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A “ONE-MAN RELOCATION TEAM”: SCOTT HENRY PETERS AND AMERICAN INDIAN URBAN MIGRATION IN THE 1930S

ROSALYN LAPIER AND DAVID R. M. BECK

Federal urban relocation programs for American Indians, commonly believed to have been launched in the 1950s, were actually first initiated under the aegis of John Collier’s Office of Indian Affairs. As the case study of OIA Placement Officer Scott Henry Peters shows, federal officials recognized by the early 1930s that significant numbers of American Indians were migrating off-reservation. As an American Indian working for the Indian Office, Peters attempted to provide employment opportunities for young American Indian adults migrating to cities and help them adapt to modern urban life. This article extends the literature on urban American Indian history back in time and reveals some of the contradictions inherent in Collier’s policy initiatives.

IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH century, American Indians began to migrate from their reservation communities to urban and non-reservation rural areas across the United States in small but growing numbers. American expansion had caused massive land and resource losses, leading to desperate and depressing conditions in tribal homelands. The often misguided efforts by the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) to assimilate or modernize Indian people and communities only complicated their lives, frequently exacerbating the problems they faced on a daily basis.¹ Not surprisingly, the failure of U.S.-sponsored reservation economies, and

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¹ Before the Office of Indian Affairs was renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947, it was referred to variously as the OIA, the Indian Office, the Indian Service, and the Indian

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the abject poverty they engendered, caused some Indian people to seek opportunity outside of reservation communities. Federal assimilation efforts, such as the boarding school programs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, strengthened this pattern of out-migration.

But despite the promise of assimilation—that Native individuals could participate in the socioeconomic benefits of the larger American society—opportunities to do so were extremely limited. By the late nineteenth century, numerous tribal people across the United States had joined local wage labor economies. Those living in rural areas increasingly performed manual labor or took other menial jobs—some became indispensable to their local economy. Native laborers also associated themselves with specific professions, such as railroads or steel.² Indians could obtain jobs in agriculture, resource extraction, or other industries, but few opportunities existed beyond those at a relatively menial level. The growing number of American Indians educated in off-reservation boarding schools, for instance, found few economic opportunities in the white man's world.

In fact, having few other options, a significant number of Indians worked for the Indian Service in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Cathleen D. Cahill has observed in *Federal Fathers & Mothers* (2011), “the Indian Service was the primary employer of the first generation of white-collar and professional Native workers.” By 1912 it employed some two thousand Indian people, who accounted for one-third of its regular workforce.³ A growing number of these employees held professional positions. But outside the OIA, Native professionals, including those who moved to urban centers farther from home, found it difficult to gain employment. Such a small number of individuals succeeded as professionals in the white man's world that most of those who did became well known.⁴

This describes the condition of economics and employment in Indian country when John Collier took charge of the Indian Service in 1933. He immediately initiated reforms, famously reversing several key policies that attacked tribal cultures and

Bureau. We use these terms interchangeably in this article.

² William J. Bauer Jr., *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California's Round Valley Reservation, 1850–1941* (Chapel Hill, 2009); David R. M. Beck, *Seeking Recognition: The Termination and Restoration of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, 1855–1984* (Lincoln, 2009), 68–95; Alice Littlefield and Martha C. Knack, eds., *Native Americans and Wage Labor: Ethnohistorical Perspectives* (Norman, 1996); Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, 2005), 74–115; Kurt M. Peters, “Watering the Flower: Laguna Pueblo and the Santa Fe Railroad, 1880–1943,” in *Native Americans and Wage Labor*, ed. Littlefield and Knack, 177–97; and Jim Rasenberger, *High Steel: The Daring Men Who Built the World's Greatest Skyline* (New York, 2004), 133–72.

³ Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869–1933* (Chapel Hill, 2011), 260.

⁴ Other well-known individuals included Carlos Montezuma, Charles Eastman, and Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Sa).



Figure 1. Scott Henry Peters, [date unknown], folder Scott Henry Peters Office Personnel, Civilian Personnel Records, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1850–1957. Photo courtesy of National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.

communities. He put an end to reservation land allotment, empowered tribal governments in a limited way, and rescinded strictures on religious practices. He also recognized the issue of Indians migrating off-reservation, as well as its resultant problems, and instituted a placement program that served as a precursor for the later relocation policy initiative. This short-lived program illuminates some of the contradictions and limitations inherent in his initiatives. Although Collier is known for putting an end to forced assimilation and encouraging tribal self-determination, his initiatives continued paternalistic federal control of Indian affairs. This bureaucratic attitude ultimately doomed the placement program.

Scott Henry Peters—the individual Collier hired to coordinate the program in the Midwest—was a successful businessman and Indian community leader. (See figure 1.) He became responsible for finding work for Indian people in the private sector, a challenging task in Depression-era America. Peters recognized that tribal members leaving their reservation communities needed help to successfully settle and make a living elsewhere. A primary reason that he went to work for the Indian Service was to help facilitate this. Although tribal people across the United States had increasingly joined local wage labor economies, for the most part they did so close to home.

Getting jobs in faraway cities presented complex new challenges for Indian individuals, primarily due to separation from social support systems and severe limitations in the ways they could make a living (because subsistence activities were no longer possible, for example). As William J. Bauer Jr. (Wailacki and Concow of the Round Valley Indian Tribes) has observed, the strength of “social networks, usually family and kinship groups,” has been key to Native American economic success in the modern world. And wage labor, for people still living in their homelands, could be supplemental rather than the sole source of support, since it was but one of “a range of economic choices.”⁵

Peters understood these obstacles, which seemed to make him the ideal person for the job. The modern American Indian leader LaDonna Harris (Comanche) has observed that tribal people create new kinship support systems when they move to urban areas, and indeed, such kinship extends well beyond blood relations.⁶ Peters recognized and incorporated this need into his new work, viewing his role as two-pronged: to provide support, especially for his younger charges, and to find full-time employment for migrating Indians. But his efforts ultimately led to a falling-out between him and the Indian Service.

Federal officials and tribal members struggled to create new systems and patterns of work and behavior to enhance adaptation to modern changes in difficult times. Cahill has observed that “[p]olicy makers argued that employing people who had been educated in federal Indian schools would offer living examples of the ‘civilized’ path they

⁵ Bauer, *Migrant Workers*, 8.

⁶ LaDonna Harris, in discussion with the authors, Americans for Indian Opportunity Conferences, held in the United States, Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Bolivia, 1993–2012.

hoped all tribal members would eventually take while also serving as a defense against backsliding.” These individuals’ “agendas and actions made the bureau particularly contingent and discordant, messy and divided.”⁷ As Peters’s case shows us, when those agendas conflicted too deeply with OIA policy, the Indian Service viewed the programs as failures. The tension between Peters and the OIA ultimately led to the discontinuation of the placement program rather than its reform. This article explores how Peters’s efforts increasingly shaped Indian country and the United States more broadly.

Until recently, the historical literature has largely ignored American Indian economic history when it did not fit Euro-American perceptions of communal tribal culture-based economies. Indian entry into the wage labor market, which began to occur prior to the twentieth century, has been ignored for this reason. Instead, scholarship focused on pre-reservation economic history and factors such as the impacts of resource loss and land allotment. With few exceptions, scholars have only recently begun to analyze tribal and individual Indian economic histories that broaden our perspectives. Alexandra Harmon has argued that one of the effects of “anthropology’s long monopoly on Indian scholarship” has been to keep economic historians out of the field of Indian history.⁸ Her observation can be extrapolated to a variety of subfields that should be given more attention.

The narrow study of American Indian history has resulted in the failure, with a few exceptions, to acknowledge the development of urban Indian populations and communities prior to World War II.⁹ Urban Indian history has generally been told beginning with relocation efforts initiated by the federal government in the 1950s to move individuals and families from reservations to urban centers across the United States. Indeed, these significant demographic changes meant that by the late twentieth century, most tribal members no longer lived in reservation communities. But the idea for such a policy actually began to germinate much earlier. In the 1930s, the OIA established a small placement office within its employment division to oversee employment programs in reservation and off-reservation communities, in both rural and urban settings.

The placement program initiated under Collier’s leadership as commissioner of Indian Affairs developed from both the increasing awareness of the dire conditions in Indian country following the release of the 1928 Meriam Report—officially titled *The*

⁷ Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers*, 7, 259.

⁸ Littlefield and Knack, eds., *Native Americans and Wage Labor*; Brian Hosmer and Colleen O’Neill, eds., *Native Pathways: American Indian Culture and Economic Development in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder, 2004); and Alexandra Harmon, *Rich Indians: Native People and the Problem of Wealth in American History* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 11–2.

⁹ For notable exceptions, see Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration and Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill, 2012); Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle, 2007); David R. M. Beck, “Developing a Voice: The Evolution of Self-Determination in an Urban Indian Community,” *Wicazo Sa* 17 (Autumn 2002): 117–41; and Nancy Shoemaker, “Urban Indians and Ethnic Choices: American Indian Organizations in Minneapolis, 1920–1950,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 19 (November 1988): 431–47.

Problem of Indian Administration—and the ideals of Progressive Era reformers. The report informed policy makers across the federal spectrum of the failure of forced assimilation policies such as general land allotment and the education system to provide healthy homelands for tribal people; it made clear the federal government's failure to meet its trust responsibilities toward Indians. Suggested solutions fell in line with previous reform efforts—even those tied to failed policies in the decades preceding the report's release, from the 1880s through the 1920s.

Framing reformers' early attitudes toward Indians was the idea that Native cultures were dying and that Indian survival meant leaving those cultures behind. Reformers recognized the impoverishment that the growth and expansion of American nationhood had brought to Indian people. They also believed that adapting Indians to American culture on political, social, and economic fronts would move them from poverty to prosperity. Politically that meant adopting Western-style institutions such as the justice systems and police forces established in Indian country in the late nineteenth century. Socially it meant adapting to American belief systems, including Christianity and education. And economically it meant taking up typical American livelihoods in the increasingly industrialized trades and manufacturing sectors. By the turn of the twentieth century, American Indians educated in the new boarding schools—some of whom became white-collar professionals—allied themselves with these reformers.¹⁰

Collier wanted to address the employment problem quickly. Few job opportunities existed within tribal communities, and both the Great Depression and racial prejudice complicated finding work away from reservations. Bauer aptly observed that in the job market “Indians found themselves racialized in relation to working-class whites and other migrants who competed with them for jobs.”¹¹ Typecast into narrow employment categories at the same time as they entered alien cultural surroundings, Indians faced unusually difficult challenges. Collier decided that the Indian Service should provide assistance to individuals transitioning to employment in the modern world.

Collier intensified the growing trend of employing Indians in OIA positions when possible, and he did so at the reservation, regional, and national levels. In 1934 Indians held one-third of the approximately five thousand “regular classified” Indian Service positions; just five years later, this number grew to more than half. A change in civil service hiring rules, in part, made this possible. Collier explained in 1934, “By Presidential order this year all Indian Service positions under Civil Service are open to Indians by noncompetitive examination.” In addition, Indian employees could more easily earn seniority, meaning they qualified sooner for better positions; and salaries became

¹⁰ Two of the key works on the progressive aspect of this era are Frederick E. Hoxie, ed., *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston, 2001) and Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse, 1971).

¹¹ William Bauer, “Working for Identity: Race, Ethnicity, and the Market Economy in Northern California, 1875–1936,” in *Native Pathways*, ed. Hosmer and O'Neill, 239.

somewhat more competitive in order to attract and keep better quality employees. The Meriam Report, however, bemoaned the low level of OIA salaries.¹²

The OIA looked to its employment division, and the regional placement offices within it, to expand employment opportunities for Indians. Collier's reports to the Secretary of the Interior throughout the 1930s illustrate this. The Meriam Report had recognized in its opening words that "[a]n overwhelming majority of the Indians are poor, even extremely poor, and they are not adjusted to the economic and social system of the dominant white civilization." In addition, the report distinguished between earned and other income: "The income of the typical Indian family is low and the earned income extremely low." So to help Indians achieve financial independence, the placement office focused on wage-based employment, with a primary emphasis on earned income.¹³

While most placements occurred on reservations or in Indian agencies, an increasing effort focused on finding both rural and urban work off-reservation for migrating Indians. The authors of the Meriam Report recognized the need to provide work for the small but steadily increasing number of tribal members leaving reservation communities, devoting seventy-five pages to a chapter on "Migrated Indians": "Their motive in migrating is almost wholly economic. Returned students, even though little more than children themselves, and despite the best will in the world to 'uplift' their race, in many cases see the hopelessness of attempting self-support when handicapped by the limited opportunities on their reservations."¹⁴

During the 1930s, the Indian Service increasingly focused on finding quality jobs, not simply manual labor positions: "The employment division has centered its attention largely upon the placement of qualified Indians in the better type of jobs instead of upon mass-recruiting of Indians for any and every type of work. There is developing, therefore, a specialized and individualized placement procedure." While the Meriam Report suggested that local, state, and federal agencies outside of the Indian Service would be in the best position to help Indians find jobs, under Collier the OIA did a significant portion of that work itself.¹⁵ In doing so, it hired a small cadre of placement officers to work in both rural and urban areas, opening and closing offices in cities on

¹² "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1934* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), I:20.1:934, 114 and "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs," *Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1939* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1939), I:20.1:939, 23, both U.S. Documents, silver microfiche (hereafter Commissioner Report, year, microfiche number, page) and Lewis Meriam et al., *The Problem of Indian Administration*. . . . (Baltimore, 1928; repr., New York, 1971), 155.

¹³ Meriam et al., *Indian Administration*, 3–4. The report distinguished between earned and unearned income, the latter including lease money for land and natural resource extraction or dividends.

¹⁴ Meriam et al., *Indian Administration*, 667–742, 736.

¹⁵ Commissioner Report, 1936, I:20.1:936, 205; Meriam et al., *Indian Administration*, 124–5; and Commissioner Report, 1953, I:20.1:953, 123–4.

occasion in order to put officers in close proximity to jobs and the people who needed them.¹⁶ In 1935 the OIA opened a Midwest office in Chicago, which it later moved to Milwaukee, to serve the region from Michigan to Wisconsin. Scott Henry Peters, a Chippewa businessman from Chicago's North Shore who was active in national Indian affairs, was hired to run the office. He held the position until 1942.¹⁷ Longtime Chicago Indian community leader Willard LaMere (Winnebago) would refer to Peters's role many decades later as a "one-man relocation team."¹⁸

Peters was an ideal candidate for a role in the new Collier administration. His success in business could be traced to a boarding school education that was significantly influenced by the Progressive Era reform movement. In 1925 he became a leader of one of the most successful national Native organizations of its day, the Grand Council Fire of American Indians.¹⁹

Born in Isabella County, Michigan, in 1877, Peters identified his Indian name as Te-Gwab, which he translated as "Bow." Peters was schooled at Mt. Pleasant and Carlisle Indian Industrial Schools, where he learned the craft of tailoring. He later attended a business college for advanced vocational training, and then opened up his own cleaning and tailor shop north of Chicago in about 1905; he moved his business to Wilmette in 1921. In the suburban cities of Waukegan, Wilmette, and Evanston where he lived he was considered a prominent businessman. During his eight-year tenure at the OIA, Peters's primary concerns focused on advancing Indian rights, improving the conditions under which Indians lived, and increasing public awareness of major issues regarding modern Indians both on and off the reservation. One of his lifelong goals aimed "to insure that the voice of our people shall be heard in determining our own destiny." He and the Grand Council Fire represented a new era in leadership, as off-reservation Indians attempted to take control of both the Indians' future and the outside world's views and definitions of Indians. This reflects what Harmon called a long-standing pattern among Native American leaders: "In reality, Indians have taken active part in processes that generated common images of Indians."²⁰

¹⁶ In 1936 the OIA closed an office in Kansas City "[b]ecause most of the girls placed were from Oklahoma and wanted work nearer their homes. . . . An attempt is, therefore, being made to bring this service to the Indians." Commissioner Report, 1936, I:20.1:936, 205. In 1938 the OIA closed the Gallup, New Mexico, office and opened one in Billings, Montana, the first in the Northern Plains states. Commissioner Report, 1938, I:20.1:938, 257.

¹⁷ Folder Scott Henry Peters Office Personnel, Civilian Personnel Records, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1850–1957, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO (hereafter Personnel Folder).

¹⁸ James B. LaGrand, *Indian Metropolis: Native Americans in Chicago, 1945–75* (Urbana, 2003), 63. LaMere "first came to Chicago in the early 1920s." "Willard LaMere, 72; Developed American Indian Programs," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 December 1990. Currently the Wisconsin Winnebago identifies its name as the Ho-Chunk Nation.

¹⁹ In 1933 the organization was renamed the Indian Council Fire, although we refer to it as the Grand Council Fire in this article.

²⁰ Scott Peters, "The Development of One First American," *Illinois Clubwoman's World*,

To illustrate the drastic economic changes Indians had undergone in a short period of time, Peters told his own story in a 1925 article that appeared in *Illinois Clubwoman's World*. An epidemic of typhoid fever forced his family to sell its land allotment in Michigan to pay doctor bills. They purchased a second home with the remaining money, which they sold after another bout with illness. They then left the reservation to begin a nomadic life of migrant farm work and seasonal logging; Peters was forced to work starting at age eleven. Like others of his generation, he and his five siblings were sent away to boarding school—he left for boarding school at age fourteen—because they had no home.²¹ In later years, he cited these childhood experiences as major influences in his life.

Living in poverty and overcoming family tragedies convinced Peters that the duty of all people was to “encourage the young Indian to leave the reservation and . . . fight his battle of life on his [own] merits.” He truly believed that Indians would have a better life off their tribal lands. Also, his business success taught him to think of himself as a model of Indian entrepreneurship and proof that Indians could adapt to modern America. In a comment reminiscent of earlier urban Indian leaders such as Carlos Montezuma (Yavapai), Peters said, “Give my people the same opportunity that I have had, and they will meet you face to face in this social and business world.”²²

In a speech at the 1925 American Indian Day celebration in Chicago, Peters spoke on “The Successful Indian of Today.” He appealed for increased educational opportunities and urged the public to support Indians both on and off the reservation.²³ To Peters, Indian survival depended on economic opportunity.

Progressive Era reformers like Peters thought Indians needed to take a place in modern American society. Although in retrospect his actions may seem to have been influenced by the non-Indian assimilationist philosophy of the time, he believed that Indians could successfully enter the modern world without abandoning their tribal

November 1925; Scott Peters OIA employment application, 2 February 1935, Personnel Folder; “To Chicago’s Indian Councils Come Chippewa and Blackfoot,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 April 1929; Flora Warren Seymour to Malcolm McDowell, 17 December 1925, folder Flora Warren Seymour Correspondence, box General Correspondence, Records of the Board of Indian Commissioners, 1869–1933, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1793–1999, Record Group 75, National Archives and Records Administration—Washington, DC (hereafter BIA Records); Peters OIA employment application, Personnel Folder; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of Population: 1920, Illinois, Volume 67–68: Cook Co., Chicago City*; and U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population, Illinois: Cook Co., Chicago City*; “Indians Call for Full Citizenship, Resent Being Wards,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 September 1929; and Harmon, *Rich Indians*, 10.

²¹ Peters, “One First American.”

²² Scott Henry Peters, “Chippewa Favors Business Profession for the Indian,” *American Indian Magazine* (July 1927): 15. For more on Montezuma’s leadership in Chicago, see Rosalyn R. LaPier and David R. M. Beck, “Crossroads for a Culture,” *Chicago History* 38 (Spring 2012): 22–43.

²³ “Wah-Ne-Tah to Speak Tonight, Indian Day Speaker Daughter of Blackfoot Chief,” *Evanston (IL) News-Index*, 25 September 1925.

heritage. Economic success need not mean giving up being Indian. Other boarding school-educated Indians of his time agreed, and they also increasingly began to view the history and culture of Indians as an important contribution to American society. With this in mind, Peters tried to change the way Americans viewed Indians, in terms of both the present and the past.

His most powerful statement as president of the Grand Council Fire came in 1927 in response to Chicago Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson's "America First" campaign, which urged the city's school system to teach American rather than British exceptionalism in its histories. Peters wrote a moving document that he and other council leaders presented to Thompson that was eventually entered into the *Congressional Record*. He argued that if the mayor insisted on teaching America First, then history texts should represent the first Americans accurately. "We do not know if school histories are pro-British," he wrote, "but we do know that they are unjust to the life of our people—the American Indians." The document articulated numerous ways in which this was so.²⁴

As his public role increased, Peters's private business became less important. In the years prior to the closure of his cleaning establishment in 1933, while he was president of the Grand Council Fire, he increasingly gave public presentations and acted as a spokesman for Indians in Chicago. In 1930 he helped plan the 1933–1934 Century of Progress World's Fair, where he served as chair of the Indian Participation Committee and worked as a lecturer throughout the fair's run.²⁵

In January 1934, Peters submitted an application for employment in the new Collier administration. He commented at the time, "It has been my life's ambition to help my people and promote a greater understanding between the Indians and the White People." Among Peters's acquaintances, and a Grand Council Fire supporter, was Anna Ickes, whose husband, Harold, served as Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior. That spring, Anna wrote a note to E. R. Burton, the director of employment for the OIA, recommending Peters for a job. Within days the OIA requested references from Peters's past employers and acquaintances.²⁶

Peters then wrote to Burton that he hoped for work in "any part of the United States." He told Burton, "It will be an honor and privilege [sic] to give out first-hand experience to my people and promote better understanding between the White and Red Men, gradually leading the Indian to self-determination, and finally to self-government." He observed that the Indian Service no longer resembled the organization

²⁴ "Memorial of Grand Council Fire of American Indians," 70 Cong. Rec. 8369–70 (1928), reprinted in "There Are Many, Many Facts History Books Do Not Tell," *American Indian Magazine* (June 1928): 14.

²⁵ "World's Fair at Chicago," *American Indian Magazine* (September/October 1930): 12.

²⁶ Scott Peters to [?] Landsdale, 5 February 1934; John Collier to Peters, 26 February 1934; Mrs. Harold [Anna] Ickes to E. R. Burton, 25 April 1934; Burton to R. M. Brown, 27 April 1934; Burton to Wilmette State Bank, 27 April 1934; Burton to Jacob Barr, 27 April 1934; Burton to Rufus Dawes, 27 April 1934; Burton to A. Ickes, 28 April 1934; and Burton to Fred Buck, 3 May 1934, all Personnel Folder.

that he had been raised to mistrust. He probably recognized what Cahill has observed: that Indian OIA employees had the opportunity to impact policy in their efforts to improve the quality of life for Indian people.²⁷ Peters viewed a job within the Indian Service as a continuation of work he had carried on as Grand Council Fire president.

After the fair ended in 1934, Peters's friends from the Grand Council Fire solicited officials to provide him with an OIA position. Founding council member Ada Gridley wrote Collier that fall, describing Peters as "an exceedingly conscientious, loyal-minded type of man, who gives the best there is in him to any work he undertakes." Ickes himself wrote to Edith Peters, assuring her the Department of the Interior was diligently working to find a job for her husband.²⁸ By fall's end, a senior employment agent within the OIA recommended that the Minneapolis Office be divided into two regions—one covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Minnesota, and the other covering Iowa, Wisconsin, northern Illinois, and Michigan. Peters would be right at home in such a place. With the influence and aid of his friends, in February 1935, at the age of fifty-seven, Peters began his second career as a placement officer in the OIA's employment division.²⁹

Collier's Indian Service was organized into three categories: administrative, policy, and service. The employment division fell under the service category. The two sections within the division—scholarship aid and employment—had national and field offices. Peters was appointed as an assistant guidance and placement officer, and his initial assignment took him to Chicago. But after in-service training in Washington, DC, and the completion of a several-month-long trial period, he would be considered for a higher grade of pay and an office in Minneapolis, with responsibilities throughout "his entire district," stretching from Michigan to Iowa and the Dakotas.³⁰

Burton described his expectations in a letter to Peters prior to his accepting the position. "You . . . would be expected to sell the idea of Indian employment to employers in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, and possibly in parts of Michigan. You would receive applications from Indians of this section, look up their qualifications and do your best to place them in suitable jobs." More specifically, Peters was to establish relationships with "public and private employment offices, industrial, commercial, civic, social, educational, and other organizations" and "analyze . . . the supply of Indian labor available, classified by occupation and location," within his service area.

²⁷ Peters to Burton, 17 May 1934, Personnel Folder and Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers*, 259.

²⁸ Ada Gridley to Collier, 15 October 1934; Mrs. Scott [Edith] Peters to [Anna] Ickes, 26 September 1934; and Ickes to [Edith] Peters, 10 October 1934, all Personnel Folder.

²⁹ Peters to Burton, 27 November 1934; memorandum by John Collier, 26 October 1935; E. L. Compton to Burton, 9 November 1934; and Burton to Miss Roberts, 21 February 1935, all Personnel Folder.

³⁰ OIA Employment Division organizational charts, 12 February 1936, folder Organization of Office of Indian Affairs, box 6, entry 1014Y, Office of Management Services Division of Management Research, Organizational Charts and Related Records, 1936–68, BIA Records and memorandum by E. R. Burton, 17 December 1934 and Burton to Peters, 31 January 1935, both Personnel Folder.

He was to connect Indians needing jobs with potential employers on a one-by-one basis and provide follow-up oversight to confirm their ability to maintain employment. He would essentially serve as a one-man employment agency for the region. According to official documentation, Peters worked almost entirely on his own initiative, reporting directly to Burton in Washington, although he was requested to seek advice from the Minneapolis office.³¹

Peters viewed his job as having two separate but related purposes. A newspaper reporter who interviewed him in September 1935 observed that, on the one hand, "For those young Indians who want to leave their reservations and their rural lands and meet white competition in the city, there is one program." That consisted of Peters guiding these individuals into appropriate fields of work in the urban areas within his jurisdiction. On the other hand, "For the Indians who do not want to leave their ancient culture and the poor reservations which the white man has left them, there is another." In this, Peters would aid individuals from more than a half dozen distinct tribal groups, and many more tribal communities, in finding work on or near reservations close to them. Of the former group, the reporter observed of Peters, "He has to supervise the migration of the most restless elements of 60,000 people, from farm to city, where they will take their place in the hurly-burly of modern competition."³²

By the end of February, Burton requested that Peters be provided a small space in the Chicago Indian warehouse. The warehouse, which operated intermittently in Chicago because of the city's position as a railroad center, shipped goods destined for Indian country under treaty agreements and the federal trust responsibilities toward Indian tribes.³³ Peters would spend little time at the warehouse; he was primarily expected to be on the road or in the field creating relationships with employers and agencies and lining up jobs for tribal members. This arrangement severely cut into his meager government salary. He owned a car but would need to pay maintenance and gasoline costs. He was not permitted to claim mileage for his driving within Chicago—a sprawling city with suburbs growing southeast toward Indiana, as well as north and west—even when he was seeking out potential employers.³⁴

³¹ Burton to Peters, 3 December 1934 and Personnel Classification Board Form No. 4, 11 February 1935, both Personnel Folder.

³² Curtis Fuller, "Lone Indian Employment Agent Tackles Big Task," *Evanston Daily News-Index*, 26 September 1935, Personnel Folder.

³³ Burton wrote, "His headquarters will *probably* be Waukegan, Illinois." Burton to Roberts, 21 February 1935, Personnel Folder. This was where Peters had initially established his cleaning business. Burton to Mr. Fry, 26 February 1935, Personnel Folder; "Chicago and Indian Supplies," *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago), 16 January 1886; "Chicago to be the Headquarters," *Daily Inter Ocean*, 25 February 1894; "Indian Supply Depot Closed," *Milwaukee Journal*, 19 February 1895; and "Bids for Indian Supplies," *Milwaukee Journal*, 29 April 1896. For address changes as the warehouse moved to different sites in Chicago in the early twentieth century, see letterhead on stationary in Chicago Indian warehouse, Central Classified Files, 1907–1939, BIA Records.

³⁴ Collier to Peters, 6 February 1935; Burton to employees, 26 February 1935; U.S. Department of the Interior, Form 1-430, 28 February 1935; Peters to Burton, 3 October 1935; and

Peters immediately made contacts with manufacturing firms. He created a strong working relationship with Greyhound Lines in Chicago and reported that its staff was “very favorably impressed with the qualifications of our trade school graduates.” He worked closely with Ford Motor Company and General Motors in Detroit to find factory placements. Frank M. Langdon, the chairman of the Michigan Indian Affairs Committee of the American Legion, reported in June that Peters “apparently is meeting with considerable success” in the automobile industry. Peters believed that the “industrial and commercial belt” provided “a wonderful field for my work” and that most factory executives “are willing to co-operate with us on our program.” He regularly fielded calls asking for both “boys and girls” for job placements by the fall of 1935 but had difficulty following up due to the expense of driving from place to place. “I . . . find that with my travel expense cut to [a] minimum, I cannot take time enough in the field to make my necessary calls and placements with the large automobile mfg. companies in Michigan, or to get into Wisconsin to make my follow up calls,” he told Burton. Peters earned a 50 percent salary raise that fall. In winter the bureau recommended that Peters move his office to Milwaukee to be closer to many of his clients. He eventually rented office space there and completed his move as of 1 July 1936.³⁵

Despite the handicaps and adjustments affecting both Peters and the OIA, Peters succeeded in placing individuals in jobs. By late spring the following year, Peters estimated that he had placed thirty-five “girls” in jobs in Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee; he reported that most were thriving. He considered one of his failures a woman who married at eighteen. “I have been informed that she has been quite irresponsible even before she came to work at Chicago,” he wrote to his new supervisor, E. L. Compton, and he heard “that she had previously been with the circus.” He also reported that “two or three girls” returned home “on account of lonesomeness,” and two others “were not able to make good as house workers.” Compton recognized the challenges inherent in such placements, telling Peters he was “to be complemented [sic] for your fine success.”³⁶

Peters placed all the young women in domestic household work, with pay between \$5 and \$8 per week. Peters viewed these types of positions as gateway jobs. He believed that the work provided an opportunity to “establish a residence there,” after which he would look for jobs for them “in factories and commercial work”; but few such jobs were

Burton to Peters, 14 October 1935, all Personnel Folder. After a General Accounting Office ruling, the commissioner’s office granted and then rescinded permission to reimburse Peters’s local travel related to work. Memos from commissioner [Collier] to Peters, [n.d.], Personnel Folder and Irving Cutler, *Chicago: Metropolis of the Mid-Continent* (Dubuque, 1976), 141.

³⁵ Peters to commissioner [Collier], 26 October 1940; Frank M. Langdon to Burton, 27 June 1935; Peters to Burton, 3 October 1935; U.S. Department of the Interior, Form 1-612, 26 October 1935; Guy W. Numbers to Peters, 30 October 1935; S. W. Crosthwait to Peters, 14 April 1936; assistant to commissioner [Crosthwait] to secretary [Ickes], 16 April 1936; Numbers to Peters, 17 April 1936; E. J. Armstrong to Peters, 19 May 1936; and Scott Peters oath of office, 6 November 1937, all Personnel Folder.

³⁶ Peters to Compton, 26 June 1936 and Compton to Peters, 30 June 1936, both Personnel Folder.

available for women. He also believed “that girls need more supervision than boys,” and so he worked with his old allies at the Grand Council Fire to establish an Indian girls’ club in Chicago. His wife, Edith, assisted him in this effort, and the club organized picnics, sponsored dances, and held regular meetings at a downtown YMCA. In addition, through his connections with Illinois women’s clubs, Peters secured scholarships that enabled Indian girls to attend nursing school.³⁷

Peters found factory work for the young men, placing nineteen in the automobile manufacturing industry by fall 1936. He also established social organizations for young adults and attempted to organize an effort to loan money to Indians new to the city so that they could afford housing while awaiting work. The Indian Service, however, noted that this plan, though laudable, could not be considered part of Peters’s official duties.³⁸ It was the first indication of differences between Peters and the OIA regarding the scope and meaning of his work.

Peters also aided individuals in acquiring appropriate clothing and even dental treatment. And when young adults became ill, he did what he could to help them. His old friend Ada Gridley wrote to Collier that Peters succeeded in gaining the confidence of those he placed in jobs and their employers: “The activity in Indian affairs which has resulted from his work here is something to be proud of.” The impetus for doing this probably emanated from both traditional Native values—helping to care for those less fortunate than the caregiver—and the effect of Peters’s progressive reformist training, which sometimes led to moralistic responses to situations. In one case he wrote his supervisor, “I have been very depressed lately to learn that so many of our people are using peyote and marihuana.” Some Progressive Era tribal leaders, as well as many employees within the Indian Service, frowned upon the use of peyote, a hallucinogenic cactus and sacrament of the Native American Church. Peters’s supervisor merely recommended that he contact the police and not discuss it with other Indians.³⁹

In addition to carrying out job-related duties, Peters continued to serve tribal communities in both educational and advocacy roles. His ongoing relationship with urban Indian leaders and women’s clubs dated to the early twentieth century.⁴⁰ During his

³⁷ Peters to Compton, 26 June 1936 and Peters to Fred H. Daiker, 13 February 1942, both Personnel Folder.

³⁸ Peters to Compton, 18 November 1936 and Crosthwait to Peters, 8 February 1937, both Personnel Folder.

³⁹ R. G. Chambers to Peters, 3 November 1936; Peters to Olive Gwinn, 11 November 1936; Peters to J. G. Townsend, 1 December 1936; Townsend to Peters, 11 December 1936; Peters to Eugene J. Warren, 13 January 1937; Peters to Wilfred Tyosh, 25 January 1937; Peters to J. C. Cavill, 7 June 1939; F. M. Mueller to Peters, 24 May 1939; Gridley to Collier, 11 July 1936; and Compton to Peters, 6 August 1938, all Personnel Folder and Omer Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman, 1987).

⁴⁰ “Man of Thousand Voices Will Give ‘Carmen’ at Club,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 November 1941. Descriptions of some of these earlier relationships and discussions of urban Indian leadership in this era can be found in LaPier and Beck, “Crossroads for a Culture” and Beck, “Developing a Voice.”

entire tenure in the OIA he constantly reminded women's club members of their good work on behalf of Indian people and that Indians deserved a place in modern American society. He wanted clubwomen to know that "the Indian *loves* his Country and we should be responsible for helping him find and maintain his rightful place in it today."⁴¹

Advocacy remained an important role for American Indian leaders as they moved to cities in the early twentieth century and transferred their traditional values to new settings. Peters infused his tenure as president of the Grand Council Fire with this value, and he continued it with his work in the Indian Service and those activities that went beyond his job description. He established a social club in Detroit for young Indian boys and girls, for example. He also advocated for individual tribal members caught in difficult situations. In 1935, soon after he took the job at the Service, he alerted authorities to a gang of ruffians in the Detroit suburb of Berkley who had "been preying on the Indian girls" in the area "for several years," according to the American Legion's Frank M. Langdon. Peters worked to convince the young women to testify against the thugs, thereby aiding the prosecuting attorney.⁴²

Peters's supervisor described his work in glowing terms: "he has performed his duties with excellent results." Based on this and a 1937 evaluation that rated his work as very good, he received another promotion and a salary raise to \$2,000 annually. He continued to receive exemplary performance evaluations, scoring in the very good range again in 1938 and in the extreme high end of the good range the next year. By early 1940, his job performance received even more praise; during the first half of the year, the number of placements almost equaled that of the previous year. Whether the country was beginning to pull out of the Depression or Peters's contacts were strengthened enough to pay bigger dividends, the OIA was happy with his work. Peters felt so good about his success that he asked to expand his operations to Ohio so he could place mechanics at Greyhound in Cleveland. The Indian Office turned him down due to what they considered his already unmanageably large territory.⁴³

In addition to praise, the OIA criticized Peters for his willingness (or insistence) to do work beyond his job description. In summer 1939, the assistant clerk working under him complained to Peters's supervisor that "he often tries to handle social work cases," when these should be under the purview of the social worker in Michigan. Because

⁴¹ Meeting minutes, 24 September [1936?], 15 March 1939, 10 December 1940, [n.d.] January 1941, 19 February 1941, and 18 February 1942, all folder 27, box 17, Indian Welfare, 1936–1947, Departmental Files 1924–1981, Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs Records, 1894–1984, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL (hereafter Indian Welfare).

⁴² Beck, "Developing a Voice," 121–6; meeting minutes, 19 December 1940, Indian Welfare; and Langdon to Burton, 27 June 1935, Personnel Folder.

⁴³ E. L. Compton, "Field Service—Regular Rolls Classification Sheet, United States Department of the Interior," 3 November 1937; E. L. Compton, efficiency report, 1 July 1937; personnel reallocation document, 19 November 1937; Numbers to Peters, 30 November 1937; Crosthwait to Peters, 13 December 1937; Compton, efficiency report, 1 April 1938; E. J. [sic] Skidmore, efficiency report, 23 June 1939; Skidmore to Peters, 15 March 1940; Peters to commissioner [Collier], 26 October 1940; and Skidmore to Peters, 8 November 1940, all Personnel Folder.

he was acting outside of his own area of expertise, she questioned the efficacy of his work. She also observed that “when he is in the field he quite often advises Indians to write him concerning educational matters,” when these “should be turned over to [the] Superintendent of Indian Schools” in Milwaukee.⁴⁴ Peters blurred the lines between his responsibilities to the Service and to Indian individuals, which increased his conflicts with the OIA. His background in Indian community work and his own personal life history caused him to define his job more holistically than the Indian Service desired.

William R. Zimmerman, assistant commissioner of Indian Affairs under Collier, also expressed concern that Peters did not recognize proper boundaries related to his position. In 1940 he wrote to Collier regarding an incident that occurred during a law and order conference in Minneapolis. Peters was not afraid to speak out in public, and Zimmerman “objected most strenuously to” some of his remarks. Peters reported at the conference that his work at the Red Lake Indian Reservation led him to extol “the attractive features of life in the cities” to school children, which in turn led “almost all of the children” to conclude “that they were looking forward to leaving the reservation and living in nearby cities.” A note written in pencil, probably by Collier, read, “Peters keeps on this kind of talk. He doesn’t know anything else. He can’t be reconditioned, I opine.”⁴⁵ Collier was likely correct in this assessment. Peters’s own experience shaped his beliefs, after all, and these experiences had taught him that consistent employment gains would be found off-reservation.

So far as Zimmerman was concerned, however, this worked against OIA policy. Employment was a key feature of the policy—the Service recognized that an increasing number of tribal members were migrants, in both rural and urban contexts—yet the program was not intended to encourage removal from reservation communities but to provide employment opportunities for those who decided to make the move on their own. In August, while Peters was vacationing in New York, the commissioner called him into the central office in Washington, DC, “for the purpose of discussing employment problems in your district.”⁴⁶

In 1941 Ralph West of Detroit also complained to Collier about Peters. West, a Native American and ex-Marine who had graduated from Grinnell College in Iowa, was in his second year of law school and was “employed at the Ford plant.” He approached Peters in the hope of obtaining a less physical job but did not receive the help that he wanted. He charged that Peters failed to keep in mind “the larger purpose” of his work as a “vocational guidance officer . . . to wit; the advancement of the Indian generally, in all fields of endeavor.” West believed that Peters put too much emphasis on employing as many Indians as possible rather than focusing on individual needs. He charged that Peters placed all men and boys in factory work and all girls and women in housework,

⁴⁴ Memorandum by acting assistant to commissioner, 24 July 1939, Personnel Folder.

⁴⁵ Assistant commissioner [William R. Zimmerman] to Collier, 7 February 1940 and note by JC [Collier?], 8 February 1940, both Personnel Folder.

⁴⁶ Peters to commissioner [Collier], 5 August 1940, Personnel Folder.

even in the case of skilled or college-educated individuals. He added that this kind of “menial” work “can be had by consulting the daily ‘want ads.’” West also charged that Peters referred to Indians as “backward” when speaking with prospective employers; although Indians were shy, West argued, they should not be referred to as backward. He implored Collier to hire a more competent employee for this position. The Indian Office assured West that his letter would be useful to them.⁴⁷

Each man reflects a different era of experience in Indian country. West, who represents New Deal ideologies, was less influenced by progressive values than people like Peters. Progressives saw Indians as largely helpless and in need of aid, which ironically conflicted with their views of the importance of education and helping Indians stand on their own. This self-contradiction becomes apparent when someone like West asks a Progressive Era leader for assistance. While this incident may point to Peters’s inability to adapt to changing times, it may simply reflect his own idea about the importance of placing individuals in jobs in cities until they could become established and seek more meaningful employment.

Peters received his first unsatisfactory grade at his service evaluation a month later despite achieving a 41 percent increase in permanent placements outside of the Indian Service—from 161 to 227—in a single year. The comments on his evaluation reflect both types of complaints he had received of late: “Mr. Peters is not qualified by training or experience as an Employment Agent. His employment activities are seemingly often at variance with the established policies of the Indian Service, particularly in regard to the inducement of Indians to leave the reservation to obtain employment in urban areas.”⁴⁸ Such complaints seem to be a convenient excuse to ease Peters out of his position more than a reflection of actual policy. A fine line always existed between finding employment for off-reservation Indians and the recognition—by both Peters and those within OIA bureaucracy—that numerous tribal members migrated off-reservation. Peters had never made a secret of his belief that Indians could best succeed away from reservation communities. Early on his encouragement to those wanting to make a living in the city was viewed as positive; later it came to be seen as counterproductive.

In June 1941, the OIA again reprimanded him, this time for taking three “Indian girls” from Macy, Nebraska, to Milwaukee for housework rather than finding them work locally. Despite the allegations, Peters insisted, “It is the policy of this office not to encourage young men or girls to leave their homes and seek employment in cities.” He did so only at their or their families’ request, he averred. After the girls had been forced to leave Flandreau Indian School in South Dakota, Peters had tried unsuccessfully to find them work in Sioux City, Iowa, only thirty miles from home. Peters knew from his own family’s experience the desperate need for income that accompanied

⁴⁷ Ralph West to Collier, 1 March 1941 and Skidmore to West, 7 March 1941, both Personnel Folder.

⁴⁸ Scott Peters service rating form, 15 April 1941 and untitled statistical document, 24 April 1941, both Personnel Folder.

abject poverty and the role young people played in helping to support their families. Nonetheless, OIA officials stated they were uncomfortable because “contrary to Office instructions he takes young Indian girls to the larger cities for domestic services, etc.”⁴⁹

The Indian Service reorganized as U.S. involvement in World War II unfolded. Peters’s office now came under the welfare division, and new instructions about his position specified that his work “must supplement and not conflict with the economic and social programs of reservations.” The Indian Office clearly rejected Peters’s efforts to provide the broad variety of services individuals needed to succeed in a new and sometimes bewildering environment. It advised him to build new contacts and that the “most important part of your job” was to “[s]ell employers and agencies on the idea of using Indians.” It also encouraged him to make more placements and contacts in smaller rather than larger cities.⁵⁰ At this time, OIA policy began to shift back toward keeping Indians in reservation communities despite the fact that they were leaving on their own in increasing numbers. Peters was caught on the wrong side of the federal government’s policy pendulum as it swung past him in the other direction.

Collier’s Indian Office largely reflected the reformist background of the man himself. He worked hard to implement policies that would reverse the deleterious impacts of previous federal efforts and provide for the development of modern tribal economies and political systems while recognizing the value of Indian cultural perspectives and activities. But Collier’s perspective enshrined a backward-directed policy rather than one that incorporated the modern economic and demographic changes in the United States. Tom Holm has observed that Collier “was decidedly critical of industrial and urban culture” due to his own disenchantment with it. Collier’s view, coupled with a romanticized view of American Indian life, contradicted Peters’s efforts to help Indians adapt to city life far from reservation homelands.⁵¹

Peters’s government work came to an abrupt end in 1942. He had asked to be hospitalized or moved back to Chicago two years earlier for outpatient treatment for headaches (after a serious automobile accident on the Menominee Reservation in 1936) and symptoms from “a moderately severe case of diabetes.” By June 1941, Indian Office personnel were deciding whether to keep or dismiss the sixty-four-year-old Peters, whose work could be physically strenuous as well as emotionally debilitating. As Cahill has observed, the grueling nature of Indian Service jobs meant its employees found it challenging “to remain healthy until the retirement age of seventy.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Daiker to Peters, 18 June 1941; Peters to Daiker, 7 July 1941; and assistant to commissioner to Frank Christy, 23 June 1941, all Personnel Folder.

⁵⁰ Daiker to Peters, 23 June 1941, Personnel Folder.

⁵¹ Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans & Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin, 1985) and Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920–1954* (Tucson, 1977).

⁵² Memorandum by Meta Clark, 25 June 1941; Peters to Compton, 3 July 1936; statement of A. E. Winter, 25 July 1936; Peters to Compton, 3 August 1936; Merle E. Whitlock to Compton, 8 August 1936; and “Employee’s Notice of Injury and Original Claim for Compensation and

Federal employment policies also became stricter. Peters failed a required OIA civil service examination, resulting in a change in his employment status from classified to unclassified. Peters believed that not having time to prepare for the test, which took place immediately after he had returned from a strenuous road trip, and being examined as a clerk rather than as a field officer negatively affected his results. Internal documentation suggests that the Service was dissatisfied with his work but unsure whether or how to dismiss him.⁵³

Then, just weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, non-defense government expenditures were slated for elimination so that monies could be directed to the U.S. war effort. The fund that had paid Peters's salary since he came on board at the OIA was axed almost immediately, as civilian agencies faced major funding cuts. The Washington, DC, office of the OIA moved to Chicago in 1942 to make more room in Washington for defense space needs—Peters asked for, but was not provided, defense work—and the OIA abolished his position on 25 April of that year. In one final irony, his last service evaluation rated his work as good. Unfortunately, within months of his dismissal, Peters suffered a stroke and became a “semi-invalid.”⁵⁴

It would be another decade before the modern relocation program would try to find jobs for American Indians in urban areas, but that effort would focus heavily on permanently moving people from reservation communities to cities. By contrast, under Collier the OIA focused on employment—both rural and urban—without specifically encouraging relocation. With reservation employment opportunities limited, the Indian Service nonetheless attempted to find work close to the places where people lived. As Zimmerman argued, the OIA's policy was not to encourage people to move to urban areas. Nonetheless, more and more tribal members made that decision. For a while, the Office continued to help migrating Indians find jobs in cities. But Collier's Indian Service ignored the trend of Indian migration and based its policies on an unrealistic view of the needs of tribal members.

More broadly, Collier's focus on “traditional” economic development in fields such as arts and crafts and the type of agriculture that the U.S. government found acceptable helped cement societal stereotypes about Native American work and economies at the same time Indians moving off-reservation in the early twentieth century contradicted this view. Men like Peters further complicated the narrow public and federal definition of successful Indians as those who assimilated or threw off their tribal past for a modern, mainstream American cultural future. Even these Indians' own rhetoric

Medical Treatment,” 25 August 1936; and Peters to commissioner [Collier], 12 August 1940, all Personnel Folder and Cahill, *Federal Fathers & Mothers*, 255.

⁵³ Daiker to Collier, 15 July 1941 and Peters to Skidmore, 23 July 1941, both Personnel Folder.

⁵⁴ Skidmore to Peters, 31 December 1941; “Scott Henry Peters Retirement Report Card”; Peters to Collier, 4 January 1942; Scott Peters efficiency rating, 31 March 1942; [Edith] Peters to Skidmore, 23 November 1942; F. T. Smith to [Edith] Peters, 18 December 1942; Bradford F. Miller to Indian Field Service, 7 August 1948; Zimmerman to Miller, 3 September 1948; Betty Elliot to John Brophy, 3 October 1949; and Daiker to Elliot, 18 October 1949, all Personnel Folder.

at times reinforced that notion. Yet in many cases they brought themselves into the modern world using traditional tribal values to ground their relationship to new surroundings. As Menominee tribal member Roy Oshkosh aptly observed in a 1927 *Chicago Daily Tribune* interview, “we like our modern comforts now.”⁵⁵ This did not mean they gave up being Indian, only that they continued to adapt to a changing environment, as they had for millennia.

Although many tribal members believed they needed to change the ways they lived in the world, many who moved away from their communities, including Progressive Era reformers like Peters, retained the essential cultural values of their fellow tribesmen and tribeswomen. Peters, following the example of Carlos Montezuma before him, conducted his work in Chicago and beyond using historic tribal leadership values for modern economic and social purposes. In the end, this was irreconcilable with both John Collier’s Office of Indian Affairs and American perceptions of Indians.⁵⁶ Ultimately, the Indian Service viewed Peters’s work as a failure. Ironically, when the OIA established the relocation program in the 1950s, the earlier placement program was not even a part of institutional memory.

By the early 1940s, the OIA could not stem the tide of Indians leaving reservation communities for large cities on their own without federal assistance. Its policy reversal stood in contradiction to the social change occurring in Indian country. Over the next several decades, the strength of this demographic shift meant the majority of Indians in the United States lived in urban areas. Peters’s short-lived work, which was reborn more than a decade later during the era of termination, began to lead the way in accommodating this change—until it was abruptly cut short. The failure to continue this effort represents a missed opportunity for the OIA to serve the needs of Indian country in a twentieth-century context.

Scott Henry Peters was well suited by personality and life and job experience to do the work he did until health problems, exacerbated by age, slowed him down and times changed faster than he could. Despite many barriers, he aided thousands of American Indian individuals to find their place within the rapidly changing world that was remaking tribal society in the United States. In doing so he fulfilled his goal of expanding opportunities for Indian people in the most difficult of circumstances. Peters had fulfilled what he referred to as “my life’s ambition . . . to serve while making a livelihood for myself.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “Squaws Rule Wigwam Now, Redskin Sighs,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 February 1927.

⁵⁶ For more on the difference between American perceptions of Indians and the sometimes incongruous or contradictory reality, see Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, 2006).

⁵⁷ Peters to Landsdale, 5 February 1934, Personnel Folder.