

# Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School (MIIBS)

1893-1934



Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School Opening Day

June 30, 1893 – Courtesy of the Alice Littlefield Collection  
Ziibiwing Center Archives of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan

## Boarding School ERA

*“Kill the Indian, Save the Man” – Richard Pratt*

American Indian boarding schools were designed to destroy American Indian cultures, languages, and spirituality. Students were forced to accept white culture, the English language, and Christianity. The first, and most well-known of the schools, was the Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School. The school was established in 1879 by an Army officer named Richard Pratt, and was located in an abandoned Army post in Pennsylvania.

Pratt conducted a social experiment with Apache prisoners of war. The captives were shackled and sent by train to a camp in Florida thousands of miles from their home. He cut the men's long hair, put them in uniforms, forced them to learn English, and subjected them to strict military protocols. During the course of their experiment, some of the men were severely traumatized by the experience and committed suicide. Most of the prisoners survived and learned the English customs and language. Using this social experiment as a model, Pratt went to Congress and requested funding for the similar education of all American Indians.

### The Pratt/Carlisle Model Sweeps across North America

By 1900, most American Indian children were taken from their families. They were transported by train and later by bus to American Indian Boarding Schools where they would be put into uniforms, have their hair cut, and be forced to act and speak like white people. Many spent their entire childhood in the American Indian Boarding School system without seeing their parents and families for many years.

Upon graduating, these young American Indians still retained certain aspects of their traditional culture yet acted, spoke, and thought like English-speaking, white Americans. They would often return to their families and communities feeling like outcasts and in most instances their families and communities treated them as such. No matter how much time, money, and effort was made to assimilate American Indians, white society still did not readily accept them. No longer finding an identity in either the white or tribal society, thousands of American Indian adolescents were thrust into an abyss of lost identity.

## Creation of MIIBS Committee

On April 24, 2011, via a land conveyance from the State of Michigan, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan (SCIT) acquired 8 acres of the former Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, including the Mission Creek Cemetery through a \$1 deed.

A Phase I Feasibility Study conducted by a working MIIBS group revealed that a majority of Tribal Community members agreed that the land and property needed to be restored.

In July of 2011, Tribal Council approved a motion to commence with a Phase II Feasibility Study. This phase encompassed the gathering of viewpoints from Tribal Community members, conducting property analyses, and developing a plan to transform the property to remember the children and reflect the historical significance. Methods used included hosting community events and forums, surveying Tribal membership, and summarizing these findings for presentation to the SCIT Tribal Council for consideration, resolution, and action. The MIIBS Committee was sanctioned by the SCIT Tribal Council in October of 2011 and is charged with continuing the feasibility study work.

## Commitment/Mission Statement

We are committed to sustaining the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan and our partners' efforts to transform, preserve, and finance the development of the Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School to become a place for healing, education, wellness, and empowerment to a local, national, and global level.

## Strategic Directions

- Research, Visioning, Planning & Prioritization
- Asset Preservation
- Facilitation, Participation through Cultural Reclamation
- MIIBS Project Staffing
- Obtain Funding
- Actualization & Manifestation of the Vision

*Meetings are held once a month  
at the Ziibiwing Center.*

**For more information,  
please contact:**

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**MIIBS**  
**Committee**