

## HB 2384 – Shawnee Indian Mission

I oppose transfer of the Shawnee Indian Mission to the Shawnee Tribe. This place is important in the history of this country at a time of great westward expansion not just to one segment of our population.

It would be a mistake to transfer the historic site in efforts to rectify historic wrongs to Native Americans. As I have said before, this place should not have existed because Indian Schools were part of a historic wrong to the indigenous people of this country. However, it would be very incorrect to conflate what happened here with the undeniable, horrifying abuses of Indian Schools later in the century when the focus of their mission became subjugation and elimination of identity that resulted in great and unforgiveable mistreatment of students.

I refer you to the submission I made when a similar bill was introduced last year. The theory of the time was that Native Americans should be prepared to voluntarily assimilate. Children were not required to convert to Christianity (Methodist) and Sunday church services at the Mission were voluntary attended by some tribal members who lived nearby.

Chief Barnes' continued assumption/insistence that there was abuse of pupils is belied by the situation that existed i.e. parents chose the school where their children could spend their federal education voucher and parents lived nearby in places like Shawnee, Lenexa and Olathe. They were not uninvolved in their children's lives and children whose parents lived in those communities returned home during school recesses.

Abuses would have been known by those parents and I have asked Chief Barnes before to relay handed down Shawnee stories of the things he alleges. He never has yet he continues to espouse unsubstantiated allegations regarding hardships which would have been suffered by staff as well as

students. For example, single teachers slept in the same quarters as their students and cholera was not unique to the Mission and not uncommon among settlements.

The “forced labor” he alleges was also part of a vocational education i.e. one of the reasons the Shawnee Indian Mission was uniquely preferred by parents who had many religiously established Missions in the nearby area from which to choose. Other schools didn’t train students to perform trades i.e. dress making, farming, blacksmithing etc. Their curriculums were classic education with an emphasis on religion.

The Mission is on the trails West and trade from the South. It was a last chance to make sure your wagon and oxen were ready for the journey and that you had all the supplies you needed. The onsite store sold clothing and other supplies and general accounts during the time certainly portray it as a harmonious, active place. (There are pictures and firsthand reports available through KHS.) Most of the people who settled the West probably passed here or nearby as did those heading West due to the Gold Rush. Fur trappers and other traders traveled from the East and South through here to Westport to sell their goods.

The fact that this place has survived uniquely among all others was due in great part to the value those in this area placed on it and its history. When it was saved from destruction in 1927, it was due to the efforts of local people and when the Supreme Court made its ruling, it cited the importance of knowing and valuing our history to the creation of good citizens.

When Fairway sought to build their City Hall on the site in 2005, it was also stopped due to the efforts of local people who placed great value on our history.

It is important that Native Americans also have participation and input regarding the site. Certainly, I believe Chief Barnes being contacted and involved was part of a sincere effort to make that happen. I recently revisited an article produced on the Shawnee Indian Mission’s website posted on

November 20, 2021 welcoming the Chief as their “new partner.” It is my understanding that until he was reached out to, he did not the site existed.

While I understand the Chief’s relationship with the Foundation and Fairway because I understand why the things that offended him did so, I also know that his understanding of the Mission’s history seems based more on what he believes than the result of real study of the place or historic documents.

The Library at the Mission (located in the same North building where the Bogus Legislature first met) has been a labor of love volunteer historians (primarily retired history teachers and professors) has been built over many years of research and preservation and is held in high regard as have the Kansas Historical Society’s records. Perhaps the missing piece is input from the tribes whose children once attended here. Even those with the best of intentions can’t completely put themselves in the place of those with different backgrounds. However, it all must be factual and accurate.

I believe we would be better served by leaving the ownership and decisions regarding the Mission to KHS, the people of Kansas’ designated steward with oversight from the National Park Service. Transferring ownership to only one party with investment and interest here would serve none of us well.

I am sorry for the quality of this submission. I only received notice that the deadline was 4:00 p.m. today at 2:45 p.m.

Thank you.

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