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Schooling and Servitude: Menominee Children, Bound Labor, and the Struggle for Authority in
Michigan Territory, 1827–34

By Vivien Tejada

Established on Menominee homelands in Green Bay, Cadle Mission (1829–41) was one of dozens of schools that aimed to assimilate Native American children in the early nineteenth century. Officials hoped Protestant missions would Americanize the Upper Midwest, turning Native people toward the United States and away from their fur-trading allies. Michigan’s Territorial Council empowered its missionaries with an 1827 bill allowing them to bind Native children to their schools as indentured servants. This legislation possesses few parallels in the history of Native schooling, but it underscores the centrality of racialized labor control to the assimilatory project. That system faced a severe test in December 1833, when Richard F. Cadle ordered the whipping of eleven boys boarding at his mission. Cadle justified this “cruel and unusual punishment” on the grounds of the children’s supposed indentured status, but Menominee children and parents rejected his authority. Although the school was backed by U.S. officials in Green Bay, the incident culminated in its closure, demonstrating that the Menominees and their mixed-ancestry allies retained influence in the region longer than historians have previously recognized. It also shows that children were central to struggles between the United States and Native nations during the removal era.