



## **“I Don’t Know What We’d Have Done Without the Indians”: Non-Indian and Lakota Racial Relationships in Box Butte County’s Potato Industry, 1917-1960**

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Article Summary: A labor shortage during World War I left western Nebraska potato farmers facing the loss of their crop. They brought in Lakota (Sioux) Indians as harvesters, beginning a tradition that lasted from 1917 through the 1950s. The story is one both of prejudice and understanding, cooperation and conflict—and of longstanding relationships forged by economic necessity.

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Photographs / Images: Lakotas at the Burlington depot in Alliance, 1930s (2 views); workers in potato fields near Mitchell (3 views); sorting potatoes near Alliance, 1922; an “exaggeration postcard” showing enormous potatoes; harvesting southeast of Alliance; the Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, 1933 (Mari Sandoz photograph); Central School, Alliance; panoramic view of Alliance (2-page spread); a Lakota family in front of their white canvas tents, Box Butte County, mid-1920s; a postcard showing children playing with potatoes; potato cellar in Box Butte County; view of Hemingford, undated; Sioux Indian harvest dance at Pine Ridge

Tables: Nebraska’s total harvested potato acreage, selected years, 1915-1961; Box Butte County’s total irrigated acres, 1945-1954

# “I DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'D HAVE DONE WITHOUT THE INDIANS”

BY DAVID R. CHRISTENSEN







## Non-Indian and Lakota Racial Relationships in Box Butte County's Potato Industry, 1917-1960

Dressed for a dance, Lakotas pose at the Burlington depot in Alliance in the 1930s. NSHS RG2063-50-1

Lakotas at the Burlington depot in Alliance in the 1930s. While many whites assumed that traditional culture would disappear as Lakotas assimilated, the Lakotas themselves had different ideas. NSHS RG2063-50-2

As the sun rose behind the Sandhills, illuminating the sky to a reddish-orange tint, a Lakota family emerged from their white canvas tent ready for the day's potato harvest. Two Lakota men and women crossed the farmyard to the corral, where they helped the farmer hitch horses to wagons and to the potato digger. An elderly Lakota woman remained in the tent, brewing coffee and looking after the children—who were already scurrying about the farmyard playing “cowboys and Indians.” A dusting of frost on the grass, dirt, and

Besides Box Butte County, potatoes were also grown in the North Platte valley. Workers dig and pick potatoes at Henry Perkins's farm northeast of Mitchell. NSHS RG1431-64-29



Lakota children attended Grandview Elementary because at the time their families could not find housing outside of south Alliance. Author's collection

equipment signaled the need to finish the harvest before a hard freeze ruined the potatoes. The Lakota women's feet felt the sting of the morning chill through their moccasins. With the horses hitched, the farmer, his sons, and the Lakotas left for the potato fields to finish the harvest. En route, the sons and Lakotas engaged in a friendly conversation and wager regarding which group would pick the

most potatoes—even though the Lakotas always won. Such a scene occurred annually on almost every farm in Box Butte County, Nebraska, during the first half of the twentieth century. Although anti-Indian prejudice was always present, the potato industry improved racial relationships between Lakotas and non-Indians, even resulting in enduring friendships.

At the edge of the Sandhills, Box Butte County is located in the center of the Nebraska Panhandle. Today the county has only two incorporated towns: Alliance, the county seat, and Hemingford, eighteen miles away. In the 1910s expansion of the county's potato production created a need for migrant labor. Until about 1960 Lakotas from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota came to work the potato harvest. Before the 1930s both farmers and other non-Indian county residents mostly treated the Lakotas well, grateful that their labor saved the potatoes from rotting in the fields. Likewise, the Lakotas were pleased to have jobs where they were paid fairly treated, and appreciated by non-Indians.

Although migrant labor exposed non-Indians to Lakota culture and initially helped dispel





mutual stereotypes, racism and prejudice eventually soured relations between the two groups. During the Great Depression and World War II, the once welcoming communities in Box Butte County expressed anti-Lakota sentiments. Many farmers who hired the same Lakota families for decades rejected the towns' prejudice; still, relationships between farmers and Lakotas were susceptible to the fluidity of the potato market. Periods of drought, depression, crop disease, and low potato prices resulted in low wages, which at times combined with alcohol-related problems to strain relationships.

Scholars have revealed that migrant labor was essential to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century expansion of western extractive industries. American Indians used wage labor as a means of subsistence and community building, oftentimes entering and leaving wage labor at their own discretion. Many different systems of labor emerged, but Native peoples relied on their vast kinship networks for support, and strengthened their cultural identities while creating non-reservation Indian communities.<sup>1</sup>

Building on this scholarly framework, I will argue here that social relationships between non-Indians and Lakotas are a crucial and neglected part of interracial dynamics in western Nebraska. The poor race relations between Lakotas and western Nebraska residents are well known.<sup>2</sup> Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., referred to Alliance as "a town almost as notoriously anti-Indian as Gordon [Nebraska]."<sup>3</sup> Even so, emphasizing racial tension overlooks cases of racial understanding and cooperation, and misses the complexity of Lakota and non-Indian relationships forged during the early twentieth century potato harvests.

### Settlers of Box Butte County

in the 1890s soon discovered its agricultural potential, and in the early 1900s local farmers began to see potatoes' promise as a cash crop. Western Nebraska's altitude—3,500 to 5,000 feet—results in lower temperatures essential for greater tuber growth. Its sandy soil improves the development of a tuber's size and shape.<sup>4</sup> Cool nights, light rain-fall, and few insects make for ideal conditions.

A 1914 Alliance Commercial Club pamphlet praised the potato crop's reliability and profitability. In 1915 work started on large warehouses

### Nebraska's Total Harvested Potato Acreage, Selected Years, 1915-1961

| Year | Acres Harvested |
|------|-----------------|
| 1915 | 97,000          |
| 1917 | 112,000         |
| 1920 | 85,000          |
| 1930 | 101,000         |
| 1940 | 81,000          |
| 1945 | 67,000          |
| 1950 | 43,000          |
| 1955 | 20,000          |
| 1956 | 20,100          |
| 1957 | 17,700          |
| 1958 | 17,400          |
| 1959 | 14,900          |
| 1960 | 15,100          |
| 1961 | 11,500          |

Figures show a mass decline in statewide potato production starting with the Great Depression. Before then, Box Butte County alone had regularly harvested between 15,000 to 20,000 acres of potatoes, but had only 5,700 acres by 1946. Nebraska's potato industry never recovered from the Depression, and the decline intensified in the 1950s.<sup>7</sup>

in Alliance, Hemingford, and Marsland (a town northwest of Hemingford along the Niobrara River). The warehouses would protect the crop from frost while farmers waited to ship during peak prices. Demand for tubers grew in the East, and the Chicago-based Albert Miller & Co. contracted 100,000 bushels of potatoes for 1916.<sup>5</sup>

Potatoes quickly became a profitable investment. In 1915 seven acres of potatoes produced 1,232 bushels valued at \$520.72, a \$74.40 per-acre average. According to the *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, in 1916 farms in the county earned an average of \$1,250 each from potatoes alone. E. I. Gregg, a farmer outside of Alliance, had forty acres in potatoes and received \$3,000; another grower received \$5,000 on forty acres. The average amount planted in tubers was twenty-five



Top: Another view of the North Platte valley: digging, picking, and hauling potatoes at the C. Lane farm on the Dutch Flats northeast of Morrill. NSHS RG1431-65-07



Right: Sorting potatoes near Alliance in 1922. NSHS RG1431-8-2



acres, yielding 150 bushels per acre. Moreover, with numerous acres of undeveloped prairie, Box Butte County's potato industry had room to grow.<sup>6</sup>

Wartime demand led farmers to plant a vast number of potatoes in 1917, but they forgot one major thing: harvesting them is a delicate matter. Usually a light frost kills the vines and signals the beginning of harvest, since the potato will mature no further and the skin sets. However, a heavy frost ruins the tubers. If below-freezing weather damages the unharvested potatoes, the harvest ends. Farmers harvested potatoes with a horse-drawn (later tractor-drawn) machine known as a potato digger that dug them up and dropped them on the ground. Workers placed the potatoes in a wire basket, dumping full baskets into a wagon that followed alongside.<sup>8</sup>

Facing a labor shortage due to the World War I military draft, Box Butte County Agricultural Agent George Neuswanger wrote a letter to growers that was published in the *Alliance Semi-Weekly*

*Times*. He "sent out a call to farmers to list their needs at the county office so that a determined effort could be made through the State Department of Labor to supply the demand." Many farmers intended to store their tubers, which made a timely harvest more important. Neuswanger pointed out that "every grower is familiar with the evil results of storing potatoes which have been harvested too green or too ripe which is very liable to occur in some instances when help is scarce." If a farmer required workers, he or she was to notify the county agriculture office immediately.<sup>9</sup>

Growers faced the possibility of watching their crops rot in the ground, but Neuswanger raised sufficient workers from the Oglala Lakotas of the Pine Ridge Reservation. Although Lakotas had always been nearby (the reservation's southern edge is only ninety miles from Alliance), until this time Box Butte County farmers had only hired them individually and sparingly. Now they had little choice.<sup>10</sup>

**Exaggeration postcards were a popular way to promote a region's agricultural bounty in the early twentieth century.** NSHS RG2053-13



**Failures in federal and tribal** government policies, loss of land, lack of infrastructure, and corruption, provided the Oglala Lakota with little chance for employment in the first half of the twentieth century. At the recommendation of government officials during World War I, the Lakotas sold most of their cattle herds to support the war effort. The resulting loss of their economic foundation led to extreme poverty on the reservation by the 1920s. Most Lakotas turned to off-reservation work for subsistence, such as employment in Wild West shows, but many chose agricultural labor. Lakotas turned to the potato fields for economic gain and survival, but they also had social motivations. Gathering in large numbers at the "Indian camps" in Alliance and Hemingford reaffirmed kinship ties and revived a traditional custom that land allotment had weakened.<sup>11</sup>

Lakota laborers created curiosity and apprehension among most Box Butte County non-Indians, who lacked a clear understanding of the Oglalas. For example, a 1917 letter in the *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times* argued (inaccurately) that a Lakota outbreak had been a serious threat to the country at the time of the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890. In addition, many local farmers were recent immigrants, who probably had only stereotypical knowledge of Indians as influenced by popular culture. Although citizens no longer worried about an Indian outbreak, many continued to think of the Lakotas as "savages" who took up arms against the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Despite such prejudices, growers quickly realized the value of the Lakota farm laborers. However, "The agency [Pine Ridge Agency] will not permit them to come on an individual application so they have to be procured through

Harvesting southeast of Alliance. NSHS RG1431-8-24







an official organization like the farmers' association which is affiliated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture."<sup>13</sup> So many people now wanted the Lakotas that the agent had to create more applications. Wages ranged from \$3 to \$3.25 a day, and Lakotas housed themselves in tents, wanting only pasture for their horses. Most farmers paid more; growers who compensated Lakotas by the acre (instead of per day) paid a daily wage as high as \$6.70.<sup>14</sup>

Tent living became the norm for Lakota workers. A tent had a stove, with its stovepipe going through the roof. A Lakota man recalled seeing many of these tents burn down. His family had two feather mattresses that everybody fought over to sleep on; otherwise, they put blankets down over a tarp. No more than six people lived in a tent. To wash, families might fill a cream can with water and take sponge baths. Farmers usually provided an outhouse. When it got too cold to live in a tent, the people usually moved back to the reservation.<sup>15</sup>

Just as non-Indians often possessed stereotypical views of Indians, Lakotas also stereotyped potato farmers. Oglala Philip Romero and his

family were in Alliance for several days helping friends find harvesting work. Romero was well educated and attracted to Alliance because of its new reputation for fine treatment of Lakotas. He told the *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times* "that the Pine Ridge Indians have been prejudiced against the people of Alliance through the circulation of false rumors concerning the 'wild cowboys' and others who would tear their tents down and otherwise molest them." Ranchers using unfair grazing practices on the reservations or trying to swindle Lakota land were daily realities. Romero made many trips to Alliance seeking to overcome the fears of his fellow tribal members. Their worries diminished after many Lakotas followed him and received good treatment. Said Romero, "Box Butte farmers need have no fear concerning their potato harvest this year or any year, for the Indians will always come here when help is needed," as long as the growers paid and treated Lakotas well.<sup>16</sup>

While racism and mistreatment existed in Box Butte County, Lakota migrant labor helped diminish mutual stereotypes. The *Alliance Herald* noted, "When Indians go to work they take the whole family, the household goods, all of the

**The Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, photographed in 1933 by Mari Sandoz, who would soon achieve national acclaim for her book *Old Jules*.  
NSHS RG2063-14-4**

Central School, Alliance, Neb.



**A proposed 1948 contract required farmers to arrange public school enrollment for Lakota children whose parents worked for more than three weeks.**  
NSHS RG2956-32

horses and the dog. They move in caravans and groups and usually camp near town until the potato harvesting begins, then each family picks and picks carefully and rapidly.”<sup>17</sup> One farmer recalled that during the horse and wagon days of early World War I when Lakotas came to work, it looked like a giant wagon train coming across the countryside. Non-Indians thus saw Lakotas as a people with families who worked for a living, not as stereotypical “savages.”<sup>18</sup>

Still, the interaction during harvest revealed cultural differences, such as the Lakota custom of drying meat. In 1917 the local stockyard gave the Lakotas camping east of Alliance two cows that had died. The Lakotas butchered them, sliced the meat, and hung it on a wire to dry. Local papers reported that the smell annoyed some nearby residents. Citing sanitation concerns, they forced the Lakotas to move their camp. Although a physician was surprised at the Lakotas’ thriftiness, he thought the practice was unsanitary and wanted





them to leave town permanently. The farmers, however, kept the Lakotas in Alliance.<sup>19</sup>

The efforts of Neuswanger, the Alliance Community Club, the Hemingford Commercial Club, and F. D. Healy and other farmers paid off: they solved the harvest labor problem, and Box Butte and Sheridan Counties consequently became the two largest potato-growing counties in Nebraska.<sup>20</sup> Farmers were elated when Lakotas picked around a million bushels of potatoes in 1917 (a bushel of potatoes is roughly sixty pounds). The *Alliance Herald* stated, “Many farmers say that the Indian is an exceptional man for work on the potato crop. It was probably more or less in the way of a contingency that many of us discovered the fact, but now that we are aware of it, let us remember that the Indian helped us out when labor was very scarce, and with the wish that he may come again next year to harvest a crop of spuds twice as large as the present one.”<sup>21</sup> Even the author of the critical Wounded Knee letter now espoused a different view: the Lakotas were no longer threatening and were welcomed “with open arms.”<sup>22</sup>

Some Box Butte County residents were unaware of the Lakotas’ need for work and their difficulty in finding it. The author of an *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times* article thought it was admirable that the Lakotas came to work because with federal support, “the Indians do not need to work and they do not need to come all the way to Alliance to find it,” when, of course, Lakotas could not make a living on the reservation. Their harvest work countered the stereotype of the “lazy Indian.”<sup>23</sup>

Most Indian families returned to the reservation after the harvest, but a few remained throughout the winter working in North Platte Valley sugar beet factories, for the railroad, or in Sandhills potash plants fourteen miles east of Alliance. Around

Box Butte County’s Total Irrigated Acres, 1945-1954

| 1945   | 1946   | 1947   | 1948   | 1949   |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 9,850  | 11,000 | 12,510 | 10,300 | 12,100 |
| 1950   | 1951   | 1952   | 1953   | 1954   |
| 13,900 | 15,100 | 16,300 | 19,650 | 21,090 |

As farmers emerged from the Depression and World War II, most had acquired the capital to construct irrigation works. Growers irrigated crops other than just potatoes, such as corn and sugar beets. Irrigation was protection against drought and ensured better crop yields. Farmers could sometimes double their potato yields with irrigation.<sup>45</sup>

a hundred Oglala families marked the end of the harvest by performing dances on Box Butte Avenue (the main street in Alliance). They dressed in traditional costume, and Philip Romero gave a brief speech on Lakota history. Afterwards, grateful growers treated the Lakotas to a big feed. The *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times* urged people to come see the dance, saying that it was a chance to see Lakota culture before it disappeared. Along with many other non-Indians, the newspaper predicted that the Oglalas might lose their old ways and assimilate into white culture.

At the time, the U.S. government strictly regulated and frowned on such public practices of traditional Indian culture. Yet, the Oglalas danced to resist assimilation pressures and maintain cultural values.<sup>24</sup> Residents and growers came to express appreciation and witness what they assumed was a vanishing culture; they did not see Lakota participation in wage labor as an adaptation to modern society that allowed them to reaffirm traditional cultural practices.

Alliance, Nebraska, 1914.  
NSHS RG3152-1-27



A Lakota family in front of their white canvas tents, usually located in the farmyard. Taken on Kristian Marinus Christensen's farm, western Box Butte County, in the mid-1920s. Author's collection



After the 1918 harvest fifty-six Lakota families comprising 212 people asked to have a powwow in Alliance before returning to the reservation.<sup>25</sup> W. D. Fisher, secretary of the Alliance Community Club, told the *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times* that due to the wartime labor shortage, a large number of businessmen had agreed to close their stores to help with the harvest, but their stores had stayed open thanks to the Lakotas. Fisher believed that the community needed to show its appreciation by attending the show, and "to do this we must declare a half holiday and make them king of the day."<sup>26</sup> Post-harvest dances remained an annual event until the 1930s.

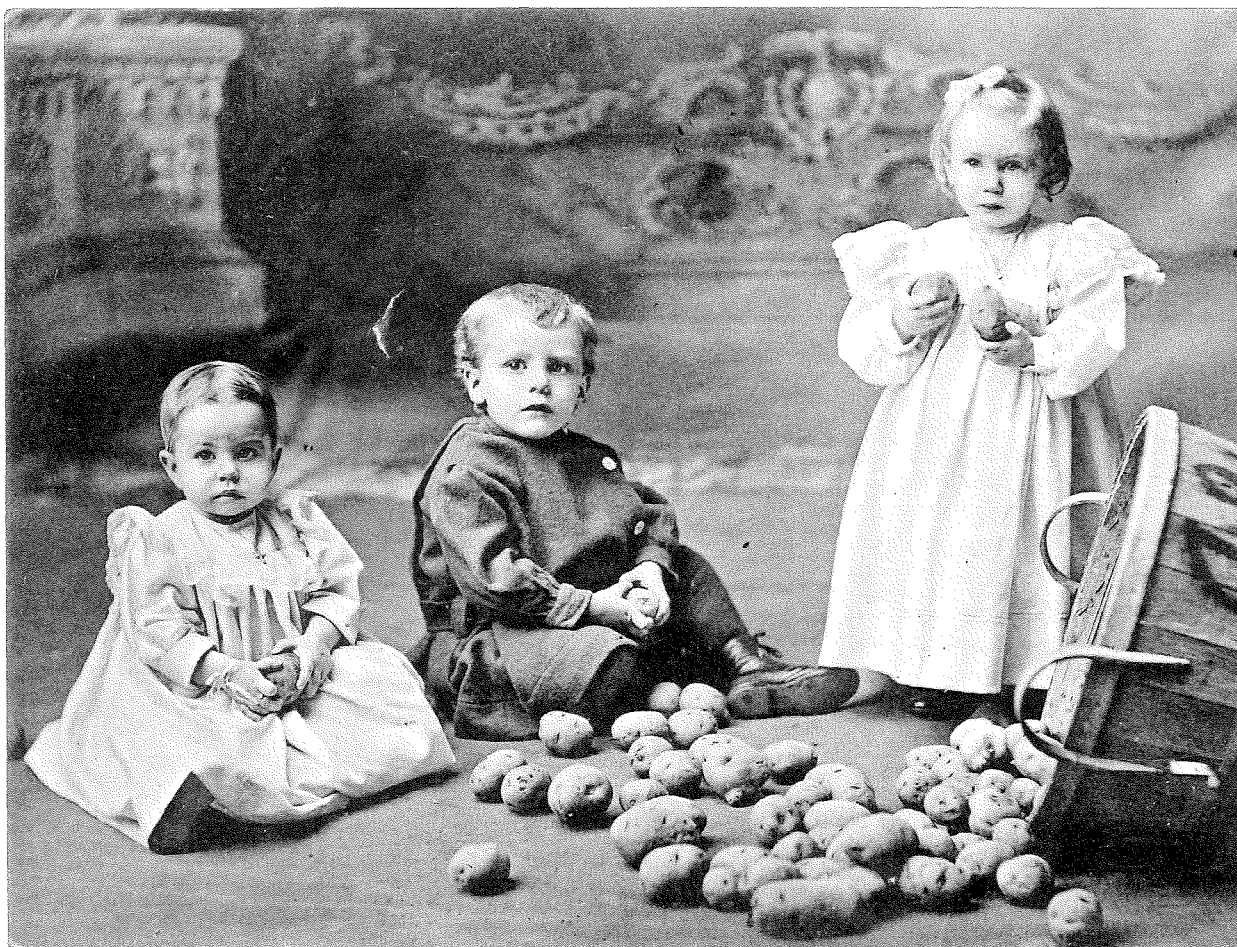
**Migrant white laborers appeared** in the post-World War I years. In 1921 the Box Butte County Farmers' Union met to determine wages. Although Lakotas would sometimes dispute wages, white laborers were more inclined to protest. It was difficult to predict the potato market and selling price, but the Farmers Union decided on four dollars a day without board for the Lakotas, along with giving them potatoes, kindling wood, and feed for their horses (growers gave these three items every year). Whites would receive three dollars per day with board. According to the *Hemingford Ledger*, many whites refused this offer in the hope of an increase in pay, and were then on the streets begging for food. Lakotas accepted the wage scale, and comprised more

than half of the workforce.<sup>27</sup>

Wages fluctuated yearly due to potato quality and the current market. Wages decreased in 1922, and non-Indian migrants again tried to raise the pay scale. Neighbors hired away Lakotas by offering a few cents more. Growers tried to set a uniform price, \$2 per day with board and \$2.50 without board. The Lakotas demanded \$3 (without board) and threatened to return to the reservation. Several farmers ended up paying \$3, and some Lakotas left for \$3 wages in the North Platte Valley or the Hay Springs area. The year 1923 saw the same low wages. This time many Lakotas stayed home, forcing a small number of farmers to trade labor with each other to harvest their crop. Farmers could set their own prices as long as they were competitive enough to entice workers.<sup>28</sup>

In 1924 Lakota workers made their annual migration on time, but due to poor weather the potatoes were unready for harvest for one to two weeks. While waiting, the Lakotas used up their supplies and needed money. They arranged to have a powwow in Alliance where they could "pass the hat" to see them through until harvest began. The *Alliance Times-Herald* noted that many times the Lakotas were the "salvation of the potato growers" and urged people to assist them. At the time, Alliance residents still saw the Lakotas as transients and not as an incessant drain on community resources.





"Two never  
failing crops"  
Alliance, Nebr.

*I ain't over in mind did  
not, have time to stop  
am going to Shoshone from  
here & Henry*

Miller Bros. Pub.

Making matters worse, wages had decreased. Lakotas told the Alliance newspaper that Hemingford "cut the wage scale to \$2.50 a day, which the Indians look upon as placing too great a burden on the friendship between the races."<sup>29</sup> Many left for Alliance to await the harvest there rather than work for lower pay. Lakotas also correctly feared that Hemingford would dismiss school as it had the previous two years. Schoolchildren worked for even less than the Lakotas, which kept labor prices down. Growers blamed low wages on weather-inflicted poor yields, averaging only fifty bushels an acre. Growers had to be careful, however. If the Lakotas believed that a grower mistreated or underpaid them, they went elsewhere, and a farmer with a bad reputation found difficulty acquiring workers.<sup>30</sup>

Unbeknownst to farmers, many Lakotas accepted them into their social kinship networks. While farmers failed to understand the dynamics and obligations of kinship, it was central to the Lakota culture. As Dakota Ella Deloria noted,

kinship demanded relatives not harm each other, "so it was necessary first to make relatives of erstwhile strangers, thus putting them 'on the spot,' and then deal with them on that basis."<sup>31</sup> Lakotas expected farmers to be honest and provide fair treatment, pay, and potatoes in return for their own honesty and hard labor. Over time, many farmers and Lakotas developed relationships that developed into a kinship system, especially among the Lakotas who worked decades for the same farmers.

Another problem arose in 1924, when the city placed Lakotas on a new campsite in south Alliance. Lakotas frequently went to the stockyards asking for livestock killed in shipment; once again, the smell of curing meat bothered some nearby residents. When they discovered that the Lakotas were camping on private land, the residents contacted the landowner, who demanded that the city remove the Lakotas. The city manager arranged for them to move onto nearby city land, but the episode offended the Lakotas, especially since

**A postcard shows the importance of potatoes to community identity.** NSHS RG2956-36



**A potato cellar in Box Butte County, 1917.** NSHS RG3152-3

the new campsite was next to a septic tank and had no water on site, forcing women to walk to a house for water. The Lakotas were especially displeased that the site lacked forage for their horses. Alliance had failed to live up to its reputation for hospitality, which broke kinship obligations and revealed that a few residents were becoming openly prejudiced toward Lakotas.<sup>32</sup>

Even with the campsite debacle, both Hemingford and Alliance tried to make the Lakotas feel welcome by inviting them to participate in local harvest celebrations. Lakota men and women took part in races and other games; a favorite was the Indian pony race. The powwow was so popular that even Lakotas who were not in the area picking potatoes came just to dance.<sup>33</sup>

In the early years, most Lakotas refused to trust farmers completely and demanded daily payment. Farmers typically gave the wages to the head of the family or person in charge, who would then distribute the money. At first growers paid by the day, but in the mid-1920s they began to pay by the bushel or row, allowing skilled pickers to earn more per day. For example, in 1927 pickers received five to six cents per bushel and many picked 100 to 150 bushels a day. Thus, harvesters stood to earn nine dollars a day. An excellent picker could pick up to 200 bushels or more in a day. One farmer recalled that his family's Lakota harvesters always desired to pick alone and have their own team and wagon. No one could pick as fast as they could, and they never wanted anyone to slow them down. The Lakota pickers harvested quickly, moving the horse and wagon alongside by giving a verbal command. While this system appeared to earn the Lakotas more money, it probably only induced them to pick faster and

thus work fewer days. If paid by the day, Lakotas could pick at a slower pace, working longer and eventually making more money. Additionally, Lakotas receiving a daily wage never had to worry about losing money on low yielding fields. Paying by the bushel was more cost effective for the farmer, depressed wages, and encouraged faster harvesting. However, the farmers did not usually lower wages based on race. White workers received the same wage as Lakotas if they boarded themselves, otherwise farmers paid whites a dollar less.<sup>34</sup>

Lakotas spent a fair amount of their wages at stores in Alliance, Hemingford, or Berea, buying groceries and a large amount of porcelain ware. Saturdays were usually a big shopping day. In the early days, if a Lakota did not have enough money, he or she might give the storeowner drums, jewelry, or necklaces as payment, redeeming the items later with cash. The store kept the item if the customer failed to return. Other storeowners allowed Lakotas to put items on layaway.<sup>35</sup>

**The Depression crippled the** potato industry. Due to drought and low prices, farmers employed only about half the normal workforce, and there was a push to hire local men first.<sup>36</sup> Yet numerous Lakotas had been coming to harvest potatoes for many years. One man—the *Hemingford Ledger* called him “our friend”—had picked tubers for the same farmer for fourteen consecutive years. Despite low pay, “winter will come and he [*sic*] must eat so we will make what we can.”<sup>37</sup> Unlike workers with no associations, Lakotas who had built kinship relationships with farmers over several years had a job waiting for them.



In 1932, however, county commissioners caused a labor shortage by telling Lakota workers that the county no longer needed them. Wanting local workers to pick the potatoes, the commissioners asked reservation officials to keep the Lakotas at home. This decision hurt both farmers and Lakotas, since few local people worked the harvest. In 1933, therefore, the commissioners asked Pine Ridge Agency officials to allow Lakotas to work in the potato fields. This time reservation officials required a formal request before they would allow anyone to leave for the harvest.

Farmers preferred Lakotas because they knew how to harvest correctly and were tireless workers, while most others quit. Many white men shied away from the actual harvesting and sacking, preferring to drive the horses. Lakota women, meanwhile, had always worked alongside the men picking potatoes. Additionally, a farmer might hire an older Lakota woman to help with the housework and cook for the workers.<sup>38</sup>

During the Depression the newspaper warned against spreading word of a labor shortage too widely since it might bring in masses of transients. Another reason people desired Lakotas is because they would return to their reservation, while transients might remain in town, draining relief supplies.<sup>39</sup> When in later years Lakotas established a permanent residence in Alliance, prejudice against them increased rapidly.

Federal relief programs also caused a shortage of potato harvest workers. Box Butte County farmers had to offer higher wages and a percentage of the crop to entice people to pick. Some brought in Lakotas from the Rosebud Reservation. Relief projects by the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps—Indian Division (CCC-ID) on the reservations made it difficult for farmers to compete. For a few producers, the potato price was so low that harvesting was not worth the cost.<sup>40</sup>

Alcohol became an increasing problem for Lakota harvesters during the Depression. There is little evidence of a drinking problem in the early 1920s; the *Alliance Times-Herald* revealed in 1923 that not more than two Lakotas had been in trouble with the law locally. Reports of police arresting Lakotas for intoxication did not appear in the newspapers until the late 1920s. At this time, it was illegal for non-Indians to sell alcohol to Indians. In 1929 police arrested two Wyoming

sheepherders for providing liquor to three Lakotas at the Alliance Indian camp. The county fined the Lakotas \$3 and the herders \$100. This was the usual fine for giving Indians alcohol, though sometimes offenders received sixty days in jail as well. Most of the men arrested under this law were migrant laborers.<sup>41</sup>

Lakotas originally sought alcohol for a mind-altering experience that fit with their traditional cultural practices and, because of its illegality, consumed the beverages quickly to eliminate the evidence. An unfortunate association developed over time in which Lakota males consumed alcohol and partook in daring activities to validate their manhood. Alcohol use provided adolescent males with a means to obtain respect from older Lakota males—in essence, a rite of passage into manhood.

Alliance residents applied the “drunken Indian” stereotype to all Lakotas, many of whom were not alcoholics. Although some American Indians developed chronic drinking problems, others simply adopted the white style of binge drinking, a common custom among laborers across the West. Many Lakotas drank excessively only during certain events such as vacation, holidays, payday, or for stress alleviation, and the timing and setting of these occasions resembled those of their non-Indian neighbors.<sup>42</sup>

Although some farmers were prejudiced against Indians, by the 1930s they enjoyed much better relations with Lakotas than did city residents. Growers saw a different side of the Lakotas who lived near them during each harvest. One farmer remembered that most were good workers, but a few got a “little crazy” when they drank. Even so, he stated, “I don’t know what we’d have done without the Indians. There was no way we could have harvested everything, and they were a very hard working people.”<sup>43</sup>

The droughts of 1934 and 1936 nearly destroyed the entire potato crop. Facing drought and low prices, farmers greatly reduced their potato acreage, 50 percent less in 1937 than in 1936. In the fall of 1936, however, the Koester brothers dug two irrigation wells—Box Butte County’s first large-scale irrigation project. In 1937 twenty-five local men and twenty-five Lakotas worked the potato harvest on the Koester brothers’ farm just east of Alliance. One of the brothers told the *Alliance Times-Herald* that he did not “know what we’d do if it were not for the men from the reservation.”



B9441 View of Hemingford, Nebr.

Hemingford, Nebraska,  
undated. NSHS RG2956-32

In contrast, many other residents seem to have forgotten the potato industry's importance and its dependence on Lakota labor. Gone were the town celebrations of Lakota harvesters, as Alliance and Hemingford began harboring anti-Lakota sentiments that would eventually become rampant in the 1940s.<sup>44</sup>

**The potato industry faced** uncertainty on the eve of World War II. Depression and drought had reduced the rural population and its income, making it difficult for farmers to buy new machinery or irrigation equipment. Defense jobs and the draft reduced the number of available agricultural workers.

Many Lakotas, meanwhile, had stopped trying to farm on or near the drought-stricken reservation. And when war broke out in Europe in the fall of 1939, the government greatly cut funds to the CCC-ID. As relief work diminished in the 1940s, most residents failed to find work on the reservation and required government relief. Some Lakotas who had never picked potatoes did so now. One Lakota man recalled that his grandparents, aunts, and uncles told his family about

harvesting potatoes in Nebraska. After his father's CCC-ID job ended, his tiyospaye or extended family went to Nebraska together.<sup>46</sup>

In 1942 the *Alliance Times-Herald* reported on the labor shortage, reminding farmers that Lakota men were draft eligible. The reservations also had a high enlistment rate. Men enlisted for patriotic and cultural reasons, but also for the income. As a result, many of the men who came in previous harvest seasons were already in military service. The director of the Nebraska Certified Potato Growers discussed the pending workforce shortage in a meeting. The county still required eight to nine hundred more harvesters for all crops. Growers believed they would have enough pickers; the problem was finding people who could "buck" or lift the fifty- to seventy-pound sacks into trucks and cellars.

Potato picking, too, had changed. Though a few workers continued to use baskets as in the 1920s and early 1930s, most wore a belt with two hooks to which they attached a burlap sack. The picker bent over to pick up potatoes and threw them between their legs into the sack, filling it to around fifty pounds, depending on how much he or she could pull.<sup>47</sup>

Setting wages still required cooperation and negotiation between farmer and picker. Many growers continued to pay by the row. Since each field yielded differently, farmers first dug a row or two, and the potatoes were gathered and weighed. Then the grower and one or two Lakotas in charge of the pickers negotiated the number of bags that a row would yield and how much the pay would be by row, bag, or bushel. Most growers averaged the number of bushels and paid per row. In 1942 wages were good and pickers averaged eight to ten dollars per day. Lakotas still wanted farmers to pay them daily, but most growers now waited until the end of the week or job. A few Lakotas quit. Even so, Lakota workers required most farmers to show them how they figured the wages. One farmer recalled that he always had a couple of "educated" Lakota boys alongside him while he figured the pay. Another farmer recalled how he showed his workers the pay scale to let them see how the wages were calculated to prove that he was not cheating them.<sup>48</sup>

Farmers showed Lakotas their appreciation and followed kinship obligations by giving their workers free food and by taking them into town on Sunday afternoons. Farmers also gave them money for groceries, which they took out of the worker's paycheck at harvest's end. Some Lakotas spent all their money in one night. A farmer might give workers a few hundred-pound bags of potatoes and sometimes beans or meat. One Lakota remembered eating so many potatoes as a youth that he never ate them much afterwards.<sup>49</sup>

For the 1942 harvest, the Employment Service office in Alliance encouraged farmers to contact it so its office on the Rosebud Reservation could line up harvesters. However, a rumor reached the reservation that Alliance would not allow Lakotas to stay in town and growers worried this would discourage workers from coming. The Alliance paper alleged that the rumor originated with the "city asking some of the bad actors to leave town."<sup>50</sup>

It wasn't the rumor that kept many Lakotas from coming to the Alliance area; it was better-paying defense jobs and competition from other agricultural areas. As work on the Alliance Army Air Base concluded, Lakotas left to work on bases at Scottsbluff and Ainsworth, leaving the Alliance Indian camp almost deserted. Likewise, North Platte Valley sugar beet producers hired a greater

number of Lakotas; and the Holly Sugar Company in Sheridan, Wyoming, sent representatives to recruit Lakotas working at the Alliance air base. Nevertheless in many cases Lakotas returned to the farmers for whom they had worked in previous years, again speaking to long-term relationships and bonds of kinship.<sup>51</sup>

In 1943 Box Butte County farmers looked to several labor alternatives. They tried unsuccessfully to obtain prisoners of war. Several wanted to drive to the reservations to get workers, but lacked transportation. The rationing of tires (starting December 1941) and gasoline (starting fall 1942, with tightened restrictions in 1943) made travel difficult, though farmers received more allotments of these commodities than non-farmers. A number of growers found all the help they needed by traveling to the reservation themselves.<sup>52</sup>

Many farmers preferred picking up workers at the reservation, because Lakotas without transportation were unable to go into town every night and spend their earnings. As the *Alliance Times-Herald* reported, "one trouble with Indian labor in recent years, the farmers say, is that they would leave the first payday and they wouldn't come back until they were flat broke." Meanwhile unharvested potatoes remained in the fields, and farmers worried about frost. However, this happened in only a few reported cases.

Farmers did not understand the Lakota social dynamics of wage labor, which created tension. Some Lakotas may have believed it was more important to follow kinship obligations by immediately leaving to share the income with their relatives, and in adapting to the wage system many Lakotas struggled to understand the capitalistic tenet of saving money. Even so, many Lakotas stayed until they finished the job.<sup>53</sup>

A few smaller-acreage farmers worked together by employing the same Lakotas. One farmer brought the Lakotas from the reservation; another took them back. Another farmer remembered always having to take the Lakotas to receive their government-issued rations, such as cheese, crackers, and other items before leaving for the harvest. The farmer picked up all the workers at the same location on the reservation, but had to return them to their individual homes.<sup>54</sup> To acquire workers farmers had to follow Lakota desires.

World War II brought Alliance its first year-round Lakota population when construction of



the Alliance Army Air Base attracted laborers from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations. The Lakota population swelled when harvest workers arrived. Because Lakotas living in Alliance lost the federal programs and protection of the reservation, in 1943 the city manager sought assistance from the Committee on Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., and from the Pine Ridge Indian Agency. The city had always made only temporary arrangements, which were usually insufficient and unsanitary, and a year-round population exacerbated the problem.

Some residents demanded the city expel the Lakotas. The city government refused to remove the Lakotas if they wished to stay, and because of discrimination and the wartime housing shortage, the workers were unable to find housing outside of south Alliance. The *Alliance Times-Herald* blamed the terrible conditions in the camp for the problems that Lakotas were having. Unlike some Alliance residents, the newspaper continued to recognize that Lakotas were crucial to successful harvests.<sup>55</sup>

**Farmers emerged from World War II** with money, and many began irrigating. Although this increased yields and required more labor per acre, Box Butte County potato acreage decreased greatly (see table on p. 127). Nevertheless, the first postwar harvest promised a bumper potato crop, but two things made it difficult for local farmers to obtain enough Lakota laborers. The first was competition from other western Nebraska potato and sugar beet growers; the second was a nationwide meat shortage. Cattlemen wanted the Office of Price Administration (OPA) to end price controls and subsidies on livestock and meat, and withheld their livestock waiting for higher prices. Demand was high, and butchers' shelves went empty. Meanwhile, Lakotas wanted meat when they came to harvest, and if none was available, many threatened to stay on the reservation. The government finally allowed the Omaha OPA office to increase its meat quotas. Alliance butchers received an additional 11,880 pounds of meat for workers only.<sup>56</sup>

The year 1948 saw the first discussion of written contracts between farmers and Lakota workers. The chairman of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council (OSTC) met with potato growers along with the head of the Nebraska Employment Service (NES) to discuss a contract that would protect both

farmers and Lakotas. The OSTC planned to create a list of reliable workers and make sure these harvesters fulfilled their part of the agreement if the farmers did also.<sup>57</sup>

The tribal council revealed several unfair labor practices, such as growers stranding Lakota families by refusing to take them back to the reservation. In such cases, tribal relief funds had to be used to get the Lakotas home.<sup>58</sup> Several other farmers, mainly outside of Box Butte County, failed to provide hospitalization or even first aid in cases of injury. The Alliance newspaper reported that a North Platte Valley farmer refused to call a doctor for an ill Lakota man. The man died and the farmer still refused to help, leaving the dead man's family to depart for the reservation in a truck that broke down near Alliance. The family then carried the body about six miles to town.<sup>59</sup>

Box Butte County farmers seem to have been more likely to show concern for their Lakota workers. For example, an employee at the Certified Growers Association took sick Lakotas to the reservation hospital. If farmers took their workers to a local doctor, the doctor might refuse to see them; even emergency room doctors were reluctant to take Indians because they had no ability to pay on-site, though sometimes doctors donated their time. As one Lakota man said, "You didn't dare get sick."<sup>60</sup>

The OSTC and the potato growers negotiated a contract (which did not include the Rosebud Lakota). Farmers agreed to provide transportation to and from the reservation. In case of an emergency, the grower would transport the worker or family to the reservation. Harvesters had to leave the county within a reasonable time after they finished the job; if they stayed in the area, the farmers' responsibility to take them home terminated. Growers were to post bond with the tribal treasurer to cover the expense of transportation; they would get their money back only after they returned the harvesters.

The contract also required growers to find and pay for medical care for workers injured on the job, including hospitalization. Non job-related injuries were the worker's responsibility. Growers agreed to "provide water, fuel, and sanitary facilities." Lakotas agreed to stay until the harvest was completed, and to clean up their campsite after harvest while receiving the harvest wage rate for doing so. On days when weather suspended work, farmers had to give food to employees. (A few



farmers disliked this provision, saying they had no control over the weather.) Finally, the farmer had to arrange public school enrollment for Lakota children whose parents worked for more than three weeks.<sup>61</sup>

The contract offered protection for the Lakotas that some growers and the federal government had failed to provide, and it gave farmers some safeguards as well. However, as the 1948 potato harvest began, only a handful of Box Butte County farmers signed contracts. Negotiations between the OSTC and the NES were finished too late, and many growers had already made their usual arrangements. Nor did most local farmers use contracts the following year. Lakotas made few complaints about Box Butte County farmers; rather their grievances centered on the North Platte Valley. Even without the contract, most Box Butte County farmers already abided by most of its provisions.<sup>62</sup>

**The year 1948 also saw some** non-Indian residents try to help the Lakotas. That

summer an *Alliance Times-Herald* headline read, “Indians Living in Squalor—Need Help.” Lakotas in south Alliance lived in “conditions that wouldn’t be allowed for cattle.” The newspaper advocated the purchase of an army barracks from the air base and moving it to south Alliance, where the city would furnish it with sanitary facilities. The south Alliance camp had no shower, only tubs for sponge baths, and the outside toilet was a block away. The *Times-Herald* said that “we [whites] deprived them of what they had and gave little or nothing in return.” Discrimination forced the Lakotas to live in the most unsanitary places and work only jobs whites refused to take. The newspaper believed the Lakotas were good people who had been considered “savages only because they tried to protect what they deemed their own.”<sup>63</sup>

A few days later the *Times-Herald* editor noted that people could send contributions for the barracks project to the newspaper. The hope was to raise the funds and complete the project before the coming harvest season.<sup>64</sup> By August 10 the fund stood at \$1,175.50—short of the \$2,000 goal.

Like this dance held at Pine Ridge, South Dakota (“Cal” refers to President Calvin Coolidge, not shown), Lakotas held annual dances in Alliance, Nebraska, at the close of the potato harvest. The dances were an annual event from 1917 until the 1930s. NSHS RG802-119-25

The plan's biggest sponsors were farmers and the Alliance Council of Churchwomen. One farmer stated:

This is one civic enterprise that I believe in. In the past I have had occasion to hire Indian help on my farm and I have always found them to be steady and industrious. But when I took these workers back to their camps, I felt ashamed of myself. There wasn't much I could do and it is gratifying to me to see that others are joining in this endeavor. I'm glad to help.<sup>65</sup>

Several non-Indian south Alliance residents disliked the Indian barracks project. Claiming the Lakotas stole gardening supplies, the local residents wanted the city to move them away. They complained that they had been trying to get water and sewer lines for twenty-seven years and the city did nothing until it decided the Indians needed the improvements. The city replied that it had planned the improvements before the barracks project emerged.<sup>66</sup>

The project moved forward slowly. The city council approved moving the barracks to south Alliance, and sponsors bought the building from the city for \$300. The city and volunteers were still trying to finish it in 1949. They hoped to have it done before winter, although the building had already provided some shelter during the infamous blizzard of 1949, which had created twenty-foot snowdrifts in some places and had almost completely covered the Lakota tents. The Indian center project did not reach completion until 1950 due to lack of funding, during which time Lakotas began using the unfinished barracks as a recreation center.<sup>67</sup>

By 1956 so many Lakota homes had laundry and shower facilities that the Indian center planned to convert the laundry and one shower into a residence. The facility developed activities to help the Lakotas gain skills in English, reading, and sewing. The United Church Women believed their activities were producing a positive image. More local businesses were hiring Lakotas, though it remained difficult for them to find steady employment in town. The jobs were usually manual labor, such as shoveling coal or unloading lumber.<sup>68</sup>

Disturbed by Lakota harvesters' living conditions, people in Hemingford began a fund drive in 1957 that in about a month raised \$1,342.56 to establish a twelve-by-eighteen-foot laundry and

shower facility for harvesters and to pour concrete floors for tents at their Indian campground. Unlike Alliance, the council solicited contributions both in town and in the surrounding area. Volunteers pledged to build the facility. The Hemingford Community Service Council, which consisted of delegates from local churches, sponsored the project and worked out the details. The completed facility had laundry and shower facilities with hot water, electricity, fifteen concrete tent platforms, an incinerator, and outdoor pit toilets. The council rented fourteen of the campsites for a dollar per week while the other was rent-free for the Lakota couple aiding in managing the camp. A Lakota woman was the assistant camp manager. The camp complied with all State Department of Health regulations. When money became available, the council hoped to build a recreation center and provide homemaking classes, as well as activities for children.

Local churches planned to incorporate the migrants into their congregations.<sup>69</sup> A farmer near Hemingford recalled that only a few of his Lakota employees went to the Catholic Church in town. Not every church was open to having Lakotas attend services. One Lakota man remembered that his family usually found a local Catholic church and took Sunday as a day of prayer. If they could not find a church, his grandfather led them in prayer. Because of prejudice, they always first checked out the smaller towns' churches before attending, but frequently never felt comfortable.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to Hemingford's small permanent Indian population during these years, several Lakotas worked in the Nebraska Certified Growers warehouse. They sorted and graded potatoes, sewed the bags shut, weighed them, and loaded them into railcars or semi-trucks. A man in Hemingford had a few trailers and shacks that he rented to Lakotas for an exorbitant price. Some Lakotas stayed until November, through the winter, or all year to help harvest other crops, sort potatoes, or do other farm work. If farmers hired Lakotas year-round, they usually provided them with a shack or an old house in which to live.<sup>71</sup>

In 1950 the Federal Bureau of Employment Security and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agreed to provide public employment services to Indians on reservations. Under this plan, farm placement agents met twice a year with BIA officials to determine the number of needed and

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available workers. However, most farmers continued to contact and transport the same Lakota families that had harvested for them previously.<sup>72</sup> Sometimes farmers didn't make the first contact. A Lakota man recalls that a couple of family members went out and talked to the growers to line up two or three fields to pick. His uncle would say, "Let's go back and see such and such a person." The farmer held the field for the family if they told the farmer they would return next year. A handshake usually cemented the relationship.<sup>73</sup>

**Alcohol problems seemed to** worsen in the 1950s. The *Alliance Times-Herald* reported Lakota alcohol offenses, which increased each autumn during the influx of harvest workers. Police also arrested numerous Lakotas at the fall festival celebration. Their options were to pay the fine (usually ten dollars); have friends, family, or employer pay bail; go to jail and receive two dollars credit toward the fine for every day behind bars; or not pay and leave town.

The newspaper contained reports of Lakotas either paying fines or leaving town. For example, in 1959 after the Alliance police arrested eleven harvesters, they terminated nine of the workers' fines in return for their leaving town under police escort.<sup>74</sup> The police also looked for intoxicated Lakotas, which led to harassment for others simply going about their business.

An employee for the Nebraska Certified Potato Growers in Hemingford remembered efforts to keep Lakotas in the Indian camp at night, especially on Saturdays. The office frequently received calls about Lakotas in trouble, and staff would then have to go to town and resolve situations that sometimes required the sheriff. To avoid this problem, the Certified Potato employee found out what the workers wanted and purchased it himself. He recalled going through all the butcher shops in Alliance looking for beef kidneys, a Lakota delicacy eaten raw and covered with salt.<sup>75</sup>

The federal government repealed the law banning the sale of alcohol to Indians in 1954, and Nebraska made the repeal effective September 18, 1955. Before then, Lakotas had to drink all their alcohol quickly to get rid of the evidence, for even if police found them passed out in public, they went to jail only to sleep off the binge. Some Lakotas believed that this law taught them not to drink socially and increased the chances of alcoholism.

After the repeal, older Lakotas continued to drink this way out of habit.<sup>76</sup>

One farmer recalled that occasionally, when he took his harvesters to town, one became drunk and went to jail. The grower would have to return the next morning to get the worker. Still, he only had a few workers whose behavior sometimes posed a problem. Another farmer recalled that every so often a group of Lakota employees, after working hard for weeks, would suddenly and without notice fail to show up for work. Many times this was because of alcohol.<sup>77</sup>

By the 1950s large-acreage growers developed different relationships with their Lakota workers. A few potato farmers (who each hired more than a hundred Lakota families) built or expanded on-site facilities for the Lakota workers and their families, essentially creating a Lakota village. These farmers wanted to keep their workers away from town because they feared losing them during the harvest. Bill Riis built such an Indian camp on his farm north of Alliance. In 1949 it contained seventy tents and three hundred Lakotas. Riis built a playground, a store, and a loudspeaker system to communicate with his workers and to broadcast radio programs for their enjoyment.<sup>78</sup>

The Koester brothers' farm also contained a Lakota camp. Though the farm was within walking distance of Alliance, the camp had its own store, stocked by one of the farmers' wives. The Koesters recorded workers' purchases and deducted the cost from the final payment, which they withheld until the end of harvest, which also helped keep workers on the farm. They paid their workers on the morning before they went back to the reservation, after earlier cases in which a few workers went into town after being paid the night before they left, and then missed the ride home the next morning.<sup>79</sup> The farm stores likely had everything the Lakotas wanted at the same prices as in town; otherwise they would have demanded money to shop in town. Nonetheless, the farm stores gave farmers a degree of control over their Lakota workers, especially since they became indebted to the farmer.

Despite these efforts, farms sometimes saw alcohol-related violence between Lakotas. Stabbings took place, such as when the *Hemingford Ledger* reported that a Lakota woman stabbed a sixteen-year-old girl on a farm near town. A farmer revealed that most of the time the guilty persons

disappeared afterwards. For example, one day he heard a scream and discovered a pool of blood in the house where the Lakotas were staying, but no one was there. He never learned what happened.

This grower had other incidents with intoxicated workers, usually late at night. One time an individual was in a tent with a knife. The Lakota workers wanted the farmer to settle him down, but the farmer refused. To this farmer, it seemed that intoxicated males gave women a hard time. One morning, he picked up a female Lakota harvester from the sheriff. The sheriff had found her naked with cactus in her feet, which the grower picked out. Apparently she ran into the countryside to escape a Lakota male. The farmer stated that while he employed Lakotas who never had a drinking problem, he had more problems with younger Lakotas, as they tended to drink more. Another grower recalled that one of his workers got drunk and assaulted his wife. The farmer warned that he would call the sheriff if it ever happened again, and the man never drank again while working for the farmer.<sup>80</sup> Although alcohol could strain the Lakota-farmer relationship, farmers became attuned to dealing with the incidents, and habitual offenders lost their jobs.

White-Lakota relations were at times turbulent in the late 1940s and 1950s, mainly in town. A Lakota man remembered how after his grandfather received and distributed pay, the family went to town to buy groceries and clothes. Because of prejudice, they had to be careful which stores they entered. They would consider which storeowners were the nicest or talked kindly. Several stores placed signs in the windows that read "No Indians or dogs allowed." Grocery stores allowed Lakotas, but restaurants and drugstores did not (though restaurants had been open to Lakotas before the 1930s). Lakotas shopped in large groups to be safe. For many young Lakotas who had never been off the reservation, this was their first encounter with prejudice.<sup>81</sup>

Although farmers and Lakotas generally maintained good relations during the 1940s and 1950s, there were incidents of tension. For example, a farmer and four Lakotas got into an argument in a Hemingford bar over the price of potatoes and the wages being paid for picking them. The men followed him from the bar, ran his car off the highway, and assaulted him.<sup>82</sup> Not all potato producers used the same Lakotas every year; farmers hiring

large numbers of pickers did not form personal relationships with each of their workers, and were more apt to encounter problems than farmers with fewer workers.

Children can reveal the difference between the level of prejudice in town and on the farm. It could be intimidating to attend school in Alliance and be surrounded by fluent English speakers. Grandview Elementary put most Lakotas in one room, where they never learned much or advanced, but they could attend regular classes if they demanded to do so. Fights with non-Indians were common. On the farm, however, children too young to pick potatoes babysat, cooked, or laid out gunnysacks for the potato pickers—but most of the time they played, often with the farmer's children.<sup>83</sup>

**The early 1960s marked the** end of potato growing for the vast majority of Box Butte County farmers. A few growers mechanized, but most switched to other crops, especially winter wheat. The Koester brothers were one of the county's largest growers, but quit the potato business around 1964. The Nebraska Certified Potato Growers' warehouse in Hemingford closed in the early 1960s due to lack of business. Mechanization and declining potato production virtually ended the use of Lakota harvesters.<sup>84</sup>

Even so, some farmers and Lakotas maintained their relationships. A farmer recalled accepting an invitation to visit his former workers at their home on the reservation. An auctioneer remembered a 1960s auction during which he realized that the cattle he was about to sell were those of a Lakota man who picked potatoes on his father's farm in the 1920s and 1930s; he immediately went over to talk with the man. Another farmer stated that he had both good and bad experiences with Lakotas, and could not judge them just on bad incidents. In fact, the years of driving to the reservation left such an impression that every month he donates money to the mission school on the Pine Ridge Reservation. He also knows the whereabouts of his former workers' grandchildren, who still hold fond memories of playing in his farmyard.<sup>85</sup>

Why did Box Butte County farmers usually display less prejudice and have better relations with the Lakotas than did the townspeople? Many growers, who employed Lakotas for decades, understood their needs and desires. Personal

relationships allowed them to work through problems. Without experiencing these relationships, the growing towns evolved into enclaves that harbored prejudice. Individual Lakotas who got into trouble after drinking in town led to the stereotyping of all Lakotas as drunks. Finally, the establishment of a year-round Lakota population led to increased racial tension.

The early years in which Lakotas worked in the potato harvest saw far better relations than during the 1940s and 1950s. Unlike in America's large cities, Box Butte County had few racial troubles during World War I and the 1920s. Prejudice increased during the 1930s, and by the 1940s and 1950s the social fabric connecting growers, townspeople, and Lakota farm workers began to unravel.

The potato industry and its use of Lakota labor provides a significant example of Native peoples participating in wage labor, which greatly affected Box Butte County's economy and its farmers' success and income. It also reveals the development of interracial cooperation and cordial relationships in spite of poverty and racial tension. Today, eroding potato cellars are visible remnants of the once-mighty Box Butte County potato industry. More important, Lakotas remain part of the Alliance community half a century after the industry's local demise. ■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblers: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001); Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack, eds., *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Robert Campbell, "Newlands, Old Lands: Native American Labor, Agrarian Ideology, and the Progressive-Era State in the Making of the Newlands Reclamation Project, 1902-1926," *Pacific Historical Review* 71 (May 2002): 203-38; William J. Bauer, *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Brian Hosmer and Colleen O'Neill, eds., *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004); Colleen O'Neill, *Working the Navajo Way: Labor and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Stew Magnuson, *The Death of Raymond Yellow Thunder: And Other True Stories from the Nebraska-Pine Ridge Border Towns*

(Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2008); Michael Joseph Engle, "Thunder on the Prairie: The Raymond Yellow Thunder Case and the Rise of the American Indian Movement," Masters thesis, The University of Texas at El Paso, 1997; Russell Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), 18. Deloria was referring to Gordon and its history of prejudice that led to a group of whites murdering Lakota Raymond Yellow Thunder in 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Esther Anderson, "The Potato Industry in Nebraska," *Economic Geography* 6 (January 1930): 37-39, 45, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Alliance Commercial Club, "Box Butte County, Nebraska," Alliance Printing Co., 1914, in the Knight Museum, Alliance, NE; *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 4, 1912, 1; Oct. 22, 1915, 1; Oct. 29, 1915, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Nov. 23, 1915, 1; Oct. 20, 1916, 1; Oct. 24, 1916, 1. Note that while Lakotas harvested potatoes in the Hemingford area before 1920, the lack of sources forces specific discussion to focus on the Alliance area in Box Butte County.

<sup>7</sup> Nebraska Department of Agriculture, *Nebraska Agriculture Statistics: Centennial Edition* (Lincoln: State-Federal Division of Agricultural Statistics, 1967), 25; Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Economic Development, *Nebraska Agriculture Statistics: Historical Record, 1866-1954* (Lincoln: State-Federal Division of Agricultural Statistics, 1957), 29.

<sup>8</sup> For information on the processes of the potato harvest, see the numerous articles pertaining to the harvest from October through November in both 1917 and 1918 in *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*; Howard Christensen, interview by author, Alliance, Nebraska, May 10, 2005, and Dec. 28, 2006; Don Haas, interview by author, Hemingford, Nebraska, May 15, 2007; *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Sept. 25, 1917, 1; *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 20, 1927, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Sept. 25, 1917, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1910, 1.

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Biolsi, *Organizing the Lakota: The Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); Paul Robertson, *The Power of the Land: Identity, Ethnicity, and Class Among the Oglala Lakota* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Akim Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge: Oglala Lakota Politics from the IRA to Wounded Knee* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007); Jeffery Means, "From Buffalo to Beeves: Cattle and the Political Economy of the Oglala Lakota, 1750-1920," Ph.D. Diss., Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2007; L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 8; For the Lakota social aspect, see Ella Cara Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (New York: Friendship Press, 1944), 38-45, 86-98.

<sup>12</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 16, 1917, 4; For discussion on whites' fears of a Lakota outbreak in the early twentieth century as well as changing attitudes to Lakota pacification see the "Violence" chapter in Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 5, 1917, 6.

<sup>14</sup> *Alliance Herald*, Nov. 1, 1917, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Cedric DeCory, interview by author, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, May 16, 2007; See also Delphine Red Shirt, *Turtle Lung Woman's Granddaughter* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 151.

<sup>16</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 12, 1917, 1; Oct. 16, 1917, 4. See also Robertson, *The Power of the Land*. Lakotas had faced violent encounters with non-Indians off reservation. In 1901 the Weston County, Wyoming, sheriff along with local ranchers



deterred Lakotas from hunting in the county through violent means. See Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 17-20.

<sup>17</sup> *Alliance Herald*, Sept. 27, 1917, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Haas interview.

<sup>19</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 16, 1917, 1; *Alliance Times Herald*, Sept. 23, 1924, 1, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Alliance Herald*, Nov. 1, 1917, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 15, 1917, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 16, 1917, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1918, 1; Moses, *Wild West Shows* 8, 272-73; see also Robertson, *Power of the Land*, 65-74.

<sup>24</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 26, 1917, 1; *Alliance Herald*, Nov. 15, 1917, 1; Moses, 257, 258. See also chapter 10; Clyde Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), see chapter 3; Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, see chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Oct. 17, 1918, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1918, 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Hemingford Ledger*, Sept. 22, 1921, 1. For information on white transient laborers and more examples of white agricultural workers arguing for higher wages, see Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*, Sept. 29, 1922, 1; Sept. 14, 1922, 1; Oct. 4, 1923, 1; *Alliance Semi-Weekly Times*, Sept. 22, 1922, 1; *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 19, 1923, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 26, 1924, 1, 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1924, 5; DeCory interview.

<sup>31</sup> Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 29. A couple of farmers told me they never understood some of their Lakota workers' actions until years later after they read books on Lakota culture.

<sup>32</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 26, 1924, 12; Sept. 23, 1924, 1, 4. Harold Schmitt, interview by author, Hemingford, Nebraska, May 20, 2008; Christensen interview, Dec. 28, 2006. The Lakota custom of curing meat left an impression on people. Farmers always seem to recollect this habit. One even remembers that the day after lightning struck a cow, several Lakota women walked more than two miles to butcher it and dry the meat.

<sup>33</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 29, 1925, 1; Oct. 15, 1927, 1; Oct. 2, 1923, 10; Sept. 23, 1921, 1; Oct. 4, 1921, 1; Sept. 30, 1921, 1; Oct. 16, 1923, 1; *Hemingford Ledger*, Sept. 28, 1922, 1; Sept. 25, 1924, 1; Oct. 2, 1924, 1. Again, Lakotas coming just to dance speaks to their desire to reaffirm traditional practices and kinship relations as well as a sense of autonomy from the watchful eye of Indian agents. See Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 86-98.

<sup>34</sup> *Hemingford Ledger*, Sept. 23, 1920, 1; Oct. 6, 1927, 1; *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 25, 1927, 1; Christensen interview, Dec. 28, 2006; Haas interview. Historian William Bauer notes that Indians in the Mendocino County, California, hop industry saw their wages decrease by about 50 percent after farmers switched from daily wages to by the bushel. Also, some farmers did try to hire Lakotas for less. Again, however, race was not always a factor in depressed wages, as farmers desired schoolchildren because they worked for less than Lakotas. But, in the 1960s and 1970s, a few unethical farmers desired alcoholic Lakotas because they could pay them a lower wage, as the Lakotas wanted just enough money to buy alcohol.

<sup>35</sup> Jim Girard, interview by author, Alliance, Nebraska, Aug. 12, 2008; Red Shirt, *Turtle Lung Woman's Granddaughter*, 151.

<sup>36</sup> For information on the Depression's effects see *Hemingford Ledger*, Oct. 2, 1930, 1; Oct. 16, 1930; Sept. 1, 1932, 9; Sept. 17,

1931, 1; Sept. 29, 1932, 1; *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 26, 1930, 1; Sept. 1, 1932, 1; Oct. 4, 1932, 1; Sept. 18, 1931, 1; Sept. 25, 1931, 1; Oct. 2, 1931, 4; Oct. 13, 1931, 2. One of the county's largest producers hired 125 men in 1931 and only 30 in 1932. Wages decreased to three cents a bushel without board or two cents with board.

<sup>37</sup> *Hemingford Ledger*, Oct. 8, 1931, 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 7, 1932, 1; Sept. 9, 1933, 1; Oct. 3, 1933, 1; Christensen interview, Dec. 28, 2006. Farmers' daughters would at times pick too.

<sup>39</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 26, 1933, 1. See also Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, and Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 4, 1935, 1; Oct. 8, 1935, 1; Sept. 24, 1935, 1; Joe Starita, *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge: A Lakota Odyssey* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 232.

<sup>41</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 12, 1923, 1; Oct. 1, 1929, 1; Oct. 21, 1938, 1; *Hemingford Ledger*, Oct. 25, 1928, 1; Oct. 11, 1928, 1; Sept. 26, 1929, 1; Oct. 16, 1930, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Beatrice Medicine, *Drinking and Sobriety Among the Lakota Sioux*, 69, 127; William Unrau, *White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country, 1802-1892* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Peter C. Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Medicine, see Chapter 5; Kathryn A. Abbott, "Alcohol and the Anishinaabeg of Minnesota in the Early Twentieth Century," *Western Historical Quarterly* 30 (Spring, 1999): 25-43; see also José M. Alamillo, *Making Lemonade Out of Lemons: Mexican American Labor and Leisure in a California Town 1880-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2006); Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor*.

<sup>43</sup> Christensen interview, Dec. 28, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 15, 1937, 6; Oct. 19, 1937, 1; Oct. 5, 1937, 1; Sept. 26, 1939. The *Alliance Times-Herald* during September and October of 1936, 1937, 1938, and 1939 contains an article almost every week on irrigation wells. Hemingford shipped more than 2,200 cars of potatoes in 1933, fewer than 50 in 1934 and none in 1936 because of drought.

<sup>45</sup> Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Economic Development, *Nebraska Agriculture Statistics: Historical Record, 1866-1954* (Lincoln: State-Federal Division of Agricultural Statistics, 1957), 70, 72.

<sup>46</sup> L. F. Snipes, Quentin W. Lindsey, and Frank Miller, *Farm Labor, World War II, Nebraska Report* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, College of Agriculture, Extension Service, 1947), 3-4; Douglas Hurt, *The Great Plains during World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 154-55, 189, 193, 350-51, 354; Mark Monroe, *An Indian in White America*, Carolyn Reyer, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 8, 16; DeCory interview. Many Lakota families desired to work the harvest because they would be with their extended family, which Lakotas call *tiyospaye*. This reaffirmed traditional practices that allotment had weakened; see Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 40-49.

<sup>47</sup> Hurt, *Great Plains during WWII*, 364-65; *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 15, 1942, 1; Henry Huber, interview by Warren Trank, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, Jan. 16, 1990; Harold Schmitt, interview by author, Hemingford, Nebraska, May 20, 2008.

<sup>48</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 15, 1942, 1, 2; Sept. 25, 1942, 1; Delphine Red Shirt, *Bead on an Anthill: A Lakota Childhood* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 14; Warren Trank, interview by author, Alliance, Nebraska, May 15, 2007; DeCory interview; Harold Schmitt, interview by author, Hemingford, Nebraska, Aug. 13, 2008. The base wage was ten cents per hun-

dredweight (cwt) or six cents a bushel, but it varied. In irrigated fields, the wage was from around four to five cents per bushel and in dryland seven to eight cents. Pickers who boarded themselves received around eight cents a bushel. Truckers got sixty cents an hour for driving potatoes from the fields to cellars or town. The Koester brothers always had three or four harvesters who could pick four hundred bushels in a day. At the six cent rate, that amounted to twenty-four dollars per day.

<sup>49</sup> Haas interview; Schmitt interview, Aug. 13, 2008; Trank interview; DeCory interview.

<sup>50</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 15, 1942, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Sept. 22, 1942, 1; Hurt, *Great Plains during WWII*, 351. Lakotas sought higher paying defense jobs, as wages in airplane manufacturing in Wichita, Kansas, were around forty dollars a week and as much as twelve dollars per day. Defense industries paid Indians the same as whites, and the aircraft industry paid women the same as men, unlike other factory work. In 1942 women averaged sixty cents per hour and men seventy cents for factory work. At the Alliance Army Air Base, wages for junior firefighters were \$1,680 per annum; for truck drivers and fireman boiler, eighty-three cents per hour; for plumbers, eighty-nine cents an hour; and for base laundry workers, \$25.48 per week. If a Lakota had the necessary skill, training, or means to relocate, a defense job averaged \$2,000 to \$2,500 annually, much better than harvesting crops. See *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 7, 1943, 1; Hurt, *Great Plains during WWII*, 70, 193, 199, 360.

<sup>52</sup> Hurt, *Great Plains during WWII*, 121, 125, 128; *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 8, 1943, 1; Oct. 1, 1943, 2; Oct. 7, 1943, 1; *Hemingford Ledger*, Sept. 30, 1943, 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 1, 1943, 2. Farmers interviewed stated that they had the same Lakota family every year and never had much of a problem with them leaving and not returning. If they did, it was only one or two individuals. See Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, chapters 8 and 13; Kathleen Pickering, "Decolonizing Time Regimes: Lakota Conceptions of Work, Economy, and Society," *American Anthropologist* 106 (March 2004): 85-97.

<sup>54</sup> Schmitt interview, Aug. 13, 2008; Haas interview. Occasionally farmers encountered trouble while returning their Lakota employees to the reservation. One time when a farmer took his workers home, he stopped in Rushville and bought some wine. One worker refused at first to get back in the truck, and then had the grower drop him off at the edge of the reservation.

<sup>55</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Nov. 16, 1943, 1; Gloria Clark, *World War II: Prairie Invasion* (Kearney: Morris Publishing, 1999), chapter 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 27, 1946, 1; Oct. 11, 1946, 3, Sept. 29, 1946, 1; Sept. 17, 1946, 1; Hurt, *Great Plains during WWII*, 382-84.

<sup>57</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 14, 1948, 1. The OSTC formed after the Oglalas voted to accept the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. For more information, see Biolsi, *Organizing the Lakota*; Reinhardt, *Ruling Pine Ridge*.

<sup>58</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 14, 1948, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., Sept. 14, 1948, 1. It is around 90 miles from Alliance to the south edge of the Pine Ridge Reservation and about 150 miles from Alliance to the south edge of the Rosebud Reservation.

<sup>60</sup> Trank interview; DeCory interview.

<sup>61</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 21, 1948, 1; *Hemingford Ledger*, Sept. 23, 1948, 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 26, 1948, 1; Oct. 15, 1948, 1; Sept. 2, 1949, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., July 30, 1948, 1; Clark, *Prairie Invasion*, 42; Monroe,

*Indian in White America*, 18.

<sup>64</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Aug. 3, 1948, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Aug. 10, 1948, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., Aug. 13, 1948, 1; Sept. 10, 1948, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., Aug. 13, 1948, 1; Sept. 27, 1948, 1; Oct. 1, 1948, 1; Sept. 13, 1949, 1; Oct. 6, 1950, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., Oct. 15, 1956, 1; Monroe, *Indian in White America*, chapter 4; Trank interview; Leslie Frances Durhman, "Nowadays We Call it South Alliance: The Early History of a Lakota Community," Masters Thesis, University of Arizona, 1997, 81. Mexican migrants also used the facility throughout the 1950s.

<sup>69</sup> *Hemingford Ledger*, Oct. 24, 1957, 1, 10; Nov. 28, 1957, 1; Sept. 4, 1958, 1; Sept. 18, 1958, 1; Oct. 30, 1958, 12.

<sup>70</sup> DeCory interview; Schmitt interview, Aug. 13, 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Schmitt interview, Aug. 13, 2008; Trank interview.

<sup>72</sup> Haas interview; U.S., Department of Labor, *Farm Labor Fact Book* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 140.

<sup>73</sup> DeCory interview.

<sup>74</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 20, 1942, 1; Oct. 5, 1945, 10; Oct. 7, 1947, 2; Oct. 4, 1958, 2; Oct. 8, 1959, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Trank interview; Red Shirt, *Bead on an Anthill*, 48-49.

<sup>76</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Sept. 20, 1955, 1; Oct. 5, 1945, 10; Monroe, *Indian in White America*, 107-108.

<sup>77</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 1, 1943, 2; Schmitt interview, May 20, 2008; Haas interview; Trank interview.

<sup>78</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 4, 1949, 1.

<sup>79</sup> William Wilbrand, interview by author, Alliance, Nebraska, Aug. 8, 2008.

<sup>80</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 12, 1953, 1; Schmitt interview, May 20, 2008; Christensen interview, Dec. 28, 2006. Still, statistics show non-Indians were more likely to abuse sexually Lakota women.

<sup>81</sup> Monroe, *Indian in White America*, 20; DeCory interview; Durhman, "South Alliance," chapter 3.

<sup>82</sup> *Alliance Times-Herald*, Oct. 18, 1955, 1; Tension over wages was not just a racial issue as groups such as the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World) created many incidents of labor unrest across the West. See Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*; Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans*.

<sup>83</sup> DeCory interview; Red Shirt, *Turtle Lung Woman's Granddaughter*, 145-46, 155; Monroe, *Indian in White America*, 19; Schmitt interview, Aug. 13, 2008; Starita, *Dull Knives of Pine Ridge*, 248.

<sup>84</sup> C. E. Bishop, ed., *Farm Labor in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 4-5; Trank interview; Haas interview; Schmitt interview, May 20, 2008; Wilbrand interview. Today, only a couple of farmers raise potatoes for seed or chips.

<sup>85</sup> Haas interview; Schmitt interview May 20, 2008; Christensen interview, Dec. 28, 2006.