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Review of *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949* By Amanda J. Cobb

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Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949. By Amanda J. Cobb. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xviii + 162 pp. \$27.50.

Conventional wisdom among scholars of Indian history holds that the boarding school experience for most Indian children was grim, a forced isolation from family and community in a misguided attempt to eradicate Native cultures and identity with the aim of assimilating Indian peoples. The researcher who has spent time interviewing boarding school alumni in Oklahoma, however, often hears a positive perspective composed of life-long relationships, fond memories, and gratitude to the institution. That positive perspective toward Bloomfield Academy is the starting point of Amanda J. Cobb's history of the Chickasaw institution, whose students were proud to be "Bloomfield Blossoms" from the "Bryn Mawr of the West."

Bloomfield Academy, according to Cobb, was different because throughout its ninety-seven year history it reflected the values and goals of the Chickasaw people. Cobb divides the history of the institution into three peri-

ods based on changes of control. Bloomfield was founded in 1852 by missionaries who emphasized religion and Chickasaw acculturation. But Chickasaws provided strong support for the school in the belief that literacy was a valuable new weapon in the defense of their nation against aggressive outsiders. They demonstrated this by funding the school, enthusiastically enrolling their daughters, and placing importance on commencement activities. While in control from 1865 to 1898, Chickasaws, according to Cobb, sought to make their daughters not Anglo-American girls but their equals, able to negotiate the white world and support their Chickasaw husbands in economic and social interactions across cultural boundaries. Emphasis on refinement as well as academics won the institution its reputation as a finishing school. Federal control, which began with the process of dissolving the Chickasaw national government and lasted until 1949, transformed Bloomfield into a government boarding school renamed Carter Seminary. Even then, Cobb asserts, Bloomfield served Chickasaw purposes. By then Chickasaws believed so strongly in literacy, it had become a part of their culture. Isolating the students at Bloomfield while stressing that value reinforced and redefined the Indian identity government boarding schools aimed to erase.

This book is a work of the heart for Cobb, a Chickasaw descendant of Bloomfield students. Some scholars may object to its personal style and lack of real comparison with contemporary Indian schools. But Cobb is to be commended on her use and analysis of sixteen interviews collected from Bloomfield/Carter students. This book contributes an often overlooked facet of the Indian school experience so important to Great Plains people and cultures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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