

Native American Schoolgirl Editors and the *Hallaquah*
Jacqueline Emery, Ph.D., English Department, SUNY Old Westbury
Historic Children's Voices Symposium, May 3, 2024
American Antiquarian Society

In December 1879, Ida Johnson (Wyandot?), Lula Walker (Wyandot), and Arizona Jackson (Wyandot) launched the first issue of the *Hallaquah* at the Seneca Indian School.¹ Consisting of four pages, with two columns on each page, the *Hallaquah* featured updates on Congressional appropriations and other news pertaining to the school and local Seneca and Wyandot tribes, letters from students, essays, editorials, and editorial commentary. The three young Native women editors founded and printed the small newspaper on a Daughaday model printing press. Over the course of its short run, lasting just under two years, the schoolgirl editors published ten issues and reached a circulation of nearly 400. This is notable considering that, unlike their male counterparts at other boarding schools who received formal training in printing, they were largely self-taught at setting type and writing copy. It is even more remarkable that the editors announced their intention to make the *Hallaquah* serve their own interests and those of local tribal communities and not strictly those of school authorities: "We desire and intend that the *Hallaquah* shall represent the spirit of our school and always speak in behalf of its interest," write Johnson, Walker, and Jackson. "Supported directly by the *Hallaquah* Society, it yet is intended to be a true exponent of the Seneca, Shawnee, and Wyandotte Industrial Boarding School, and a news letter to the neighboring people as well as for the pupils." Their intention to make the *Hallaquah* a community-building tool for Native Americans reflects a commitment to using their school newspaper in ways that school authorities did not anticipate.

One of the most distinctive features of the *Hallaquah* that makes it unique among boarding school newspapers is that its editors used the editorial *we* to create a collaborative space

and render visible the often-hidden editorial practices of newspaper making in the context of the boarding school. Employing the editorial *we* in their editorials enabled the young women to reflect, sometimes critically, on a boarding school education designed to train Native women to become domestics and housewives, not professional printers, writers, and editors.

The *Hallaquah* thus serves as an excellent case study for better understanding the gendered dimensions of editorial work and what that meant for young Native women in the context of the boarding school.

In the pages of the *Hallaquah* the schoolgirl editors assumed an editorial *we* similar to the sisterly editorial voice that Patricia Okker associates with women-edited periodicals in the nineteenth century. This voice, according to Okker, “is characterized by a relative informality and an assumed equal and personal relationship between editor and reader” (23). Like women editors who adopted a sisterly editorial voice in order to “present readers, writers, and editors as equally important participants in a periodical conversation” (Okker 31), the editors of the *Hallaquah* sought to establish an equal and personal relationship with their readers.

Significantly, the editorial voice in the *Hallaquah* is markedly different than the editorial voice we hear, for example, in one of the *Hallaquah*’s better-known contemporaries, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s *Indian Helper*. Okker’s discussion of the difference between nineteenth-century women’s periodicals that were edited by men and those that were edited by women is useful for understanding the difference between boarding school newspapers edited by students and those edited by school authorities. As Okker explains, in women’s periodicals that were edited by men, “the editorial voice reinforced the authority of men over women: men speak, women listen” (22). In the *Indian Helper*, white adults speak, Native American girls listen. For example, in the 2 October 1891 issue of the *Indian Helper*, the editorial voice of the

Man-on-the-band-stand, a white, male persona who claimed editorship of the newspaper, acts as a kind of cultural broker between his female students and their white counterparts, who are eager to know more about reservation life.² He emphasizes the superiority of Euro-American civilization through his references to a ‘dark’ Indian past and a ‘lighter’ present and future: “We feel proud because we have come out of the darkness of those days into the light of a better understanding of things, but we are not ashamed of a past we could not help.”

The voice we hear is not that of Native American girls but rather the voice of the Man-on-the-band-stand. His use of the editorial *we* creates a sense of cohesion between himself and his female students. By speaking for his students, he gives the impression that they share his worldview and eagerly accept his denigration of Native American cultural traditions. Furthermore, the title, “Not As Our Girls Are Now,” suggests that girls at Carlisle no longer wear moccasins and cook Indian food, as girls growing up on the reservations do. By insisting on the difference between Carlisle students and their female counterparts on the reservations, the Man-on-the-band-stand reaffirms the school’s promise to students that if they sever ties with their Indian pasts and transform themselves to be more like whites, they can enjoy the fruits of civilization: education, happiness, and freedom. The editorial *we* in the *Hallaquah*, however, challenges the notion that to speak English and be a boarding school student meant they were no longer Indian. When Johnson, Walker, and Jackson use the editorial *we*, they do so to create a collaborative and conversational space for themselves and their readers.

In their first editorial, they reveal their insecurities about being judged in this new public forum by fellow students, teachers, and members of the local community. Quoting a line originally published in Caleb Bingham’s *Columbian Orator* (1810), they write, “We pray you— ‘Don’t view us with a critic’s eye but pass our imperfections by.’” By asking their readers to

overlook their imperfections, their initial editorial resembles those by women editors who, especially in first issues, ask readers “for indulgence while the magazine finds it [sic] legs, as it were” (Harris xxxiv).

They strike a somewhat less apologetic tone in their February 1880 editorial, as they remind readers that they are new to newspaper making:

With the Matrons’ help we have set up all the type for this issue and we now hope to be able before long to do all the work ourselves. News-paper making isn’t play, and then it is not at all pleasant after we have done the best we can and the type are all distributed to find someone who tells us, ‘Why didn’t you do [sic] this way, or that way it would have been so much better.’

These early editorials lend insight into the schoolgirl editors’ attempts to write copy and set type without formal training and with limited help from their teacher. Their remark that “news-paper making isn’t play” suggests not only that they took their roles as printers and editors of the newspaper seriously but just as significantly that they wanted their work to be taken seriously by readers. Such appeals also suggest their awareness of and interest in engaging with nineteenth-century editorial conventions.

In “Our New Type,” which appeared on the cover of the March and April 1880 issue, the editors reported receiving a new supply of type, paper, and ink as well as a new Daughaday “No. 1 improved model hand press.” Thanking their “very kind friend” and benefactress Susan Longstreth of Philadelphia for these materials, they write: “Sometimes when we would have failed from the multiplied sources of discouragement incident to those who undertake to do something they know but little about, we are stimulated to renewed diligence in the effort, to use in printing our little paper, what has thus been so generously given us.” In “Double Number”

they explain that various delays “too tedious to mention” caused them to postpone the March issue until April, and they express disappointment with the issue and vow “we may never try it again.” They printed an impressive 300 copies of the double number, which consisted of eight pages with two columns each, twice the length of a regular issue.

Yet they repeatedly emphasize their disappointment with the results: “We would be willing to write a long apology for the imperfect printing of our paper if that would make it any better.” They also frequently apologize for delays, as they do in their editorial for the double number:

Our little “STAR” is still shining in its corner as bright as ever though it was a little late making its appearance before the public this month. The reason it is so late is that two of the Editors were absent; also we were late getting moved into our new Office; and now we are moved a little further from the Matron we will have more of the work to do ourselves, which of course will do us more good than harm: we are getting along so well without very much help this month that we expect to try to do all of the work alone for the next issue.

Their repeated emphasis on how hard they worked to perfect their craft without the influence of teachers reflects their growing confidence and pride in their accomplishments as editors and printers. Their editorials also reveal that collaboration does not always translate into sharing the labor of newspaper making. As they explain, the absence of two of the editors meant that one editor had to do the bulk of the work, resulting in a late issue.

Even as they gained more experience with newspaper making, they faced other challenges resulting from the demands of the domestic labor they were required to perform at the school. At the Seneca Indian School and similar boarding schools, where the aim of female

education was to train students to become housewives and domestic workers, young women were expected to cook, clean, wash laundry, sew, and nurse sick classmates and teachers. Within this context, editorials appealing to readers to forgive them for late issues resulting from their domestic duties along with their critical commentary, pose a challenge, however subtle, to a domestic education designed to train young Native women to become domestics and housewives.

Editorials like the one that appeared in the May 1880 issue of the *Hallaquah* provide insight into how the schoolgirl editors responded to the demands of the domestic labor they were required to perform and its impact on their newspaper making:

After this issue of the *Hallaquah*, there will be but one more number of this volume. We had thought that every number we had published, that the next one would be easier, but each time we find new difficulties to overcome and as two of the Editors are away this time, there is more work for one to do than usual, and that is somewhat mixed up with tonic powders, quinine, and about fifty girls to look after.

A note appearing below the editorial explains that Jackson was “again at her desk, after an absence of three weeks caused by sickness,” revealing that she assumed responsibility for finishing the issue while Johnson and Walker were away. Once again, we see Jackson picking up the slack, but what is notable in the editorial is that she offers a critical response to the domestic ideology of the boarding school where she and her female classmates were being trained, first and foremost, to become submissive domestics. Jackson resists, albeit subtly, the definitions imposed on her by the domestic ideology of the school. As we see in the editorial, Jackson defines her “work” primarily as her editorship of the *Hallaquah*, not her domestic tasks, and suggests that her editing is “somewhat mixed up with” her domestic labor. In this way, she

prioritizes her editorial work and downplays her domestic tasks—a move that enacts a challenge, however subtle, to the policies and practices of the boarding school designed to transform Native female students into housewives and housekeepers.

In their editorial commentary they also remark on their domestic training. In the February 1881 issue the editors write, “One of the large girls is staying out of school this week to help the seamstress and three are out helping the laundress. Next week will be the time for some of us to take their places.” Explaining the various domestic tasks they performed at the school, they continue: “We each have our different kinds of work, such as cooking, washing dishes, &c. Matron changes the detail every two weeks for such as that. But we have to stay out of school one week at a time to sew and wash, while our other work does not keep us out at all” (“Locals”). The schoolgirl editors point out that, unlike sewing and washing, their “other work” does not disrupt their schoolwork. Even though the passage suggests that their “other work” refers to domestic tasks like cooking and washing dishes, it is possible they could also mean their printing and editing of the *Hallaquah* and the experience of teaching themselves how to set type and write copy, among other skills. When read in this way, the passage might suggest that the schoolgirl editors viewed their domestic labor (or some forms of it) as more disruptive to their schooling (and likely less fulfilling) than their newspaper making. Such a reading opens up the possibility that the schoolgirl editors are not only offering their critical perspectives on their domestic training but that they are also combatting the underlying assumption that such training was befitting Native American female students who were believed to lack the intellectual capacity to learn and achieve academically and professionally.

As these editorials and commentary demonstrate, the editors confronted innumerable challenges in getting out each issue. Absences among the editorial staff due to illness were

common. The editors nursed their sick classmates and routinely assisted the laundress, seamstress, and cook. Other delays resulted from inadequate funding that plagued the newspaper and the school as a whole. Despite the various challenges they faced—from inadequate supplies to illness and even death among the editorial staff—and their frequent apologies for late issues and comments about the need for improvement, the editors produced what Native press historians Daniel F. Littlefield and James W. Parins aptly describe as a “remarkably professional” newspaper “when it is considered that the editors were nearly entirely self-taught” (144). Recovering the editorials and editorial commentary in the *Hallaquah* provides insight into how Johnson, Walker, and Jackson asserted their public authority as they negotiated their roles at the school and in the press. The *Hallaquah* and boarding school newspapers more broadly are an untapped resource for scholars working to recover early indigenous literary production and to complicate our understanding of editorial decision making in boarding school newspapers.

Works Cited

“Double Number.” *Hallaquah* Mar.-Apr. 1880: n. pag.

Editorial. *Hallaquah* Dec. 1879: n. pag.

Editorial. *Hallaquah* Feb. 1880: n. pag.

Editorial. *Hallaquah* Mar.-Apr. 1880: n. pag.

Editorial. *Hallaquah* May 1880: n. pag.

Enoch, Jessica. “Resisting the Script of Indian Education: Zitkala Ša and the Carlisle Indian School.” *College English* 65.2 (2002): 117-41. *JSTOR*.

Fear-Segal, Jacqueline. “Eyes in the Text: Marianna Burgess and *The Indian Helper*.” *Blue*

- Pencils and Hidden Hands: Women Editing Periodicals, 1830-1910*. Ed. Sharon M. Harris. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2004. 123-43.
- Harris, Sharon M. Introduction. *Blue Pencils and Hidden Hands: Women Editing Periodicals, 1830-1910*. Ed. Sharon M. Harris. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2004. xxv-xxxvi.
- Katanski, Amelia V. *Learning to Write "Indian": The Boarding-School Experience and American Indian Literature*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2005.
- Littlefield, Daniel F. Jr., and James W. Parins. *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals, 1826-1924*. Vol. 1. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984. Print. 3 vols.
- "Locals." *Hallaquah* Feb. 1881: n. pag.
- Marek, Jayne. "Women Editors and Little Magazines in the Harlem Renaissance." *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches*. Eds. Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible. New York: Routledge, 2016. 105-18.
- "Not as Our Girls Are Now." *Indian Helper* 2 Oct. 1891: n. pag.
- Okker, Patricia. *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century American Women Editors*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995.
- "Our New Type." *Hallaquah* Mar.-Apr. 1880: n. pag.

Notes

¹ The Seneca Indian School was founded in 1871 in Wyandotte, Oklahoma under the auspices of the Society of Friends. In 1876 the federal government began to assume a more active role in Indian education, and it oversaw all of the missionary schools in Indian Territory, including the Seneca Indian School.

² The Man-on-the-band-stand was a white, male persona who claimed editorship of the *Indian Helper*. Whereas some critics contend that the Man-on-the-band-stand was Pratt himself, others take a different position. Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Amelia Katanski argue convincingly that while the persona reflects Pratt's ideology, the voice belongs to a white woman named Marianna Burgess, who co-edited the *Indian Helper* and oversaw all the Carlisle Press publications. As Katanski explains, "Combining the beliefs of the school's founder with the voice of its press, the Man-on-the-band-stand embodies the power of discipline at Carlisle; he expresses the collective voice of the pedagogy of oppression practiced by the school" (54).