The Indians, by being held on reservations remote from contact with the white race, have been under almost insurmountable disadvantage. I count it among the very greatest of all the wrongs we have committed against the Indians that we have so imperiously excluded them from all possibility of demonstrating their possibilities to labor and learn. — Richard Henry Pratt

Satisfactory progress has been made during the brief period of the existence of this school, proving beyond controversy the superiority of this plan over the reservation system, where they [American Indian children] are constantly under the very influences that we seek to educate them out of. — M.C. Wilkinson

Armed with one-way tickets to America, a small entourage of Indians stared anxiously from the square windows of a Northern Pacific passenger car slowly pulling out of Puyallup, Washington Territory. Eighteen pairs of eyes watched as the huge steam locomotive, the supreme symbol of Euroamerican technology and civilization, churned southward through a frigid Northwest gripped by one of the harshest winters in memory. On board was an elite vanguard, the best and the brightest from the Puyallup Indian Reservation. Their
destination was Pacific University at Forest Grove, Oregon, which had been selected as the site for the first off-reservation boarding school for Indians west of the Mississippi.3

These youngsters, most of whom were only in their teens, would eventually lead lives of accomplishment and standing within their tribe. Jerry Meeker would become the first Puyallup to graduate from high school. Henry Sicade would serve on the Puyallup Tribal Council for nearly a half-century and, along with another member of that first class of eighteen, William Wilton, would help found the Fife Public School District on their reservation. David Brewer would rank on his death in 1908 among the staunchest supporters of Indian education. Upon entering school, he resolved “to do his best to succeed, for it promised so much for his people.” Peter Stanup, a class spokesman at Forest Grove, would assume a similar role for the Puyallups when he returned to the reservation.4

Through selected correspondence from 1880 through 1884, it is possible to explore the participation of these and other students at Forest Grove Indian School, revealing the human drama that unfolded as federal officials imposed assimilative education in the Pacific Northwest. The letters offer a glimpse into the contact that existed among students, parents, and school personnel as the government carried out its efforts to remake Indians in the dominant Euroamerican image. A grim portrait emerges, a tableau of Indians and whites alike hopefully accepting the promise of off-reservation education only to be confronted with a harsh reality. The school system in its infancy was unprepared to meet the challenges and responsibilities that came with such an undertaking. The federal government significantly miscalculated the human and economic investment required to create what sociologists have termed “total” institutions, in which virtually every aspect of students’ lives are regulated and controlled.5

Social intervention on such a sweeping scale produced an enduring legacy. Under-funded, understaffed, and intentionally isolated, the off-reservation boarding school became one of the most contentious aspects of Indian-white relations in the United States. Off-reservation education institutionalized assimilation, the underlying principle being that separation from family and immersion in non-Indian culture were essential for effective acculturation. By the time the Forest Grove school opened in 1880, public acceptance of formal Indian education had grown, and experiments had been tried in Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, and Virginia. But the movement received its greatest boost from army officer Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of Carlisle Indian School and the architect of much of the theoretical framework behind off-reservation boarding-school education. His hard-fisted approach called for a rigid, insensitive application of assimilationist ideals. In
February 1881, Pratt declared that he considered "the hardship of separation between parents and children as nothing compared to the hardships of their savage life and the want of success in almost all efforts to educate them under its influences at the agency."\(^6\)

Perhaps with justification, historians studying the origins of the off-reservation movement have looked to the East Coast, where the "prototype" boarding school and superintendent were located. Unrecognized has been the fact that in the late 1870s another soldier was working to convince the federal government to open an off-reservation boarding school in Oregon. Captain Melville Cary Wilkinson, much like Pratt, was an ardent assimilationist who believed that separating Indian children from the ideas, values, and habits of their parents and ancestors was crucial. Unlike Pratt, Wilkinson served only briefly in the Indian service, a fact that has relegated him and his school to the margins in studies of the off-reservation boarding-school movement. By extension, it also has obscured a larger truth: that the federal government conceived the Carlisle and Forest Grove schools as a piece, identical institutions planned side by side and strategically placed, one on each coast. This article focuses on Captain Wilkinson, the school he built and oversaw, and the children and families who experienced off-reservation boarding-school education at Forest Grove.\(^7\)

Melville C. Wilkinson was born in Scottsburg, New York, on November 14, 1835. He passed his younger years in the mercantile and railroad businesses before enlisting in the Union Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. Gallant and meritorious conduct in the 107th New York Volunteer Infantry earned him brevet promotions to lieutenant and captain, but his injuries during the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, derailed his participation as a front-line soldier. Suffering from what today might be diagnosed as
Civil War Syndrome, Wilkinson served out the remainder of the war as an officer in the Veterans Reserve Corps. Neither time nor treatment, however, would heal his wounds. His combat experience left him a broken man, a reality that would haunt him for the rest of his life.8

After the war, Wilkinson turned from soldiering to teaching. He spent a year as an instructor of military science at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and then secured an appointment as aide-de-camp to Major General Oliver Otis Howard, the commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the university’s president.9 During this period, Wilkinson made his first significant contribution to Indian education, helping to bring Indian students to Howard University, whose primary charge was to educate freed slaves. In October 1870, while on detail at Fort Lyon, Colorado, Wilkinson received a letter from a missionary requesting that educational opportunities be made available for African American children living in Indian Territory. Expanding on the suggestion, Wilkinson told General Howard that he believed there was an opportunity not only for blacks but also for Indians to attend Howard University. Alluding to the reservation Indians, he explained that he felt “confident” that “by giving the matter” his “personal, and earnest attention” General Howard would be able “with God’s blessing” to “open a feeder (for the students will be self sustaining) to the University” in which “not only Colored, but the Indian” could be “induced to come.” Wilkinson concluded, “It really does seem best for me to visit these people!” Between 1871 and 1875 Howard University enrolled several Indian children, one who came all the way from Washington Territory.”10 The experiment represented an early milestone in the development of a system of off-reservation boarding schools.

In 1874, the U.S. Army commissioned General Howard as the commanding general of the Department of the Columbia with headquarters in Oregon. Wilkinson followed him west to Portland and achieved almost instant notoriety. A rabid Congregationalist and self-described “ranting religious,” Wilkinson left an indelible imprint on the city’s church community.11 As president of the Young Men’s Christian Association, he became known as a “religious zealot” and “born evangelist.” The Morning Oregonian once reported that Wilkinson would “step out into the crowds on the street and talk to them as man to man . . . pray with them and sing hymns with them.” He was known for his generosity and would “take up some poor, degraded, lonesome piece of humanity, kindle into flame the little spark of manhood, give the fellow a cheering word (and the price of a meal or a pair of shoes), and if the notion happened to strike . . . carry the fellow off to his own house and give him a bed to sleep in.”12

But Wilkinson had been sent on a mission of a different kind. Relations between Indians and whites had reached a breaking point, a
rupture that inevitably spilled over into military intervention. In late 1873, Wilkinson supervised removal of the Modocs from Fort McPherson, Nebraska, to Indian Territory. He took part in several skirmishes and battles during the Nez Perce War in 1877, distinguishing himself most notably at Clearwater and Kamiah. According to General Howard, Wilkinson’s “gallant services” at Clearwater resulted in a promotion of the aide-de-camp to brevet major. Wilkinson’s conduct in the Paiute-Bannock War in 1878 proved less illustrious. In command of a gunboat on the Columbia River near Wallula, he ordered his men, heavily armed with a Gatling gun and muskets, to fire on a large group of Palouse Indians comprised mostly of noncombatants. An eyewitness to the unprovoked attack reported that at one point Wilkinson seized control of the field piece and with his own hands unleashed a firestorm so deadly that when the shooting finally stopped “men, women, and children lay in every direction.”

That awful day was a turning point. Although commended by General Howard “for efficiency in commanding the gunboat” and being a “faithful officer,” within weeks of the battle Wilkinson applied for an eight-month leave of absence in order to look for a new career. Study of the “Indian question” consumed his energy, and his effort paid dividends. By the following spring Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz was considering him for duty in the Indian service. Wilkinson was aligning himself at the center of an important shift taking place in American Indian education.

In March 1879, Wilkinson left Oregon for Washington, D.C. There he befriended Richard Pratt, who had also grown disillusioned with a military solution in Indian affairs. In 1878, Pratt had enrolled groups of Indians at Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute in Hampton, Virginia, a Freedmen’s Bureau school dedicated to the education of former slaves. Philosophical differences with Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the superintendent of the school, however, had sent Pratt in search of his own school. In Washington, he and Wilkinson successfully lobbied Secretary Schurz, Secretary of War George W. McCrary, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Ezra A. Hayt to establish two off-reservation boarding schools, one in the East and the other in the West. In April 1879, Wilkinson wrote Hayt encouraging the commissioner to support the two schools. Wilkinson noted that in the past five years he had “visited” and “inspected” virtually every Indian group living between Arizona and Alaska. Two months later, the government gave its approval for the schools that would soon be built at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and Forest Grove, Oregon.

Wilkinson was ready to proceed, but because federal law prohibited army officers from holding civilian positions, his anticipated role as teacher needed to be tied to his position as soldier. In Wilkinson’s
“NEW RECRUITS—SPOKANE INDIANS, after Seven Months at School.” Off-reservation boarding schools often used photographic propaganda to generate financial support and convince a sometimes skeptical public that Indians could be civilized. Shorn hair, military uniforms, erect postures, and self-confidence comprised part of the idealized American image that officials hoped to convey. Wilkinson envisioned his students returning to their reservations, assuming positions of leadership, and guiding their people through an ongoing process of acculturation.

In July, Wilkinson was named professor of military science and tactics at Pacific University in Forest Grove, which the Congregational Church had established in 1849.

The question of where to locate the Forest Grove school produced little controversy. Pacific University, twenty-six miles southwest of Portland, boasted close connections with Indian education, making it a natural and logical choice. In Forest Grove’s favor was the presence of Sydney Harper Marsh, the president of Pacific University. Marsh was a maternal great-grandson of Congregational minister and Yale graduate Eleazor Wheelock, the founder of Dartmouth University and an early advocate of boarding-school training. Missionaries Elkanah and Mary Richardson Walker, who established the Tsimakain Mission among the Spokanes in 1839, also lived at Forest Grove. The Walkers were active in the affairs of Pacific University, and their sons would later teach at Forest Grove Indian School. Furthermore, Forest Grove was a “dry” town and Myron Eells, a graduate of Pacific University and a

Collins, The Broken Crucible of Assimilation
Wilkinson's and Pratt's destinies were unfolding along parallel lines, and Wilkinson believed a close relationship had been forged. In a letter to Pratt written that autumn, Wilkinson fondly recalled how their lives had become inextricably intertwined. He also shared his feelings and hopes for the job that lay ahead. “You will pray, & ask the dear friends who rally around you so nobly, many of them, to pray for me,” he appealed to Pratt, to “pray for the same work way up here in the great new north-west.”

We will try to please GOD in what we do, and if before we are privileged again, except in spirit, to take each other by the hand, [or] we are called to the final account may “that confidence which hath such recompense of reward” be ours, as step by step, in GODs strength, we go forward in our chosen blessed work. I do thank GOD for you, for that meeting in Washington, and for all that has already come of it, and is to come.

Wilkinson concluded: “How singular [that] we should have met as we did, all those weeks of weary waiting, of going up & down, to & fro,
through our modern Rome, often in discouragement & doubt, as to the immediate future."

With his detachment to Pacific University and the selection of Forest Grove, Wilkinson eagerly sought to begin raising a school. His faith in the Indian Office suffered a blow, however, as months passed and no money arrived. In late September 1879, only a month before Carlisle Indian School opened in Pennsylvania, he complained to the commissioner of Indian affairs:

The Honorable Secretary of War would not have detailed me as he has, but for the Indian work. Here I am ready for it, only lacking the sinews of war [sic]. It does not seem possible, after all, that the work is not going forward on this Coast. Will Capt. Pratts Carlisle sponge soak up everything? Must I wait further legislation? Dear Commissioner, I am patient, and about my other duties, but long to be at the work. Please don’t let any miscalculations as to expense here, prevent restatement. May I hear something?

Wilkinson’s letter made the point. In November, he was notified that funds would be forthcoming so construction could get underway. By January 1, 1880, a girls dormitory — two-stories, sixty by thirty-two feet with a seventy-five-person capacity — was built on four acres adjacent to Pacific University. Shortly thereafter, a shop for vocational training was completed and the lumber for a boys dormitory was purchased. To start and keep the school operating for the remainder of the fiscal year, Wilkinson requested an additional $2,500 from the federal government, which Schurz approved.

In mid-December 1879, Wilkinson was sent to central Washington to gather scholars from agent James H. Wilbur on the Yakama Reservation. Inclement weather and other factors resulted in the failure of this first recruiting effort, prompting Wilkinson to shift his focus west of the Cascade Mountains. His fortunes turned on the Puyallup Reservation when he met with Indian agent Robert H. Milroy, who had already advised him that students attending the reservation boarding school might be willing to transfer. With Milroy, Wilkinson selected Forest Grove’s first student body, seventeen Puyallups and one Nisqually. Those students supplied much of the labor to construct the school’s original buildings.

With fourteen boys and four girls, Forest Grove Indian School officially opened on February 25, 1880. Soon, Native children from Oregon, Idaho, Montana, northern California, and Alaska were enrolled. By October 1885, when the federal government removed the school to a new site just north of the state capital at Salem (now Chemawa Indian School), 321 students had enrolled, 147 from Washington, 87 from Oregon, 52 from Idaho (all Nez Perces except one Salmon River), 24

———. The Broken Crucible of Assimilation. 473
Alaska Natives, and 2 Crows from Montana. Males enrolled in greater numbers than females, 193 to 128, and Puyallup maintained the largest representation of any reservation with 55 students. Forty-three children, or 13.4 percent of Forest Grove's student population, died in school, most of them young women (24.2 percent of the total female population compared to 6.2 percent of boys).23

Six of the students who died were Spokanes, a tribe that occupies a key place in the history of off-reservation education. Wilkinson's first contact with the Spokanes concerning Forest Grove took place in October 1880 when he traveled to eastern Washington Territory to consult with Chief Moses of the Columbia Sinkiuses and Chief Lot of the Lower Spokanes. Chief Moses, according to Wilkinson, had "promised both Gen Howard & myself that he would send his son & others from his people [to Forest Grove], but that wily old chief did not."24 Chief Lot, however, agreed to send eight Spokanes (seven boys and one girl), including his son Oliver, who arrived in Forest Grove on November 22. Nine months later, in July 1881, a second group comprised of four boys and seven girls enrolled, among them Chief Lot's daughter Martha (also known as Mattie). Because of her death that October and the high mortality among the Lower Spokanes and other tribes, Chief Lot and his people came to consider Forest Grove a place from which students never returned, and they eventually refused to send more children.25

Steps therefore had to be taken to ensure and increase enrollments, a process that sometimes involved money. Wilkinson referred to enrolled students as being under "contract." For him, a few dollars paid out was a small investment for a child that would return $167, the amount the government allocated for the annual support of each student. The tactics used with the Spokanes were typical. Years later, tribal member Sam Andrews recalled:

Twenty-five years ago we brought some children away from here [the Spokane Reservation], me and Chief Lot. We went to Portland. We seen General Howard in Portland. We had the children there in our Charge, and General Howard said to Lot "I am very glad you have brought these children. To-morrow I will give you $100, and I will give Sam $100."26

In this instance, according to Andrews, the payment was declined.

The Spokanes and other Northwest tribes had their own reasons for sending their children to Forest Grove. In the decades before the school's founding these Indian societies had come under relentless assault. They had witnessed the exponential growth of the non-Indian population, the formation of western territories and states, the negotiation and renegotiation of treaties and boundaries, the removal of Indians to
reservations, and the warfare that ensued. Weary of the vexed “white problem,” Indians were searching for solutions, and some hoped for at least a partial answer in government schooling.

With a disturbing death rate, family separation, and heavy discipline, off-reservation boarding schools exacerbated rather than solved the Indians’ “problem.” As in all late nineteenth-century federal Indian schools, Forest Grove was a vocational school that offered academic training. To encourage learning, military-like methods were imposed, the goal being obedience and conformity. “The strictest attention,” Wilkinson lectured, “is given to order and system which the Indian is entirely deficient in, but which they adapt themselves to with readiness and pleasure.”

Henry Sicade, a student at the school, later outlined the organizational structure under which Forest Grove operated:

Under Captain Wilkinson the discipline was patterned after army discipline; the boys were divided into four groups with four sergeants in charge of each group. These had under corporals or assistants under them. When one offended he was brought before a court martial of the disciplinarian and the four sergeants and if found guilty was given his sentence by them.

Another observer offered a similar assessment: “Everything in the institution is arranged and carried on with military precision. The children . . . rise by a bell, bathe by a bell, sit down at table by a bell, go to prayer by a bell, take exercise by a bell, go to bed by a bell, and, for ought we know, snore by a bell and dream of bells.”
Wilkinson used the pomp of military drill to promote his school. Visiting federal officials, politicians, and townspeople could count on a parade-ground exhibition. Some onlookers, even school personnel, detected an element of exploitation in what they were seeing. Sam T. Walker, a farmer and clerk in Forest Grove, wrote:

Captain Wilkinson's greatest fault was his calling the pupils in from [the] shops, farm and school to be shown off before visitors and to hear the school sing and to hear them under his lead. . . . He was a man of strong personality and temperament, on the "mountain top today and in the valley tomorrow." He was very active in religious work and I am sure [he] had the interest of the boys and girls under his charge to a greater degree than most persons. I feel quite sure his motive in showing them off was more to get people interested in them than any praise that was given him.30

Despite the regimentation, Henry Sicade considered his experience at Forest Grove as a defining moment in his life. He described Wilkinson as "the only Superintendent that we could swear by as our best friend; we loved him, we honored him, we obeyed him explicitly." In 1917, Sicade fondly recalled his first days in Oregon:

. . . how vividly I remember that day when we filed into the two-story structure built in the woods, which housed the few employees as well as the few children. I brought up the rear, all eyes and ears. Professor [George F] Boynton, that dear teacher, a jack of all trades, who sang and preached so ably and later nursed us in our sickness. We all honor and respect him. Mrs. [Louisa] Huff, the matron, good old lady, who was our mother when we were homesick, was the other employee. The Rev. Mr. Huff, minister of the old Baptist church, lived with us. The old gentleman was big of body and I believe his soul was as big. We all learned to love him.31

Others, however, perceived a different experience. The Pacific Rural Press presented this image of Forest Grove students:

They are constantly going and coming. They are a prey to homesickness. The restraints of the school, its surroundings and all, are most burdensome and overwhelmingly oppressive to the Indian, and in desperation he seeks relief and freedom by "running away."

When first brought from their native woods and wilds, they show a decided dislike for all rules, regulations and usages of the school. They stand around and maintain a stolid quiet, refuse to talk or answer questions, are sullen and stubborn, show indifference to all things. By observation and force of example they are led little by little to "fall in line." They take more readily to the military drill and fall in at the call of a bugle.32
The situation clearly called for the hand of a strong administrator. Unfortunately for Wilkinson, his zealous but erratic and unpredictable methods proved a liability, inviting harsh criticism and gradually undermining his goals. Described as having “a nervous, active temper-ment,” he tried to adopt a hard-driving, straight-ahead approach. Evidence suggests that on occasion he removed children from reservations against their will or the will of their parents. If nothing else, Wilkinson earned a reputation — even among colleagues — as someone capable of carrying out such an act. “The forcible taking of the last six [students] from the Puyallup Indian Reservation I think was unwise,” Myron Eells reported in his diary on June 7, 1880, “as I think it will set all the Indians against the [Forest Grove] school [who live] on the Sound, who were considerably opposed to it before: when I think that judicious management might have won them over.”

Eells and Wilkinson also disagreed on other issues. Although Forest Grove adopted an academic program that obligated students to spend three to five years living on campus, Eells commented that “the keeping of all children there all the time until they have finished their education without returning to see their people even if it be [for] ten years, I think to be unwise: there may be some advantages about it, but more disadvantages, I think.” Ultimately, Eells’s opinions carried the day. An unfavorable report submitted by a U.S. Indian inspector resulted in the government refusing to extend Wilkinson’s leave from the army. As Eells bluntly put it, the inspector came away from the school “even more disgusted than I have been with it, & he has shown me how we think affairs may be remedied.”

Wilkinson’s impending removal generated considerable fallout. Poignantly, it even ended his devotion to Richard Pratt. Obsessed and fighting desperately to remain at Forest Grove — his appeals spiraled all the way to the White House — Wilkinson attempted to enlist the “father” of Indian education as part of his defense, but his bid failed miserably. Pratt was unsympathetic. “I have written and talked” to those in authority, he wrote, “but have little or no influence, and besides I have been informed that after your case was through and settled mine would be taken up. I think it best to say nothing about it. The work will go on and you and I are small factors.” A decade and a half later, Pratt’s rejection still stung, as the last correspondence between the two men illustrated. In late March 1898, Wilkinson received an unsolicited copy of the Carlisle school’s annual report. Assuming that Pratt had sent the document, he replied with an angry letter, characterizing his ouster from Forest Grove as the “greatest disappointment” of his life, an unjust and cruel act that had prevented him from building “in
the great West . . . something akin . . . to the spirit” of Carlisle. For this defeat, Wilkinson blamed Pratt: “. . . in the bitterness of the hour when with all the help I could bring of the best minds in my far away location, you chose to write the letter you did.” That betrayal, he avowed, formed a “memory” that would last with him forever. As he put it, “there my hands dropped, for if you could not understand who might?”36 Six months later, Wilkinson was dead, violently killed in a Chippewa uprising at Leech Lake, Minnesota. Meanwhile, Pratt bristled under Wilkinson’s accusations and remained conspicuously silent in discussing his former friend or his involvement in Indian education. Even in Pratt’s memoir, which extensively documented the genesis of the off-reservation boarding-school movement, Wilkinson warrants not a single reference.

Yet, Wilkinson and Pratt were contemporaries, figuratively and philosophically. While today’s generation may see them as the tools of “ethnic cleansing,” they viewed themselves in heroic roles, fighting racism and saving a people teetering perilously on the brink of extinction. Both perceived off-reservation boarding schools as embodying the best defense Native people had to guard against such a human catastrophe. Wilkinson envisioned his graduates becoming tribal leaders who would return to their reservations to protect the elder generation while serving as role models for the younger one. He believed the Indians’ prosperity depended on their ability to compete in a society that was rapidly becoming less regulated by traditional cultures and lifeways. In his assessment, their survival hung in the balance. “You know it is no light work to gather these Indians on this North-west coast where the prejudice and hatred is so great between whites and Indians,” he declared.

But to fail in the least would be to give the course of Indian education, especially in this section, a very serious “set back.” You see the fact is the vampires in this Country who are waiting to pounce upon the Reservations, soon to be broken up, they verily believe, don’t want the Indian to know anything, and so this school [at Forest Grove], specially, draws their venom. It must succeed!!!37

Wilkinson’s aspirations would not be realized, at least in Forest Grove. The issues that brought his downfall ultimately affected the school, which would survive at Forest Grove for only three years after his removal. Many factors contributed to its demise. There was insufficient land available to support the school’s agricultural program, and what land there was suffered from poor drainage and the lack of a reliable water source. Worsening matters, fire destroyed the girls’ dormitory. Those drawbacks, however, were minor. Local and regional opposition led directly to the relocation of the school. The townspeople
"ONE OF THE MAIN BUILDINGS, erected entirely by Indian Boys; Dormer windows, Rustic and Painting on all.—Their work without aid," Wilkinson wrote in the caption to this photograph. This image depicts Forest Grove Indian School, with boys in military uniforms on the left and girls in work dresses on the right. Wilkinson is standing in the left foreground.

of Forest Grove hoped the school would burn to the ground, and officials of Pacific University believed the proximity of the Indian school hurt their enrollments. In mid-1885, the federal government moved the school to Chemawa just north of Salem. Two years later, the Indian Office detailed Chemawa Superintendent John Lee to the old campus to destroy the "property used by the Indian school," which had been "condemned and ordered to be burned."

Yet, the legacy of this small school could not be easily erased. The Forest Grove era had set the stage for what would become one of the largest and most successful off-reservation boarding schools in America. Wilkinson and Forest Grove and Pratt and Carlisle soon faded from the scene, but Chemawa endured. Perhaps infused with the spirit of Wilkinson's almost fanatical passion for off-reservation boarding-school education, the school remains in operation today, having provided educational opportunities to thirty thousand Indian children.

The following correspondence documents Wilkinson's management of Forest Grove Indian School. It chronicles his relationship with students, parents, and federal officials and highlights some of the difficulties he and others encountered in off-reservation boarding-school education in the early years of the movement. Issues of finance, parent and child separation, health, and mortality predominate. Fathers and
mothers, separated from Forest Grove by long distances and frequently lacking the means to travel, had to accept that their child's welfare, safety, and comfort would be safeguarded. Clearly, Wilkinson tried to foster mutual trust and understanding; but in keeping with the underlying philosophy of off-reservation education, he also sought to retard parent-student contact. Moreover, Wilkinson wielded inordinate control over his charges and their families. He sometimes shepherded children to Oregon without parental knowledge or consent; and even when students died, he alone decided where and how they should be buried. His exercise of authority may have derived from more than the extreme, evangelical, Protestant perspective through which he rationalized all events. Wilkinson's Civil War injuries had left him with a troubled mind. By no means a healthy individual, he exhibited chronic symptoms of fatigue, anxiety, and depression, afflictions exacerbated by violent mood swings that left him virtually incapacitated at times. Although by any measure a sincere, caring, passionate, even charismatic man, the negative aspects of his personality drove a wedge between him and the families and federal officials on whose support he and the school depended.

As the following letters illustrate, even more significant than the impact of Wilkinson's shortcomings was the complexity of forced assimilation and its tragic impact on children and parents, as officials such as Wilkinson struggled to reconcile the perceived need for acculturation with the aggressive and callous means by which federal policy was administered to achieve that goal.

Only one month before the opening of Forest Grove Indian School, Wilkinson wrote Richard Pratt, who was urging him to move vigorously ahead. Wilkinson blamed his slow beginning on what he perceived were the more difficult conditions encountered in the West. He was also concerned about being able to gather sufficient students to justify the appropriations he had requested from the federal government. Prior to receiving congressional funds in 1883, Carlisle depended heavily on private donations, particularly money received from the Society of Friends. The Department of the Interior also contributed revenue from the Civilization Fund. Forest Grove was funded in a similar manner, although it lacked Carlisle's capacity at attracting charitable contributions. In its first eighteen months of operation, Forest Grove accepted students ranging in age from eight to twenty-five. In the autumn of 1881, the Indian Office limited enrollment to those sixteen and younger.

Forest Grove, Oregon, Jany, 22 1880

My Dear Pratt:

Just a word now about my work. It is not two months ago that some of the lumber now in my building was in the log, and the logs in the river at Portland 24 miles away. This is our rainy season, and it rains here as the boys say, "and don't you forget it." Well, during that time my building has gone up right in the heaviest
SCHOOL SCENE. These “scholars” were improbably posed at their desks outside the Forest Grove Indian Industrial School in about 1882. This photograph was used in Wilkinson’s effort to promote charitable support for the school.

storms. To day I’m pushing up my stoves to dry “her” out, must have some protection for my pupils, two or three deaths would kill, almost, the effort. Have been to the Yakima reservation. Was there during the fearful storm that blocked & froze everything in the Upper Country[,] East of the Mountains as we call it here, getting out myself only by the hardest [exertion]; it was all I could do to reach Portland, over the mountains, with my one assistant. I went to confer with Father [James] Wilbur, Sec. of Int. [Carl Schurz] wished me to, [Wilbur being] the great Indian Agt. of this coast, but between you & this fence post, I don’t want any of the Indian Youth who have been in his res. School; of the Piutes with him I can get some, when I can get there (down the river). It was the lack of a home which has prevented my getting started. Why bless your dear heart, it’s a long way from one place to another in this Country, which you no doubt consider. Yet if you only knew what it has taken to get the start I have already [made] you would thank GOD with me, & take courage for this part of this coast. Have two young men, Chiefs, (in the near future) [coming] from Alaska; they will remain for only the immediate future but through them [I] expect at least a dozen children before many weeks; in fact, I’m waiting, in one sense, for the kind of Indians this peculiar work is intended, as I understand it to reach. I could soon fill up chuck full of those who have been partially instructed on the reservations, on Puget Sound & in other quarters, & shall take a few. Certainly [I] must push into the work, as you say with the largest numbers, yet for the [long-term] outlook, wish, as the Irishman said, to use judition! If I only had time I would be sick for a few
weeks, & would be probably if I dared to take the time. [I was] [l]ost for a little
time in the Yakima mountains, in deep snow, thermometer fifteen, & more below;
then getting horses & myself too through the ice many times in crossing mountain
streams, or torrents, has given me an ache in the bones that wont go away, but I'm
only telling you of this, [as] here I push, as my dear Heavenly Father helps. Am
going, or expect to, over on the Sound next week & will get a few scholars ready
as over against the time when my matron, and my home will be ready for them.
Then later on shall go again east of the mountains where I have more under
contract! & bring them in. My purpose is to so get started & with such a showing
in the next two or three months that my estimate for ten thousand dollars for the
next current year can not be well reduced, & numbers can alone show this. But
here, with the exception now of Dr. Lindsley of the Presb't Ch[urch] [in] Portland
through whose request I have the Alaska young men & perhaps a very few
others, the interest is yet to be awakened. But the firm hearts & the happy faces
& the brave reliant souls of the dear workers & the backers in the East such as
will keep [us] here when the time comes, are before me and I go it blind so far as
the most of my immediate surroundings are concerned. I will ask for more help
when its logical. Shall try myself to run up to Alaska next month, if it seems then
best—Have written you this hurried note in the midst of preparation to start out.
Have not written to the Dept anything lately.

M.C.W.  

His
torian Francis Paul Prucha documented the sectarian competition that permeated
Indian affairs throughout the Gilded Age. The Congregational underpinnings of
Forest Grove Indian School rendered it a strictly Protestant institution with only a
handful of Catholic children enrolled. Umatilla head chief Winampsnoot wrote this letter.

Pendleton Org. July 29, 1881

To the Hon. Commissioner of Indian Affairs
Washington City DC

Dear Sir

Sometime ago I had a letter written [to] you in reference to the affairs on this
reservation. The Indians here are very much dissatisfied with the Agent Mr [R.H.]
Fay and earnestly demand a change. We had a Council a few days ago in which
nearly all our leading men took part and all demand an early change in the Agent.
We cant be satisfied with Mr Fay as agent. He is entirely under the control of the
Priest, and many of us are Protestants.

The Catholic Indians also agree with us and ask for a change. We are not
treated right.

The Catholic Church are making great improvements & preparations for
establishing a Catholic School and expect to take our Lands and are taking
possession of them for that purpose. We have no objections to them having
Schools for their Catholic children, but object to them taking our Lands &
money & property to do it with, while we the Protestant portion of the Indians
are left without any means of Educating our children. We ask to have an equal
challenge with the others. All the money that has accumulated from the lease of
lands for herding purposes is in the hands of Mr Fay and he says he intends to
use all of it for the purpose of building up Catholic Schools & Church. We think
it nothing but justice that we should have our share of it expended for the
purpose of educating our children free from the control of the Priest & Catholic
Church. Capt. Wilkinson sent a notice to the agent here to notify us that he
would be here soon to select 10 of our children to place in [the] Government
Indian School at Forest Grove[,] Washington Co. Org. Mr Fay refused to give the
notice & it was only accidental that we found it out. Mr Fay, we are told, informed
Mr Wilkinson that he would not allow him to come on the Reservation for that
purpose & told him to stay away. The children are ready to go and we are anxious
to send them if we are allowed to do so. We ask, Demand, and Pray that these
matters be investigated & attended to at once. The Priest here cannot speak the
English language but little better than we can, and we would like to have some
one as teacher, or have our children sent where they can be educated and taught
by teachers who can speak the English language correctly, and where they can
receive religious instructions untrammeled by the Catholic Church—Please attend
to this at once and you will very much oblige a large majority of the Indians on
this Reservation & do simple justice to all the Indians.

Very Truly your Obt. Servant

Wenapsnoot
Chief of the Umatillas

When the Spokane students arrived at Forest Grove in 1880, only one spoke English.
The October 5, 1881, Pacific chronicled their initial experiences in school. "The
Warm Springs and Puyallups [who enrolled before the Spokanes] received these wild
strangers very kindly. Soon their long hair was cut and they were clothed in civilized
garb. They were very quick to adopt themselves to circumstances. ... This summer this
number has been increased by the addition of eleven, seven being girls. They were clad in
blankets and filthy in the extreme, yet the girls of the school received these wild sisters
kindly, and performed all the disagreeable work of renovation. ... Oliver Lot, the chief's
son, a fine looking man, sat with his arm around his little sister whom he had not seen for
months, his face glowing with pride and happiness. " The students were from the Deep
Creek Settlement, where nineteen Spokanefamilies, including those of Chief Lot, Ah-ma-
mel-i-can, and William Three Mountain, had a thousand acres under cultivation. The
Colville Reservation in northeastern Washington fell under the jurisdiction of the Catholic
Church, creating tension between Wilkinson and the agent there.

For Chief Lott,
My Friend:
I want to tell you that your little daughter is better, that the Doctor has
helped her very much, and we hope before long that she will be quite well, and
the sore entirely cured. This will be good news for you, and your wife, and it will
make you very happy that GOD is taking this way of answering your prayers that
she might be made well. [Your son] Oliver is well. I have taken all the boys up near
the foot of a mountain where they can fish and hunt for about two weeks while
the teachers get rested here. I have written a long letter to the Indian Commis-
ioner. [Colville] Agent [John A.] Simms has written to him that I have been
taking away some girls from his jurisdiction (agency) without asking him. I have
explained the whole matter.
You must tell all the Fathers, and Mothers, and friends, of all the children in this school, from your people, that they are well; that they are learning to speak English fast, and learning many other things—I am so glad, all the time, that our Heavenly Father keeps them all well & that they are growing fat & strong.

All this letter will make your heart strong & all your people hearts strong & happy.

I sent you the photographs, did you get them with my letter?

Your friend,

Captain Wilkinson

Martha Lot died of tuberculosis and was buried in grave 10, lot 215, in Forest View Cemetery in Forest Grove. Chief Lot had complained bitterly of the decision to locate the school in the moist climate of the Willamette Valley. On October 2, 1891, the Morning Oregonian had reported a visit to Portland by Chiefs Joseph, Moses, and Lot. During their stay, Chief Lot was quoted as saying, “The young men [of the Spokane tribe] have attended the Chemawa school, but the change from the mountainous to the low land has been fatal to them. We want schools in our own territory.” Guy Haines, a farmer living at Walker’s Prairie just east of the Spokane Reservation, served as interpreter for Chief Lot in his correspondence with Wilkinson.

October 18th [1881]

To/
Chief Lott
Spokane Indian!

My Dear Friend—

It is always easier to smile about life than death. When I wrote you in my last letter that Mattie, your dear child, whom you and her mother, and all of the school here, loved so much, was getting better, and I felt so sure in my heart, that she would soon be quite well, and learning fast out of GOD’s word, and books, & was very happy indeed, for she had such a good mind and heart, and was so good and obedient and loving and kind that all of her teachers and I felt that in GOD’s time she would come back to you and her dear people and be a teacher to guide them out of the darkness, into the light. I have just returned with ten children, boys and girls, of the Umatilla Indians. I came back to my school with my heart strong, for GOD has been so kind in giving this school so many bright Indian children and has ever since it has started, kept away from us any serious sickness, and has so protected us from death, but when I got back to my own home today, I found the dear little child, I had prayed for and loved so much, your own dear little Mattie was dead! You must go with your wife and talk with GOD about it—He alone can comfort you in his Holy Spirit, but I can help your hearts a little by telling you that my wife when she found that Mattie was very sick brought her into our own home and [our] own neighbors came in and all have tried the best they could to save her life. She had three Doctors and they all did all they could. When the sore on her side healed up and stopped running it went to her head and that is what caused her death.— so the doctors all say, and when you and your people feel so sorry in your hearts—about her dying, you will not forget that the poor little girl has been suffering a long time with the disease that has now caused her death and when the disease went to her head she could not feel...
her pain and at the last, crossed her pretty little hands over her breast and went to sleep in Jesus. Oliver [Lot] and Charley Abraham are sitting by me while I tell my wife what to write you, and my daughter Eva is as sorry as any of the Spokane children, about her death. We laid her out in a beautiful white dress and put her in as beautiful a coffin as I would bury one of my own children in, and the kind friends who have watched with her every night since she has been so sick, brought beautiful flowers which we put around her and on the coffin, and all the boys and girls stood around her coffin and we prayed and sung and have promised GOD to go ahead and leave faster and better, because there is one less of us to do the great work of helping to save the Indian race. All of the rest of the children are well and bear the loss like brave, Christian, boys and girls. It is our first death, as I have told you, and so the loss seems doubly hard to bear. I have purchased a little piece of ground near the school, in which some of the best people in the Country are buried, and [I] shall make it beautiful by any improvement I can put upon it so that when you and your friends come to visit the school, by & by, as I hope you will, your hearts will be as happy as though Mattie were buried in your own Country & it will do the Indians more good to have her buried here, where the boys and girls can visit her grave often and make it beautiful to GOD in plants and flowers and as a place where they meet to pray that his Holy Spirit will guide them in the way of all truth. Now I want Oliver to say a word next to you & his mother.

Oliver says he came down to the Captain's home many days, and stayed at night some times, and watched the care Mrs. [Gertrude B.] Wilkinson and all took of Mattie and he feels as if they did all they could—he and all of the Spokane boys and girls were very much comforted when they saw how peaceful and beautiful Mattie looked in her coffin—Oliver says in two or three days he will feel like writing more to his Father—Tonight he cannot think—

Charley Abraham wants to say a few words—"I am very sorry tonight that my little friend's mother and Capt. Wilkinson & the rest have very heart strong. And this night I don't know what to say—because my heart hurts much"—Charley thinks in a few days he will write some more.—

Dear Friend—

This week Saturday I [will] take all the children to Portland where they will be the guests of the different churches—that is—where the people of the churches will take care of them. In the largest buildings in Portland, they have put all kinds of mechanical implements—and my carpenter boys & shoemakers and blacksmiths and the girls also, have put specimens of what they have done with their own hands—and this has greatly pleased the thousands of white people who [will] visit that building every day and evening. It will do all the boys and girls a great deal of good to see for themselves what it is that makes the white-man's civilization and it will encourage them to know that they are growing up into the same civilization—It is encouraging them very much to know that their exhibition is attracting a great deal of attention and gaining them a great deal of praise. So that while you must necessarily feel so sadly about your great loss you must not forget how fast your children are learning that wisdom which will bring them back to you and your people wise and strong to help you & them up—I will send you a little box which you can get when you go to Walkers Prairie by calling on Mr. Haines. In this little box will be a few things which will remind you of Mattie,
SHOEMAKING. Teaching students a trade, such as shoemaking, was a primary objective of Indian education. In addition to school-use production, items were sold to offset operating costs.

they belonged to her. I will also send you some of the flowers that were about her little hands in the coffin. I shall be very anxious to hear from you & the people.

Your true friend,

Captain Wilkinson. 43

The reaction of the Umatillas to the news of a student’s death suggests the strain parents suffered under while their children attended Forest Grove. Emma, the daughter of Chief Winampnoot (abbreviated in this letter to Winam), was enrolled in Forest Grove on October 17, 1881, the day after Martha Lot died. It is unknown whether Emma contracted tuberculosis on the reservation or at Forest Grove. William Cameron McKay, the author of this letter, was the grandson of fur trader Alexander McKay. His father Thomas fought in the Cayuse War; his mother was a member of the Chinook tribe.

Capt. M.C. Wilkinson.

Sir

Yours of 20th inst came duly to hand. But have been unable to answer it. I was called away immediately after receiving it, and [I] only returned night before last. Yesterday I visited [Umatilla head chief] Winum and his people and read your letter to them. It was a great blessing and restorer of good feelings, as they were much exercised in the circulation of a report that one of the children you took down had died. I found them in a sorrowful mood; but after reading your letter of the 20th to them it pleased them. I told them should anything of the kind
have] happened, I was positive you would have written me immediately on the subject. Mrs Winum felt worse than any, thinking that [her daughter] Em[ma] might be the one, as she is not very robust. [Cayuse chief] Old UmHowlish stated he would feel sorry if any of the children had died, but at the same time, he would not say anything nor would he feel that he was doing wrong or sorry that he had sent them down with you: as they would have died even were they here. He says to tell you his feelings—be kind and take good care of them.—The Priest continues to abuse the Indians for sending the children to the America School and [where they are] taught everything but the true Religion. They would surely go to Hell and there is no salvation for them, all such argument he used to effect upon the Indians mind, and [he] has succeeded to effect the Catholic Indians. They certainly believe that it was not right to send them to a Heretical School—But Winum and his people are better pleased that they have been the means of filling up the quota that has been allowed by the Government in your training school. He considers that he has so much the advantage of the others. Do not fail to write often as I will inform them of the contents of your letter—they look for it. I would like [it] if I [could] go down [to Forest Grove] as soon as you could make it convenient—or else put it off till first or middle of December—use your judgment—We shall have much to tell you of the doings at the agency, and of course—we are trying to keep ourselves posted of their doings &c.

I remain Yours Respectfully
Wm McKay MD.

Wilkinson frequently pitted mothers and fathers against each other by requiring dual consent before a student could be disenrolled. In this letter, he refuses the wishes of a mother until the father has been consulted. Agents and superintendents on reservations had no obligation to release their students to him, impeding Wilkinson’s efforts to expand enrollments.

Forest Grove, Oregon,
November 5th, 1881

Doctor Wm C McKay
Pendleton Or.

Dear Sir:

I am just back from Portland, and catch a moment of time just to say that you are right when you tell the Indians that when anything happens in regard to their children, they should know, I will inform them at once. The child that died was Spokane Chief Lotts daughter. I took her knowing that she was not as healthy as the others, but knowing also that my Doctor could do better for her than none, & that in the school with its regularity (in my judgment) there was every means to suppose that she might be entirely cured, but [I] was mistaken. Winum, UmHowlish, and the others, who have sent children here have done the very best thing they could have done. This school, with the blessing of GOD, has done more good, already, for the Indians than it would be graceful perhaps for me to say. The Mechanics Fair granted the school a diploma for their work; the citizens of Portland are one in the matter now of what can be done with Indian boys and girls when they have the opportunity. The educators of Portland congratulate me more than I had ever expected possible on the real success of the school.
The Priest is wrong; the right education is out of hell, not into it! If he has been correctly reported to you as talking against this school he will soon find that it will not do! Tell UmHowlish I thank him for his kind words of confidence. Tell all the Indians that the day is breaking for them, Catholics and all.

You see I am just now only writing you a hurried note. I will think much about when it will be best for the visit [you plan] to make [to] the school. It does seem now that your suggestion is a good one, that of postponing it until later. I will see and write you again soon. One of the boys, the pale looking one, was sent out into the orchard to pick apples and the apples were good and he ate too many, and he has been troubled with his stomach some since, but is better. Emma tells me her head don't ache as much as it did. She is looking better, tell her mother, and so are all of the children. Tell the Indians this as from me. I will never deceive them about their children!!

The Agent has written me that the mother of the Indian boy Yal-no-shat "demands" that her boy must be returned to her at once and writes me to return him without delay. But I had your letter stating quite a number of facts in the case, so I wrote the agent that I was maturing places for having some of you come: that of course it would not do to send the boy back alone, that if he would pacify the mother for a few days I was certain that it would be all right, and there, of course, the matter must rest until the father is consulted, and the Indians decide. I will never move in such matters without deliberation and ample consultation!!

I did not expect to write you but a short note, and here is quite a letter & there is much more I would like to write about but you know how full I am of care with so large, and such a delicate family to guard & provide for & handle.

I am glad you wrote me fully what the Indians say, & how they feel. Let us trust more to GOD and He will, when we do our part, give us great victory as He has ever done of old.

Your friend.
Capt. Wilkinson 45

Education and allotment fit hand-in-glove for assimilationists. In schools, Indians acquired at least a basic knowledge of how to manage a small farm, from caring for equipment and livestock to knowing when to plant and harvest. Literacy enabled returning students to manage their affairs without being taken advantage of by unscrupulous outsiders.

December 15, 1881

To Mrs. Elizabeth Hazard
15 Kay St. Newport R. I.
Dear Madam:

Yesterdays mail brought your great favor. The five hundred dollars shall be used as you direct. There are now waiting two Umatilla girls. Your gift places it beyond any doubt their coming. I speak of the Umatilla Indians because just now, they are the least unfitted for the breaking up of their Reservation. To-days Washington dispatches makes public the fact that a bill has been introduced in Congress to break up their reservation, and although in the near future such actions under proper guarding, may be best, generally, for the Indians, giving them land in severalty, still these Umatillas are in the very worst possible condition.
for such a great change. For twenty years they have been under the Catholic Church, and while Romanism has done better for some other Indians, on this Coast, these Umatillas have been plunged into darkest night—so your gift is a great boon to them & they shall have its fullest benefit.

From the very start of this school, first, last, and all the time, in counsel with the Indians, I have insisted that they must educate their women, and that unless they would give me girls I would take no boys.

Captain Wilkinson.46

The tone of this letter suggests that Chief Lot questioned Wilkinson's explanation of his daughter's death. Wilkinson also mentions Nelson Miles, who was O.O. Howard's successor as commanding general of the Department of the Columbia. A supporter of off-reservation education, Miles commented in the January 13, 1886, Morning Oregonian:

"The reservation system has outlived its usefulness. The various reservations, with a few exceptions, have become social sore spots. They are breeding grounds for a mongrel race and a refuge for outlaws and indolents. Such are the conditions and influences of reservation life that the Indian, instead of being bettered, is positively degraded by them. He is made the victim of his own worst passions and is losing even his most hopeful characteristic, the love of independence."

To/Chief Lott and his wife:

My Friends:

I commenced a letter to you the other day but some important event called me away so that I could not finish it, and now to day I am going to write you a little letter. I am very very busy with my school. I have 87 children and they need a great deal of care, and by looking after them, trying to keep them well[,] getting the things they need, it quite keeps me busy so all the parents and friends of the Indians must remember that if I don't write to them I am doing something better for them when I am trying each day to do those things for their children that will keep them healthy, keep them at work, and study, so that by & by they can come home to be strong to lead & teach their people.

I want to tell you that Oliver is doing very well. One thing is very good about him, he is very kind to the little boys, they seem to like him very much. This is a good sign when any stronger man is a friend to the weaker and helpless, such men always do much good among any people, and I am very glad to say this about Oliver, as by & by you will want him to help you both should you live to be old people. Then besides Oliver must prepare himself to take care of his people.

And I want to say also some good words for the other boys and girls. —Charley Abraham is one of the best young men in this school, he studies hard, he works hard, and in all he does & says he is trying to fit himself for usefulness among his people; his teachers think a great deal of him. He works well at the blacksmith trade, and could do many useful things now for you all if he should come home tomorrow. All the other boys try to do as they are told and are learning pretty fast. They all seem to realize that they have hard work before them. I tell them their people are very poor, that they have no good houses, that they will have to work hard & long before they see their own dear people comfortable. I am
HOUSEKEEPING. Wilkinson hoped to prepare young women to be wives and mothers living on small farms on local reservations, so he had them learn sewing, ironing, sweeping, washing, and cooking. He refused to enroll boys except when accompanied by a similar number of girls.

trying to get them to understand that they can never do their people good until, they learn not only to build houses, learn to be blacksmiths and shoemakers, but that they must learn about GOD and His Holy Word, and then, surely, by & by, they will be able to really help their people.

The girls are all doing first rate. You would be very glad in your hearts if you could see them—Yesterday I had another picture taken of the girls & boys who came last, and when they send me back some from Portland, I will send you one, and I want you to show it to all your people that they may be very glad too!

And now my dear friends you must not mourn for your dear little girl. You know how I told you how my wife had her taken to my own house, and you remember how much my daughter Eva, who came with me after the children[ , ] thought of her, she was with her all the time when she was very sick, and they had two doctors and they did all they could to save her life but GOD, for some reason, that you will know some time, took her home to Himself. I do hope next summer you may come to see where she is buried; the children will keep her grave looking nicely. You must not feel sadly about her death, I mean so sadly that you cannot be cheerful and help your people. I am telling the children that now they not only have their own, but Matties work to do besides, [so] they will have to work all the harder, and you must be happy in your other children. You know that I have always tried to give you the very best advice I could, and this is good advice. I am trying to push Oliver along so that he can learn how to write himself to you and all his people.

Oliver & Charley Abraham, will make good leaders for their people, if GOD spares their lives.
You know there is no place on Earth where we can put our children where death can not find them, and just stop and think that there has only been one death in this school since it was started two years ago; and you know your dear little girl was not well when she came, and when you think about all the rest of the children that are growing strong, very fast, and learning very fast, you must remember and be thankful to GOD that He put it into your heart first to advise your people to send their children—

The snow is deep in your country. The wind blows cold, but you must remember that by & by the Spring will come, and the warm sun, and the birds, and the flowers, and the grain, and the fruit, so you must learn to be patient, until GOD makes the Earth new again, and fresh and warm.

General Miles who is the General in Command is coming to see the school, and when he does I will keep my promise and tell him about you and Sam [Andrews] and Abraham Oh-Ma-Melcau—and Cornelius & Three Mountain William and all the rest of your good people. There this has grown out of a little into a big letter.

I am always very glad to get a letter from you.

Remember me very kindly to all the Indians, and to Guy Haines and his good daughter.

Your friend,

Capt. Wilkinson.47

In addition to Martha, the Lot family suffered the loss of at least two other children. Oliver Lot reveals in this letter that his brother has died on the Spokane Reservation, and we learn that his cousin has died as well.

February 28th, [1881]

To/
Chief Lott,

My Friend:

Oliver [Lot] & Charley Abraham are in my home this evening and they want me to write a little to you, and to all their people at home. The letter that you wrote & Abraham & Sam Andrews & Samuel wrote came safely with the $1.75 for Oliver. You see I am talking a little myself first. I will try and see how I can help you best to get Guy Haines to be your farmer. I wish it might [happen], for he could do them a great deal of good, but I fear they will think at the [Indian] Department that the farmer at Colville ought to help you, but I will tell the Indian Commissioner that you are far way from the Agency at Colville, and that it is impossible for the agent to help you as he could if you were nearer to him. I am very glad you are doing what you can to provide instruction for your people on Sunday: You do right when you help them, for by helping them GOD blesses you, as He does all who try to help others; and your wife too must think about the women of your tribe, and help them, and so her heart will be made glad by the Holy Spirit. It is a dreadful thing to have the young men get to gambling & drinking. You must talk against them going into the towns; bad white men will sell them whiskey, and make them drunk no matter how much trouble it makes [for] the Indians; besides when the young men come back from this school, they will
want some help; just think how long & hard they will have to work on these young men to get them back, and many of them will be lost, so you must do all you can to prevent your young men from getting poisoned!!

Now I will ask Oliver to say something. Oliver says: “I thank you for the money you sent me. My dear father, I love you very much. I know you feel very sorry for your little girl, and your nephew, and I am thinking about you, and that I am just beginning to get the right way in my heart; and now I tell you my mother you must not make too long cry for your little girl, and your nephew—You must not have too much sorrow in your heart. I get sorry for my sister, and then in a few days make my heart good, and the right way teaches me that she is now better off with GOD, and out of all her sickness, and trouble, and this makes my heart good and happy: Yes I hear that my brother is dead, and it makes my heart sorry, and I am sorry for you too, because you are getting old now and [there is] nobody to help you at your work; when I came away [to this school] I know he would help you, and all the time I am here I think that he help you, and now that he is dead, and you are getting old, and cant work so hard, it makes me sorry for you. This is all I say to you my father. Now my mother I love my little sister, and my brother very much. I want you to take good care of them. I want them to learn to do right. Mother I am very well. I am learning now how to know something. I love this school very much, very nice. We all very well in this school, boys and girls: Your children all very well, and getting along nicely. They are learning about GODs word, and now I hear that you have Church every Sunday, and I am very glad, and I tell you, try hard to be good all the time. GOD help you. I try hard at this school to do right, and when I come back to my people I will help them to do right, and so I am glad you have Church every Sunday, and when I come back I will try to teach my people. I am very glad to hear about Coo-Yaa, hope he will do well. We all very glad about our people. You know me, I love you all. This is all I want to say this time.”

Charley Abraham says: , “Now Lott and Abraham and Sam, I want to say something to you. I am very glad you have Church every Sunday—You stop drinking whiskey, stop gambling, and I tell you try hard to be good, and I try hard in this school to be good for you & our people. We have learned GODs word, learn to do right, learn how to make something.

We [are] all very well in this school except Garfield Hayes, he is a little sick, he is getting better now—Well Abraham, I am very glad you come to see me, and their children, & this school, and I am very glad if Capt. Wilkinson can take my little sister in this school, because I love this school very much, and I want my sister to learn to be good—Thats all this time.”

And now both Oliver & Charley have sent you many words. Oliver is anxious about his father and says that if he understood English better he would like to come [home] right away to help his father.

I think Lott, you had better write to him and tell him he must be contented until he has learned more about the white man's way and about GOD's Word, so that when he does come back he can be of much service to his people; write him a kind and encouraging letter that will make him contented, and his heart happy.

Your friend,
Captain Wilkinson.
William Chinook Parker was the author of this letter. He died in 1890 on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. His remarks suggest the range of response that assimilative policies and education generated among Indians.

Warm Springs Agency,
March 7, 1882

Win-ap-snoot—

My Dear Friend

I will tell you some words. You are related to my family by the old time folks, and I often think of you, as a relative, but I have no time to go and see you. I was down to Forest Grove last fall to see our children at the school there. I had one child there. She used to go to school here most every day. Some how rather she could not learn fast here. Why was it? because there was only one teacher here and when the teacher would go to his dinner and turn the scholars out, they would talk their own language, and the same way, when they went home at night—Captain Wilkinson wanted children and built a school house, and I was very glad. When he came here he asked for our children and I let him have my only child. After she had been there a little more than a year I went to see her, saw there your daughter and grand child and some others of your people. I saw those who were taken there first, and they seemed just like the white children you see among the whites, they appeared just the same. The boys I saw working at carpentering blacksmithing shoemaking &c. and the girls, dress making cooking &c busy all the time. You know it is hard for strangers to get along together and just so it is with us, for if we try to follow our own old ways we will always be opposed to the white mans ways, and seem as enemies to them. Our nature is very curious; our nature, so different from white mans, always painting, war dancing, and wild, and white men cannot understand us.— We had better give up our way and turn to the white mans ways. Live on farms, raise horses, cattle, sheep, hogs and grain, and when Sunday comes leave off your work and go to meeting and not run horses and work on that day. I saw your children and they were doing very well. They had plenty to eat & to clothe them, and seemed happy. When a common man says anything we are not apt to pay much attention to it. But for all that I will say a few words to your Agent. The Government has spent a good deal of money for us, but we have a long ways to go yet to catch up with the white man. We need more help in our school. Here we have an Indian woman as matron. I think we would get along faster if we had a white woman. [Warm Springs Indian agent] Captain [John] Smith wants to have the Indians do all they can and it is well enough to put them in many places, but I think that here, and at your agency if you have Indian employes, you will learn to talk and work like white men much faster—if you have white employes.

Now my friend Win-ap-snoot, I never know how you stand towards christ. I wish you would tell me. Here, we many of us belong to the church. Over 100 have professed religion, and are trying to live good lives. I try to live near christ every day, and I dare not do wrong for I know Gods eyes are upon me. When you get this letter answer me back. Let me know how you feel towards christ.]

Your Friend
Billy Chinook
When Wilkinson wrote the following letter, five months had elapsed since the death of Martha Lot. During that time, Forest Grove witnessed an increase in both disease and mortality. Julia Taylor and Mary Lyal from the Puyallup Reservation probably suffered from trachoma, a chronic, contagious viral disease that thrives in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions and produces bumps or nodules on the inner eyelid. The rubbing of the nodules on the cornea can cause irritation, pain, discharge, light sensitivity, impaired vision, and even blindness.

March 9th 1882

To/
Dick Lyal,
My Friend:

Your letter asking me to send Mary home, or to send you money to come and see her was received last week, but I have been absent and could not answer you. You tell me you are glad I keep my promise, and send Julia Taylor home; no, I did not promise to send Julia home, as I did, for how could I know that she was going to have sore eyes so long? Julia has had very sore eyes nearly all winter, both of them were sore. Mary has had her eyes sore but very little, and only one of them hurting her much, now her eye is nearly well. It will not be best to have Mary come home now, and I am not breaking any promise when I say so. You remember that when the school first started some of the Indians came here from Puyallup, and the Government paid their expenses because it was best to have you all know about the school, so you could see with their eyes, & hear with their ears, all about the school; that I promised, and did I not keep my promise? Then I told you that the Rail Road Company, no doubt, would give the Indians passes from Tacoma to Kalama, and several Indians have got passes—[Puyallup chief] Tom Lane only a little while ago. Now I wish I had money to send you—but you must believe me when I tell you that the Government does not give me any that I can use in this way, else I would do so—and I am too poor to send any myself. No doubt like Tom Lane you can get a pass, and then he can tell you how much it cost him to get here, & back to Kalama. I have not given any Indians any money the way you ask for it, so you must not let your heart feel disappointed, or sorry.

And then you must not forget how GOD has kept Mary strong, and that she is well, while so many children have sickness and died since she came here; besides it would have cost a white man just about nine hundred dollars; think how much that is! to have sent a child to school as Mary has been sent. Her clothes are clean & warm; her food is plenty and good; her bed is clean and comfortable; her teachers are kind and teach her her lessons well; her Matron is helping her to know how to take care of her room, and her clothes and how to keep clean and nice: Ah, Dick Lyal you ought, and all the Indians ought to thank GOD for what He has done for you in giving you such a school for your children. I wish you would read this letter to your good wife, and the other Indians, and I hope you will soon get a pass and what money you need, and come and visit Mary who loves you so much, and when you come I will see that you are well taken care of while you stay. I am in a great hurry or I would write you a longer letter, for I like to talk for the good of my Indian friends—

Your friend
Capt. Wilkinson.
Jennie M. Fletcher was a thirteen-year-old member of the Snohomish tribe enrolled in the Puyallup boarding school. In this letter, Wilkinson acknowledges taking her to Forest Grove (with the consent of agent Robert Milroy) without parental knowledge or approval. Such recklessness elicited claims of "abduction" by Indian families and drew the ire of non-Indians such as Myron Eells. Fletcher remained in school and was a member of Forest Grove's first graduating class in 1885. She then joined the faculty as a music teacher. Her brothers, David and William, also enrolled and graduated.

April 8th 188[2]

To/
Wm C. Fletcher
Port Blakely, W. T.

Dear Sir:

I am just returned from the Puyallup Reservation school. A rich and kind lady in the East had sent me some money [and] with it I was able to bring from that school five girls, yours with them. General Milroy U.S. Indian agent and the teachers of the school thought it was an opportunity your child might never have again and urged me to take her with the understanding that if you and your Wife did not choose to have her remain I was to send her back. This school is entirely among the whites; the boys and girls have the best of influences, and far superior advantages to a reservation school being away from so many, as you must know[,] contaminating influences, specially are the girls benefited by their special training. Your daughter was anxious to come and I could not deprive her of very likely the only opportunity she might ever have. The school is specially to train teachers for work among the Indians. Out of books the girls are trained in housekeeping and sewing. We are near (a few rods) Pacific University, one of the best Educational Institutions on this coast; of course it is an excellent opportunity for the children of this school to meet, and be under the influences of those who attend, and instruct in an Institution of this character. If I could have visited to communicate with you, and not lose for your daughter the opportunity of coming, I would have done so. There are thirteen girls here from Puyallup, counting your daughter, so you see it is very [much] like her being at Puyallup without many of the disadvantages. Jenny said you told her she might go to school where she wanted to, she is now in my office, and I have said that next year, if the Government will make the appropriation larger, I will take at least one of her brothers. She says she would like to have David come. I know you would be very glad did I have time to write you fully of this school (or could you see it) that Jennie is here— She seemed so bright and intelligent that I felt at once interested to have her where she might have the best opportunities.

One of the best girls here is an Aunt to Jennie—her name is Annie Porter, a daughter of your wifes half sister as I understand it and with all the other girls from Puyallup Jennie will be happy and contented.

It will be well for you to write as soon as possible. Jennie will be anxious to hear from you, and will feel better when she understands your mind in the matter— Meanwhile she will have the best of care, and will keep up her study and her work.

M.C. Wilkinson, U.S. Army,
In charge of school.51

COLLINS, The Broken Crucible of Assimilation 495
Families made many appeals to visit Forest Grove, but the federal government failed to appropriate funds and, as Wilkinson admitted, he hoped to limit familial contact.

April 8th [188]2

To/
General J. W Sprague, Supt &c.

Dear General:

I do wish that Chief Lott, with his interpreter “Sam” might have a pass to come & see their children here. I have your telegram from Chenney with reference to transportation for them; being absent my clerk wrote instead of telegraphing you; tried to see you at Tacoma when I might explain. I know how much you will dread to open the “pass” question with Upper Country, but for the Chief & his interpreter the general character of the question may not be given; besides, I am doubly careful and concerned for the few visitations made here by the Indians during the years their children are in school the better.

If you will send me a pass for Chief Lott and Sam, Interpreter for Chief Lott, I will ask Mr. [C.H.] Prescott [Manager of the Oregon Railway & Navigation Company] for a like favor of these Indians.

With some money given by an Eastern lady I brought from Puyallup five promising girls this week.

Information from Washington points to substantial help for this school; am trying to give these boys and girls lessons in hard sense, and work, and I never have for one moment forgotten, that its a lift against the ages, but we must retain faith in GOD, and His power to help in such a work, or lose the needed strength. The Anglo-Saxon not many hundred years ago turned on and ate each other; why cant we of the 19th century, with all our helps lift this race, who, to say the least, are not eating each other.

Respectfully and very sincerely yours,
M.C. Wilkinson, U.S.A.
In chg of school.

April 26th [188]2

To/
Chief Lott.
Care of Guy Haines, Esq. Walkers Prairie W T.

Enclosed you will find passes. Mr. Haines, your good friend, will explain how you are to use them. The children will all be very glad to see you. Pas-cah, the young man whom I named George Dorn has had much sickness lately from scrofula, the Doctor thinks that it will be best for me to send him back with you. We will see. [George] Braj Secup has had some of the same trouble but is better.

You will remember that Pas-cah's trouble comes from his blood, not anything he has grew into here.

I think it will be well for you to come as soon as you can leave your work. You ought not start without a little money. Each of you. You will not want much. There is no way the government can pay any of your expenses—but now

A part of the process of constructing a new identity for Indians involved assigning them Americanized names.
"THE WAY INDIAN BOYS BUILD, make Bedsteads, Beds, and keep their Sleeping rooms at Indian Training School, Forest Grove, Oregon," reads the caption to this photograph. Military-style uniforms hang neatly in closets, and everything appears in order in this immaculately kept, if somewhat sterile, community dormitory room.

that you have passes you can come. I do hope your people are getting in some good crops, and when you come away: You need not be gone from there long. Your friend, Capt. Wilkinson.53

This letter refers to the enrollment of Jennie Fletcher, whose parents contacted an attorney to investigate Wilkinson’s actions.

May 8th, [188]2

To/
Mr. Yoder, Esq.
New Tacoma, W. T.
Sir: Yours of the 29th Apr[i] is before me.
I have only as [a] reply to say that you have had grossly false information with reference to the subject matter of your information. The Indian girl came away from the Puyallup school freely voluntarily and with her own consent of these facts. You can convince yourself by inquiry of the teachers at said school. The girl came with six others. To kidnap children and bring them to this school is not the manner in which Indian youth are obtained for this school; further the girl could not be coaxed away from the school, and you certainly may rest assured she shall not be forced away.

Collins, The Broken Crucible of Assimilation
I can not believe you would fool her Father out of a fee by getting him to go to the law. Are you familiar with 2111 Revised Statutes U.S.?

You see this is the second time that somebody in New Tacoma has undertaken to greatly misrepresent myself in connection with the visits I have made for Puyallup children. My judgement is that it is about time intelligent people came to understand the spirit & aim of the government in establishing & conducting this school. There is not a child here but who came gladly.

Yours &c

M.C. Wilkinson

Carlisle Indian School became famous for its "outing" system in which students were employed outside the school for part of the day and during summer vacations. Students were also placed in the homes of townspeople for whom they worked for their room and board. An outing program was never fully developed at Forest Grove, partly because of the more negative perception of Indians in the West.

June 10th 188[2]

To/
Jay Francis, Esq.
Portland Or.

Sir:

It certainly must have been a mistake on the part of somebody who gave you the impression that the Government was educating Indian girls here as servants. Their own people need them far more than can any body else, besides, one of the great reasons urged by their people against their coming was that they had been told I intended to make servants of them, so you can readily see how it would embarrass the work should some one desire [them] to go out to service—They are to be leaders [and] teachers for their people.

You see I answerd you quite at length though ________ [pressed] for time, because I do not wish you, or any one else, to think that I am not in favor of their working & hard too, as they do, but to allow the girls to go out to service is quite out of the question; yet I can think of what great benefit it would be to them if
they could have instruction, if only for a limited time, in such homes as I am convinced yours must be.

Yours truly,
M.C. Wilkinson.55

Anticipating the General Allotment Act of 1887 — or the Dawes Act — Wilkinson placed heavy emphasis on husbandry. The act called for subdividing reservation lands into individual parcels and returning excess lands to the public domain. The paucity of available farmland at Forest Grove factored in the decision to move the school to Salem.

June 12th [1881]2

To/
Umatilla Chief Winnapsnoot,
My Friend:

I want to write you a few words to night, it is ten oclock. I had just come to my home from my school and am tired but I have some words in my heart I want you to know and I shall be very busy tomorrow & may not have time in several days to write you. I want you to know, and all your people [to know] how fast your children in this school are learning; [I] want you and them to know how willing they all seem to be to learn out of books, and to do the work they are asked to do. The farmer says that Charley Wilhelm, the boy who was skin and poor when he first came but the one that is now growing fat & strong, a Umatilla boy—is the best boy he has. I am thinking for your boys that if they learn to farm it will be good, of course by & by it will be good for some of them to learn trades, but your Reservation may soon have to be cultivated and you [will] want many of your young men to know how to do this in order that they may hold land. Now you see how one of the Umatilla boys is leading all the rest in work upon the farm; this ought to cheer all of your hearts that your boys are doing so well. I need not tell you about Emma Winnum and the girls. You have letters from Emma and she tells you about all the rest. But especially you should be thankful to GOD that He has given you such a good daughter, one who loves you & her mother very much one who loves her people so much and is trying to study hard, learn out of books, learn how to keep house, learn how to take care of little girls so that she may come home to lead her poor blind and deaf people away from the bad influences of bad white people, and teach her people especially out of GODs Holy Word.

You know how much GOD has been pleased to bless her letters to her people, how much more GOD will bless her words when she comes home. You must all pray that her life may be spared. I am glad to tell you that her health is better than it used to be. She does not have her hard head aches so much; her eyes have been sore but they are getting well. Now this is all of my letter now. Next year the government is going to have more children here[;] perhaps more can come from Umatilla. I expect to come up to The Dalles pretty soon, and then may come on to Pendleton to see you all again. I will let you know. But I do not forget your promise to come and visit this school some time. Good night.

Your friend
Captain Wilkinson
(over)
But I must say a few words more about what this school has done for the Indians all over the whole Country. Mr. [Henry Winslow] Corbett of Portland, who once was in Washington helping to make our laws, said, the other day to the Indian boys and girls, that it was hard for him, and some others, to tell which of the two schools here they thought the most of, the one for white young men & women, which had been started for more than thirty years, or the one for the Indians which had only been started a little over two years. He told the boys to work & study hard & by & by they could have their land, just like white men, vote, & when they proved that they were willing to grow up like the good white men, they too could help make the laws. I send you a paper with some pictures of the school; this paper goes all over our land & across the great waters and will help in making many more friends for the Indians who want to live right get an education and come to be like good white men who study GODs word & try to do as it teaches.

Your friend.
Captain Wilkinson.⁵⁶

As the death toll mounted, Wilkinson increasingly allowed students in failing health to return home in an effort to protect the school's image.

June 22nd [1882]

To/ Dick Lyal:

Your letter asking me to let Mary come home [on] the 4th is recd. Mary has been sick. She has had considerable trouble with one of her eyes, but she is much better. She has one other trouble so the Doctor tells me that is common to young girls. I tell you so that you & her mother can understand why it is best for her now, and for the next two weeks to have the best of care. If the Doctor says that it is safe for her to come home by the 4th of July, and if I can come as I am now thinking that I may, I will bring Mary with me; if however she is not in such condition as to make the journey safe why [then I know] you do not want her to run any chances of injury. Now you must not think that she is very sick because she is not, but she is in such condition that it will not do for her to be exposed. Now if she cant come by the 4th just as soon after as it is safe for her and we can find some body to send her with she shall come. So you must be contented for the present in thinking that just as soon as it is possible she shall come home. But you, must, and all the other Indians who have children here must remember that it is only because she has been sick &c. [that] coming home will do her much good that she comes; for you see, just as soon as the other Indians hear that I am going to let her come they will ask for their children. Now if I should let many of them do so you will see how it would not do.

I have given my promise to let her come just as soon as she is well enough and I can get her put in good care, for the journey. You can get the pass and send the money. You had better get the pass for sixty (60) days on account of her health.

Your friend,
Captain Wilkinson.⁵⁷

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General William T. Sherman thought little of military officers holding supervisory positions in Indian schools. According to Wilkinson, Sherman believed it was the type of work that "any old granny could do." Wilkinson, when confronted with the prospect of returning to his regiment, denounced garrison duty as a "living death."

Forest Grove Or July 20th [1882]
Via Cornelius
To Secretary Interior,
Washington D. C.

General Sherman offered to place me on retired list ten years ago. Order me [to] Washington [on] business connected with [the] school, and I will retire if necessary to hold this work.

Wilkinson

Although male and female students were segregated at Forest Grove, marriage was sanctioned as a method of breaking down tribal distinctions. For example, the April 8, 1883, Morning Oregonian reported that four students had married, a Puyallup and a Chehalis and a Puyallup and an Alaska Native.

July 31st 188[2]

To/
Mrs. S. Dickinson
Chilicoat, Alaska:

[II] [h]ave only time to say that Sarah is doing very well indeed. She is growing more thoughtful, more energetic. Mrs. Wilkinson had her with us some little time before Mrs. W— went East. There is a prospect that I may be ordered to my Regiment, have been away several years, and my Department objects to a longer detail here. Still I may be able to remain another year. The rule in the Carlisle Pa. and the Hampton, Va. Indian training schools, is that children can remain three years; the Alaska children have been here not quite as you know 1 1/2 years, perhaps it may be best for Sarah to come home after two years here, though of course a longer time would be better for her. Both Mrs. Wilkinson & myself will only be too glad to help Sarah all we can. Indeed for your encouragement I may say that she had done far better than I thought she could. I believe she is trying to be a prudent Christian girl. She is praying earnestly for her people, and trying to get ready to come back to lead them into Civilization. I am greatly encouraged about her. My present good Matron says of her that she does better work generally

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in carrying out the rules of the school than any other girl. I found that she was interested in a young man, a half breed, from [the] Puyallup Reservation [on] Puget Sound, and I at once, brought her under severe discipline, and her mind soon came back to its good sense—You have doubtless been told how strictly the girls are kept, and above everything else, first and last and all the time they are guarded—upon this alone of course, depends the usefulness of this school, and knowing it I have made the rules very strict. So you may give yourself no uneasiness—Should I have to go to my Company—I am an officer in the U.S. Army, Mrs. Wilkinson will most likely be appointed here at least for a time as Principal, and will have special charge so you may still rest assured, should I leave that Sarah will be safe.

Yours very truly,

M.C. Wilkinson.

In this letter to Yakama agent James H. Wilbur, Wilkinson explains in detail what he considered to be the advantages of off-reservation boarding-school education. One wonders if Wilbur, who had devoted a significant part of his life to on-reservation education, took issue with some of Wilkinson's assertions. At any rate, Wilbur declined to send the forty students requested.

August 22nd [1882]

To/
Rev. J. H. Wilbur
U.S. Indian Ag[en]t &c &c

Dear Father Wilbur:

... I have a matter of no small importance to confer with you about. There has been an appropriation of $30,000 made for this school for this fiscal year, but 147 children must be here or it is not available. $200 per capita is the amt. allowed with but $500 for transportation. I can not bring the children from far off points you see.

General Milroy visited this school a few days since; he gave, as you remember, the first children to the school. He is strongly in favor of my getting the number required viz. forty from Yakima. But I have thought like this, that you would be glad to have that number of children, those whom you have watched over, and are so deeply interested in [to] have the singular advantage of this school [or] three years. In these years they could learn much [that] they can not in a much longer time, if at all, on the reservation, by reason of association—specially so with reference to English speaking, and an entire separation of the sexes. They would be here where you could visit them, watching over their character building. Mrs. Wilbur too could see how much faster, how much more thoroughly can the principles of womanhood be inculcated, away from the blighting association of much of the influence that comes to the girls in their home? influences. It would be like the sending away of our own Children for a time for superior advantage.

It does seem to me that you have a good opportunity to greatly help your people. You know better than Gen. Milroy what children ought to come. They should be the brightest, the best; the children who will command some family influence when they return. I had about made up my mind to come without writing, having so much faith, that under the circumstances, your judgement
would be my own, and the children would be sent without doubt. But after the visit of Gen. Milroy [I] concluded it best to write. Have (am) enlarging my buildings, and will have better advantages than when you were here.

You know I have been twice to Yakima—each time urged to make the visit by Sec. Schurz. It did not seem wise for you to send children. I am sorry now that you did not. The only Piute boy I have is certainly making rapid progress. In English speaking he quite excels many & when he came he could not speak it at all. Of course you know how much faster many things can be taken in here, so I need not enlarge. The opportunity is given you now to put in special training twenty girls and twenty boys. I believe those children who are leaving home to do their people most good from here are the oldest ones! So those over twelve, even some who are sixteen should have the preference for this higher training. Let me urge you to look at this matter carefully. The appropriation is being lost, now, to the Indians, and I have much reason to haste in gathering them. Mrs. Wilkinson has been appointed as Principal of the school so that if Gen. Sherman & the Sec. of War shall insist on my leaving to my Regiment [on] the 15th of October next[,] the school will not be changed in its plans during the time I may have to be away from it. For your children to see and be with the whites continuously; in the Sunday School to meet with specially good workers; to always step out of the school room, or work shop, or homes, into an atmosphere of higher civilization, always English speaking, will soak into them an Education in itself not to be calculated!

I know how you have felt with reference to this same work to be done on the reservation, but its [here] the kind that cant be had there, for the years in question, that I am pleading [for] now. Would it be well for me to bring my Piute boy? he would like very much to come. My transportation funds are so small however that I may not be able to do so.

It would be well if two representation men could be selected to come and take back to their people the surroundings in which their children are.

With kindest regards to Mrs. Wilbur, and your good workers, I am as ever,
Yours very truly,
M.C. Wilkinson

P.S.
May I hear from you at the earliest possible day?
MCW60

This letter shows Wilkinson finalizing his departure from the superintendency of the Forest Grove school.

October 22d [188]2

To/
Chief Lott:

The Chief of the Army says I must go to my Company. You know I belong to the Army, and must obey orders, but I hope to be able to come back to this school in a few months. I have many good friends who will try to have this so. Mrs. Wilkinson who has helped me so much, and who took such good care of your little daughter, and who takes such good care of all the children has been appointed to take charge of the school, so you and all of the Indians can know that my going away does not change the school.
I will try to write to you soon from Missoula Montana, where I am going. You must not feel discontented about your children; they are all well [and] are doing well in their study and work. Of course they play some which is right. I hope to see you all before a very long time. You must try and get ready so that when your children come back they can build some houses and make you & themselves comfortable. Oliver is learning fast to build and Charley Abraham will know how to do much work.

Your friend,
Captain Wilkinson.

Seemingly oblivious to the shortcomings of the program he had helped establish, Wilkinson continued to entertain notions of returning to the field of Indian education, even after two years of being away from Forest Grove.

Fort Missoula, M. T.
November 5th 1884.

To/
Doctor Wm McKay
Pendleton, Or.

Dear Doctor McKay:

I am coming back to Oregon for a short visit; it seems a little selfish for me to do so without seeing some of the Umatilla Indians and it occurs to me this evening that I had best write asking you about it. Can I do the Indians any real good by coming? I do not care to do so just to see their new church and their faces but if by meeting them somewhere, probably best in the new church, I may be able to make my plans for doing so. I know how much Winum and his wife loved Emma, and my coming to see them & talk to them a little, best of all to pray with them may really help them. When you receive this, think it over carefully, and on my way down the river, [I] may be able to stop off at Umatilla and run up to see you all.

You know I can never lose my interest in Indian Education; of the practical kind. Some of my good friends who are the good friends of this educational work, are hoping, so they say, to have me back again in the work of organization. My health is much better for my long rest. When you see Winum or his good wife please tell them that I would like very much to see them and will try to do so & Mrs. Wilkinson is still at Forest Grove where my son is in school; of course my journey home is to see my family. I shall bring my daughter back with me if my son is well enough to remain in school!

Very truly your friend,
M.C. Wilkinson.
U.S. Army.

The following is an undated statement attributed to Chief Lot. Other than his remarks in the Morning Oregonian, this is Chief Lot’s only known response to the events that unfolded at Forest Grove.

My father was Chief of all the Indians and he used to tell them what it was right to do. After his death my brother became Chief and he was a good Chief too. I
was bad ... When my brother died they wanted me to be Chief. But my heart was full of bad. I could not get good out of the bad. But [the federal government in] Washington wanted me to be Chief. Then I studied to be good. I was anxious to learn to read and to use pen and ink. I like my family to go along side of me, and I was anxious to have my people learn to read and write. The minister tells us God is up there. I hear it but it goes in the ear and out. I lose it. I look up into the sky and see nothing. Where is the road to see God Almighty? I look through something that the white man uses to see a long distance and I see nothing but blue. I look down and see only the ground. The minister takes the Bible and interpret what Jesus said, and that was to me a glass to see God. Then I worked harder than ever, and I wanted to see my children read and write before I died. That was my mind when General Howard saw me. He told me, “Washington wants you to send your children to a place towards where the sun goes down where they can go to school.” God knows I love my children. God knows what I wanted. Captain ... [Wilkinson] came the next year and asked if I could send some. The people were afraid, but I sent mine. The next year he wanted some more. I gave him a lot of boys and girls. They sent the sick back; the rest died down there. (Of twenty-one pupils sent, sixteen died.) I made up my mind that my people were right in being afraid to send the children away. Then I wanted a school house right by my house. I went to Washington and spoke only one thing: “I like a school house.” Two men then told [Chief] Moses, “Lot says he wants a school house; do you want a school house?” Moses answered, “No.” Then they asked [Chief] Tonaskit and again they used my name. “Lot says he wants a school house; do you want one?” “No, I sent my children to Catholic school.” Then they turned to me: “Why do you not send your children to Catholic school?” “I want an American and not an Italian to teach my children,” (answered Lot.) They said, “Lot you go home and in two months you will have a school house.” (That was in 1883.) It was three years that I was very anxious. They built one for Moses, and one for Tonaskit, but none for me. I hear that they looked at a place on the hill ten miles from my house. My people do not want to send their children so far away. If I had had white people’s children I would have put their bodies in a coffin and sent them home so that they could see them. I do not know who did it, but they treated my people as if they were dogs. My people are afraid. ... They should give me that school house. When they buried sixteen of our children they should pay by building a school.63

Notes

2. Monthly report for Forest Grove Indian School, September 1880, Roll #630, M234, RG 75, National Archives, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1881 [hereafter LRIA].
5. The characteristics of total institutions are discussed in Erving Goffman, Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1961), 1-123.


8. Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1903), 1037. Wilkinson’s military career is extensively documented in Roll #134, M1064, RG 94, National Archives, Letters Received by the Commission Branch of the Adjutant General’s Office, 1863-1870 [hereafter LRCBAGO].


10. Wilkinson to Howard, October 17, 1870, Box 47, Oliver Otis Howard Papers, Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.


12. Morning Oregonian (Portland), October 7, 1898.


14. J.D. Cox to C. Schurz, April 14, 1879, Roll #480, LRIA.

15. Utley, Battlefield and Classroom, 190.

16. Wilkinson to E.A. Hayt, April 8, 1879, Roll #483, LRIA.

17. Wilkinson to Hayt, April 20, 1880, Roll #630, LRIA.


19. Wilkinson to Pratt, November 24, 1879, Box 9, Folder 328, Pratt Papers.

20. Wilkinson to Hayt, October 22, 1879, Roll #628, LRIA.

21. Wilkinson to Hayt, January 9, 1880, and Wilkinson to R. E. Trowbridge, April 12, 1880, Roll #630, LRIA.

22. Robert Milroy strongly supported the off-reservation movement. See The Morning Star (Carlisle, Penn.), May 1886.

23. Statistics tabulated from Chemawa Indian School Index to Descriptive Statements of Students, 1890-1914, P2263 and Chemawa Register, 1880-1928, P2008, both RG 75, National Archives-Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle [NARA]. This article also draws on statistical data collected by Rick Read, former Pacific University archivist, which he graciously shared with the author.

24. Wilkinson, November 1880 monthly report, Forest Grove Indian School, Roll #630, LRIA.

25. Wilkinson’s meeting with Chief Lot was reported in Seattle Daily Intelligencer, July 17, 1881. Lot was head chief of the Spokane Indian Tribe in eastern Washington state, and his obituary appears in the Spokane Review (Spokane, Washington), April 10, 1902. Upon his father’s death, Oliver Lot became head chief. Find his obituary in The Spokesman Review (Spokane, Washington), April 10, 1902. Wilkinson to Howard, October 17, 1870, Box 47, Oliver Otis Howard Papers, Special Collections, Bowdoin College Library, Brunswick, Maine.