Railroad Ties: Tracks to the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe Reservations, 1860s-1910s

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Abstract

This essay interrogates the comparative effects of railroad colonialism at the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe Reservations in northwestern Minnesota. Charting the history of railroad expansion in Minnesota from the mid nineteenth to early twentieth centuries using maps, railroad promotional materials, and Indian agent correspondence reveals how, when, and why the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe experienced land dispossession and environmental degradation. Despite their geographic proximity, White Earth and Red Lake faced different federal policies. Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, both the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe lived upon denuded reservation lands. While existing historiography analyzes White Earth and Red Lake (primarily) in isolation, this paper exposes how railroad colonialism links the histories of both reservations. This essay seeks to illustrate the benefits of analyzing Ojibwe history through the lens of railroad colonialism to convey a unified narrative of Ojibwe dispossession that transcends reservation borders.
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Introduction

When the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie railroad first cut through the western prairie of the White Earth Ojibwe Reservation in 1904, the “Ojibway of White Earth Reservation were given the honor of naming” the five stations within reservation boundaries. Russell Fridley, former director of the Minnesota Historical Society, reveals that the Ojibwe “held a council…and petitioned officials of the Soo Line to give all villages in the area Indian names.”

Features of the landscape inspired some names, but two towns specifically addressed the arrival of the railroads. “Bejou” means “hello” in the Ojibwe language, and one of the towns was “so named because it was the first town on the reservation reached by trains running south.” “Waubun,” translated as “daylight,” was “so named because the early train running south reached it at daybreak.”

Three years later and 75 miles northeast of Bejou, the Indian agent at the Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation penned letters to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. He “request[ed] advice” on whether timber “on the reservation may be cut and sold for…railroad ties,” recommending “that he be authorized to employ Indians” to cut logs that could produce

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1 Karen Daniels Petersen, ed., “Ojibway and Dakota Place Names in Minnesota,” The Minnesota Archaeologist 25, no. 1 (January 1963): 19; Russell W. Fridley, “Some Highlights in the History of Mahnomen County” (unpublished manuscript, Minnesota History Center, June 1, 1955), 1. Please note that the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie Railroad will be called by its colloquial name, the “Soo line,” throughout the rest of this essay. The Soo line was established in the Twin Cities, funded privately, and did not have land grants. It eventually became a subsidiary of the Canadian Pacific. See Patrick Dorin’s The Soo Line (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1979) for further detail.

2 Fridley, Some Highlights, 1.

3 Petersen, “Ojibway and Dakota Place Names,” 19. The evident misspelling of both names indicates that Euroamerican officials, and not White Earth Ojibwe, had the privilege of placing the new names on the map. “Hello” is spelled “boozhoo” in the Ojibwe language (Anishinaabemowin), and the closest translation of “daylight” would be “waaban.” See John D. Nichols and Earl Nyholm’s A Concise Dictionary of Minnesota Ojibwe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) for definitions and spellings. “Boozhoo” is on page 39 and “waaban” is on page 114.
“100,000 ties.” Yet the Clerk in Charge in a previous letter complained that the Red Lake Ojibwe “simply [would] not hurry” to furnish the railroad at Red Lake with “freight” such as railroad ties. Just as the White Earth Ojibwe encountered railroads upon their reservation, so the Red Lakers found themselves “tied” to the railroads snaking their way across the American West.

In 1904, railroad lines sliced through both the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe Reservations in northwestern Minnesota. While the two reservations inhabit different ecosystems, the railroads facilitated Euroamerican access to the abundant natural resources at both reservations. White Earth comprises 800,000 acres straddling prairies, hardwood forests, and coniferous forests en route to the fertile-soiled Red River Valley; Red Lake once consisted of over 3 million acres and mainly resides in Minnesota’s northern pine lands. White Earth and Red Lake also encountered different federal policies. The Mississippi Band of Chippewa Indians (who would become the White Earth Ojibwe) experienced a forced relocation to the newly established White Earth Reservation in 1867; the Red Lake Ojibwe faced several land cessions but remain on their ancestral lands to this day. While the White Earth Ojibwe received privatized allotments on their reservation and underwent the opening of reservation lands to

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4 Carl W. Allen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, December 7, 1907, January 4, 1908; Correspondence with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1906-1912; RG 75, Box 1 of 2, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
5 R.E.L. David to Maj. G.I. Scott, September 30, 1903; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 1 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
7 “Treaty between the United States of America and the Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi: concluded March 19, 1867; ratification advised, with amendment, April 8, 1867; amendment accepted April 8, 1867; proclaimed April 18, 1867,” Treaties between the US and the Indians, No. 196, Washington, D.C., 1867; Treuer, Warrior Nation, 22, 62-6, 76, 86-7, 207.
Euroamerican settlement, Red Lakers successfully resisted allotment and continue to hold their lands in common. However, by the early twentieth century, local settlers, land speculators, and lumber companies claimed that “Indians are not farmers” and that valuable lands are “abandoned by the Indians” to validate white presence at both reservations. White Earth and Red Lake soon fell prey to settlement and market interests that denuded the landscapes and threatened Ojibwe cultural practices that depended on coexisting with sustainable ecosystems. Despite their inherent differences, White Earth and Red Lake experienced similar dispossession by the 1910s. Railroad colonialism links the histories of White Earth and Red Lake.

Existing scholarship examines the narrative arcs of the two reservations in isolation. Comparing their histories through the lens of railroad colonialism clarifies how, when, and why White Earth and Red Lake faced federal policies and environmental degradation. Melissa Meyer, in *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889-1920*, argues that the introduction of allotment policy at White Earth in the late nineteenth century led over eighty percent of lands to be in the hands of Euroamerican homesteaders, speculators, and timber tycoons by 1909. In *Warrior Nation: A History of the Red Lake Ojibwe*, Anton Treuer structures his analysis around significant figures in the Ojibwe band’s past, citing the persevering, “warrior” character of the Red Lake people and the reservation’s “geographic isolation” as setting Red Lake apart from other Ojibwe bands and reservations in the state. Brenda Child’s *My Grandfather’s Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the*
Reservation documents the dispossession that settler colonialism effected at Red Lake and the repercussions for traditional Ojibwe lifeways at the reservation.\textsuperscript{13} None of the authors provide an extensive comparative analysis between White Earth and Red Lake. And while all three mention the presence of railroads at or near the reservations, none elaborates on their role as colonizing agents.\textsuperscript{14} This essay seeks to intervene in this historiographical narrative by revealing how railroad colonialism reexplains the federal policies enacted and environmental degradation present at White Earth and Red Lake. Furthermore, this analysis exposes the benefits of drawing White Earth and Red Lake together for perceiving the common agents involved in dispossessing the Minnesota Ojibwe.

This essay both revisits archives investigated by Meyer, Treuer, and Child and probes new sources to frame the dialogue on railroad colonialism at White Earth and Red Lake. In interrogating sources, this paper limits its focus to railroad interests. Railroad interests shaped the trajectory of railroad colonialism. Railroad interests include Euroamerican commodification of land, settler agriculture, natural resource extraction, and the federal land surveys and maps that allowed these processes to occur.\textsuperscript{15} Limiting the analytical scope to railroad interests allows a targeted comparison to emerge between White Earth and Red Lake. Drawing on General Land Office (GLO) and county atlas maps, Indian agent correspondence, council minutes, and railroad promotional materials refocuses existing historiographical arguments on the railroad.

Cartographic analysis particularly departs from existing scholarship, exposing how railroad land grants initiated surveys that led the cartographic grid to unfurl across reservation

\textsuperscript{15} This is my definition, signifying that this essay concerns itself less with railroad construction and operation than with the multitude of factors surrounding railroad expansion that resulted in indigenous dispossession.
lands, subsuming the Ojibwe and their lands into federal geographic consciousness. By documenting every tree, brook, and clearing upon the reservations, the federal survey process granted the government legibility of indigenous lands, which in turn enabled their expropriation. The surveys and maps implicate railroad interests in the policies that chipped away at Ojibwe lands. Figures 1–4 illustrate the stages of railroad expansion in Minnesota between the 1870s and 1900s in relation to original vegetation in the state and the locations of White Earth and Red Lake.16 When paired with Indian agent correspondence, these maps highlight how natural resource interests in the state influenced railroad developments that in turn delivered EuroAmericans to reservation lands. While Red Lake, farther north in the state, remained out of cartographic consciousness for a longer duration than White Earth, by 1912 a railroad map encouraging settlement in Red Lake County declared that “All Roads Lead to Red Lake.”17 Railroad colonialism subjected both White Earth and Red Lake to continental imperialism by the 1910s.

16 Images included in the text are cited in captions instead of in footnotes. The body of the text will engage with the images, but please read the captions for further detail.
17 Red Lake County: The Best County in the Best State in the Union, 1912, Minnesota Historical Society Pamphlet Collection, Minnesota History Center.
Figure 1: This map shows White Earth and Red Lake and railway lines completed in Minnesota in 1870. Figures 1–4 show the locations of White Earth and Red Lake, the original vegetation/ecosystems of Minnesota, and the railroad lines completed in Minnesota for each decade from the 1870s to 1900s. The black outlines drawn on the base map represent the reservations; Red Lake is northeast of White Earth. The base colors on the map represent ecosystems: yellows signify grasslands; reds and greens denote hardwood forests; and blues, pinks, and greys designate coniferous ecosystems. Not all railroads in Minnesota are represented on the map—just those that would be built closest to White Earth and Red Lake. The Northern Pacific Railroad is in blue on the map, while predecessor lines of the Great Northern Railway are in red. Notice how the railway lines run due west to the grasslands and northeast to Lake Superior. White Earth is split evenly across three ecosystems, whereas the terrain immediately around Red Lake (the lake itself) is largely pine lands. Base map image citation: F.J. Marschner, *The Original Vegetation Map of Minnesota* [map], 1:500,000 (St. Paul: North Central Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1930). This is a 1974 colored version of the original. Railroad line information supplied by Richard S. Prosser’s *Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
Figure 2: This map shows White Earth and Red Lake and railway lines completed in Minnesota in 1880. Notice how the Northern Pacific line approaches the southern border of White Earth, while Red Lake remains removed from railroad lines. Also notice how the railroads populate the grassland regions of Minnesota, stretching to the far northwest corner of the state—this is the Red River Valley, a region known for its fertile soils. Base map image citation: F.J. Marschner, The Original Vegetation Map of Minnesota [map], 1:500,000 (St. Paul: North Central Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1930). This is a 1974 colored version of the original. Railroad line information supplied by Richard S. Prosser’s Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
Figure 3: This map shows White Earth and Red Lake and railway lines completed in Minnesota in 1890. Red Lakers ceded a large portion of their reservation owing to federal pressures in 1889 (discussed in body of this essay). Notice how the railroad lines enclose White Earth on the western side of the reservation, whereas few railroads approach Red Lake. The Great Northern line, in red, begins to veer east towards Red Lake at this moment. Base map image citation: F.J. Marschner, *The Original Vegetation Map of Minnesota* [map], 1:500,000 (St. Paul: North Central Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1930). This is a 1974 colored version of the original. Railroad line information supplied by Richard S. Prosser’s *Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
Figure 4: This map shows White Earth and Red Lake and railway lines completed in Minnesota in 1900. The line in green, representing the Soo railroad line, depicts the extent of the Soo line in 1910. Notice how the Soo line crosses through White Earth. Also notice the short, dark line entering Red Lake: this represents a logging railroad. Larger railway lines also approach Red Lake, but railway lines encircle White Earth more than Red Lake. Base map image citation: F.J. Marschner, *The Original Vegetation Map of Minnesota* [map], 1:500,000 (St. Paul: North Central Forest Experiment Station, Forest Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1930). This is a 1974 colored version of the original. Railroad line information supplied by Richard S. Prosser’s *Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
Secondary literature beyond the scope of local history informs this essay’s stance towards railroad colonialism. In *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, William Cronon argues that Chicago gained economic prowess in the mid to late nineteenth century by forging “intimate linkages” between city and country via railroads.¹⁸ This hinterland network of railroads endangered the environmental sustainability of the Western terrain as lands fell under the plow, axe, and hooves of cattle.¹⁹ But what happens when “intimate linkages” develop not only between city and country, but also between city and reservation (in this case, between Minneapolis-St. Paul and Ojibwe reservations)? Patrick Wolfe contends in “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” that settler colonialism “destroys to replace” indigenous occupants of the land with nonnative inhabitants.²⁰ According to Cronon and Wolfe, then, the influx of settlers via the railroad not only denudes landscapes, but also dispossesses indigenous peoples of their lands and threatens the ecosystems that undergird their subsistence economies.

Manu Karuka recently published *Empires Track’s: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* in part to highlight the deleterious effects railroad developments had on Native American populations. Karuka’s concepts of continental imperialism (recognizing the United States as an agent of internal colonization) and countersovereignty (the United States as reacting in its modes of claiming land to preexisting indigenous sovereignties) inform the stance taken towards railroads as agents of colonialism in this analysis.²¹ As Ned Blackhawk writes in his review of *Empire’s Tracks*, railroads “chart rather than follow the course of empire,” and Karuka ties together the railroad’s role in capitalist

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¹⁹ Ibid.
expansion and indigenous dispossession to frame his discourse on “railroad colonialism.”

Although Cronon, Wolfe, and Karuka direct their gaze towards communities outside of Minnesota, their methodologies assist in locating railroad colonialism in Ojibwe communities to interrogate how railroads served as vehicles of dispossession.

Richard White’s *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* also motivates the arguments presented in this essay. White interrogates the operation of transcontinental railroads and argues that they outstripped settler demand and were wasteful, redundant (too many lines), environmentally destructive, economically unstable, and catastrophic to indigenous communities. His narration ends, however, largely before 1900, and he barely touches on the lumber industry’s connection to railroad developments. Moreover, although he mentions indigenous communities, his treatment remains fairly cursory and concentrated on Plains populations. At the end of his text, White engages in a counterfactual exercise that provides a segue to this essay’s analysis. He hypothesizes that if “railroads were built according to demand” instead of fostering demand, and if transcontinental lines had not been subsidized, then “there would have been more time for Indians to adjust to a changing world.” White gestures to the Diné (Navajo), “with their reservation intact and a functioning economy,” compared to the Lakota, “with their reservations subdivided and allotted and their attempts to adjust thwarted,” to provide a comparative framework for how transcontinental lines destroyed adaptive capacity in the latter case. By comparing White Earth and Red Lake (as allotted and nonallotted reservations), this essay seeks to build on White’s work by revealing how early-

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24 Ibid., 516-17.
25 Ibid.
twentieth-century railroads also forwarded continental imperialism to destructive ends for indigenous communities.

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, the first section of this paper charts the deep history of Ojibwe-Euroamerican interactions in Minnesota to build a framework for understanding the divergence between the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe in terms of ancestral lands, political structures, economic incentives, and Euroamerican relationships. The next section explores how the presence of a transcontinental railroad near White Earth, versus the absence of a railroad near Red Lake, occasioned differences in 1860s federal policy. The following section analyzes maps and Indian agent correspondence to reveal how the transcontinental railroad drew White Earth into the market economy compared to Red Lake in the 1870s and 1880s. The subsequent section close reads federal commissioners’ council minutes at White Earth and Red Lake in 1889 when the Ojibwe experienced pressures to accept allotments upon their reservations. The final section interrogates how the influx of railroads within reservation boundaries at White Earth and Red Lake in the early 1900s spawned environmental degradation and endangered the survival of Ojibwe lifeways. Although differing in timeline, both the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe suffered under railroad encroachment.

**Colonial Cartography: From the Fur Trade to Early Settler Colonialism**

Railroad growth in the mid nineteenth century accentuated preexisting differences between the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe, their ancestral lands, and interactions with Euroamerican actors. Grounding the history of the Ojibwe in nineteenth-century maps sheds light on how transitions in the Euroamerican colonial project precipitated differences in the ways the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe experienced railroad expansion by the 1860s. Red Lake,
though present on maps in the early nineteenth century, gradually disappeared from federal cartographic consciousness. Simultaneously, the federal government’s geographic interest in the ancestral lands of the Mississippi Band of Chippewa intensified. The Mississippi Band of Chippewa would become the White Earth Ojibwe after their relocation to the reservation in 1867. Evaluating the federal government’s shifting geographic knowledge of the Red Lake and Mississippi Band Ojibwe assists in understanding how and why they faced encounters with railroads in different periods and contexts.\(^{26}\)

In the basement of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library hangs William Clark’s map of the United States from 1810. Although geographic knowledge accumulated from Lewis and Clark’s expedition to the West Coast populates the map, Clark by no means confines his map’s contents to their journey (see Figure 5). Cobbling together source materials from across time and space, Clark fills the map with locations embedded in the consciousness of Euroamerican and European colonial powers. Minnesota’s Red Lake, home to the Red Lake Ojibwe, appears on Clark’s map with acute interest. Its geometric representation and attendant labels gesture to an explanation for its appearance: the fur trade. The words “NW Co.” surround some lakes, and the chain of lakes, connected by waterways, suggest that EuroAmericans accrued this geographic knowledge by traversing the northern landscape. “NW Co.” refers to the North West Company, a Canadian fur trade company, highlighting the extent to which the Red Lake

\(^{26}\) Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger’s concept of “agnotology,” introduced in *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), has inspired my map analysis in this paper. Agnotology means the study of ignorance and serves as a counterpart analytic to epistemology (broadly defined as the theory of knowledge). Proctor suggests that ignorance, like knowledge, has the potential to shape relationships and power dynamics. On page 2 of the text, Proctor writes how ignorance can be a “form of resistance to…dangerous knowledge.” In this paper, I suggest that federal knowledge of indigenous lands produced legibility that was dangerous to the sovereignty of Ojibwe people, while federal ignorance of indigenous lands (particularly at Red Lake) enabled the continuity of Ojibwe sovereignty and resistance to Euroamerican interference for a longer duration. Reviewing the histories of the Red Lake and White Earth Ojibwe on the map before the introduction of railroads reveals how railroads shaped federal knowledge and ignorance of Ojibwe lands.
Ojibwe inhabited a zone of competing colonial interests. While decades later Red Lake lay beyond the interests of railroad activity, early-nineteenth-century Red Lake drew geographic and economic attention for the furry animals that abounded in its pine forests.

Figure 5: This zoomed-in view of Clark’s 1810 map shows Red Lake and surrounding waterways. The labels, such as “NW Co.,” indicate the fur trade knowledge that led to Red Lake’s appearance on the map. Notice how the chain of lakes running southeast from Red Lake conveys the experience of navigating these regions (as opposed to surveying them for commodification purposes). Image citation: William Clark, *Clark’s Map of 1810* [map], no scale given, from Lewis and Clark Expedition Maps and Receipt, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

The Ojibwe’s encounters with the fur trade followed centuries of coexisting with the varied ecosystems of the Great Lakes region. The Ojibwe, part of the larger Algonquin family of tribes, migrated from the East Coast to the Great Lakes over hundreds of years owing to population pressures and intertribal conflict. A prophecy guided the Ojibwe west, encouraging them to settle in “the land where food grows on water,” and the Ojibwe halted their migration.

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upon reaching the wild rice-laden waterways of the Upper Midwest. The Ojibwe practiced a subsistence lifestyle, acting as stewards of the land and migrating with the seasons in intratribal bands to retain a balanced dependence on the varied natural resources of the northern woodlands and pine lands. Hunting occurred in the winter, maple sugaring signaled the transition to spring, small-scale agricultural and gathering dominated summer months, wild ricing along waterways marked the transition to fall, and harvesting ensued before the onset of winter. Not only did the Ojibwe inhabit varied ecosystems in this annual cycle, but they also split roles among genders (women, for example, traditionally harvested wild rice), resulting in a mobile lifestyle that allocated duties in a way inconsistent with the Euroamerican practices and lifeways that would infiltrate the region in later centuries and decades.

French, and eventually British and Euroamerican, fur traders arrived in the Upper Great Lakes region beginning in the seventeenth century. Their arrival resulted in a reorganization in traditional Ojibwe lifeways and social structures, but it did not dismantle the preexisting cultural practices that sustained the Ojibwe. The seasonal round remained intact, but Ojibwe men ventured farther in the winter to trap for the coveted furs. This eventually led to greater conflict between the Dakota and Ojibwe, and the Europeans allied with the Ojibwe to push the Dakota into the grasslands during the fur trade era and established communities west of Lake Superior. In their expanded territories, the Ojibwe continued to live in villages, while fur traders established trading posts where the Ojibwe exchanged furs for desired goods such as guns, ironware, and glass beads. A new ethnic identity developed during these encounters—when the

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Europeans intermarried with the Ojibwe—and the mixed血液, métis, often managed the trading posts.\textsuperscript{33} This evolution in Ojibwe-European ethnic relations and mutual dependencies limited the extent to which the colonial enterprise could infringe on the Ojibwe’s autonomy.

Richard White terms this relationship the “middle ground,” and the economic partnerships that arose from these encounters differ from the settler colonial project that would replace fur trade relations in later decades.\textsuperscript{34} The Clark map reveals that geographic knowledge resulted from a desire to navigate, rather than expropriate, the land. Red Lake and its tributaries cohere on the map to convey how to move across the landscape to engage in trade, while an objective, quantifiable survey of the land remains a separate cartographic project. Analyzing Red Lake’s appearance on Euroamerican maps underscores its relevance to contemporary economic interests but more importantly illuminates how visual representation can serve different colonial agendas.

As the fur trade approached economic extinction in the early to mid nineteenth century, the Louisiana Purchase transformed the United States’ colonial stance towards Minnesota. Soon after Lewis and Clark embarked on their venture along the Missouri River, Thomas Jefferson tasked Zebulon Pike (in 1805) with “mak[ing] a survey of the river Mississippi to its source.”\textsuperscript{35} Similar expeditions followed, and the production of maps and travel narratives from these explorations reveal the type of geographic knowledge coveted by the federal government. Maps produced by Henry Schoolcraft in the 1830s and Joseph Nicollet in the 1840s attempt to depict the geometric accuracy of the Mississippi and its tributaries, while the negative space on these

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 18-23, 30-5.
\textsuperscript{34} White, \textit{The Middle Ground}, xxv-xxxii.
\textsuperscript{35} Zebulon Pike, \textit{An Account of a voyage up the Mississippi River, from St. Louis to its source; made under the orders of the War Department by Lieut. Pike of the United States Army, in the years 1805 and 1806, in The Boston Review, v. 4. Appendix, pp. 25-52} (Boston, MA: Munroe and Francis, 1807), 25.
maps illustrates the emphasis on surveying waterways and their banks in lieu of interior lands
(see Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: This map, prepared by Henry Schoolcraft from his 1830s travels along the Mississippi River, highlights the federal government’s interest in documenting the geometric accuracy of the river and its surrounding waterways. On one of the peninsulas extending into Leech Lake, Schoolcraft marks the presence of an Ojibwe village, thereby making the group visible in this early survey of Western territory. Notice the absence of Red Lake from the map. Image citation: Henry R. Schoolcraft, Sketch of the Sources of the Mississippi River [map], no scale given, in Narrative of an expedition through the upper Mississippi to Itasca Lake (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 7: This close-up image of Joseph Nicollet’s survey of the Mississippi River region elucidates the extensive geographic knowledge accumulated about the Upper Mississippi as opposed to Red Lake (waterways not nearly as detailed at Red Lake). Nicollet labels the land at Red Lake as “Chipeway Country,” while the absence of this descriptor in the Upper Mississippi suggests this land lost its status as “Indian country” during the early surveys. Image citation: J.N. Nicollet and J.C. Frémont, *Map of the hydrological basin of the Mississippi River* [map], 1:600,000 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Congress, Senate, 1842).

In addition to maps, travel narratives convey the other types of knowledge collected. The War Department “directed [Schoolcraft]” to record “all the statistical facts he can procure” about the indigenous peoples occupying the lands adjacent to the Mississippi River.36 Schoolcraft’s 1834 expedition served as a surveillance mission to record Ojibwe occupants of the land, and his maps label the locations of Ojibwe villages he visited near the headwaters of the Mississippi River (at Lake Itasca). The identity of the Ojibwe in this region illuminates their future dispossession: they are the Mississippi Band of Chippewa Indians, the band that experienced a

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forced relocation to the White Earth Reservation in 1867. In 1837 (only three years after Schoolcraft’s narrative was published), the Mississippi Band Ojibwe encountered their first land cession treaty that also granted them continued usufruct rights on ceded lands.\(^{37}\) By marking them on his map in his “survey” of national territory, Schoolcraft initiated the project of legibility that would enable land thievery and the Ojibwe’s removal.

Unlike the Mississippi Band Ojibwe, the Red Lakers lay outside the federal government’s immediate geographic interest. Red Lake eluded easy water transport from the Mississippi River, so federal geographic consciousness did not extend to the Red Lake region. Schoolcraft’s map in his 1834 narrative does not even show Red Lake. And while Nicollet features Red Lake on his map, the detail of the Upper Mississippi River region does not carry over to Red Lake or to the waterways surrounding the lake. Nicollet does note the “Indian Village” at Red Lake, but the map gives the impression that the Red Lakers remained isolated. After all, “Chipewy Country” labels Red Lake, while the intricately depicted waterways of the Upper Mississippi no longer bear such as epithet (see Figure 7).

A travel narrative from 1824 suggests that Red Lake posed challenges for travel that diminished interest in visiting the region and its inhabitants in the early years of surveying. While Major Long, who led the expedition discussed in the narrative, was “proposed to travel along the northern boundary of the United States to Lake Superior,” local settlers informed him “that such an undertaking would be impracticable; the whole country from Red Lake to…Lake Superior, being covered with small lagoons and marshes” that would impede travel by horse.\(^{38}\) Such insight suggests that not geographic isolation, but rather environmental conditions, made


Red Lake less relevant for Euroamericans to know in the early era of surveys. Moreover, William Keating (the author of the narrative) writes that instead of fur trading, the region west of Red Lake must “with a view to the future improvement of the country” focus on producing “agricultural resources.” The Euroamericans’ evolving designs for the land slowly erased Red Lake from cartographic consciousness.

Euroamericans’ growing interests in settler agriculture resulted in the Mississippi Band and Red Lake Ojibwe’s different relations with Euroamericans. The Mississippi Band engaged in councils with Euroamerican expeditions: Schoolcraft coopted their geographic knowledge, “request[ing] [the Ojibwe] to delineate maps of the country” and asking them “to furnish the requisite number of hunting canoes and guides.” By guiding Schoolcraft to Lake Itasca, where he “erect[ed] a flag staff” to claim the land for the United States, the Mississippi Band Ojibwe became unwitting partners in their own dispossession. Meanwhile, although Red Lakers sent offerings to these councils, they refrained from visiting. Schoolcraft recalls a Red Lake man sending a peace pipe to the party “as a token of friendship” in “remembrance of the power that permitted traders to come into their country to supply them with goods.” As Red Lakers lived out the final years of middle ground trading relations, removed from initial federal surveys, the

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39 Ibid., 50.
40 Local histories describe the large trading posts established, such as the Selkirk settlement, in the far northwestern corner of Minnesota in this era. The Selkirk settlement sat at the transition between the forest and prairie, which lent itself to easier access for Euroamericans than the region immediately surrounding Red Lake. Euroamericans’ increasing interest in agriculture and accessibility shaped Red Lake’s invisibility in future decades. See Rhoda R. Gilman, Carolyn Gilman, and Deborah M. Stultz’s The Red River Trails, 1820-1870: Oxcart Routes between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1979); William Watts Folwell’s A History of Minnesota, Volume IV (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1930); and Carroll Engelhardt’s Gateway to the Northern Plains: Railroads and the Birth of Fargo and Moorhead (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) for more information.
41 Schoolcraft, Narrative of an expedition, 40, 61.
42 Ibid., 71.
Mississippi Band Ojibwe unified to assist the federal project of documenting their ancestral lands.

**Relocations and Cessions: Tracking Minnesota’s Early Railroads, 1860s-1870s**

The Ojibwe bands’ differing experiences in the mid nineteenth century underscore the Euroamericans’ shifting interests in the land that would define railroad developments in subsequent years. By the 1840s, oxcart trails dotted Minnesota’s western prairies to carry agricultural produce to the nascent Minneapolis-St. Paul markets. Assessing the trails’ routes alongside early vegetation maps of Minnesota supports Keating’s statement that the future of the nation’s “improvement” resided in its “agricultural resources.”43 While some trails, such as the Woods Trail, briefly traverse the Upper Mississippi, most trails hug the western border of Minnesota and entirely bypass Red Lake (see Figure 8). The trails, termed the “Red River Trails,” have the Red River Valley as their destination: a region of prairie and wet prairie that lent itself to agricultural pursuits. By the 1830s, this region abounded with crops such as wheat and barley.44 The object of these trails foreshadowed the function of railroads in succeeding years.

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43 Keating, *Narrative of an expedition*, 50.
Figure 8: This map reconstructs the routes of the oxcart trails that preceded the earliest railroads in Minnesota. When viewed alongside the early vegetation maps of Minnesota (Figures 1–4), it is clear that the trails traverse the grasslands that yielded agricultural produce. Notice how some of the trails cross lands near the Mississippi Band Ojibwe’s homelands; all trails steer clear of Red Lake. Image citation: Rhoda R. Gilman, Carolyn Gilman, Deborah M. Stultz, Red River Trails [map], no scale given, in The Red River Trails: Oxcart Routes Between St. Paul and the Selkirk Settlement, 1820-1870 (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1979).

Before Minnesota gained statehood in 1858, its inhabitants already recognized the benefits of railroad infrastructure for the economy when the then-territory received a Federal Railroad Land Grant in 1857.45 Only three years later, Governor Alexander Ramsey voiced his support for large-scale railroad projects in his Inaugural Address, stating “a railroad to the Pacific from some proper point in the Mississippi valley, is already regarded as too important to be longer delayed. It would be most advantageous to…Minnesota…that the question should be

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determined in favor of the route through her own valleys.\textsuperscript{46} Ramsey continued his speech by elaborating on the agricultural and lumbering yields Minnesota had achieved that fiscal year.\textsuperscript{47} Ramsey, and succeeding governors, perceived the value of transporting the rich natural resources from Minnesota’s hinterlands to Eastern markets, and following the demise of the fur trade, agriculture and lumbering filled that void.

The Civil War era served as a turning point in investment and policy in Minnesota’s resource production and railroads. The Homestead Act of 1862, granting all settlers 160 acres of land if they moved to the West, increased Minnesota’s population by 45\% between 1862 and 1865.\textsuperscript{48} By 1864, the Minnesota State Board of Immigration published advertising guidebooks on the fecundity of Minnesota’s land for prospective settlers. That same year, the Northern Pacific Railroad (the first transcontinental line in Minnesota) received its federal grant to begin construction.\textsuperscript{49} In 1869, just a few years following the end of the Civil War, Minnesota’s railroads reached Chicago for the first time.\textsuperscript{50} These coinciding events reveal the converging political and economic interests of the state.

The process by which the land was surveyed and granted to railroads would come to bear on the experiences of the Mississippi Band and Red Lake Ojibwe in the 1860s and 1870s. In 1864, when Congress granted the Northern Pacific Railroad a large tract of public land on which to build its transcontinental line, the act also allowed the railroad company to sell acreage to

\textsuperscript{46} Alexander Ramsey, \textit{Inaugural Address} (St. Paul: Minnesotian and Times Printing Company, 1860), 22.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 4-5.
\textsuperscript{49} Wills, \textit{Boosters, Hustlers, and Speculators}, 113; \textit{An Act granting Lands to aid in the Construction of a Railroad and Telegraph Line from Lake Superior to Puget’s Sound, on the Pacific Coast, by the Northern Route}, Public Law, \textit{U.S. Statutes at Large} 13 (1864): 365-372.
\textsuperscript{50} Wills, \textit{Boosters, Hustlers, and Speculators}, 133.
settlers on either side of its to-be-constructed line as reimbursement for the enterprise.\textsuperscript{51} The railroad land grant and terms of the Homestead Act required the land to be officially surveyed, and therefore legible, to the federal government. The initial, exploratory surveys that the Mississippi Band Ojibwe participated in decades earlier reached new heights in the 1860s to satisfy white land hunger and railroad developments.

A General Land Office (GLO) map of public surveys reveals that the Mississippi Band’s ancestral lands were fully legible to the federal government by 1866 (see Figure 9).\textsuperscript{52} On the map, the grid denoting surveys envelops the Mississippi Band’s ancestral lands (located near Lake Mille Lacs, which is drawn in grey in central Minnesota). Parallel lines drawn in pink represent the railroads’ land grants, and two sets of railroad land grants sandwich the Mille Lacs region. The surveys barely outstrip the land grants, and when read alongside a map of the railroad lines completed in Minnesota by 1870, the surveys appear to facilitate the routes of the railroads.\textsuperscript{53} The Ojibwe’s legibility also enabled dispossession: only a year after this 1866 map was prepared, the federal government relocated the Mississippi Band to the White Earth Reservation (that lay just beyond the furthest extent of surveys in Becker County).\textsuperscript{54} By relocating the Mississippi Band to White Earth, the federal government divorced the Ojibwe from the ancestral lands they willingly shared with explorers decades earlier. Richard White argues that the transcontinentals fostered demand for land in the West, and the Northern Pacific’s

\textsuperscript{51} An Act granting Lands to aid in the Construction of a Railroad and Telegraph Line from Lake Superior to Puget’s Sound, on the Pacific Coast, by the Northern Route, Public Law, U.S. Statutes at Large 13 (1864): 365-372.
\textsuperscript{52} Please note: the Mississippi Band Ojibwe had been relocated to a set of reservations west of their ancestral lands by the 1850s. White Earth was established farther from existing railroad lines in 1867. See Meyer, The White Earth Tragedy, 37-40.
\textsuperscript{53} Richard S. Prosser, State of Minnesota Railroad Lines Constructed End of 1870 [map], in Rails to the Northern Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
\textsuperscript{54} “Treaty between the United States of America and the Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi: concluded March 19, 1867; ratification advised, with amendment, April 8, 1867; amendment accepted April 8, 1867; proclaimed April 18, 1867,” Treaties between the US and the Indians, No. 196, Washington, D.C., 1867.
land grant supports White’s claim that the transcontinentals wreaked havoc on indigenous land sovereignty.\textsuperscript{55}

Figure 9: This map, compiled from public survey notes, exposes which lands the federal government chose to survey (indicated by the grid) by 1866. Notice that the ancestral lands of the White Earth Ojibwe (region around Mille Lacs Lake, which appears in grey) were already surveyed by this point. The Ojibwe’s removal to the White Earth Reservation in 1867 reveals that federal knowledge of their lands enabled its expropriation. Also notice how the surveys appear to facilitate the anticipated railroad routes (railroad land grants drawn as pink parallel lines). The White Earth Reservation lay just beyond the furthest extent of surveys in Becker County. Red Lake, far north in Minnesota, remains outside the purview of surveys and railroad interests. Image citation: U.S. General Land Office, \textit{Sketch of the Public Surveys in the State of Minnesota} [map], 1:1,140,480 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Land Office, 1866), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

\textsuperscript{55} White, \textit{Railroaded}, xxi-xxxii, 508-517.
Red Lake, meanwhile, remained distant from railroad entanglements in northwestern Minnesota. Nevertheless, Red Lakers felt the effects of railroad developments through land cessions. In concert with the Homestead Act, the early railroads focused more on delivering settlers into the Western landscape for agricultural pursuits than on depositing them in forested regions. Returning to the early vegetation map of Minnesota reveals that the lands due west of Red Lake transitioned into the grasslands suitable for agriculture, and indeed, the Red River Trails facilitated trade in the region prior to railroad developments (see Figures 1–4, 8). As most of Red Lake land lay in pine forests, the land did not attract the interests of those traversing the oxcart trails west of the reservation. The Red Lake Ojibwe’s lands historically extended into the Red River Valley, but during the Old Crossing Treaty negotiations of 1863, the federal government coerced the Red Lake Band into ceding their lands stretching west of Red Lake into the fertile-soiled valley. The Red Lakers ceded nearly 11 million acres and in so doing agreed to occupy their remaining homelands in what officially became their reservation. Red Lakers experienced dispossession as did the White Earth Ojibwe, but by inhabiting forested lands less conducive to settler agriculture, those dwelling around the lake remained out of federal consciousness for a longer duration.

Maps prepared of Minnesota in succeeding years underscore how the Red Lake cession fed railroad desires. An atlas map published in 1874 shows the grid of surveys extending into the Red River Valley (see Figure 10). A black line edges its way north into the recently surveyed

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56 “Treaty between the United States of America and the Red Lake and Pembina bands of Chippewas: concluded March 2, 1863; ratification advised by Senate with amendments March 1, 1864: amendments accepted April 12, 1864: proclaimed May 5, 1864,” Washington, D.C., s.n., 1864. The Red Lake Band was not unified in its decision to accept the treaty. In fact, Ojibwe leaders would walk away from treaties and refuse to participate, should the treaties displease them. This is what happened at the Old Crossing Treaty negotiations. Many Ojibwe simply walked away, but some remained, and the federal government justified their taking of Red Lake lands regardless of if some chiefs refused to sign. The Dakota War of 1862 also contributed to the federal pressures to accept the treaty. See Treuer, *Warrior Nation*, 22-3, 43-67.
terrain, which represents a railroad: the St. Paul & Pacific, predecessor of the Great Northern Railway (a transcontinental line).57 Within eleven years of the Red Lake cession, railroad lines followed the route carved by oxcart trails in preceding decades. Upon the map, the railroad line running from east to west (the Northern Pacific) also reveals how quickly the railroad line facilitated surveys of the White Earth Reservation in Becker County. The lands nearest to the railroad line, and particularly in the western half of the reservation (the grasslands), fall within the survey grid. Like Red Lake itself, the lands farther from the railroad upon White Earth remain unsurveyed—but the template for surveys extends to these more distant lands, highlighting how soon the surveys will subsume the terrain into federal geographic knowledge.

Figure 10: This 1874 atlas map clearly shows the process by which the White Earth Reservation was surveyed. Reservation lands closest to the transcontinental line had been surveyed, whereas lands further from the line were yet to be surveyed. The representation of tree cover surrounding Red Lake and extending east reveals the Euroamericans’ expectations for what comprised these northern lands, even though they had not yet been surveyed. Also notice the differences in Red Lake’s geometric representation on this map versus on Figure 9. Image citation: A.T. Andreas, *Map of Northern Minnesota, 1874* [map], 1:760,320 (Chicago, IL: A.T. Andreas, 1874), David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

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Comparing the geometric representations of Red Lake (the lake itself) on the 1866 and 1874 maps emphasizes the lack of Euroamerican knowledge of the Red Lake region (see Figures 9 and 10). The shorelines, orientations, and sizes of both lakes substantially differ between the two maps, and neither map provides graphic detail about surrounding waterways and topographical variation. This discrepancy in Red Lake’s representation suggests that federal ignorance of Red Lake lands shielded the Ojibwe from Euroamerican economic and environmental interests. Railroad transformations in the state expose the degree of autonomy and sovereignty this cartographic invisibility afforded Red Lakers leading up to the allotment policy of 1889.

**Pre-Allotment Policy: Growing Railroad Interests, 1870s-1889**

Railroad developments increased the divergences between White Earth and Red Lake following the initial relocations and cessions at the two reservations. Analyzing the terms of the 1867 relocation policy, the correspondence of a White Earth Indian agent, maps, and railroad promotional materials highlights the extent to which railroads influenced the White Earth Ojibwe’s experiences leading up to the allotment policy of 1889. In contrast, Red Lake’s continued removal from railroad interests in Minnesota maintained Euroamericans’ lack of knowledge of Red Lake lands that in turn shaped the Ojibwe’s response to allotment. Railroad colonialism emerges as the differentiating factor between White Earth and Red Lake in this era.

In a milieu of rapid Euroamerican settlement and railroad expansion, the federal government resorted to an assimilatory reservation policy in its establishment of White Earth in 1867. The act stipulated that, should the White Earth Ojibwe (formerly Mississippi Band Ojibwe) engage in sedentary agriculture, they could each gain up to 160 acres of privatized
land. While not a coercive allotment policy, this act foreshadowed the function of the Dawes Severalty Act and its introduction at Minnesota Ojibwe reservations in the late 1880s. The act’s resonance with the Homestead Act is even more compelling. Both the Homestead Act and the 1867 relocation policy granted acreage of up to 160 acres, suggesting that the federal government intended the White Earth Reservation to mirror the settlement of surrounding lands.

While granting the White Earth Ojibwe a swath of land encompassing grasslands served to encourage their transition to agriculture, setting aside agricultural lands for their use also placed the White Earth Ojibwe in the line of fire. By the 1870s, the Northern Pacific Railroad passed near the southern boundary of White Earth, and Euroamerican settlements sprang up along the line, leading to white encroachment at the reservation. Revisiting the terms of the 1864 Pacific Railroad Act sheds light on the Northern Pacific land grant’s potential to dispossess the White Earth Ojibwe. Not only would the act “extinguish, as rapidly as may be consistent with public policy and the welfare of the Indians, the Indian titles to all lands falling under the operation of this act.” The act also specified that the lands should “be surveyed for forty miles in width on both sides of the entire line of said road…and the odd sections of land…shall not be liable to sale…except by [the Northern Pacific Railroad].” Moreover, the 1864 act refers to the Homestead Act, which “extended to all other lands on the line of said road” (that is, to the even

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58 Treaty between the United States of America and the Chippewa Indians of the Mississippi: concluded March 19, 1867; ratification advised, with amendment, April 8, 1867; amendment accepted April 8, 1867; proclaimed April 18, 1867,” Treaties between the US and the Indians, No. 196, Washington, D.C., 1867.
59 An Act to Provide for the Allotment of Lands in Severalty to Indians on the Various Reservations, Public Law, U.S. Statutes at Large 24 (1887): 388-391. The Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 set the national precedent for allotting lands upon reservations to individuals, thereby encouraging the assimilation of indigenous peoples to a settler lifestyle.
60 An Act to secure Homesteads to actual Settlers on the Public Domain, Public Law, U.S. Statutes at Large 12 (1862): 392-393.
61 Description of the lands and country along the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1884), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
sections of land that the Northern Pacific was not granted to sell). With the Northern Pacific station at Detroit less than 20 miles south of the reservation, and the surveys and land sales extending up to 40 miles beyond the railroad line, the federal government placed the White Earth Reservation within the land grant of the Northern Pacific in the relocation policy of 1867. And as not only the Northern Pacific’s land sales, but also the Homestead Act, applied to these surveyed lands, the railroad land grant appears as a primary agent of dispossession and assimilation at White Earth.

A map published by the Northern Pacific two years before the introduction of the 1889 allotment policy illustrates how promotional cartographic materials applied settlement pressures at the reservation (see Figure 11). At the time this map was published, the central hub of the Northern Pacific resided in St. Paul, and advertisements described its connections to Eastern cities such as New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, and Montreal. The 1887 map, then, served to draw settlers and speculators from the East via railroad routes. On the map, the dark black line snaking northwest is the Northern Pacific, while the orange represents its lands for sale. Notice how the sections closest to the line are no longer for sale, while the lands farther from the line are still available. At the top of the map, the White Earth Reservation, all in white, appears as an artificial island in a sea of prospective settlement. The Dawes Severalty Act materialized when settlers flocking to the West perceived reservations as inaccessible islands within coveted terrain, and this map fosters that impression. As Richard White suggests, transcontinental railroads inspired demand for Western lands, and the design choices of this map

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62 An Act granting Lands to aid in the Construction of a Railroad and Telegraph Line from Lake Superior to Puget’s Sound, on the Pacific Coast, by the Northern Route, Public Law, U.S. Statutes at Large 13 (1864): 365-372.
63 Description of the lands and country along the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1884), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
64 Frederick E. Hoxie, A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 12.
(that accentuate the island effect and convey that orange lands rapidly disappear) would instill a feeling of urgency to purchase lands within those viewing the map.\footnote{White, \textit{Railroaded}, xxiv, xxvii.}

Figure 11: This 1887 map shows lands for sale by the Northern Pacific Railroad to encourage settlement along their line. Notice the White Earth Reservation at the top of the map; the land grant extends into the reservation (represented by the staircase line). This map emphasizes that White Earth land was highly coveted by Euroamericans, and consequently made visible and available for commodification through the joint pursuits of railroad companies and public surveys. Image citation: Northern Pacific Railroad Land Department, \textit{Map of Becker and Otter Tail Counties, Minnesota} [map] (St. Paul: Land Department, Northern Pacific Railroad, 1887), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Upon closer inspection, the map visually represents the Northern Pacific’s land grant limit. The dashed line (that follows a staircase pattern) running northwest into reservation borders suggests that the railroad company intends to open lands for sale within the reservation once the present land availability dwindles. Moreover, the extension of the cartographic grid within reservation boundaries indicates that this land has been surveyed, quantified, and is therefore visible to the federal government and railroad company. As the White Earth Ojibwe encountered the 1889 allotment policy only two years after this map first circulated, and nonallotted lands became available to Euroamerican settlers through the act, this map underscores the Northern Pacific’s function as a vehicle of dispossession at White Earth.

Lewis Stowe, Indian agent at White Earth in the 1870s, highlighted the power cartographic visibility (initiated by the railroad land grant surveys) accorded the federal government. In 1877, he penned a letter to the Surveyor General of Minnesota requesting the “latest map of Minnesota,” as he was “very anxious to procure one with the reservation surveyed thereon.” By “procuring” a surveyed map of the reservation, Indian agent Stowe (and his successors) acquired knowledge of what land existed and how it was/could be used. Surveyors completed initial surveys at White Earth by the early 1870s, and the surveys (see Figure 12) list the precise location of all topographical features on the reservation. This quantified legibility of White Earth—noting every tree, brook, and clearing upon the reservation—empowered the federal government to access and allot reservation lands for settlement and market interests.

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66 Lewis Stowe, Letter Book, 1876-1877, 96, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Indeed, Lewis Stowe’s correspondence highlights the degree of legibility the federal government gained about the reservation’s natural resources through land surveys. Following a fire in the fall of 1876, Stowe wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, asking for permission to log upon the reservation. Stowe located the prime area to log in as “Township 143 and 144 N. Range 39 & 40 West.” He estimated this region to be “about fourteen miles north of the Agency, and about nine miles by land from the sawmill on Wild Rice River.” Without survey knowledge to quantify the locations of timber and distances to contact points on the reservation, Stowe would have been ill-equipped to investigate the potential to log. Moreover, the survey knowledge granted Stowe the ability to estimate the total pine that could be extracted from reservation lands: “1,000,000 feet of dead pine” and “4,000,000 feet that has been burned over,
partially destroyed” by fire.\textsuperscript{67} Stowe’s estimations underscore how railroad land grant surveys not only made reservation lands visible and quantifiable, but also more easily facilitated resource extraction.

Stowe’s correspondence also reveals how the Northern Pacific transformed lifeways and patterns within the reservation. In a letter from January 1877, Stowe wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wishing “to pay Indians…for…[lumbering work], with permission to sell lumber off the reservation sufficient to pay them for the balance of this work,” believing “it would be of great benefit to the Indians here.”\textsuperscript{68} To “sell lumber off the reservation,” Stowe mentioned that “common lumber on the Northern Pacific Rail Road is worth $12.00 per thousand [feet],” illuminating how the railroad already tied the reservation to market influences by the 1870s.\textsuperscript{69} As Ojibwe men once engaged in the fur trade in the winter, so lumbering at White Earth replaced this previous economic activity in winter months. Lumbering, while tying the reservation and its inhabitants to the market economy, did not substantially infringe on the White Earth Ojibwe’s subsistence strategies in the early years of the reservation. Stowe lamented that the children “follow in [their] fathers’ footsteps” instead of engaging in sedentary agriculture, but he nevertheless avoided intervening in their seasonal rounds so “that they might not be interrupted in their hunting season.”\textsuperscript{70} The railroads began to shift the economic activity at White Earth in the 1870s, but the Ojibwe still retained some autonomy over their lifeways.

Railroad proximity, however, injured the White Earth Ojibwe by transforming their access to markets. Stowe wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs how, after the Ojibwe received their annuity payments (annual stipends from the federal government), “many of the

\textsuperscript{67} Stowe, Letter Book, 127-8.  
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 130.  
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 128.  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 65, 64.
Indians went to Detroit station to buy supplies.” In so doing, the Ojibwe incorporated the Euroamerican market into their economic activities. Yet Stowe also documented the dangers this posed to the Ojibwe. He wrote how “many of them became intoxicated, and more whiskey than usually was brought upon the reservation.” Stowe emphasized that “a detective is all important in or near an Indian reservation like this” so he can “bring evildoers to justice.” By “intimately linking” reservations and Euroamerican markets, the railroad embodied the “destroy to replace” tenet behind settler colonialism: allowing substances such as alcohol to “destroy” the White Earth Ojibwe and “replace” them with “evildoers” seeking to undermine indigenous presence upon the land. Although Stowe remained ambiguous as to the agents that introduced alcohol to the White Earth Ojibwe, the growth of Euroamerican settlement along railway lines implicates white economic interests in endangering the strength and stability of Ojibwe communities.

While the presence of railroads near White Earth threatened Ojibwe communities, the federal government believed the railroad provided the necessary means to carry out Indian affairs. Stowe’s correspondence exposes how the absence of railroads obstructed the completion of his duties. Stowe complained to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that some Ojibwe living at Mille Lacs had not migrated to White Earth, and that he wished the government to coerce them into “permanent[ly] remov[ing]” to the reservation so he could more easily distribute their annuity payments. He elaborated that “the trip to Mille Lac with annuity goods and supplies is a hard one, our almost impassable roads, and necessarily incurs the expenditure of quite a sum of money each year.” While railroads infiltrated the Mille Lacs region, no railroad lines existed that could easily transport Stowe from White Earth to Mille Lacs. The nearly “impassable roads”

71 Ibid., 184-5.  
hindered Stowe from governing the Mille Lacs Ojibwe and surveying their goings on, illuminating the degree of autonomy removal from railroad lines afforded the Ojibwe dwelling away from White Earth. Nevertheless, by encouraging a coerced relocation to White Earth, Stowe could thwart their relative independence from government surveillance.

Red Lake also remained inaccessible via rail. In the 1870s and 1880s, Red Lake’s roads and trails provided the only means of travel to the reservation. Congress funded the construction of a road—the Red Lake Trail—from White Earth to Red Lake in the early 1870s, which reached completion in 1875. The railroads still lay far south of Red Lake in the 1880s. John G. Morrison, an enrolled “mixed blood” Ojibwe at White Earth, recalls that in 1888 he “made [his] first trip to Red Lake on a tote team, hauling freight from Detroit.” He made over 20 trips between the two reservations that winter, averaging five days each to cover the 80 miles of road that “was poor most of the way and narrow and muddy.” While both reservations eventually relied on the railroad for supplies, Red Lake remained distant from railroad interests. And without intensifying railroad and market interests near Red Lake, Red Lake also continued to elude federal land surveys in the 1880s.

The absence of a federal agency at Red Lake until 1900 illuminates the interconnection between railroad interests and federal governance. In the mid nineteenth century, railroads pushed towards the West and expanded into agricultural lands, but they continued to steer clear of the northern forests. Early logging, especially after Minneapolis and St. Anthony consolidated

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74 William O.S. Sutherland and Madeline C. Sutherland, “Buena Vista, Minnesota: A History of the Town and its Wagon Trails Together with the Making of the Red Lake Indian Reservation” (unpublished manuscript, Minnesota History Center, 1999), 51.
76 Charles Vandersluis and Leo Soukup, Ojibwe Imprints of Northern Minnesota (Bemidji: Beltrami County Historical Society, 2014), 44.
77 Treuer, Warrior Nation, 74.
their lumbering mills in 1856, occurred along waterways in Minnesota. Stowe discussed milling logs on the Wild Rice River at White Earth. Within a reasonable distance of the Northern Pacific, logging at White Earth for a commercial market remained plausible. Red Lake, however, lay so far removed from railroad lines that neither logging for a commercial market nor federal governance emerged as priorities. Red Lake fell under the control of the White Earth Agency by 1879, but the challenge in traversing the trail from White Earth to Red Lake underscores Red Lakers’ continued isolation from federal consciousness.

Federal surveys’ arrival to Red Lake in the 1890s signifies the shifting attitudes towards Minnesota’s northern forests. As lumber along waterways dwindled in Minnesota, Euroamericans turned to railroads to draw timber from the landscape. Before 1890, the only surveys at Red Lake marked the western boundary of the reservation in the 1870s (to specify where settlement in the Red River Valley could end) and the international boundary between the United States and Canada. Logging railroads altered this dynamic, and the transcontinental railroad company that would build a line closest to Red Lake—the Great Northern—consolidated in 1889. A sectional map and promotional pamphlet produced by the Northern Pacific in the early 1890s discuss the state of lumbering in Minnesota. The authors remark that “more than half of the total area of northern Minnesota is a vast pine forest,” and while logs were historically “conveniently hauled” via waterways on the Upper Mississippi, “in recent years several logging railroads have been built…to reach districts of pine which are remote from streams.”

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78 Wills, _Boosters, Hustlers, and Speculators_, 84.
79 Sutherland and Sutherland, “Buena Vista, Minnesota,” Appendix. A timeline of the Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation is included in the appendix.
81 Ralph W. Hidy, Muriel E. Hidy, Roy V. Scott, and Don L. Hofsommer, _The Great Northern Railway: A History_ (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988), 72-3.
year,” they write, “new lines are built” to tap into the resources at locations such as Red Lake.\textsuperscript{82} Although published after the 1889 allotment policy, this map and pamphlet illustrate the transformations leading to the Euroamericans’ changing view of Red Lake in the late nineteenth century.

By 1889, the Northern Pacific featured White Earth as a tourist destination along its transcontinental line. A guidebook published by the company in 1889 urges Euroamericans to visit “this beautiful reservation, as fair a country as the sun ever shone upon,” stressing that visitors “are always received with kindness.”\textsuperscript{83} When the federal commissioners visited White Earth and Red Lake in 1889, the former was firmly entrenched in the landscape of white settlement and resource extraction in the American West. In contrast, Red Lake had just begun to pique the curiosity of Euroamericans eager for lumbering opportunities. The reservations’ differing and evolving encounters with railroad lines would come to inform their responses to the allotment policy—known as the Nelson Act—during the tipping point year of 1889.

**Reviving Ojibwe Voices: Nelson Act Negotiations, 1889**

The council minutes from the allotment policy (Nelson Act) negotiations feature some of the only Ojibwe voices in this narrative. Outside of tribal records upon reservations, few sources in national archives breathe life into the opinions and views expressed by the Ojibwe. Reading the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe’s responses against the backdrop of differential railroad developments gestures to how railroad expansion influenced the Ojibwe’s lived experience and

\textsuperscript{82} Northern Pacific Railroad Company, *This sectional land map of northern Minnesota includes the new iron district of the Mesabi Range, productive farming sections, the great Pine Belt, the beautiful Lake Park Region, and the famous fertile Red River Valley* (Chicago: Poole Bros., Engravers and Printers, 1893), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

\textsuperscript{83} The Great Northwest: *A guide-book and itinerary for the use of tourists and travelers over the lines of the Northern Pacific Railroad, its branches and allied lines* (St. Paul: W.C. Riley, 1889), 94-6, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
divergent attitudes towards allotment at both reservations. Nevertheless, while the council minutes shed light on Ojibwe views towards the allotment policy, only a few voices speak on behalf of the White Earth and Red Lake communities.\(^{84}\) Understanding the limited representation of Ojibwe opinions remains essential for not generalizing about the larger communities.

The Nelson Act of 1889, formally titled *An act for the relief and civilization of the Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota*, attempted to wrest land sovereignty from the Ojibwe. The federal commission sent to Minnesota was charged to “negotiate…for the complete cession and relinquishment in writing of all [the Ojibwe’s] title and interest in and to all the reservations…except the White Earth and Red Lake Reservations.” The lands of White Earth and Red Lake would “be allotted…in severalty…in conformity with” the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887. Any lands remaining after granting Ojibwe allotments would “be disposed of by the United States to actual settlers only under the provisions of the homestead law.”\(^{85}\) The White Earth Ojibwe agreed to take individual land allotments under the terms of the act, whereas the Red Lakers ceded over 2 million acres of their reservation but resisted allotting their remaining lands. By the mid 1890s, both White Earth and the ceded lands at Red Lake were overrun with

\(^{84}\) As noted previously, the Red Lake chiefs would walk away from negotiations with the federal government if they did not intend to sign. Some elders’ voices consequently do not surface in the council minutes with the federal commission. Treuer discusses this in *Warrior Nation* on pages 22 and 23, noting how all chiefs from one area of Red Lake—Ponemah—refused to sign the policy in 1889. The opinions present in the White Earth council minutes also require qualification. Following the fur trade, the White Earth Ojibwe were classified as “mixed bloods” and “full bloods,” with the term “mixed blood” intending to connote métis heritage. Often “mixed blood” and “full blood” status conveyed more of a lifestyle choice than a biological identity: “mixed bloods” tended to adopt settler lifestyles, whereas “full bloods” continued to abide by their subsistence economies. Certain “mixed blood” families, such as the Beaulieus, accrued political sway on the reservation. The Beaulieus were involved in managing trading posts (métis heritage), and they quickly transitioned to a settler existence upon White Earth following the relocation. The dominance of voices such as the Beaulieus’ in the council minutes skews the White Earth Ojibwe attitudes in favor of settler ways, failing to represent all views in the community. See Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 72-107 for further information.

Euroamerican settlers and speculators. While existing historiography focuses on Ojibwe political dynamics, resource extraction potential, and federal land policies as defining White Earth and Red Lake at this moment, railroad colonialism captures the differences in the Ojibwe’s and federal commissioners’ reactions to allotment at both reservations.

At White Earth, Ojibwe spokesmen communicated their approval of the legislation in their final meetings with the federal commission. Chief Wob-on-ah-quod proclaimed, “If I was a young man and had the advantages now thrown open to these young men…I should actually overflow with joy.” Another elder, John Johnson, agreed to sign because of the opportunity “to conquer poverty by our exertions” in assuming a sedentary, agricultural existence upon allotted lands. In endorsing the allotment policy, these White Earth men exposed their desire to adopt settler ways.

The White Earth elders never attempted to resist allotment, nor were they able to. Henry Rice, one of the commissioners, expressed at the start of the negotiations that “under the present act…we are authorized to give every man, woman and child 160 acres of land as allotment; and in the case of the death of any person who has received such an allotment, the land passes to his or her legal representatives.” In the context of 1870s land surveys at the reservation, the White Earth Ojibwe possessed little agency to prevent the government from allotting their lands that were so visible on the map as a result of the Northern Pacific land grant surveys.

From the moment the councils commenced, the White Earth Ojibwe’s main concern was “there would hardly be enough land” for everyone to receive his or her respective allotment.

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86 Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 49-67, 137-140; Treuer, *Warrior Nation*, 11-12, 86-103. The Red Lakers agreed to cede their lands in exchange for payments, and they also received money for surveys completed on their lands.
87 “Minutes of Councils Called to Accept the Act of 1889,” RG 75, Box 50, White Earth Councils, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO; 80, 83.
88 Ibid., 3.
89 Ibid., 33.
They doubted that, with Ojibwe migrating from other reservations, each person upon the reservation could receive allotments. Indeed, White Earth Ojibwe member John Beaulieu attempted to argue “by facts and figures that [the Ojibwe] cannot be allotted 160 acres of land each, of agricultural land.”90 Preoccupied with how the “lands are to be divided pro rata,” the White Earth spokesmen demonstrated their familiarity with and interest in promoting Euroamerican settlement patterns upon the reservation.91

However, the Ojibwe remained opposed to the opening of the reservation to outside settlement. Gustav Beaulieu asked the commissioners, “If we accept this bill, will you pledge yourselves not to open a foot of this reservation to settlement by the whites?”92 The commissioners avoided a direct response, but Gustav’s question illuminates the settlement pressures the White Earth Ojibwe already experienced at the reservation. After all, once news of the Nelson Act circulated to EuroAmericans in the Midwest, the Duluth Daily Tribune “warned [all settlers] not to go upon any of the lands within the limits of the reservation,” as they were not yet for sale.93 The Northern Pacific linked Duluth to Detroit, stressing the dangers White Earth’s proximity to the transcontinental line posed to protection from an influx of settlers. The railroad appears to have accustomed the White Earth Ojibwe to the concept of allotment, while simultaneously instilling wariness of encroachment from outside settlers.

Close reading the language of some elders underscores how the railroad served as an agent of settler colonialism. At the end of the negotiations, Chief Wob-on-ah-quod declared that the Ojibwe “should certainly profit by the opportunities now offered.” John Johnson stated that

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90 Ibid., 5. Only agricultural lands were allotted in the immediate aftermath of the Nelson Act.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 33.
93 “Chippewa Indians. The White Man Has No Rights That Red Man Must Respect,” Duluth Daily Tribune (Duluth, MN), Mar. 6, 1890.
“with your aid and protection and advice we shall certainly make progress.” Wob-on-ah-quod, in addressing his fellow Ojibwe, proceeds that “if you continue in your old ways, thinking that revenge is sweet, remember that that is not the way to be good members of society.” Wob-on-a-quod’s statements support Patrick Wolfe’s argument that the “logic of elimination” that governs settler colonialism concerns eliminating the native as native. Both White Earth spokesmen, in their expressions of gratitude to the federal government, use the language of “profit” and “progress” as they look to the future. In so doing, these men embody Wolfe’s construct of settler colonialism: that it destroys to replace, and in this case, to replace previous occupants of the land with assimilated, Westernized Ojibwe.

But how do railroads play a role in this narrative? Looking at atlas maps following the Nelson Act negotiations at White Earth suggests an explanation. The surveys of railroad land grants displaced Ojibwe sovereignty upon the land and replaced it with the cartographic grid—once on the Mississippi Band Ojibwe’s ancestral lands, and once again upon the reservation. By receiving privatized allotments to “improve” the land, some White Earth Ojibwe seized the opportunity to reinsert themselves into the cartographic narrative (albeit under the terms of land commodification). County atlases from the early twentieth century feature White Earth Ojibwe as owning parcels of land, highlighting the visibility that results from reclaiming the land in the form of allotments (see Figure 13). The railroad, in first making the White Earth Ojibwe visible, likely inspired Ojibwe to adopt settler lifestyles. Nevertheless, the legibility surveying afforded also paved the way for expropriation.

94 “Minutes of Councils,” White Earth Councils, 80, 83, 98.
Figure 13: Although difficult to discern, Ojibwe names label some of the allotments surrounding this lake at White Earth in a 1911 county atlas. This reveals that allotment (somewhat) empowered the White Earth Ojibwe to reclaim land, albeit under federal terms. Notice, however, how small the Ojibwe’s parcels of land are—many well under the 160 acres initially intended for allotment. Image citation: *Standard Atlas of Becker County, Minnesota* (Chicago, IL: Ogle & Co., 1911), 97, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

A final concern expressed during the White Earth negotiations related to the Red Lake Trail. Kesh-ke-we-gah-bowe mentioned “that the road from here to Red Lake is a very bad one, so that I have to get my wagon repaired every week, in carrying the mail.”96 Not only does this comment underscore Red Lake’s separation from railroad lines and other easy transport, but it also exposes the federal government’s continued lack of interest in Red Lake in the 1880s. The commissioners voiced no concern over the challenges of navigating the way to Red Lake; the White Earth Ojibwe felt compelled to draw attention to the issue.

The Red Lakers, in their negotiations with the commission, remained staunchly opposed to the act. Statements such as “your mission here is a failure” and “we do not believe it is to our

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96 “Minutes of Councils,” White Earth Councils, 88.
interest to comply with [your] request” frequent the elders’ speech. The Red Lakers not only expressed their resentment of the act, but they also succeeded in resisting the terms stipulating allotment. Chief May-dway-gon-on-ind dug in his heels, saying “I will never consent to the allotment plan. I wish to lay out a reservation here where we can remain with our bands forever.”

And unlike the White Earth Ojibwe, who largely agreed to the assimilatory project, the Red Lakers prevented the privatization of their lands.

Connecting the Red Lakers’ responses to railroad interests in the state sheds light on why Red Lake could resist allotment. Without a railroad land grant infringing on reservation boundaries, Red Lake eluded the cartographic grid in the years leading up to the Nelson Act. Quantifiable knowledge of the land, and especially of its natural resources, dictated the extent to which allotment could take effect. After Red Lake spokesmen criticized the allotment policy, commissioner Henry Rice remarked on the differences between White Earth and Red Lake. At White Earth, Rice stated, “they have taken their allotments; one here and one there, scattered over the reservation….now I want you to bear in mind that…[that] reservation [has] been surveyed.” He juxtaposed this with Red Lake, saying “your reservation has not been surveyed, consequently it would be impossible to make the individual allotments that will be made to the others.”

As the public land surveys fed railroad interests, the absence of railroads near Red Lake afforded the Ojibwe the invisibility to thwart allotment.

Comparing the Red Lake and White Earth Ojibwe’s responses to the act reveals the effects of railroad colonialism in shaping attitudes towards allotment. While the White Earth spokesmen could “overflow with joy” at the terms, Red Lakers expressed no such sentiments.

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97 “Minutes of Councils Called to Accept the Act of 1889,” RG 75, Box 50, Red Lake Councils, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO; 6, 10, 17.
98 Ibid., 24.
Pus-se-nous, for example, stated that “there are none here who are owned by any one; each one owns himself...we own the land in common whenever we are a community.” May-dway-gon-on-ind expressed that “we should own in common everything that pertains to us, with those that are suffering in poverty just the same as we are.”

Commonality and common ownership remain a notable thread throughout the Red Lakers’ councils with the commissioners. Whereas Red Laker May-dway-gon-on-ind believed they should share in the poverty of all, John Johnson urged his fellow White Earth Ojibwe that they should “conquer poverty by our own exertions.”

The market forces and privatization interests at White Earth, introduced and maintained by the railroads, stand at odds with the anti-settler colonial sentiments espoused by the Red Lakers.

Although Red Lake lands lay outside of railroad interests leading up to the Nelson Act, the commissioners highlight the shifting economic interests of the state. Henry Rice commented that Red Lake “is much larger than any of the other [reservations],” but that the other reservations possess “very large and valuable tracts of pine” that “are situated upon navigable streams near markets, to which the logs can be very easily sent to be manufactured into lumber.” To the “white people,” reservations such as White Earth were more valuable. Rice proceeds to equate White Earth to “a small piece of gold” and Red Lake to “a larger piece of silver” to emphasize how White Earth enticed greater interest for Euroamerican economic incentives.

Nevertheless, as timber along “navigable streams” diminished, Rice and his fellow commissioners pushed for surveys at Red Lake. He addressed the Red Lakers, stating that only “you who are here know its value; you know whether it is pine, agricultural land or swamp.”

With the surveys, EuroAmericans would glean knowledge of the land that would fuel their

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99 Ibid., 15, 20-1.
100 Ibid., 22-3, 46.
101 Ibid., 47.
extractive desires. Not only transcontinental railroads, but also logging railroads, now paved the way for resource extraction and dispossession.

**Crossing Lines: Shifting Railroad Infrastructure, 1890s-1910s**

On the front page of the first issue of White Earth’s Ojibwe-run newspaper, *The Tomahawk*, a headline boldly declares “Reservation Railroads.” At the time of this newspaper’s publication in April 1903, “several engineers…have been upon this Reservation with the view to running lines for the road” over the summer. The article continues that “if these reports are true the prospects of having…railroads through this reservation at an early day are exceedingly bright.” The author subsequently urges fellow Ojibwe to “not hesitate to grant some liberal right of way” to the railroad companies, arguing that “nothing could be of greater benefit or more conducive to the prosperity of this reservation.”

Following the Nelson Act negotiations, the White Earth Ojibwe’s enthusiasm for a railroad running through reservation boundaries remains unsurprising. With many Ojibwe eager for market connections and to settle upon agricultural lands, the economic benefits of a railroad appeared promising. Not only did the White Earth Ojibwe enthusiastically welcome the Soo railroad line in print form, but they also made an effort to accommodate the new line on their lands. John G. Morrison recalls in an interview that “the five stations of the Soo Railroad established in the western part of White Earth Reservation were bought as inherited allotments.”

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federal government opened nonallotted lands to Euroamerican settlers. Allotment enabled the expropriation of land, and heeding the advice to “grant some liberal right of way” to railroad companies, some Ojibwe gave up their allotments to bring a railroad to the reservation that many believed would be “conducive to the prosperity” of White Earth and its inhabitants.

Analyzing railroad colonialism at White Earth in the early twentieth century extends beyond the purview of Richard White’s narrative. While the Northern Pacific influenced the introduction of allotment and the rise of market interests at White Earth, the regional railroad line (the Soo line) in the early 1900s rapidly dispossessed the White Earth Ojibwe of their lands. Railroads within reservation lines, even without substantial land grants, challenged the degree to which the Ojibwe could “adjust to a changing world.”

When the Soo line began daily service to the White Earth Reservation in 1904, settlement patterns within the reservation immediately shifted. White settlers congregated in the five villages around the railroad lines on the western end of the reservation, accruing wealth by sending timber and produce to market. The Ojibwe less engaged in sedentary agriculture transitioned farther from the lines into the remaining hinterlands where resource extraction occurred; this pattern remained into the 1930s. The Standard Atlas of Becker County, published in 1911, reveals how the market town Ogema grew up around the Soo line, and more importantly shows the large plots of land the primary lumber and land companies owned in town (see Figure 14). The convenience of daily transport fueled lumber extraction, endangering the lands and resources remaining on the reservation.

104 Meyer, The White Earth Tragedy, 49-67, 137-140; Treuer, Warrior Nation, 11-12, 86-103.
105 White, Railroaded, 517.
The introduction of this daily railroad service coincided with a series of laws (1904-1906) opening pine lands on the reservation for allotment and allowing the Ojibwe to sell their pine to lumber companies separately from the land itself.\(^{108}\) Although the Ojibwe should have had access to these lands, lumber companies surveyed the available territory to claim the best parcels of pine. They subsequently cajoled Ojibwe into selling pine on their lands, and by 1909, 80% of available land at White Earth was held privately, particularly by lumber and land companies.\(^{109}\) The *Standard Atlas of Becker County* visually shows this trend, as Nichols-Chisholm and other land and lumber companies accrued vast tracts of land across the reservation—some well over 160 acres, or the amount of land originally intended for allotment (see Figure 15). The Luck Land Co. proudly showcased its most expensive lands directly along the Soo line, highlighting the value of owning farmlands on the path to Minneapolis-St. Paul markets.\(^{110}\) The intersecting agendas of political, market, and railroad interests that Richard White illustrates in his history of the transcontinentals continued at a regional scale to dispossessionist ends (see Figure 16).


\(^{109}\) Jill Doerfler, *Those Who Belong: Identity, Family, Blood, and Citizenship among the White Earth Anishinaabeg* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 5-7; Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 142-160. Although beyond the analytical scope of this essay, laws passed in these years perpetuated race labels (“full blood” and “mixed blood”) to facilitate white access to Ojibwe allotments. When the Nelson Act passed, the federal government granted the White Earth Ojibwe a 25-year trust period to protect their allotments from land thievery. The laws passed between 1904 and 1906 ended this trust period for “mixed blood” Ojibwe, allowing Euroamericans to purchase their allotments. The federal government used eugenics to determine who was “mixed blood” versus “full blood,” and besides enabling dispossession, the eugenics-determined “mixed blood” and “full blood” labels defined tribal citizenship for the following century. See Meyer and Doerfler for further information.

\(^{110}\) *Lands on White Earth Reservation: Owned by Luck Land, L.S. Waller, president, Waubun, Minnesota* (Luck Land Company: Waubun, n.d.), Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 14: This page of the 1911 Becker County atlas shows the growth of Euroamerican land and lumber companies along the Soo line (depicted on the left side of the image). Ogema was one of the five stations the White Earth Ojibwe petitioned to name. The overwhelming Euroamerican presence at this townsite highlights how railroads within reservation boundaries facilitated dispossession and resource extraction. Kolb & Bohmer was a land company and R.C. Chisholm was a lumber company. Image citation: *Standard Atlas of Becker County, Minnesota* (Chicago, IL: Ogle & Co., 1911), 20, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 15: Figure 13 is the bottom left corner of this page. Several of the land and lumber companies accrued tracts of land larger than the 160-acre plots originally granted for allotment, highlighting how Euroamericans purchased lands out from under the Ojibwe. The “Indian Village” at the top left of the page denotes how the Ojibwe cohered on their diminishing lands to live, which prevented them from succeeding financially among Euroamericans. Image citation: Standard Atlas of Becker County, Minnesota (Chicago, IL: Ogle & Co., 1911), 97, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
Figure 16: This photograph was taken of a family living at the Elbow Lake “Indian Village” in 1901. Before the influx of railroads within reservation boundaries, the presence of Euroamericans already threatened the Ojibwe’s ability to retain land sovereignty upon the reservation. Image citation: C.C. Andrews, Chippewa Indian family, Elbow Lake, White Earth Reservation, C.C. Andrews Photograph Collection, 1901, Minnesota History Center.

Not only cartographic materials, but also Indian agent correspondence, document the damages inflicted by railroad colonialism at White Earth. The tone of the newspaper article (in eagerly welcoming the Soo line to White Earth) fails to resonate with the experiences of Ojibwe upon the reservation. In 1904, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote on behalf of an Ojibwe man to the Indian agent at White Earth, arguing that the “damages…alleged to have been caused by the construction” by the railroad company “of a ditch through the [man’s] allotment” cut the
land “into undesirably sized tracts.” The railroad line not only sliced through Ojibwe land, but also hindered its agricultural potential that would allow the allottee to succeed financially among white settlers. The purchase of inherited allotments for “station grounds” also injured Ojibwe inhabitants: another letter requests the Indian agent to represent the “Indian allottees damaged…[by] the taking of such grounds.” “Taking” implies that the Ojibwe maintained little agency in preventing the railroad company from procuring their lands. Although eager for railroad operations within the reservation, the Ojibwe experienced intensive dispossession.

The operation of the Soo line resulted in greater injury to the Ojibwe through Euroamerican encroachment and timber extraction (see Figure 17). The Commissioner of Indian Affairs suggested to the Indian agent in 1905 that “some of the logs should be banked on the railroad right of way” to benefit the “company” when “offer[ing]” the logs “for sale.” The Indian agent also “request[ed] authority to advertise for sale pine and spruce logs now being cut” from the reservation “in the St. Paul Pioneer Press and the Minneapolis Journal.” Federal agents not only supported the actions of lumber companies upon the reservation, but also endorsed their commercial interests. Depredations upon Ojibwe lands ensued. One Ojibwe woman complained to the Commissioner that the “Wild Rice Lumber Company cut and removed timber from her allotment” and that “she has not been paid” for this activity. Over ten years

111 Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Simon Michelet, February 11, 1904; Correspondence and Circulars Received from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; RG 75, Box 4, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
112 Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Simon Michelet, October 25, 1904; Correspondence and Circulars Received from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; RG 75, Box 4, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
113 Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Simon Michelet, March 3, 1905; Correspondence and Circulars Received from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; RG 75, Box 4, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
114 Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Simon Michelet, February 7, 1905; Correspondence and Circulars Received from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; RG 75, Box 4, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
115 Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Simon Michelet, April 14, 1904; Correspondence and Circulars Received from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs; RG 75, Box 4, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White
later, in 1916, the White Earth Agency filed similar claims against companies such as Nichols-Chisholm for pine thievery from Ojibwe allotments.\textsuperscript{116}

The railroad also contributed to impoverishing Ojibwe who sold their land as white presence at the reservation increased. Only a year after the Soo line entered White Earth, an Ojibwe woman wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs regarding payment after having “sold some land through the Indian Office here last year.” She could no longer tend the land because her husband had been “commited to an Insane hospital,” so she moved to a town upon the reservation. Without receiving the money for selling her land, however, she was concerned that her new “property” would be “taken away from [her].”\textsuperscript{117} Instead of bringing “prosperity” to the Ojibwe, the presence of railroads upon the reservation deprived the Ojibwe from “conquer[ing] poverty” as the spokesmen during the Nelson Act negotiations had envisioned.

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\footnotesize\textsuperscript{116} White Earth Indian Agency to Nichols-Chisholm Lumber Co., March 16, 1916; Agency Central Subject File; RG 75, Box 44, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{117} M. Jourdan to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 22, 1905; Correspondence and Circulars Received from the Commissioner of Indians Affairs; RG 75, Box 4, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
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Figure 17: This photograph, undated but from the twentieth century, shows the degree of deforestation ensuing upon Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota. Although the reservation is unspecified, deforestation of this magnitude occurred at White Earth. Image citation: [no title], n.d., Photograph, Consolidated Chippewa Agency, RG 75, Box AV2, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.

Railroad colonialism followed a different path at Red Lake than at White Earth. Instead of railroad land grants, intensifying Euroamerican desires for natural resources prompted the surveys on Red Lake lands. The surveys Henry Rice alluded to in the 1889 Nelson Act negotiations came to fruition, and by 1896 the lands Red Lakers ceded to the federal government opened for sale.¹¹⁸ Promotional materials targeting Euroamerican settlers flooded regional cities, and towns developed just outside the borders of the diminished Red Lake reservation (see Figure 18). An 1896 advertisement for settlement at the “New Townsite” Buena Vista highlighted its main attractions: “Good Agricultural Land, Fine Timber, Elegant Lakes, and Many Natural Resources.”¹¹⁹ Yet this greed did not precipitate access to lands on the diminished reservation. Notice how the atlas map below strictly demarcates the ceded lands from nonallotted reservation

¹¹⁸ Treuer, Warrior Nation, 110, 128.
¹¹⁹ Steven R. Hoffbeck, “Frontier Hotelkeeper: John Wesley Speelman and Buena Vista, Minnesota,” (unpublished manuscript, Minnesota History Center, 1989), Figure 14, “James Cyr’s 1896 Advertisement of his Turtle Lake Townsite.”
lands (see Figure 19). Railroads facilitated access where speculation and settlement could not follow: the reservation itself.

Figure 18: This map, produced by a local Commercial Club in 1896 to advertise ceded Red Lake lands for sale, reveals how Euroamerican natural resource interests in the land motivated the surveying process. Notice how the colors upon the map and key at the base indicate which lands are suitable for agriculture versus lumbering. Also notice how this map shows the process of surveying, as the unceded lands north of the lake have yet to be surveyed. The only means of transportation shown within Red Lake are “Good Wagon/Graded Road[s].” The Northern Pacific and Great Northern lines (represented on the map) led to the growth of towns, such as Red Lake Falls, to the west of the reservation. Image citation: Map of Red Lake Indian Reservation and Red Lake Falls, its natural gateway: with information regarding its advantages and the one million acres of agricultural lands opened for settlement May 1, 1896 and ten billion feet of pine timber to be thrown on the market by the United States Government at an early date [map], no scale given (Red Lake Falls, MN: The Commercial Club, 1896), Minnesota History Center.
Figure 19: This 1911 Clearwater County atlas map emphasizes the split between ceded and unceded Red Lake lands. The ceded lands (overrun with white presence) resemble the allotted lands at White Earth, whereas the unceded lands remain devoid of Euroamerican presence. Notice, however, that the cartographic grid extends into Red Lake, revealing the surveying occurring within reservation boundaries. Image citation: Alex Ringborg, *Atlas of Clearwater County, Minnesota* (Des Moines: The Kenyon Co., 1912), 13, Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

A homeseeker’s map from 1896 reveals how, even with the surveys, the lands for sale upon the ceded reservation challenged access (see Figure 20). The map indicates that the “agricultural and non-pine lands…are to be opened.” Under the “How to Come” section, the writer suggests that settlers should either come “over the Great Northern Railway” via the Red
River Valley, or otherwise “over the Northern Pacific by way of Detroit, and from there on foot or by stage.” Neither transcontinental line provided easy access to all lands upon the ceded reservation, and the Great Northern Railway just began to turn its attention eastward from the Red River Valley at the turn of the twentieth century. Euroamerican interests in the resources at Red Lake outstripped transcontinental railroad access.

Figure 20: The lands for sale on this homeseeker’s map are in orange (the ceded reservation lands). Notice how the cartographic grid unfolds across Red Lake, signifying how intensifying white interests in the lands led to surveys at the reservation. The topographical detail remains sparse within the reservation compared to surrounding lands. Also notice the intersecting railroad lines to the west of Red Lake; fewer lines approach Red Lake (some skirt the western border of the reservation, as seen in Figure 18). White Earth is at the base of the map. Image citation: H.M. Smyth, *Fosston Map: Red Lake Reservation* [map], 1:378,000 (St. Paul, MN: H.M. Smyth, 1896), Minnesota History Center.
What railroads infiltrated Red Lake by the early 1900s, if not transcontinental lines?
Instead of the regional railroads that White Earth invited within reservation borders, narrow-gauged logging railroads entered Red Lake. In the 1890s, Congress approved right-of-way access for a logging railroad to the south shore of Lower Red Lake.\textsuperscript{120} This railroad switched ownership in its early years before becoming the Minneapolis, Red Lake, and Manitoba Railroad in the early 1900s.\textsuperscript{121} Although this temporary logging line eventually linked to larger transcontinental routes, assessing the railroad’s role in its early years of operation highlights the extent to which it served as an agent of environmental degradation and dispossession upon the reservation. Comparing the effects of railroad developments on allotted and nonallotted reservations underscores the detrimental effects of railroad encroachment in both cases.

Just as laws granting white access to pine lands at White Earth coincided with the arrival of the Soo line, so similar legislation at Red Lake passed when the logging railroad first entered the reservation.\textsuperscript{122} The Morris Act of 1902 allowed for the sale of timber separately from the land at Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota. Lumber companies from nearby towns scouted out and purchased timber upon the diminished reservation—often using corrupt means, such as setting fires, to gain access to the pine.\textsuperscript{123} Under the Morris Act, Red Lakers cut over 1 billion board feet

\textsuperscript{120} U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Indian Affairs, \textit{Red Lake and Western Railway and Navigation Company}, June 13, 1890, 51\textsuperscript{st} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., 1890, S. Vol. 7, serial 2813, 1.
\textsuperscript{121} Harold T. Hagg, “Logging Line: A History of the Minneapolis, Red Lake, and Manitoba,” \textit{Minnesota History} 43, no. 4 (Winter 1972): 128. Its name is far more ambitious than its route. Initially, less than 10 miles were built of the line. Eventually it linked with the Northern Pacific, Great Northern, and other larger lines in Bemidji.
\textsuperscript{122} Veronica E. Tiller, \textit{A Forest Management History of the Red Lake Indian Reservation}, prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Branch of Forestry, subcontracted to the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, Tribal Council, Red Lake, MN, May 28, 1999, 46, 54-55; \textit{An Act To amend an Act entitled “An Act for the relief and civilization of the Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota,”} Public Law, \textit{U.S. Statutes at Large} 32 (1902): 400-405. The Nelson Act of 1889 preceded the Morris Act in permitting the sale of timber separately from the land at Minnesota Ojibwe reservations. The Morris Act addressed the abuses under the Nelson Act (particularly the rampant fires upon the reservation in the 1890s) but continued to allow the sale of timber separately from the land.
\textsuperscript{123} Tiller, \textit{A Forest Management History}, 46-54.
of pine and in so doing participated in the denuding of the reservation.\textsuperscript{124} While the absence of allotments shielded Red Lake from land dispossession, lumber companies nevertheless pressured Red Lakers to accept allotments (Red Lakers never agreed to allotment despite these attempts). In a 1908 letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Red Lake Indian agent believed “that certain lumbermen of this state have started the [allotment] movement…[they] would like to see the pine lands allotted for the reason they could hope to purchase the pine from the allottees…and that they would prefer to purchase from individual Indians rather than from the Government.”\textsuperscript{125} As timber tycoons pursued their lumbering goals at Red Lake through legislation, railroads provided the infrastructure to realize their motives.

The increase in lumbering at Red Lake in the early twentieth century reveals the dangers infrastructure such as railroads posed to the Ojibwe’s cultural and communal solidarity. The Red Lake Ojibwe remained connected to their seasonal rounds throughout the nineteenth century. Once the federal government finally established an agency at Red Lake in 1900 (coinciding with the railroad’s arrival), the Indian agent’s correspondence abounds with conflicts between the Ojibwe’s subsistence strategies and market agendas. In 1904, the clerk at the agency penned a letter to a man from a town just outside of the reservation (Thief River Falls) seeking payment after a “steamer” had “destroyed [the] fish net” of an Ojibwe woman living at Red Lake. By the end of the nineteenth century, Congress permitted steamboat traffic on Red Lake to haul lumber and other supplies; the Minneapolis, Red Lake and Manitoba railroad company operated a boat to “carry passengers and freight.”\textsuperscript{126} By hauling supplies by steamboat and by “driving logs on

\textsuperscript{124} Tiller, \textit{A Forest Management History}, 55.
\textsuperscript{125} Carl W. Allen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 3, 1908; Correspondence with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1906-1912; RG 75, Box 1 of 2,Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
\textsuperscript{126} Clerk in Charge to D.N. Winton, September 9, 1904; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 2 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO; Carl W. Allen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 1, 1908. Correspondence with
the rivers and lakes” to meet the rising demands for lumber in the state, the encroaching natural resource interests endangered Ojibwe fishing and wild ricing practices that depended on clear and tranquil waters. Additionally, while in 1907 the Indian agent at Red Lake wrote that “fish and game are quite plentiful, and maple sugar and snake root” support many Red Lakers, Ojibwe men nevertheless found themselves “anxious to work for wages” in sawmills to make ends meet. Moreover, because lumber companies purchased the timber “more than 40 miles away” that could be transported by railroads, the profits “benefited white communities instead of the Indians.” Although the Red Lake Ojibwe evaded allotment, the intensifying natural resource interests that gained access to Red Lake endangered their autonomy and lifeways.

Even without railroads expanding within reservation boundaries, the natural resource extraction occurring within Red Lake borders pertained to railroad developments. An Indian agent letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs sought permission to cut and sell wood for “fence posts, telegraph poles and railroad ties.” At one location within the reservation, the agent estimated that the wood could produce “20,000 railroad ties,” while in another location he estimated the wood could yield “100,000 ties.” The lumbering motivations at Red Lake fed railroad interests regardless of railroad presence upon the reservation.

The Red Lakers’ attitudes to the introduction of the railroad within the reservation differed substantially from the White Earth Ojibwe’s enthusiasm for an “exceedingly bright”
future with railroads. No newspaper evidence provides a direct comparison between opinions at both reservations. However, while some White Earth Ojibwe wished to “grant some liberal right of way” to the Soo line, the Red Lake Indian agent in 1903 complained that “the Indians simply will not hurry” to haul freight for the newly built Minneapolis, Red Lake, and Manitoba line.\(^{131}\) The Red Lakers’ reluctance to supply the railroad reflects their separation from railroad lines, markets, and presence on federal maps for decades leading up to the twentieth century.

Although lack of allotment preserved the Red Lake Ojibwe’s sovereignty, it made them more susceptible to railroad right of way. At White Earth, the newspaper article detailing the Soo line’s construction implored fellow Ojibwe to grant right of way to the railroad on their allotments. The privatization of land made damages from railroad right of way more challenging to appease. Indeed, “each allottee [had to] consent” to and accept “adequate compensation” for the right of way at White Earth to be built.\(^{132}\) To settle upon a “permanent right of way” at Red Lake, the railroad company had to “reach…an agreement, as to the damages, with the Indians.”\(^{133}\) Nevertheless, the railroad company argued that as “there are no allotments” within the reservation, “we further find that there are no individual holdings for which damages should be determined.” Furthermore, the company stated that “we believe five dollars per acre to be just and fair” for damages, as the land was not privatized.\(^{134}\) Without individual land allotments, the

\(^{131}\) R.E.L. David to Maj. G.I. Scott, September 30, 1903; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 1 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.

\(^{132}\) Simon Michelet, December 15, 1904; Land Records Subject File, 1903-1921; RG 75, Container OS1, Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, White Earth Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.

\(^{133}\) Daniel Sullivan, Superintendent of Logging, to James A. Peterson, March 13, 1903; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 1 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.

\(^{134}\) Indian Agent to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 28, 1903; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 1 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO. The Indian agent is citing the company’s correspondence in his letter to the Commissioner.
Red Lake Ojibwe possessed less agency to negotiate the right-of-way terms compared to the White Earth Ojibwe. Lack of allotment failed to help the Red Lakers more easily “adjust to a changing world” of railroad incursion.\textsuperscript{135}

Lack of allotment also hindered the detection of timber depredations upon the reservation. In 1903, the Superintendent of Logging wrote that as Red Lake “is an unallotted Indian reservation,” it “will be impossible to ascertain the description of the land from which these logs were cut without employing the service of a surveyor.”\textsuperscript{136} Although the cartographic grid unfurled across reservation lands, the lack of privatization via allotment thwarted the extent to which pine thievery could be monitored. With the influx of the logging railroad within reservation boundaries, this continued ignorance of the pine lands at Red Lake made the reservation increasingly susceptible to environmental degradation. Cartographic invisibility no longer assisted, but instead injured, the reservation that fell prey to lumbering interests.

In addition to the rapid denuding of landscapes upon the reservation, the logging railroad also presented a fire hazard. A letter sent by the Red Lake Indian agent to the Minnesota Forestry Commissioner in 1908 recounted how “last April many fires started along the railroads and in the settlements south of the reservation.” He described how “while the Indians were engaged in fighting fires south of the agency, a fire started from the railroad” and “killed about 2 million feet of pine.”\textsuperscript{137} As the Red Lake Ojibwe’s subsistence practices depended on coexisting with forested ecosystems, the railroad’s destructive potential hindered the continuity of Ojibwe lifeways. Moreover, the presence of fire forced the Red Lakers to “engage…in fighting fires”

\textsuperscript{135} White, \textit{Railroaded}, 517.
\textsuperscript{136} Daniel Sullivan, Superintendent of Logging, to Charles C. Haupt, U.S. Dist. Attorney, March 18, 1903; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 1 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
\textsuperscript{137} Carl W. Allen to C.C. Andrews, Forestry Commissioner, October 9, 1908; General Correspondence Sent and Received, 1901-1922; RG 75, Box 3 of 6, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
instead of pursuing activities for their own economic and communal benefit. The Indian agent at
the reservation in 1907 recorded in his annual report that “if the [Ojibwe] develop their own
resources, a prosperous community may be built up here.” But the logging railroad’s
dispossessive and destructive capacity served as a direct threat to this forecasted self-sufficiency.
And as the railroad linked the reservation to lumber markets, the logging railroad emerges as a
colonial agent at Red Lake.

The legacy of the logging opportunities the railroad provided resulted in further
dispossession at Red Lake. Already in 1908, the Indian agent believed that the “timber lands
should be reserved” and “properly managed” according “to methods of similar work upon the
National Forest Reserves.” By 1914, forester J.P. Kinney proposed a bill to create a federally-
managed Red Lake Indian Forest that came to fruition in 1916. The deforestation that ensued
from lumber companies’ access to Red Lake lands via the railroad necessitated measures to
“properly manage” Red Lake forests according to “scientific forestry.” However, by removing
Ojibwe agency over a large swath of land (100,000 acres) and replacing it with federal
governance, the Red Lakers experienced dispossession once again. And as the government failed
to oversee logging by Euroamerican companies, over 80% of the pine lands were cut in
succeeding years. The Red Lake line hauled 1,000,000 tons of timber to market between 1916

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138 Red Lake Agency Annual Report, July 25, 1907; Correspondence with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs,
1906-1912; RG 75, Box 1 of 2, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, Red Lake
Agency, National Archives at Kansas City, MO.
139 Carl W. Allen to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 3, 1908; Correspondence with the Commissioner of
Indian Affairs, 1906-1912; RG 75, Box 1 of 2, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior,
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140 “Draft of a Bill to Provide for the Establishment of a Forest Reserve within the Red Lake Indian Reservation,
Minnesota,” J. P. Kinney to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, July 31, 1914; William Heritage Papers, Box 2, Folder
“Red Lake Indian Reservation: Miscellany, 1914-1918,” Minnesota Historical Society Manuscripts Collection,
Minnesota History Center.
141 Ibid.
and 1920. Furthermore, the Red Lake line made possible the extraction of fish (a subsistence food for the Red Lakers) to provide World War I home front food supplies. In 1918 alone, the line hauled 500,000 pounds of fish to Minnesota markets. In conveniently tying the nonallotted reservation to outside markets, the logging railroad precipitated environmental degradation and endangered lifeways that linked the Red Lakers’ experiences to the White Earth Ojibwe’s in the 1910s.

**Conclusion**

In *Empire’s Tracks*, Karuka writes that railroad colonialism “was produced through great suffering.” The “suffering” experienced in the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe communities transcended reservation borders to cohere the two reservations in a unified narrative of dispossession. Just as timber upon the reservations dwindled in the 1910s and 1920s, so the lumber industry collapsed in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The “intimate linkages” railroads forged between the cities and reservations denuded reservation landscapes. Norman Gras, in a speech to the Minnesota Historical Society in 1926, lamented, “with forests gone, best mines exhausted, soils fouled, streams polluted, and rivers reduced to brooks, our descendants will say, what a price to pay for progress.” To counteract this environmental destruction, reactive measures, such as the Red Lake Indian Forest, removed Ojibwe authority over their own lands and in so doing further threatened their lifeways. Indeed, state policies “criminaliz[ed] the seasonal round” by establishing seasons in which hunting was permitted. Moreover, since lumber work

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143 Ibid.
144 Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, 41.
provided essential wage labor for the Ojibwe, the deforested reservation lands prevented Ojibwe from earning an income. And at White Earth, because the majority of lands lay in the hands of Euroamericans, Ojibwe fled to nearby towns to rebuild their lives.\textsuperscript{147} Existing historiography argues that federal policies and environmental degradation shaped the histories of the White Earth and Red Lake reservations, but maps, correspondence, and railroad promotional materials illustrate how railroads bridge these fields to serve as the vehicles of dispossession.

If suffering defined the era of railroad colonialism, then resilience has since marked the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe. The Ojibwe language, Anishinaabemowin, inherently advocates for sustainable measures: one Leech Lake Ojibwe man used the word \textit{jiniganaweijigandaagwak}, meaning “the way one might care for another,” to describe sustainability.\textsuperscript{148} In recent decades, Winona LaDuke has established the White Earth Land Recovery Project to encourage the continuity of Ojibwe lifeways and the preservation of diverse ecosystems on the reservation. Red Lake, too, has focused on conserving natural resources and has managed its own forests since 1997—after the federal government finally relinquished control over managing tribal lands. Red Lake “acknowledges the importance of sustaining their natural resources to revitalize their culture and tradition as part of reestablishing connections with their ancestor’s past practices.”\textsuperscript{149} Although railroad colonialism threatened the White Earth

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\textsuperscript{147} Meyer, \textit{The White Earth Tragedy}, 222-4.
and Red Lake reservations, the Ojibwe have since severed ties with their railroaded past to craft their own futures of survivance.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{150}“Survivance” (combination of “survival” and “resistance”) was introduced to the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies by Gerald Vizenor (White Earth Ojibwe) to represent indigenous communities’ perseverance in the face of colonial threats. See Gerald Vizenor,\textit{Manifest Manners: Narratives of Postindian Survivance} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vii.
Bibliographic Essay

As a toddler, I used to sit with my great grandfather along the Mississippi River in southeastern Minnesota counting train cars as they sped by on tracks running parallel to the river. Growing up in a small town on the banks of the Mississippi—a town named Winona, a Dakota woman’s name—I came to know the land as labelled with indigenous names and traversed by railroad tracks. Though these memories remained imprinted on my mind, I spent my later childhood years in the Twin Cities and San Francisco, removed from the rural Midwestern landscape teeming with references to colonial encounter and westward expansion. Nevertheless, when an opportunity to study Minnesota Ojibwe history arose at Yale, these memories resurfaced to steer my research direction.

In the fall of my junior year, my senior thesis started to take shape in Professor Ned Blackhawk’s “Writing Tribal Histories” seminar. As my first experience studying Native American history in college, I did not have an articulated research interest to explore at my fingertips. My childhood spent canoeing in northern Minnesota and learning about Ojibwe history in school piqued my curiosity to learn more about the Minnesota Ojibwe. Professor Blackhawk introduced me to Melissa Meyer’s *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889–1920* and William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* to situate me in the fields of American environmental and Ojibwe history. Meyer’s text concerns the land dispossession and environmental destruction that occurred at the White Earth Ojibwe Reservation following the introduction of the allotment system in the late nineteenth century. Cronon contextualizes the rise of Chicago’s economic prowess as a product of the hinterland railroad network it developed to fuel agriculture and natural resource extraction. These narratives, documenting contemporary
histories, run in parallel but minimally overlap in subject matter. At a poignant moment in his introduction, Cronon discusses the “intimate linkages” between city and country that spurred Chicago’s development (xv). Reflecting on my childhood surroundings in rural Minnesota, I felt that Cronon’s use of “intimate linkages” evoked a connection between not only city and country, but also Euroamerican railroad expansion and indigenous presence upon the land. Together, Meyer, Cronon, and my personal history alerted me to the potential of surveying the railroads’ role in settler colonialism and Ojibwe dispossession.

Since this idea first developed, Manu Karuka has published *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* as one of the only secondary sources explicitly detailing the relationship between Euroamerican railroad expansion and Native American dispossession. Karuka’s text remains largely theoretical (he fleshes out the concept of “railroad colonialism”), so while his approach has informed my research methodology, my focus on northern Minnesota extends his concept to a new case study for analysis. Richard White’s *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* has also played a significant role in guiding my research direction. White exposes how the federal government and railroad tycoons jointly engaged in dispossessing indigenous occupants of the land via substantial transcontinental railroad land grants. White’s discussion of the steps the federal government and railroad companies took to survey and market their lands has influenced my analysis of railroad land grants as agents of dispossession for the Minnesota Ojibwe. While White analyzes the role of railroads in building the American West, he does not discuss Ojibwe dispossession and minimally focuses on the Upper Midwest. In the context of secondary literature, my emerging topic appeared to intervene in the existing historiography of the
American West by grounding Karuka’s theories and White’s approach in historical research of the White Earth and Red Lake Ojibwe.

Before Karuka published his text, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library’s holdings already revealed the potential of researching railroad colonialism for my seminar paper in Professor Blackhawk’s class. The Curator of Western Americana, George Miles, was instrumental in helping me find sources concerning both the White Earth Ojibwe Reservation and railroad developments in the early years of Minnesota statehood. Cartographic materials defined my argument, alongside promotional materials published by the Northern Pacific Railroad (a transcontinental line) and the correspondence of White Earth Indian agent Lewis Stowe. Meyer, in The White Earth Tragedy, emphasizes that the introduction of allotment at the White Earth Reservation in 1889 enabled the expropriation of reservation lands by settlers. County atlases, railroad maps, and local tourist materials from the era allowed me to reframe Meyer’s analysis in terms of the vehicles that enabled dispossession: the railroads. Weaving together the chronology of lumbering and milling industries in the Twin Cities with the resource extraction ensuing at White Earth realized my goal of revealing how “intimate linkages” applied not only to city and country, but also to city and reservation. Interrogating how, when, and where railroad lines developed, and how railroad companies sold lands to speculators and prospective settlers, illuminated how the Northern Pacific can be implicated in the creation of the 1889 Nelson Act allotment policy and the land thievery that subsequently ensued.

While the paper I prepared for Professor Blackhawk’s seminar launched me into studying the interconnections between railroads, Ojibwe dispossession, and resource extraction, my interests evolved by my second semester of junior year. Exploring more than one Ojibwe reservation in Minnesota intrigued me, as I wished to understand the role of railroad expansion at
other reservations in the state. North of White Earth resides the Red Lake Ojibwe Reservation. Brenda Child and Anton Treuer have penned books discussing the political structures, Ojibwe-Euroamerican relationships, and resource extraction (lumbering and fishing) occurring at Red Lake. What remained intriguing to me was that Red Lake, unlike White Earth, successfully resisted the terms of allotment in the 1889 Nelson Act. What factors allowed this to happen? How did railroads play a role in this divergence between the two reservations? How did this policy result in differing relationships to railroad expansion in subsequent decades? This prompted me to frame my thesis as a comparative history between White Earth and Red Lake, which (to my knowledge) no scholar has fleshed out—particularly in regard to railroad expansion.  

I was fortunate to receive the Silliman College Richter Summer Fellowship and the RITM Summer Research Fellowship to fund my travels to archives last summer. Engaging with footnotes in the secondary sources I consulted, I decided that the most useful archives for me to visit would be the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul, MN and the National Archives in Kansas City, MO (Record Group 75). At the Minnesota History Center, I consulted homesteading and railroad maps, county atlases, railroad promotional materials, local histories, newspaper clippings, Indian agent diaries, and senators’ papers (among other materials). These sources helped me build the historical context around the Nelson Act and subsequent acts designed to grant Euroamerican access to reservation lands.

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151 Other Ojibwe reservations existed in the state in the late nineteenth century. I confined my research to White Earth and Red Lake largely because of the limited scope of the thesis, but also because the 1889 Nelson Act set in motion the termination of all Ojibwe reservations in Minnesota besides White Earth and Red Lake (the act specified forced removals to White Earth). This did not actually occur, but the language of the Nelson Act helped me set parameters for my project as a whole.
Visiting the Minnesota History Center also proved useful for engaging with unpublished secondary sources. Manuscript dissertations on topics such as the growth of certain townships in northern Minnesota gave me perspective on the demographics of local Euroamerican settlements, as well as how the chronology of their development and sustainability mapped onto larger economic and infrastructural transformations in the state.

A limitation faced at the Minnesota History Center was the relative absence of Ojibwe voices in the archives from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One source, a transcribed oral history from the mid twentieth century, records the recollections of John G. Morrison (a “mixed blood” Ojibwe man who lived at both White Earth and Red Lake). His personal account of the geographic, political, environmental, and cultural relationships between the two reservations furthered my understanding of Ojibwe experiences upon the reservations, especially with regards to differences in railroad proximity at White Earth and Red Lake. Nevertheless, while this source informs my analysis, I regret having so few materials from an indigenous perspective.

The National Archives in Kansas City, MO provided a wealth of primary source material to support my project. The archives shed light on Native voices, albeit filtered through a federal government lens. One of the most useful sources for my thesis, the Nelson Act Council Minutes from White Earth and Red Lake, brings to life Ojibwe responses to the act in the form of minutes taken by federal agents sent to negotiate the act’s terms. The marked differences in the acquiescence of the White Earth Ojibwe (fairly pliant) and Red Lakers (quite resistant) has

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152 I have been lucky to study (at an elementary level) Ojibwe language through the Native American Cultural Center on Yale campus, but I unfortunately had few opportunities to use this limited linguistic training in my research.

153 Charles Vandersluis and Leo Soukup, Ojibwe Imprints on Northern Minnesota (Bemidji: Bemidji County Historical Society, 2014). The transcribed oral history was recently published and distributed to the Minnesota History Center.
provided an analytical lens for me to perceive how railroad expansion contributed to the Ojibwe’s differing reactions at the two reservations. The National Archives in Kansas City, MO also house boxes of Indian agent correspondence. These letters, circulars, and miscellaneous documents form the backbone of my thesis, highlighting the consequences of the influx of railroads within White Earth and Red Lake in the early twentieth century.

Before turning to the research conducted at Yale this past fall, I would like to briefly note that the Library of Congress’s online archives have also expanded my source base. In particular, the archives contain some copies of the Ojibwe-run White Earth newspaper, *The Tomahawk*, which illuminate Ojibwe opinions on Euroamerican interactions and the introduction of the Soo railroad line at White Earth. Unfortunately, few sources from Red Lake offer a useful angle for comparison.

Much of my primary source research was conducted before fall semester this year, but I was fortunate to receive a Mellon Grant from Silliman College and funding from the Department of History to support my travels to Minnesota over Thanksgiving and winter break. I intended to visit White Earth and Red Lake in November, but winter weather regrettably prevented me from driving so far north in Minnesota. Tribal archives are very difficult to access if not a member of the indigenous community, so except for gaining firsthand experiences on the reservations, I likely would not have gained extensive historical source material from visiting. I did, however, benefit from returning to the Minnesota History Center, particularly to consult more cartographic sources.

Under Professor Bill Rankin’s guidance in his “Cartography, Territory, and Identity” seminar this past fall, I transformed my analytical framework to emphasize cartographic sources
more than I had intended to. While the paper I wrote for Professor Blackhawk’s class drew on maps and atlases, I first conceived of comparing White Earth and Red Lake cartographically in Professor Rankin’s course. I benefitted from Robert Proctor and Londa Schiebinger’s concept of “agnotology” (the study of the production of ignorance) to understand how/why Red Lake evaded the federal land survey project until the 1890s, and how this cartographic invisibility contributed to Red Lake’s sovereignty, land tenure, and relative isolation from Euroamerican influences. When read alongside the secondary sources written by Meyer, Cronon, and Treuer (among other authors), maps emerge as sources with discursive potential to explain differential railroad developments at and near White Earth and Red Lake. Moreover, the maps helped illustrate how closely the railroad followed the economic potential of various ecosystems in the state. Studying maps neatly tied together my interests in comparing the two reservations and understanding how railroad developments influenced Ojibwe dispossession and environmental degradation.

This project, while completed as a senior essay, remains a work in progress. This semester I have furthered my understanding of settler colonialism from Professor Blackhawk in an American Studies graduate seminar. In recent drafts I have interwoven discussions of settler colonialism into my argument about railroad colonialism, and I intend to continue drawing on other scholars’ frameworks and methodologies in future academic work on this topic. I hope this essay contributes to the growing intervention of railroad colonialism into historiography of Native America and the American West, and I am grateful to Yale’s Department of History for shaping my intellectual journey.

154 This consisted of returning to maps I had previously analyzed, as well as tapping into the abundant digital archives of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection (based at Stanford University).
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This project would not have been possible without the assistance of my advisor, Professor Ned Blackhawk, to whom I owe the premise and evolution of my project—I am exceedingly grateful for his consistent wisdom and guidance.

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I would like to extend my gratitude to Yale’s Department of History; the Center for Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration (led by Professor Stephen Pitti and Dr. Matthew Tanico); and Silliman College for their generous funding of my travels to archives.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Sledge, the Silliman College Writing Tutor, has devoted hours of her time to help me grow as a writer over the past four years, and I am incredibly grateful for her support in reading my thesis draft in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

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155 I am only citing the primary sources that appear in this paper, even though I consulted several more.
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