid to them in money, and what proportion shall be applied to and expended for their moral improvement and education; [or] for such beneficial objects as in his judgment will be calculated to advance them in civilization."<sup>28</sup>

Article 5 of the treaty stipulated that, in order to enable the Oto-Missouri to "settle their affairs, and to remove, and subsist themselves for one year at their new home . . . and to break up and fence one hundred and fifty acres of land at their new home, they shall receive from the United States the further sum of twenty thousand dollars, to be paid out and expended under the direction of the President, and in such manner as he shall approve" (emphasis added).<sup>29</sup>

Article 7 obligated the federal government to erect "a grist and saw mill, and keep the same in repair, and provide a miller for the term of ten years; also erect a good blacksmith shop, sup-

ply the same with tools and keep it in repair for the term of ten years, and provide a good blacksmith for a like period, and employ an experienced farmer, for ten years, to instruct the Indians in agriculture."<sup>30</sup>

In the GAO disbursement schedules used in this study, funds expended in fulfillment of the various 1854 treaty articles were accounted for separately, indicating that the goods and services provided for in Article 7, as well as the startup funds offered in Article 5, were supplementary to the fixed annuity payments (thus the \$463,424 figure mentioned earlier). Also, in order to give a full accounting of Oto-Missouri trust funds available over the 1855-81 period – as well as to ensure a full understanding of that accounting – three technical points need to be borne in mind: (1) As the 1854 Act specified that payments were to be paid on a sliding scale over a forty-year period, these funds were not completely disbursed until after 1894; (2) At the time of the 1854 treaty, the Oto-Missouri still had a balance of \$1,996 remaining in their account deriving from the proceeds of previous land cessions; (3) additional monies came into the fund following the public sale of the western portion of the Big Blue reserve, which commenced in October of 1877 and ended in 1883.<sup>31</sup> However, owing to the generous credit terms offered to purchasers, as well as to the successful stalling efforts of many settlers who were in no great hurry to initiate down payments, monies from the sale of "western portion" lands did not begin to trickle in noticeably until well after the tribe had ceded the eastern remnant as well and departed for the Indian Territory.<sup>32</sup>

The graph of Direct Payments to the Indians (fig. 1) displays annuity disbursements paid directly to the Indians themselves, or rather to Oto-Missouri chiefs who distributed the largess among tribal members as they saw fit. "Provisions" refers primarily to emergency foodstuffs and subsistence items; while "Goods" pertains to

utensils, clothing, blankets, and "gifts."

In regard to the comparatively large "Goods" expenditure for 1867, the Indians reportedly received \$6,406 in clothing. The purchase accounted for more than a third of the total annual disbursement. For most years, clothing costs were nominal; the second largest disbursement, \$2,241, occurred in 1881. Oddly, Agent John Smith saw no need to mention the mountainous clothes consignment in his annual report; choosing instead to record a general observation regarding annuity goods: "[They are] quite too often, I may say invariably, of bad quality, and far below what I conceive the government expects them to receive . . . . It seems to me the agent might be clothed with power to guard against such things, for the protection of the Indian, by rejecting such goods as did not come up to the standard."<sup>33</sup>

In interpreting the graph of Direct Payments to the Indians, two facts are apparent. First, such expenditures were anything but regular or dependable. During their first year on the Big Blue reserve, the Indians received some \$2,600 in provisions. Of that amount, \$471 was paid in partial fulfillment of the \$20,000 promised in Article 5; over the next five years \$5,000 worth of Article 5 monies were expended. Other disbursements for 1855 (which are graphed in later sections) included: \$380 in arms and ammunition, \$138 in payment to teachers, \$405 in agency household equipment and supplies, \$771 for transportation of annuity goods, \$21 worth of iron, steel, coal, and tools, and \$340 for blacksmiths and strikers. In all, the Indians received disbursements of \$4,868 during their first year, even though the treaty had promised them a total of \$40,000 in startup funds and annuity payments alone. Because the Oto-Missouri had arrived at their new home in mid-summer, too late to put a crop in the ground, their first steps on the road to "civilized yeomanry" must have seemed most uninspiring.

Second, it is clear that, in terms of

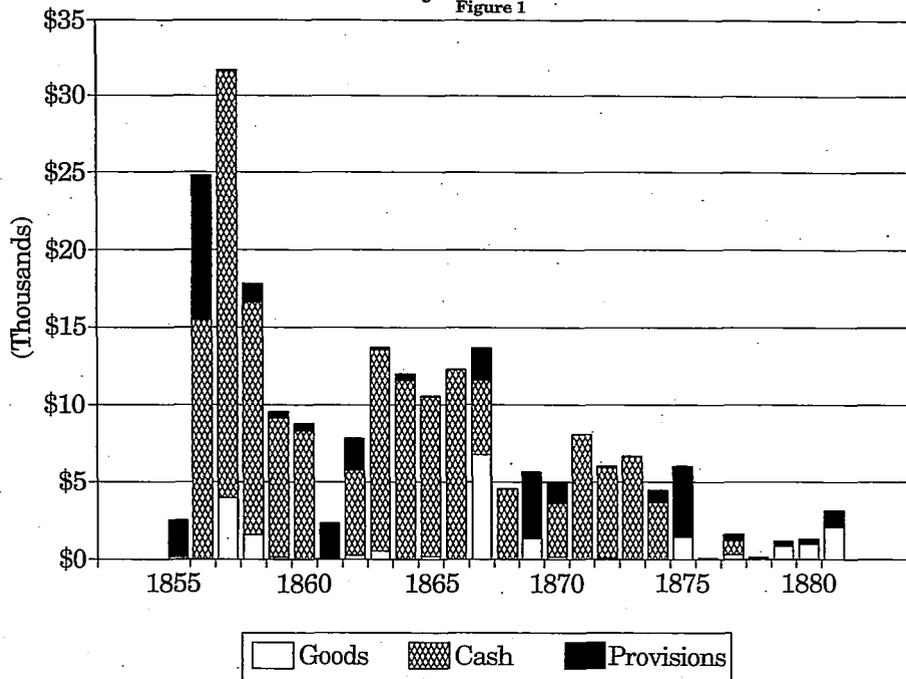
"cash in hand," Oto-Missouri independence declined steadily over time. After the arrival of Albert Green in 1869, and Jesse Griest in 1873, personal Indian annuities leveled off to a pittance, reflecting a fundamental difference in managerial philosophy between agents of the formative and Quaker periods. The former agents tended, at least on their honest days, to lead by benign example rather than by direct interference. Quaker agents preferred to take an active hand in managing the Oto-Missouri pocketbook, believing (with good reason, perhaps) that direct payments to the Indians were a waste of meager congressional appropriations and of no lasting benefit to the tribe as a whole.

As with the preceding graph, and with each of the graphs included in this study, the graph of agency Payroll Disbursements (fig. 2) displays a striking lack of continuity in the yearly outlays. Also the assumption that the lion's share of salary payments went to white rather than to Indian workers, though quite logical in terms of assimilation objectives, underscores the broader question of whether or not Oto-Missouri trustees personally "profited" from the considerations offered the tribe in payment for extensive land cessions. However, the GAO disbursement schedules fail to differentiate between white and Indian labor. Estimates of the breakdown must therefore be inferred from other sources — principally the correspondence and reports of the Oto-Missouri agents.

The graph's "Other" category refers to the salaries of various short-term (usually white) employees: physicians, clerks, attorneys, plasterers, and teamsters. "Police" pertains to tribal policemen and agency interpreters, drawn from the upper ranks of "progressive" Oto-Missouri society. A significant increase in the number of police positions occurred in 1880 and 1881, reflecting the counterreformers' concern for "reestablishing order." "Mill" refers to agency millers, carpenters, sawyers, engineers (usually white), and

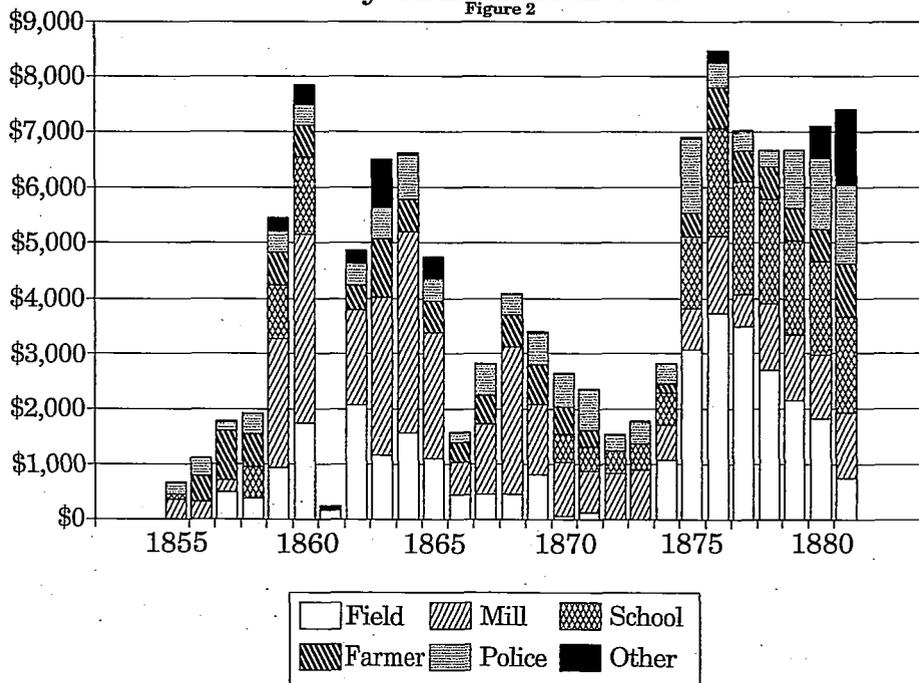
Direct Payments to Indians

Figure 1



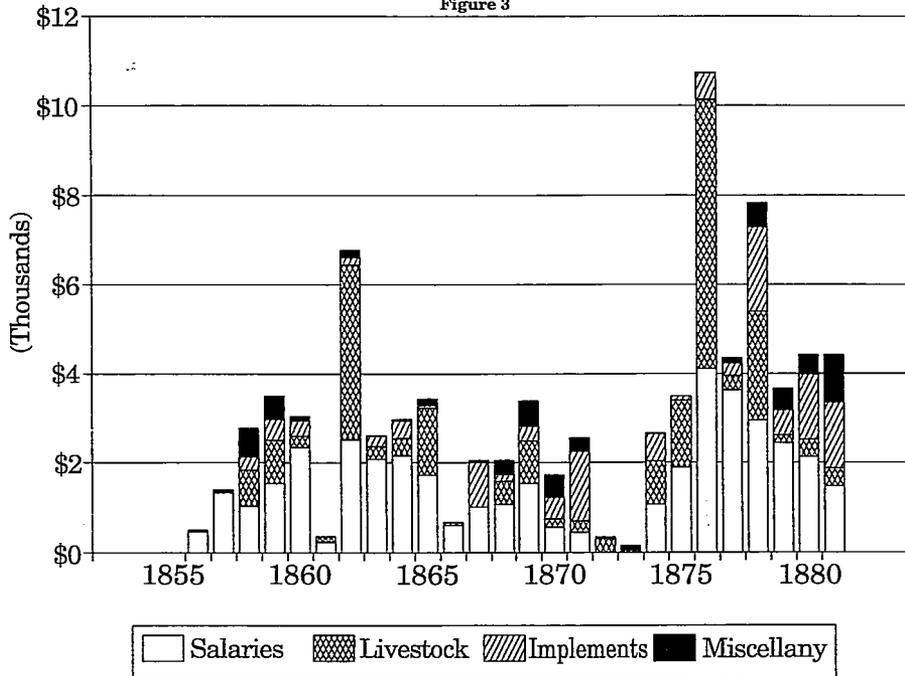
Payroll Disbursements

Figure 2



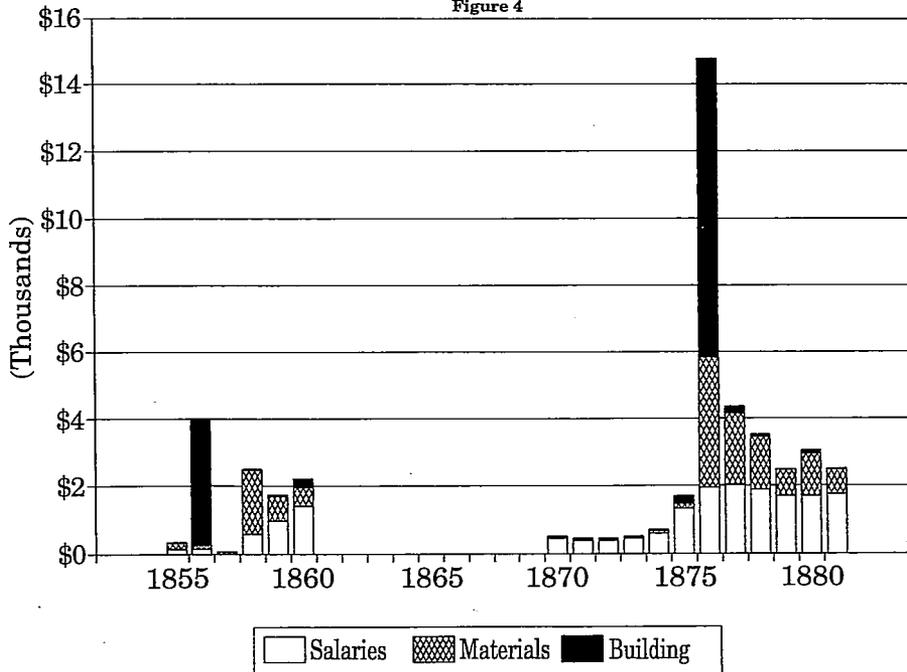
### Agricultural Disbursements

Figure 3



### Educational Disbursements

Figure 4



miscellaneous (usually Indian) helpers, as well as blacksmiths and strikers. "Farmer" and "School" positions were typically filled by white professionals, although Quaker agents occasionally hired exceptional Oto-Missouri Indians to assist in the work.

During the formative period, "Field" laborers were principally comprised of non-skilled white employees hired on a temporary or seasonal basis to break sod, plant and harvest crops (especially while the Indians were away on summer bison hunts), and, occasionally, to assist in various repairs. Under Quaker tutelage, however, a concerted effort was imposed, by means of curtailed cash payments to increasingly uncooperative Oto-Missouri chiefs, to put Indians on the payroll. In this aim, the agents (particularly Jesse Griest) were fairly successful; by 1875, 132 tribal members were listed as having labored at one time or another on the agency farm, earning one dollar a day. Unfortunately, there never seemed to be enough "Oto-Missouri" money to go around. In his 1876 annual report, Griest complained that he had not had "the means at command to utilize a larger portion of Indian labor that has almost continuously sought employment."<sup>34</sup>

The graph of Agricultural Disbursements (fig. 3) helps demonstrate the thesis that the assimilatory goal of converting the Indians into self-sufficient farmers was overly optimistic. The Oto-Missouri were without the services of an agent until the arrival of William Dennison in March of 1857. In his first annual report, Dennison recommended that withheld Article 5 startup funds "be used in purchasing at least twelve yoke of oxen, one pair of mules, two wagons, and the necessary agricultural implements, such as ploughs, hoes, axes and scythes, &c."<sup>35</sup>

With or without federal guidance, Oto-Missouri women continued to cultivate crops in traditional ways on narrow patches along stream beds where the smooth alluvial soil could be easily tilled and watered. This practice per-

## Oto-Missouri Trust Fund

sisted throughout the tribe's stay on the reserve. These plots were occasionally the only source of grain and vegetables for the Indians, particularly in times of drought or tribal disharmony. Oto-Missouri men, on the other hand, refused to participate willingly in agriculture so long as the supply of bison and annuity monies enabled them to live as they pleased.

The only area of notable success with agricultural assimilation happened to be swine and poultry production – which the Indians took to quite readily. Agents John Baker, in 1862, and Jesse Griest, in 1876, tried to interest the Indians in cattle ranching as well. Owing to the greater management that cattle required, as well as to the apparent lack of funds needed to establish a herd large enough to subsidize the Indians through recurring lean periods, the experiment was largely unsuccessful.

Agricultural disbursements decreased markedly during Albert Green's tenure, due mainly to continually shrinking funds, although a number of other factors were involved. First, Green was dismayed over his predecessors' lack of progress in promoting Indian self-sufficiency, which he hoped to remedy by reestablishing education for the children, repairing the agency's dilapidated sawmill, and providing "box housing" for cooperating Indians. Second, Green concluded that it was "far better to encourage and assist the Indians in opening and cultivating small farms and patches, which they may individually call their own, than to incur a heavy expense in enlarging the agency farm."<sup>36</sup> Agricultural monies, he believed, would be best spent in providing additional plows and teams to enterprising tribal members. Third, Green was reluctant to invest heavily in agriculture because repeated crop failures, previous agency mismanagement, internal political discord, and ever-increasing settler depredations (removing survey stakes, cutting timber, stealing livestock) had combined to sap the average tribal member's

already meager interest in occupational farming.

On the graph of Agricultural Disbursements, "Miscellany" refers to expenditures for various non-mechanical items such as seed, fertilizer, fruit trees, and the like.

Second to agricultural development, assimilation policy purportedly sought to bring literacy, cultural enlightenment, and practical education to Indian children. But, as can be readily discerned from the graph of Educational Disbursements (fig. 4), actual implementation of the policy was largely disregarded prior to the Quakers' arrival. During the entire decade of the 1860s tribal education received no funding whatsoever.

At the outset, educational responsibilities were entrusted to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church. A two-story boarding school was constructed in 1856, at Oto-Missouri expense, just outside the southern boundary of the reserve, about eight miles from the Oto village. Its siting had been intentional; the Presbyterians wanted to avoid agency and tribal interference alike. Not surprisingly the enterprise was doomed from the start. Besides being apathetic to the proclaimed importance of white education, Oto-Missouri parents were highly distrustful of government intentions, and did not care to have their children taken from them. Consequently, the school was sporadically and lightly attended. In 1859, Agent Dennison advised its closure on the grounds that it had already cost the Indians a large sum of money, "for which they have never received any benefits."<sup>37</sup>

Through the repeated urgings of Albert Green, and with supplementary assistance donated by the Society of Friends, a "day school" was built on agency grounds in March of 1870. Its first Quaker teacher, Sallie Ely, found only one or two school-aged children, out of a total of eighty-six, who could speak any English at all. But she was not deterred, saying of her pupils: "They are interested, quick to learn, and be-

have as well as we could expect, never refusing to obey us." Within six months she was pleased to report: "The majority of our pupils [now] know the alphabet perfectly, the figures up to 50, and can readily spell many names of objects and words of two letters, both on and off the cards. They can write their names on slates legibly, and make all the large and small letters very well."<sup>38</sup>

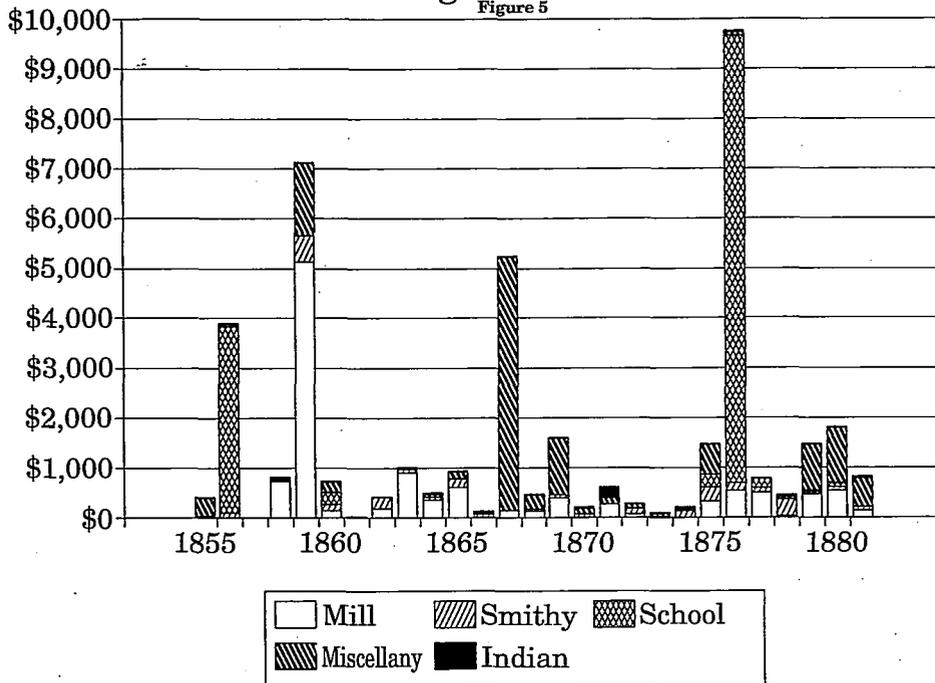
Educational disbursements increased markedly during Jesse Griest's seven-year term. Construction of a three-story, \$8,500 "industrial school" (with its attached school barn) commenced in the summer of 1875. But it was negatively received by a majority of Oto-Missouri, who were still suffering from the near-total failure of their crops in 1874, and who disapproved of so large an expenditure of tribal funds. Besides, political tensions within the tribe had never been worse. Griest's policy of withholding cash annuities to encourage Indian labor only added fuel to the fire. Because of these and other grievances, Oto-Missouri parents were unappreciative of their children's "commodious" new school. In 1878 Griest was undoubtedly chagrined to report that daily attendance for the year had averaged only nineteen students.<sup>39</sup>

On the graph of Educational Disbursements, "Materials" refers to books, stationery, clothing, furniture, equipment, school farm supplies, and the like.

The graph of Building Disbursements (fig. 5) describes the (non-agricultural) overhead costs of operating the Oto-Missouri Agency. "Mill" refers to expenses related to the erection and repair of the saw and grist mill and the carpenter shop, as well as to assorted supplies and equipment. "Smithy" pertains to the erection and repair of the agency blacksmith shop, in addition to tools and raw materials. "School" refers only to construction and repair costs – not to educational materials.

Although the tribe was obliged to pay for material expenses and the salaries of skilled tradesmen over the intervening period, actual construction

Building Disbursements  
Figure 5



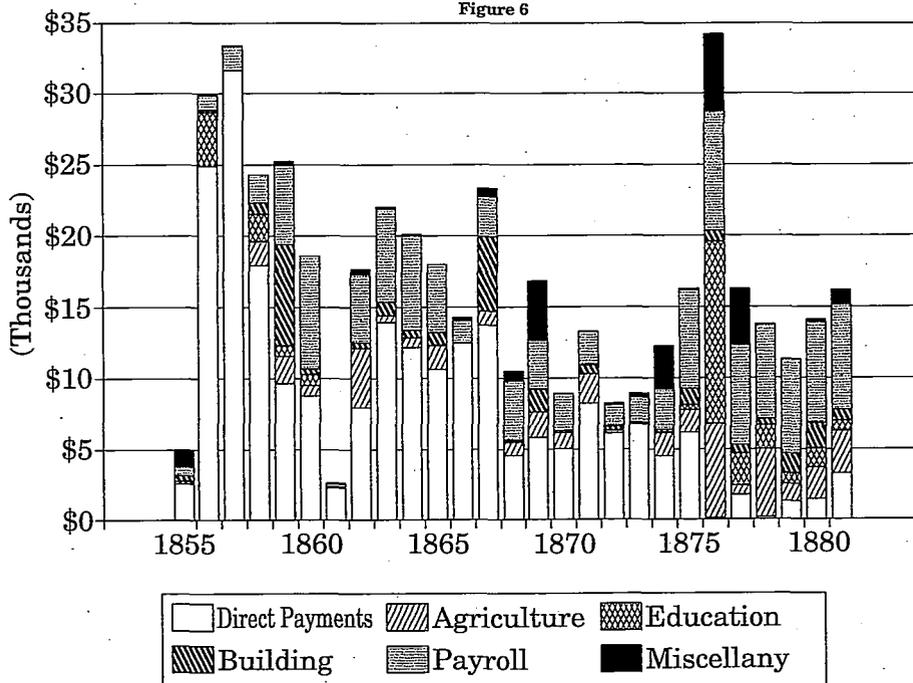
of the agency mill and blacksmith shop was not completed until the fifth year of the Indians' residence.

"Miscellany" includes household equipment and supplies, agency buildings and repairs, employee housing, fuel and light, and miscellaneous building materials. In his annual report for 1867, John Smith mentioned that he had "made great improvement in the condition of the buildings belonging to the agency," which is reflected in that year's exorbitant expenditure of \$5,104 for household equipment and supplies.<sup>40</sup> Curiously, Albert Green noted upon his arrival in 1869 that the "buildings belonging to the agency are many of them in a dilapidated condition, and appear to have suffered greatly from neglect."<sup>41</sup> None of these miscellaneous expenses pertained to Indian abodes.

"Indian" pertains to a specific ledger item in the disbursement schedules termed "Indian dwellings." It is significant that from 1855 to 1881 a total of only \$235.91 was spent on Indian housing (mostly in 1871), while for white employee housing the total was \$1,309.44.<sup>42</sup> Throughout their stay at the Big Blue reserve the majority of Oto-Missouri lived, by preference as well as by economic constraint, in traditional domiciles: cool earthen lodges in summer, and well-ventilated, easily heated tipis in winter. Despite Albert Green's constant efforts to move the Indians into drafty clapboard boxes, Griest reported in 1879 that the reserve could boast of no more than nine such structures.<sup>43</sup> Griest eventually came to hold no illusions regarding individual housing and allotments in severalty - preferring instead to concentrate his attention on the basics of education, agricultural training, and simple survival.

In the graph of Total Disbursements (fig. 6), "Direct Payments" and "Payroll" sum the expenditures (respectively) included in the previous graphs Direct Payments to Indians (fig. 1) and Payroll Disbursements (fig. 2). "Agriculture" and "Education" likewise sum the expenditures included in the graphs

Total Disbursements  
Figure 6



## Oto-Missouri Trust Fund

of Agricultural Disbursements (fig. 3) and Educational Disbursements (fig. 4), with the exception of agricultural and education salaries (which are included under "Payroll"). "Building" sums the expenses included in the graph of Building Disbursements (fig. 5), with the exception of school construction costs (which are included under "Education").

"Miscellany" includes surveying expenses, arms and ammunition, expenses of Indian delegations, miscellaneous agency expenses, transportation of annuity goods, drugs and medical supplies, and other minor items. The large miscellaneous disbursements for 1874, 1876, and 1877 went primarily towards the cost of surveying the Big Blue reserve prior to the public sale of the western portion. The other prominent miscellaneous disbursement, that for 1869, largely reflects the \$2,324 cost of sending a delegation of Oto-Missouri chiefs and headmen to Washington, D.C. to negotiate the sale of part or all of their reserve to railroad interests.

In considering the question, "Of the paltry cents-per-acre considerations ostensibly paid to native Americans in general and the Oto-Missouri in particular, what proportion actually went into Indian pockets, or stomachs?", it has not been the intention to arrive at some offhand judgment, such as the Indians had been robbed blind or they would have been better off receiving hard cash for their land cessions.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the documentary and quantitative evidence provides sufficient reason to doubt whether the Oto-Missouri actually received the full benefit of the consideration paid to them for the 1854 cession of some 1,700 square miles of prime Nebraska real estate.<sup>45</sup> To the contrary, government disbursements of Oto-Missouri monies at times benefited white employees and entrepreneurs (legitimate and otherwise) more than the Indians, and a significant portion of these shrinking funds was irretrievably squandered (albeit altruistically) on unfounded

assimilatory investments that the beneficiaries themselves frequently did not favor.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Berlin B. Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias: A Study of Indian Removal and the Legal Aftermath* (Oklahoma City: Times Journal Pub. Co., 1965), 16; Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, D.C.: 1855), 256. [Hereafter cited as *Annual Report*].

<sup>2</sup>Indian Claims Commission, *Decisions of the Indian Claims Commission: Findings, Opinions, Orders, and Final Awards of the United States Indian Claims Commission*, ii (Washington, D.C.: 1953), 97.

<sup>3</sup>David J. Wishart, "Compensation for Dispossession: Payments to the Indians for Their Lands on the Central and Northern Great Plains in the 19th Century," *National Geographic Research*, 6 (1990): 363.

<sup>4</sup>Daniel W. Overton, "A Historical Geography of the Eastern Remnant of the Oto-Missouria Reservation on the Big Blue River" (Master's thesis, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1991).

<sup>5</sup>Oliver W. Holmes, "Indian-Related Records in the National Archives," in *Indian-White Relations: A Persistent Paradox*, ed. Jane F. Smith and Robert M. Kvasnicka (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1981), 25. In their case before the Indian Claims Commission, the Oto-Missouri pled that the U.S. Government had failed in its self-appointed duty to protect the tribe's best fiduciary interests, and as a consequence, the Oto-Missouri had received far less for their lands on the northern Great Plains than their value at the time of their surrender. Cessions in 1830, 1833, 1836, 1854, 1876, and 1881 amounted to a total of some 4.5 million acres.

This paper is primarily concerned with those monies actually and contemporaneously received from 1855 to 1881 in accordance with the terms of the original Treaty of 1854 and does not take later ICC awards into consideration. Although the court eventually dismissed five of the claimants' original eight "causes of action," the Oto-Missouri nevertheless managed to come away with a final award of some \$2,930,000 in belated compensation for the "unconscionable" consideration paid their forebears. See Overton thesis, Chap. 2, 3.

<sup>6</sup>Holmes, "Indian-related Records," 26.

<sup>7</sup>Indian Claims Commission, *Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: 1978), 127-30.

<sup>8</sup>General Accounting Office, *Report Re: Petition of the Otoe and Missouria Tribe of Indians, Indian Claims Commission, No. 11* (Washington, D.C.: 1950), 176-99, 254-55, 295-301, 313, 355-58, 367-70, 373, 379-81, 394-95. [Hereafter cited as *GAO Report*].

<sup>9</sup>S. L. Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Washington, D.C.: 1973), 72.

<sup>10</sup>Robert W. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 46, 59.

<sup>11</sup>Ray A. Billington, *Western Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); Edmund J. Danziger, *Indi-*

*ans and Bureaucrats: Administering the Reservation Policy During the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974); and Utley, *Indian Frontier*.

<sup>12</sup>Danziger, *Indians and Bureaucrats*, 12; Utley, *Indian Frontier*, 45.

<sup>13</sup>Congress eventually passed a special appropriation to cover the stolen monies. However, those funds did not begin to trickle in until 1863 and as usual, they did not arrive in one lump sum. Rather, the GAO schedules indicate that they were spread out over a seven-year period. Overton thesis, 66-67. A fascinating and detailed account of the affair is provided in Richard E. Jensen, "The Oto, Missouri, and Agent Dennison," *Nebraska History* 59 (1978): 47-55.

<sup>14</sup>Clyde A. Milner, *With Good Intentions: Quaker Work Among the Pawnees, Otos, and Omahas in the 1870s* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 1, 26.

<sup>15</sup>Henry E. Fritz, "The Board of Indian Commissioners and Ethnocentric Reform, 1878-1893," in *Indian-White Relations*, 57-73.

<sup>16</sup>As concluded by Milner, *With Good Intentions*.

<sup>17</sup>William T. Hagen, "The Reservation Policy: Too Little and Too Late," in *Indian-White Relations*, 157-170.

<sup>18</sup>*Annual Report*, 1869, 353.

<sup>19</sup>Overton thesis, 71.

<sup>20</sup>Fritz, "Board of Indian Commissioners," 58.

<sup>21</sup>Milner, *With Good Intentions*, 187-98.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>23</sup>*Annual Report*, 1880, 119.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>25</sup>Fritz, "Board of Indian Commissioners," 59.

<sup>26</sup>Milner, *With Good Intentions*, 197.

<sup>27</sup>Tyler, *Indian Policy*, 95-107.

<sup>28</sup>*United States Statutes at Large*, 20: 1039.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 1040.

<sup>31</sup>*GAO Report*, 165.

<sup>32</sup>Overton thesis, 95-98; Chapman, *Otoes and Missourias*, 98-123.

<sup>33</sup>*Annual Report*, 1867, 275.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 1875, 320; 1876, 99.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 1857, 153.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 1869, 354.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 1859, 141.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 1870, 249-50.

<sup>39</sup>Overton thesis, 78-79.

<sup>40</sup>*Annual Report*, 1867, 274.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 1869, 354.

<sup>42</sup>*GAO Report*, 170-71.

<sup>43</sup>*Annual Report*, 1879, 103.

<sup>44</sup>Nor (this study has found) is it possible to come up with a precise or reliable quantitative answer to the question of "how much" actually went into "Indian pockets, or stomachs," since: (1) the GAO schedules do not differentiate between white and Indian wages; (2) the fraud factor is difficult to calculate (though there is little doubt that it existed); and (3) it is equally difficult to estimate what portion of the well-intentioned investments of Oto-Missouri monies actually translated into tangible, and edible, returns to the tribe.

<sup>45</sup>One square mile equals 640 acres; 1,087,829 acres divided by 640 equals 1,700 square miles.