

Helen P. Clarke in 'the Age of Tribes'

Montana's Changing Racial Landscape, 1870–1920

BY ANDREW R. GRAYBILL



Helen P. Clarke, the daughter of a Piegan woman and a white fur trader, led a remarkable life. An actress on the New York City stage and one of the first women to be elected to public office in Montana, Clarke became just the second woman—as well as the first (and apparently only) person of native ancestry—appointed as an allotment agent when President Benjamin Harrison signed her commission in October 1890.

Fredricks, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 941-742

ON A WINTER'S DAY IN 1911, Helen Clarke wrote a most unusual fan letter to playwright Edwin Milton Royle.¹ At the time, Royle was nearing the apex of his career—his most famous piece, *The Squaw Man*, had just concluded its third run on Broadway, and three years later it would be made into Hollywood's first feature-length film, marking the directorial debut of a struggling former actor named Cecil B. DeMille.²

Clarke, however, was not writing to lavish praise on *The Squaw Man* or even as a devotee of the theater. Rather, she sought out Royle to share her powerful reaction to the play's sequel, a novel published in 1910 titled *The Silent Call*, which for Helen had captured so well the complexities of life on an Indian reservation. From her own experiences, Helen recognized the characters and themes in the book—the corrupt Indian agent, the caring but naive missionary, and, particularly, the simmering tensions between native peoples and their white neighbors.

Especially poignant for Helen was the dilemma of the novel's protagonist, Hal Calthorpe. Like Helen, Hal was the mixed-blood child of a noted white man and his Indian wife, and like Helen, Hal had enjoyed a remarkable career. But most of all, just like Helen, Hal had felt the sharp sting of racial prejudice. Indeed, in one of the novel's most memorable scenes, Hal recoils when assaulted with the epithet “half-breed.”³

As Helen explained in her letter to Royle, she hoped that his book might alert others to the plight faced by mixed-blood individuals. But she was dubious, given the attitudes of “the poor white trash and the half civilized Westerners who believed that [an] Indian could be called good only when dead.” She marveled that such vitriol was matched by a toxic combination of ignorance and hypocrisy, which allowed “the so-called American, a mixture of so many breeds [and] nationalities [to] sit in the seat of the scornful and arrogate to himself a pureness

of blood, superiority, something of which he is so unworthy an exponent.”⁴

Helen's pain and frustration were understandable. Though born into one of Montana's most prominent families, she experienced increasing alienation as the territory's social boundaries hardened during the Gilded Age. Whereas in the 1840s and 1850s peoples of mixed ancestry had served as brokers between white and native worlds, by the turn of the twentieth century this middle ground had disappeared, swept away by the new social calculus that favored Anglo-

Americans at the expense of individuals with any degree of Indian blood. The life and career of Helen Clarke illustrates the racial transformation of Montana in the period after the Civil War, an era she bitterly denounced as “the Age of Tribes”—an epoch distinguished by the careful sorting of every people according to race, with whites at the top and all other groups below.⁵

Helen Clarke was born in 1846 at the mouth of the Judith River in what is now Fergus County, Montana.⁶ Her father, Malcolm Clarke, had come up the Missouri around 1840, following his expulsion from the U.S. Military Academy and a volunteer stint during the Texas Revolution.⁷ As the protégé of Alexander Culbertson, one of the chief traders of the American Fur Company, Clarke enjoyed quick success in the fur business.

In time, he earned the respect (if not necessarily the affection) of the Piegan Indians, who bestowed upon him the sobriquet “Four Bears” because of his prowess in hunting grizzlies.⁸

Sometime around 1844, Malcolm Clarke wed Coth-co-co-na, the teenaged daughter of a prominent Piegan chief. Such marriages were typical in the fur trade, as these unions facilitated economic relationships with the bride's male relatives. But unlike many of his compatriots, who abandoned their “country wives” and their offspring, Clarke remained devoted to his family and even sent his two eldest children—



G. W. Floyd Studio, photographer. MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 941-761

Helen was born in 1846 to Malcolm Clarke (above, circa 1865), the son of Major Nathan Clarke and a protégé of fur trader Alexander Culbertson, and Coth-co-na, the daughter of a prominent Piegan chief. Helen received a classical education at a convent school in Cincinnati, then returned to Montana in the mid-1860s to join the family on the Clarke ranch north of Helena.

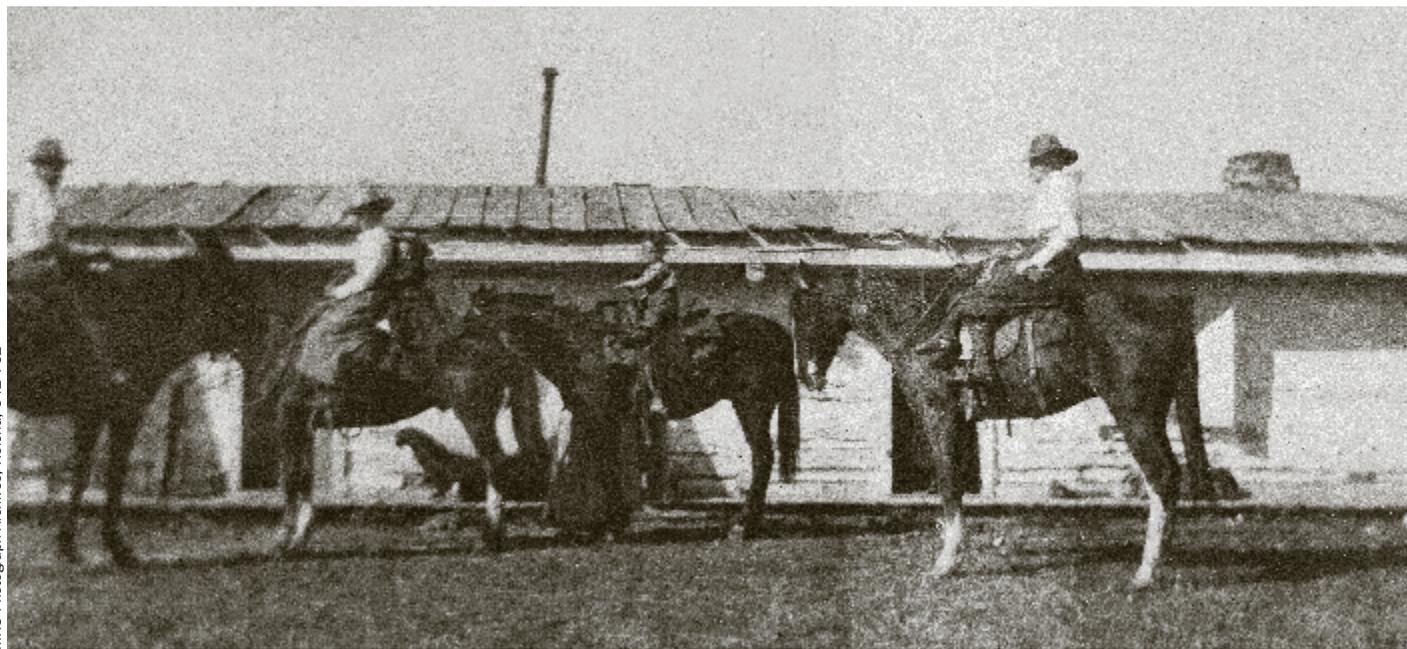
Helen and her younger brother Horace (born in 1848)—east for schooling. Though Horace soon returned to the upper Missouri, “Nellie”—as Helen was often called—received a classical education at a convent school in Cincinnati before coming home to Montana in the mid-1860s, at which point she joined her family on a ranch established by her father twenty-five miles north of Helena, the territorial capital.

Montana had changed much in Helen’s absence, marked especially by an influx of Anglo-Americans who had moved west to escape the turmoil of the Civil War and to capitalize on a series of recent gold strikes. While the Piegans had long resisted the incursions of outsiders—native and nonnative alike—the white newcomers who flooded the territory in the 1860s presented an especially daunting challenge to the Blackfeet. These newcomers rejected the relative racial accommodation of the fur trade era and violently dispossessed Montana’s native peoples, initiating a cycle of retribution that convulsed the territory and alarmed white residents and the U.S. military.

The Clarkes were pulled into this maelstrom when on August 17, 1869, Malcolm Clarke was murdered at his ranch by his wife’s cousin, a Piegan named Pete Owl Child, perhaps because of a lingering dispute over some stolen horses.⁹ At a different time, the

killing might have been dismissed as merely the outgrowth of a family feud, but considered against the backdrop of escalating native-white violence, Clarke’s killing took on a more ominous meaning. That winter, the U.S. Army launched a punitive campaign against the Blackfeet that culminated in the Marias (or Baker) Massacre of January 23, 1870, in which 173 Piegans—many of them suffering from smallpox and thus utterly defenseless—were slaughtered by the Second U.S. Cavalry and dozens of volunteer “concerned citizens,” among them Horace Clarke and his younger brother, Nathan. The carnage permanently ended Blackfeet resistance to American expansion on the northwestern plains.¹⁰

In the wake of their father’s murder, Helen and her sisters retreated to the stately Minneapolis home of their aunt Charlotte, Malcolm’s younger sister. But Helen did not remain long in Minnesota before moving to New York City, where she began a brief but acclaimed stage career. Precisely when and how she arrived in New York is not known; most of Helen’s personal papers—which included a hefty scrapbook documenting her performances—were lost to a fire in 1962.¹¹ Still, a glimpse of her time on the Manhattan stage survives in the recollections of friends and relatives and the occasional newspaper account.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 941-762

In August 1869, Malcolm Clarke was murdered at the ranch (above) by his wife’s cousin, Owl Child, which precipitated a punitive military campaign against the Piegans that culminated in the Marias (or Baker) Massacre of January 23, 1870, in which 173 Indians—many of them suffering from smallpox—were killed. Helen’s brothers Horace and Nathan participated in the army actions. In the aftermath, Helen and her sisters retreated to the Minneapolis home of their aunt Charlotte, Malcolm’s younger sister.

Only a sketchy record exists of the theatrical roles Helen played, but her fitness as a performing artist was obvious to all who knew her. For one thing, her flowing hair and willowy stature turned heads: one acquaintance remembered her as “5 feet and 10 inches of magnificent womanhood,” while another recalled her “strong aquiline nose and sharp black eyes that could sparkle at a joke or become tender at a

recollection.” But it was her “wonderful, deep, thrilling voice, unusually deep and strong for a woman,” that gave Helen such presence when on the boards.¹²

For her roles, Helen preferred the dramatic fare of the antebellum era rather than the contemporary melodramas obsessed with the social concerns of the Gilded Age. One of her favorite parts was Meg Merrilies, the soothsaying gypsy in playwright Daniel Terry’s *Guy Mannering*, an 1816 drama adapted from the eponymous novel by Sir Walter Scott. Perhaps Helen was even typecast for that part, as the role required an actress who was (according to an early reviewer of the play) “impassioned, awful, and irresistible . . . [an] indefinable being, tinged with melancholy, clothed with fierce grandeur, and breathing prophecy.”¹³

Given her enthusiasm for the stage, it is surprising that Helen abandoned New York, yet by 1875 she was back in Montana. Several stories attempt to account for her departure from the city, but the most plausible explanation is one allegedly offered by Helen herself (though its provenance cannot be fixed with certainty). In this telling, she insisted, “I was too much of self to become great. I could not forget that I was Helen Clarke and become the new being of imagination.”¹⁴ Helen’s New York sojourn proved that, whatever its painful associations, Montana was home.

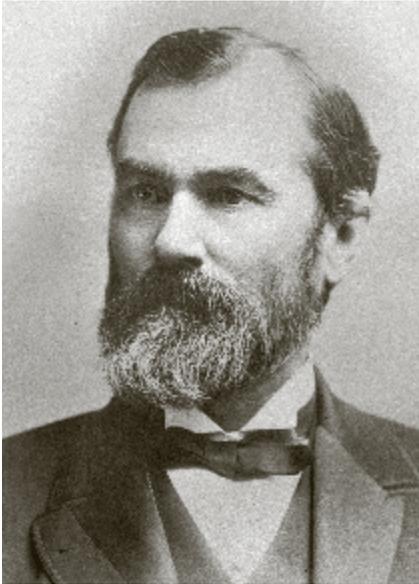
Welcoming Helen back to the territory was Wilbur Fisk Sanders and his extended family. Born in upstate New York in 1834, Sanders had moved west just shy of his thirtieth birthday, after serving with an Ohio volunteer regiment during the Civil War. Within months of his arrival in Montana, Sanders secured an enduring spot in territorial lore by successfully prosecuting George Ives for homicide and thus delivering to the hangmen of the Vigilance Committee their first victim. Though renowned for his combativeness and obstinacy, Sanders had another side: one friend remembered him as a champion of the downtrodden, citing his pro bono defense of a young Indian charged with murder; in another instance, he won an injunction against a labor union seeking to exclude Chinese workers.¹⁵

Probably because of his close relationship with Malcolm Clarke (with whom he and ten other leading citizens had incorporated the Historical Society of Montana in February 1865), Sanders recruited Helen to lead a classroom in the Helena grade school



Napoleon Sarony, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 94.1-745

Helen soon left Minnesota for New York City and began a brief but acclaimed acting career. An acquaintance recalled her “strong aquiline nose and sharp black eyes” but noted that it was her “wonderful, deep, thrilling voice, unusually deep and strong for a woman,” that gave Helen an irresistible stage presence. She had this portrait made circa 1895 in the New York studio of Napoleon Sarony, who was well known for his portraits of the stars of the late-nineteenth-century American theater.



In 1875, Helen returned to Montana Territory, where she was welcomed by the Sanders family of Helena. Wilbur Fisk Sanders (far left), who had been Malcolm Clarke's close friend, recruited Helen to teach grade school and later to run for the position of superintendent of schools in Lewis and Clark County. Wilbur and his wife, Harriet (near left), parents of five sons, embraced Helen as the daughter they never had. Their son James, home from college, once noted in his journal that he dropped in on his parents and found "Miss Clarke . . . here as usual."

in the spring of 1876.¹⁶ To be sure, she was exceptionally well prepared for the job given her education at Catholic institutions in Cincinnati and Minneapolis and especially her recent stint in charge of the one-room adobe schoolhouse at Fort Benton, a post she had assumed upon her return from New York the previous autumn.

But there was more to Sanders's efforts on Helen's behalf than the dictates of either empathy or beneficence. He and his wife, Harriet—who were parents to five sons—embraced Helen as the daughter they never had. A glance at the capital city's residential directory says as much: for the next thirteen years, Helen orbited the Sanders's mansion, renting rooms in boardinghouses never more than a block or two from the family's splendid Victorian home at 328 North Ewing Street. And she was a frequent visitor, whether stopping by for dinner and a hand of whist, giving dramatic readings in the parlor, or opening presents around the hearth on Christmas Day. Helen was such a fixture in the household that the eldest son, James, once noted in his journal—though without a trace of irritation—that while visiting Montana on a break from his legal studies at Columbia University, he dropped in on his parents and found "Miss Clarke . . . here as usual."¹⁷

Close association with a leading family had tangible benefits for Helen, but this is not to say that she turned her back on her own relatives. Rather, upon her return from the East Coast, the Sanders family was easily the more proximate, and not only

in geographical terms. For one thing, Horace Clarke had married and started a family on a ranch near Highwood, more than one hundred miles away. Their younger sister, Isabel, lived there, too, and both siblings were preoccupied with caring for their mother, who—as Horace recalled years later—never recovered from the shock of witnessing her husband's murder and thus lived a broken life until her death in June 1895.¹⁸

Of course, the one reason Helen had so much time for Wilbur and Harriet Sanders is because she had no husband or children of her own, a subject of intense interest to friends and gossips alike. Her singleness, however, was hardly for lack of suitors, as revealed by a sole surviving love letter found among her personal papers.¹⁹ Little is known about Helen's paramour, except that his name was Henry and that he wrote Helen from San Francisco in January 1884. The six-page note speaks to an intense and intimate relationship, as the author repeatedly refers to himself as her "lover" and in closing calls Helen his "darling Piotopowaka" (her Indian name, "The Bird That Comes Home").²⁰ What became of their relationship thereafter is a mystery. Or maybe not. Rumor had it (though nothing in Helen's own hand confirms such speculation) that she remained forever unmarried by choice because she would not wed an Indian and believed that no white man would ever treat her as an equal.²¹

Other Montanans were also dubious about intermarriage, as suggested by a tragic 1872 episode

involving the Clarke family. That September, Nathan Clarke—Malcolm’s younger son—was stabbed to death by James Swan during a drunken brawl. At issue was Swan’s daughter: the nineteen-year-old Clarke wanted to court her, but Swan was determined that she marry a white man instead. That the Swans were of mixed blood highlights that at least some people of mixed ancestry held the racial prejudices of the day (however self-loathing).²²

Such bigotry was gaining ground on Helen, too. In February 1880, Elizabeth Chester Fisk, a prominent white woman married to the editor of the *Helena Herald*, the state’s leading Republican mouthpiece, pulled her children from the city’s school, in part because of her dissatisfaction with Helen. Though Fisk justified her behavior on account of Helen’s allegedly sour disposition, she noted pointedly that Helen was “a half-breed Indian,” leaving little doubt that race had contributed to her decision. Helen’s devout Catholicism may also have concerned Lizzie Fisk.²³

Several factors explain the increasingly precarious circumstances facing mixed-blood peoples in Montana in the 1870s and after. First was a surge in native-white violence in the middle of the decade, as the territory’s Indian wars lurched to their bloody conclusion. In June 1876, General George Armstrong Custer and the Seventh U.S. Cavalry were annihilated at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and the following year Chief Joseph and the Nez Percés inflicted substantial casualties on the U.S. Army as the Indians attempted to reach the Canadian border. Such conflict and its attendant instability mobilized white rage against all Indians in the region, a category that—by virtue of their heritage—extended to mixed-blood people, too.²⁴

More important were Montana’s rapidly changing demographics, which in the short space of a decade remade the territory. In 1870, Montana’s native and nonnative populations were roughly equal, at approximately twenty thousand people each; by 1880, the number of whites had doubled even as the native population had begun to slide. Complicating matters, these white newcomers had no sense of the relative racial accommodation that had characterized earlier eras. Instead, white emigrants saw the mixed-blood communities they encountered as a combination of the worst elements of both races: white dissipation on the one hand and native ignorance on the

other. “Half-breed” was perhaps putting it too delicately. In the words of one late-nineteenth-century white Montanan, such individuals were “sons of a degenerate ancestry.”²⁵

No less a figure than Joe Kipp, who as an army scout and interpreter spent most of his adult life serving as an intermediary between Indians and whites (often to the detriment of Montana’s native peoples), suffered from such slights. In an obituary, a white friend remembered that “above all things, Kipp hated the word ‘breed,’ generally prefixed by the expletive ‘damn,’ so often used by the ignorant and thoughtless. . . . None know better than I how hard he tried to live so as to ever have the respect and friendship of the whites, and what fits of terrible depression overcame him when he heard his kind mentioned in terms of contempt or derision.”²⁶

Despite the worsening racial climate, Helen nevertheless managed a most impressive feat: in 1882, she (and a counterpart in Meagher County, Alice Nichols) became the first women elected to public office in Montana. Capitalizing on recent territorial legislation that extended to women the right to vote in, as well as to stand for, election in various school-related contests, Wilbur Fisk Sanders used his influence with the Republican Commission of Lewis and Clark County to get his protégée on the ballot as the party’s candidate for superintendent of schools.²⁷ Local Democrats were so impressed with Helen’s qualifications that they set aside their partisanship—if only for a moment—and withdrew their own candidate, who promptly endorsed Helen as “a lady well qualified and eminently worthy of the position.”²⁸ Thus unopposed, Helen cruised to victory on Election Day.

By all accounts, Helen excelled in her new position. In his annual reports, Montana’s superintendent of public instruction singled her out for special mention, praising her zeal and efficiency in managing the school system of the territory’s largest and wealthiest county.²⁹ And the job clearly suited Helen, starting with the annual salary of one thousand dollars, which gave her a welcomed measure of financial independence. Her success did not stop the Democrats from running their own candidate against her in 1884, but she easily dispatched Edmund O. Railsback, principal of the Helena Business College, winning with 55 percent of the vote.³⁰ She was elected to a third term in 1886.



Helen again left Montana for New York in 1889, en route delivering her nephews to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. During the next year, she visited the school regularly, often providing a performance for the students. The school's founder, Richard Henry Pratt, was thrilled, seeing in Clarke—who was “part Indian herself,” as noted proudly in the school newsletter—a role model for the native boys and girls he hoped to refashion. Pictured here, Carlisle's graduating class of 1893 included, from left to right: (standing) Helen's nephew Malcolm W. Clarke, Piegan; Fred Big Horse, Sioux; S. Arthur Johnson, Wyandotte; and (seated) John Baptiste, Winnebago; Emily E. Peake, Chippewa; and John G. Morrison, Chippewa.

Helen's triumphs proved that even if the fortunes of Montana's mixed-blood peoples were fading by the 1880s, they were not yet in total eclipse. However, to be sure, hers was an exceptional case. After all, Helen was unusually talented and attractive; she was also descended from a leading (white) figure of the territory's celebrated pioneer days and counted another such individual as a patron. As if to illustrate the singularity of her experience, a local newspaper dubbed Helen the “Aspasia of the wilderness,” likening her to the famous woman from ancient Greece whose wit and charm allowed her to move with ease in a society normally closed to those of her sex.³¹

But the analogy was apt in another, unintended sense as well. Aspasia was hounded in her own time by rumors that she was a prostitute, slanders spread by those who resented her influence with Pericles, the renowned Athenian statesman as well as the father of her illegitimate son.³² Helen had her own chorus of detractors—the Lizzie Fisks of the territory's emerging white middle class—who made life miserable. Eventually, such adversity drove Helen away from

Montana, where the new binary racial calculus left little room for people in between. As another correspondent explained: “Though endowed with much beauty, Miss Clarke was known to be the daughter of a Piegan Indian woman, and this fact caused her to be looked down upon socially. . . . [T]he gilded doors of Helena's social realm were closed to her by the four hundred.”³³ Who comprised the “four hundred” and how exactly they ostracized Helen is a mystery. But by the close of 1889, she had once again left Montana in search of a brighter future elsewhere, one that, ironically, was made possible by the passage of legislation that altered U.S. relations with its native peoples.

Signed into law by President Grover Cleveland in February 1887, the General Allotment Act transformed federal Indian policy. Known more familiarly as the Dawes Severalty Act (for its sponsor, Massachusetts senator Henry Dawes), the goal of the legislation was straightforward: to break up reservations and install native families on individually owned plots of land, with any surplus made available for purchase by non-Indians. Although the government would

hold title to the Indians' homesteads for a twenty-five-year waiting period, humanitarians and federal officials alike believed that native experience with private property would teach them thrift and self-sufficiency while encouraging the abandonment of cultural traditions.³⁴

The work of allotment began soon after the passage of the act, with government employees sent to various reservations and tasked with surveying and assigning plots to individuals or families. Helen Clarke became just the second woman—as well as the first (and apparently only) person of native ancestry—appointed as a special allotting agent when President Benjamin Harrison signed her commission on October 4, 1890.³⁵

Helen likely owed her job to Richard Henry Pratt, a retired military officer who in 1879 had established

the Carlisle Indian School, the first off-reservation boarding institution for native children.³⁶ Helen visited Carlisle's campus in central Pennsylvania in the winter of 1889–90 when she delivered two of her nephews to Pratt's care on her way back to New York from Montana. She was a regular guest at the school over the next year, and her visits were occasions to be savored, as they usually featured a performance of some sort by Helen—a recitation of a poem by Longfellow, a lesson in elocution, or a parable about moral uplift.³⁷ Pratt was thrilled, seeing in his guest—who was “part Indian herself,” as noted proudly in the school newsletter—a role model for the boys and girls he hoped to refashion.³⁸

Given Pratt's close association with the leading architects of federal Indian policy, he probably encouraged Helen to seek work in the Indian Service. And certainly her mixed ancestry played an indispensable role in her appointment. In the fall of 1890, Congress targeted several reservations in the Indian Territory for division, including lands held by some of the tribes most opposed to the Dawes Act. In assessing this thorny situation, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan wrote to the secretary of the interior: “It has come to my attention that Miss Helen P. Clark[e] . . . would be a proper person to make those allotments. . . . Being identified with the Indian race, it is probable that she would be able to exert a greater influence with them than one who is not so identified.”³⁹

Helen arrived in Indian Territory the following spring and set to work allotting the sixty-eight members of the Tonkawa tribe, who lived on a postage stamp-sized reservation twenty-five miles south of the Kansas border, in the north-central portion of the territory. Though it went quickly, the task itself was hard; Helen sweated for her eight-dollar per diem from “early morn to dewy eve,” as she put it, and often did not take a single day of rest for weeks at a time. Moreover, she and her three- or four-man crew (a surveyor, interpreter, and one or two chainmen) moved about constantly, hauling heavy stones to be used as monuments (while fretting about the attendant strain upon their horses).⁴⁰

A handful of rare photographs from Helen's time in the field speak to her resourcefulness. Though living for weeks on end in a canvas tent, Helen still preserved at least a dash of her characteristic refinement.



Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-113865

In the fall of 1890, Congress targeted several Indian Territory reservations for allotment, including lands held by some of the tribes most opposed to the Dawes Act. Helen Clarke's acquaintance with Richard Henry Pratt likely led to her appointment as an allotment agent. Helen traveled to Indian Territory in spring 1891 and set to work allotting the sixty-eight members of the Tonkawa (Tickanwa-tic) tribe. In 1898, ten members of the tribe, including Grant and Minnie Richards (above), appeared at the Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska. They were photographed by the exposition's official photographer, F. A. Rinehart.



After she finished her work on the Tonkawa reservation, Clarke moved on to allot the reservation of the nearby Otoe-Missourias. She was not welcomed. “We would rather be naked and go hungry,” said spokesmen Mitchell Deroin, “than to take allotments and to have that land go out of our hand at some future time. . . . [I]f we take allotments we will not have a home.” Also at issue was Helen’s gender. As Inspector Arthur Tinker later explained, the Indians “complained of the Great Father, for sending a woman. . . . [T]hey say they are men, and want a man to transact business with them, not a woman.” Above, at Helen’s camp at the Otoe Agency, she stands next to a wagon, conversing with two unidentified men likely of the Otoe-Missouria tribe. The other people are not identified.

One picture shows her at mealtime, joined by two others at a table covered with a crisp white cloth and arrayed with a complete place setting or two. Another image reveals the details of her sleeping quarters, which boasted a heavy, wicker-backed rolling chair, a writing desk, several photographs, and—as always—a collection of books.

Once Helen and her crew had finished allotting the Tonkawa reservation by the end of June 1891, they moved to that of the nearby Otoe-Missourias. But if the Tonkawas had given no trouble, and—according to their agent—they “seem to be satisfied with the new order of things,” the same could not be said for the Otoe-Missourias, who vigorously contested Helen’s efforts from the moment she arrived among

them.⁴¹ As explained by one of their spokesmen, Mitchell Deroin, the Indians believed (and not incorrectly) that if allotted, they would lose much of their reservation. “We would rather be naked and go hungry,” Deroin said, “than to take allotments and to have that land go out of our hand at some future time. . . . [I]f we take allotments we will not have a home.”⁴² Haunted by the possibility of such an outcome, the Otoe-Missourias threatened to kill the first member of their tribe who accepted a homestead and then set about ripping up the stones carefully laid by Clarke and her team to mark out individual plots.⁴³

And yet it was not merely the prospect of allotment that angered the Otoe-Missourias: as explained by Indian Inspector Arthur Tinker, they “complained



As an allotment agent, Helen worked for her eight-dollar per diem from “early morn to dewy eve,” as she put it. Throughout her time in the field, she lived in canvas tents, but the interior of her sleeping quarters (above) reveals that she did not go entirely without creature comforts.

of the Great Father, for sending a woman. . . . [T]hey say they are men, and want a man to transact business with them, not a woman.” To Helen’s chagrin, the Indians were not the only ones guilty of chauvinism. Clarke believed that Tinker himself had hinted to tribal leaders that she was not qualified for the work, which the Indians took to mean that her allotments had no legal standing. Though Tinker adamantly denied the charge, Helen’s concerns were legitimate: years later, in reference to her case, an official conceded the “disadvantages under which even the most talented woman labors while engaging in allotment work.” Most women employed by the Indian Service (and by the early twentieth century there were many) served as teachers or field matrons.⁴⁴

While Helen’s gender proved a liability as an allotting agent, her mixed-race status conferred no benefit, as Commissioner Morgan had hoped when he appointed her. By the end of November 1891, after almost five months among the Otoe-Missourias,

Clarke had completed only 122 allotments, to less than half the tribe. But if Helen’s background was no help in convincing Indians to accept individual tracts, it inclined her to sympathy. As she explained to her superiors: “The question of allotment is a stupendous one—he [the Indian] has not yet been able to grasp it fully. . . . The Indian’s future depends upon this choice and this privilege I trust may not be denied him even if he be not as prompt to act as the Department and I would wish.”⁴⁵

Clearly, Helen’s view was fed by the same spring of paternalism that nourished most (white) reformers. She considered the Indians prone to superstition and found them—“like children, as they are”—moody and unreliable. This dim assessment took on a darker hue in the winter of 1891–92 when work among the Otoe-Missourias stalled completely, and she moved on to allot the neighboring Poncas, who proved even less amenable. As Helen confessed in a plaintive note to Wilbur Fisk Sanders: “I feel utterly alone in

their Territory—and I long for a home face and for encouragement.” Nevertheless, she got to work, alternating between the Ponca and the Otoe-Missouria reservations during the next two years.⁴⁶

By the summer of 1894, Helen’s forbearance had evaporated. Although she had persuaded 410 of 759 Poncas and 175 of 352 Otoe-Missourias to select plots, she despaired of ever seeing the job through to completion. She vented to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Daniel M. Browning, Morgan’s successor: “I scarcely think the Indian Office realizes the situation here. I am working among a people whose very soul abominates anything tending towards civilization, and they are bright enough to see that *allotments* mean civilization ultimately. And because of this fact they have shown a bitterness unparalleled.”⁴⁷ She concluded her report by recommending that federal officials impose a deadline by which the Indians must select

homesteads or have assignments made for them—a reversal from her earlier entreaty urging patience and understanding.

As it happened, Browning warmed to her idea of an ultimatum, and thus on August 31 he ordered Helen to give tribal members thirty days to make their selections. In a sense, her suggestion worked too well: by the middle of December, Clarke had finished her task, and now she faced unemployment for the first time in her life. This was an especially worrisome prospect for a member of “the class that destiny has ordered to win bread and butter for himself or herself,” as she once put it.⁴⁸ With no job prospects in Indian Territory, Helen disposed of her horses and equipment and returned home.

Helen arrived in the upper Missouri country that spring to find her mother’s people locked in their own bitter land dispute. Since the early 1890s, rumors



Courtesy Joyce Clarke Turvey

In the winter of 1891–92, when allotment of the Otoe-Missouria reservation stalled completely, Helen and her crew began to allot the neighboring Poncas. As Helen confessed in a plaintive note to Wilbur Fisk Sanders: “I feel utterly alone in their Territory—and I long for a home face and for encouragement.” Nevertheless, she continued to work, alternating between the Ponca and the Otoe-Missouria reservations for the next two years. In this photograph, Helen sits at the dining table in her camp in Indian Territory. The other individual and girl are not identified.

of mineral wealth in the Rocky Mountains running along the west side of the Blackfeet Reservation had lured a new wave of white newcomers to northern Montana. Hoping to open this country for mining operations, federal officials dispatched a three-man team in September 1895 to negotiate with the Blackfeet for its purchase.

Although many tribal members were hesitant, the commissioners—a group that included naturalist and ethnographer George Bird Grinnell, a longtime friend of the Piegiens—held the upper hand. At the time, the Blackfeet were only a decade removed from a period of horrific starvation that had occurred after the end of large herds of bison on the plains. The tribe had survived on federal rations, but government negligence had cost hundreds of Piegan lives.⁴⁹ Therefore, when in 1895 the Blackfeet requested \$3 million for the land in question, the commissioners enjoyed significant leverage and offered only one-third that amount.⁵⁰

No record exists of the counsel Helen Clarke gave to the Piegiens who sought her advice, but considering her recent allotting experience and also the outcome of the deliberations, it seems certain that she urged the Blackfeet to accede to the commissioners' wishes. After all, Helen knew well the coercive power of the federal government, as she had just deployed it herself against the Poncas and the Otoe-Missourias. In the end, the Indians agreed to sell the so-called "Ceded Strip" for \$1.5 million and supposedly permanent usage rights. But these promises were fleeting: large-scale mining operations proved unsustainable, and Congress was persuaded to set the land aside as Glacier National Park in 1910 (just as Grinnell had hoped), which soon resulted in severe restrictions on Blackfeet access.⁵¹

In the early months of 1896, even as Congress was putting the finishing touches on a bill transferring ownership of the Ceded Strip, another document concerning Indian affairs was making the rounds on Capitol Hill. In March, the Otoe-Missourias sent a petition to Secretary of the Interior Hoke Smith insisting that they did not approve of the allotments made for them by Helen Clarke. To be sure, the secretary had received the schedules Clarke had forwarded the previous December, but thus far he had declined to endorse them, primarily because—as the tribes' agent explained—many of the Otoe-Missourias had simply

ignored Helen's assignments and settled together in camps (as in the old days of communal living) the moment she left for Montana. Vexed by their insubordination, the Department of Interior ordered Helen back to Indian Territory in the autumn of 1897 with instructions to "adjust the existing difficulties."⁵²

While surely exasperated, Helen was also delighted to have the work. In fact, her prospects in Montana were so bleak that in April of that year Helen had enlisted several well-placed friends to nudge along her reappointment as an allotment agent. To one of her advocates, Senator Thomas H. Carter of Montana, she emphasized her good record as well as her "Indian blood," before adding a sharply partisan appeal. Noting the recent election of fellow Republican William McKinley as president, Helen chided "if to the victor belongs the spoils, why *we* who were on the right side should be remembered."⁵³

The tribes, of course, did not welcome Helen Clarke's reappearance. Barely a month after her arrival in Indian Territory, the Otoe-Missourias drafted yet another petition to the government detailing their objections to allotment. It culminated in a hard truth: "The Indians of the said tribes believed they owned these lands and that they would be allowed to have the undisturbed possession of the same, and would not be molested without their consent." The Poncas were equally adamant, and in council with a visiting official from Indian Affairs, they attacked Helen personally. A man named Thick Nail declared: "I never did like Miss Clarke; Miss Clarke came down here and allotted these Poncas without their knowing anything about it. . . . [Y]ou white people must like people who tell lies." Even a pro-allotment chief noted that although he had done all the federal government had asked, "today we are hungry, we are starving."⁵⁴

If the recent Blackfeet land negotiations caused Helen to reconsider allotment policy, she did not say. Instead, she worked feverishly to complete her task—but indicated in an anxious letter to James Sanders, the eldest of Wilbur's children: "I want to remain in this work of allotting lands until I can save enough to live on in my old age." She was even more direct in a missive she sent to Commissioner of Indian Affairs William A. Jones in the spring of 1899 declaring the fulfillment of her duties: "After [April 30] I shall be without work. . . . I am a struggling woman without fortune . . . and keenly feel the necessity for making

every possible provision for the rainy day which comes to all of us who survive the storms of life sufficiently long. I therefore beg you sincerely not to let me remain idle.” This time, however, there would be no encore with the Indian Office, perhaps because—as Helen suspected—“there is a prejudice always at a woman holding any sort of position that pays.” Though she remained on the rolls of the Interior Department until 1904, she never again worked for the Indian Service.⁵⁵

Helen Clarke returned to Montana for good in 1902 following a short stint in San Francisco, where she taught elocution and, ever the student, took French lessons. While living in California, Helen had received nearly \$2,500 from the government (an indemnity for property lost during Owl Child’s raid on her father’s ranch in 1869), but it was far less than the \$20,000 she had requested and, at any rate, was equal only to a year’s salary as an allotment agent.⁵⁶ To a woman nearing sixty, with neither spouse nor children to look after her in old age, combining domestic forces with her brother Horace, at Midvale (a small town on the western edge of the Blackfeet Reservation), must have seemed to Helen her best bet.

Perhaps Helen’s age led her to want to set the record straight about her life. Not long after she arrived from the West Coast, she sat for an interview in which she refuted numerous particulars printed in the earlier story that charged the “gilded doors of Helena” had been closed to her. “Now as a matter of fact,” Helen told the writer, “I am far from being ashamed of my origin, but on the other hand am proud of both my father and mother,” adding, “I had always numbered the very best people of Helena among my friends.”⁵⁷ That was no doubt true, but

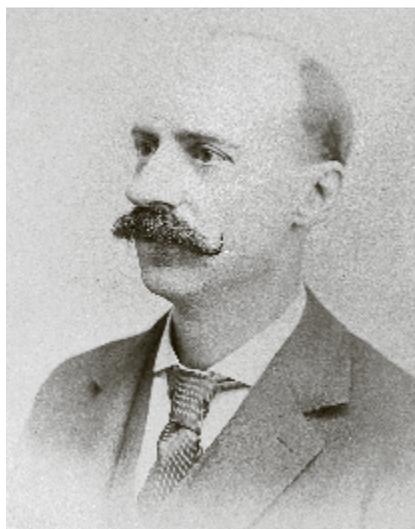
bypassing the capital city (where she had lived nearly her entire adult life while in Montana) in favor of the reservation did not end such tongue wagging.

As with her sojourn on the Blackfeet Reservation in 1895–96, Helen’s arrival in 1902 came at a propitious time. With a reservation population of approximately 2,200, the Blackfeet were enduring dizzying administrative instability as Indian agents came and went (five of them between 1897 and 1900 alone). Unfortunately, the agent appointed in 1900, James H. Monteath, believed that the surest way to force assimilation upon the Blackfeet was to withhold rations from anyone who, in his estimation, was able-bodied. During his disastrous five-year tenure, Monteath slashed the ration rolls from more than 2,000 names to less than 100.⁵⁸

In the fall of 1903, Helen orchestrated a campaign to have Monteath removed, alleging “maladministration,” which included the proliferation of alcohol on the reservation. Through his proxy, the agent insisted that “the breeds are responsible for any dissatisfaction there may be on the reservation,” a common allegation by agents, who believed that peoples of mixed ancestry fomented dissension by manipulating their Indian relatives.⁵⁹ Though the Clarkes outlasted Monteath (who was replaced in early 1905), their victory was a pyrrhic one: Horace

spent time in the reservation jail on trumped-up charges, and Monteath blacklisted Helen with federal officials, a factor that—in the opinion of one of her advocates—prevented her reappointment with the Indian Office.⁶⁰

Monteath’s vindictiveness may thus explain why, when the Blackfeet Reservation was allotted beginning in 1907, Helen was not selected for the job.



Taylor, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 943-977

Earning enough money to support herself continued to be a concern for Helen. “I am a struggling woman without fortune . . . and keenly feel the necessity for making every possible provision for the rainy day which comes to all of us who survive the storms of life sufficiently long,” she wrote in 1899. In 1902, Helen, then almost sixty, decided to combine households with her brother Horace, who lived at Midvale, a small town on the western edge of the Blackfeet Reservation. At the time, James H. Monteath (above, circa 1895) was the reservation’s Indian agent. During his 1900 to 1905 tenure, Monteath tried to force assimilation on the Blackfeet by slashing ration rolls from more than two thousand to less than one hundred. In the fall of 1903, Helen orchestrated a campaign to have Monteath removed, alleging “maladministration.”



As the daughter of a full-blood Piegan woman, Helen was entitled to 320 acres when the Blackfeet Reservation was allotted beginning in 1907. She and her brother Horace chose adjoining allotments in Midvale, just east of the land that would become Glacier National Park in 1910. To augment their finances, the siblings planned to build “chalets and bungalows” to rent to park visitors. Helen and Horace are pictured above at the small frame house they shared.

Certainly, she was an obvious and qualified candidate given her extensive work in Indian Territory. Leaving nothing to chance, the Blackfeet even sent a petition signed by two hundred individuals (representing almost one-tenth of the reservation population) to the commissioner of Indian Affairs recommending Helen for the post, but to no avail. Charles Roblin, a white man who had valuable allotting experience of his own, got the job.⁶¹

Compounding Helen’s frustration, no doubt, was her required participation in a standard but nevertheless humiliating charade: proving her native bona fides in order to secure a homestead of her own. Although Helen’s personal history was already well known to the government, on an April day in 1909, an elderly and respected chief named Little Dog came into agency headquarters and testified to allotment agent Roblin that Helen’s mother was a full-blood Piegan, thus entitling her daughter to 280 acres for

grazing and 40 acres for farming.⁶² So endorsed, Helen became allottee number 283.

Helen’s plot selection was excellent, a circumstance that was hardly coincidental since Horace (allottee number 284) had settled in the Midvale area even before the Great Northern Railway laid tracks over nearby Marias Pass in 1891. He and his sister chose contiguous homesteads within a stone’s throw of the Great Northern depot at Midvale (later renamed East Glacier Park). In 1913, railroad president Louis Hill opened the Glacier Park Hotel at the eastern entrance to the park, literally across the road from the small frame house Horace and Helen shared. Soon thousands of visitors flocked to the park, many of whom came to see the “Glacier Indians.”⁶³ Early guests included the likes of Mrs. Isaac Guggenheim and Mrs. George W. Vanderbilt as well as such artists as photographer Walter McClintock and painter Julius Seyler.⁶⁴

Glacier Park offered economic opportunity for the aging siblings—and they needed extra income. If in their twilight both Horace and Helen enjoyed good health, their financial circumstances were not nearly so robust. Like many mixed-blood people on the reservation—by this time a group that constituted nearly half its population—the Clarkes raised hay and a few cattle. Such ventures, however, were becoming increasingly difficult to sustain as allotment continued to carve up tribal lands and thus reduced common grazing space.⁶⁵ More to the point, as remembered by one of Helen’s friends, “Neither of them had much business ability so they never made much money.”⁶⁶

Some sense of the Clarkes’ economic hardships emerges in a series of letters between Helen and J. H. Sherburne, the licensed Indian trader on the Blackfeet Reservation who operated a store in Browning. For instance, in one letter she requested a pack-

age of rat poison, as “my house is alive with mice.” In another, scribbled during a brutal cold spell, Helen asked after a shipment of goods that had not yet arrived. Noting that she and her brother had only enough heating oil to get them through the night, she wrote: “We are in a sad plight—no oil . . . and soon no butter. . . [S]end goods so soon as you can.” These missives were probably easier to draft than the many that concluded with apologies like this one, from January 1916: “Wish we could have paid more on old note—but a little is better than nothing.”⁶⁷

In this bleak milieu, the Clarkes hatched a plan to capitalize on the Glacier Park tourist trade. As Helen explained in October 1913: “We intend to build chalets and bungalows and induce others to do likewise which will not only benefit the public but enhance the value of our own lands.” It was a fine idea but not as simple as she described. After all, as allotted Indians,



The extent of the Clarkes’ economic hardships emerges in letters to J. H. Sherburne, the licensed Indian trader, whose Browning store is pictured here in 1899. In one note, Helen asked after a shipment of goods that had not yet arrived: “We are in a sad plight—no oil . . . and soon no butter. . . [S]end goods so soon as you can.” Another, from January 1916, concluded: “Wish we could have paid more on old note—but a little is better than nothing.”

the Clarkes had first to secure title to their property, which was held in trust by the federal government according to the terms of the Dawes Act. The government was often eager to grant outright ownership of land to mixed-blood people (thus obviating any need to provide financial subsidy), and Helen's unique circumstances helped facilitate her application. From the moment her inquiry arrived in Washington, officials in the Indian Service fast-tracked the paperwork, with one of the commissioner's assistants noting that, though the schedule of Blackfeet allotments had not yet been approved by the president, the Clarkes' case "will be taken up specially, and this Office will make a recommendation to the Department [of the Interior] that the allotments be approved."⁶⁸

In other crucial respects, however, Helen's petition was treated no differently than that of any Indian seeking to gain title to allotted land, a process that highlighted racist assumptions of the day. To begin with, an applicant needed an endorsement from the reservation's Indian agent. More onerous was a questionnaire designed to gauge competency, that asked—among other things—an individual's degree of Indian blood and whether or not he or she used intoxicants. Helen wrote tersely: "We know we are capable of handling our own affairs."⁶⁹

Though the Clarkes' applications were approved in the spring of 1914, their dreams of financial security did not materialize, despite the construction of a number of small lodgings on their property. While the siblings found renters, the timing could hardly have been worse: the sharp economic downturn following World War I caused many of their tenants to default on their payments. As one Sherburne associate explained to Helen: "It is most awful hard to collect a Dollar from any body on any thing [at] these present times." That realization, of course, did not stop the trader from trying to collect on Helen's debt, which by the end of the decade had ballooned to nearly \$1,500.⁷⁰

If it did not bring riches, Helen's proximity to Glacier Park brought her visitors instead. In time, the house she shared with Horace became renowned as something of a rustic intellectual salon, and her guests—including the painter Joseph Henry Sharp—sat for hours with Helen to learn about the Piegan. Whether they intended to or not, visitors often exoticized their hostess. Take, for instance, a letter from

the prominent Montana suffragist Mary O'Neill, who in 1910 wrote to Helen, ostensibly to invite her to a statewide gathering of women's organizations. "How are you, Woman with the Shadow eyes?" she began, before arriving at the true purpose of her letter: "One thing I want to see [is] if you and I can coloborate [*sic*] on a book of the Mystic lore of the Indians—and no one could know it better than you."⁷¹

Even those who presumably knew her best tended to fetishize Helen's mixed-blood status. One of them, Helen Fitzgerald Sanders, daughter-in-law of Wilbur Fisk Sanders (who had died in 1905), spent extensive time with the Clarke siblings while researching her novel *The White Quiver*. Published in 1913, the book—according to its author—"is a story of the Piegan Indians before they felt the influence of the white man." In this way, Sanders's volume resembled contemporary works by photographer Edward S. Curtis or the paintings of the Taos Society of Artists (to which Joseph Henry Sharp belonged), with their romantic visions of an uncorrupted native past. Helen and Horace had been Sanders's portal to that world, which the author acknowledged in her dedication: "To Helen P. Clarke, 'Pi-o-to-po-wa-ka,' in whose noble character mingles the best of the white race and the red."⁷²

What Helen made of such oblations is hard to assess, but it is easy to imagine that she experienced less internal conflict when visited by a second group of guests: family members and Blackfeet neighbors. In later years, "Aunt Helen," as she was known, became a trusted source of emotional and financial support for Indians on the reservation, especially the elderly. According to one friend, it was this generosity—more than any absence of business acumen—that explained the poverty of Helen's later years.⁷³

On March 4, 1923, a Catholic priest named Father Halligan was summoned to the Clarkes' home. Helen, at seventy-six, was ill with pneumonia and failing rapidly, and as she had always been a devoted member of the church, someone, likely Horace, knew she would take great comfort in the clergyman's presence. As the priest and a small group kept a bedside vigil throughout the night, Father Halligan noticed that, toward the end, Helen "was reviewing her whole life." Because of her weakened condition Halligan could make out very little of what she said, but he clearly heard these words, which he shared at her eulogy a few days



If it did not bring riches, Helen's proximity to Glacier Park brought her visitors instead. Many of these white guests viewed their mixed-blood hostess as a portal to the world of her Indian heritage. In later years, "Aunt Helen," as she was known, was also a good friend to many family members and Blackfoot neighbors. According to one friend, it was this generosity—more than any absence of business acumen—that explained the poverty of Helen's later years. She died of pneumonia in 1923 at the age of seventy-six.

later. "Children," she had whispered, "should have nothing but the greatest admiration [and] the greatest respect, the greatest love and reverence for their teachers." As the priest explained to the mourners who gathered at her gravesite, these "golden words of wisdom" hearkened back to the "best and happiest years of her life."⁷⁴

Perhaps the priest was right, that at the hour of her death Helen thought of her students at Fort Benton and Helena. But there is another possible interpretation of her last words, one in which Helen is still the teacher but her students are the native peoples to

whom she devoted her later years. To be sure, such an equation would leave Helen open to unsettling charges of self-aggrandizement. And yet at least according to one acquaintance, this alternative reading may be closer to the truth: "Whatever her own opinions, she could only serve her people by counseling them to submit, make the best of the situation and so educate themselves that they might meet the whites on their own ground and possibly, finally to obtain justice."⁷⁵

This perspective is revealing, especially in its clear suggestion that by the end of her life Helen was considered an Indian (at least by Montana whites), responsible for helping accommodate "her people" to Washington's assimilationist regime. And certainly the fact that she had actively sought an allotment only facilitated such rigid classification. How Helen Clarke imagined her own racial identity is more elusive, emerging only in rare instances, as in the 1911 missive she sent to Edwin Milton Royle in which she introduced herself as a "mixed blood, or half Indian."⁷⁶ Her own life was a testament to how dramatically the meaning of those terms had changed over the course of her life: in the 1850s (and perhaps even as late as 1870), they referred to someone who walked between two worlds; by the early twentieth century, such distinctions increasingly identified someone who belonged fully to neither community, thus occupying an uncomfortable and shifting ground in between.

Andrew R. Graybill is associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the author of *Policing the Great Plains: Rangers, Mounties, and the North American Frontier, 1875–1910* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008) and coeditor of *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009). He was the Montana Historical Society's James H. Bradley Fellow in 2006, during which time he completed much of the research for this article. His book *A Mixture of So Many Bloods: A Family Saga of the American West* will be published by W. W. Norton in 2012.

Notes

1. For their assistance with this article, I thank Cathleen Cahill, Bill Farr, Nick Guyatt, Pete Maslowski, Tice Miller, Ken Robison, Mary Sriver, and especially Joyce Clarke Turvey, and the Nineteenth-Century Studies reading group at the University of Nebraska. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the History Department and Office of Research at the University of Nebraska.

2. It is worth noting that the 1911 revival ran for only eight performances. For more on the movie and its reception, see Angela Aleiss, *Making the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies* (Westport, Conn., 2005), 19–21. For more on DeMille's involvement with the film, see Robert S. Birchard, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood* (Lexington, Ky., 2004), 1–13.

3. There is a long-standing and lively debate about the use of terms such as “mixed blood” in describing peoples of Indian-white ancestry. I use the phrase (and others like it) in the way that Helen Clarke would have understood it; namely, as a descriptor for the children produced by the relationships between native and nonnative individuals (almost always the result of fur trade encounters). For a thorough consideration of the complexities bound up in such terminology, see Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, eds., *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (Winnipeg, 1985), 3–16.

4. Helen P. Clarke to Edwin M. Royle, Feb. 15, 1911, folder 2, Helen P. Clarke Papers (hereafter HPC), SC 1153, Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena (hereafter MHS).

5. It is worth noting that questions about peoples of mixed Indian and nonnative ancestry have received increased attention in recent years, with much of the best scholarship focused on Indian Territory (which became Oklahoma). See, for instance, Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in*

Slavery and Freedom (Berkeley, Calif., 2005); Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York, 2005); and Fay Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2007).

6. Several dates are given for Helen's birth; 1846 is the one offered by her grandniece, Joyce Clarke Turvey. Interview by author, East Glacier Park, Montana, October 5, 2006.

7. For more on Malcolm Clarke, see the two short articles written by his sister and daughter, respectively: Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve, “A Sketch of the Early Life of Malcolm Clark,” in *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, 10 vols. (1876–1940; repr., Boston, 1966), 1:90–98; and Helen P. Clarke, “Sketch of Malcolm Clarke,” *ibid.*, 2:255–68. The spelling of the family surname was wildly inconsistent, though by the end of the nineteenth century “Clarke” was the widely accepted version.

8. The Blackfeet Confederacy was composed of three groups: the Siksika (or Blackfoot); the Kainah (or Blood); and the Piegan (or Pikuni). Although they remained politically distinct, the three groups spoke one language, shared common customs, and faced opposition from the same native adversaries. This article uses “Piegan” and “Blackfeet” synonymously. See John C. Ewers, *Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (1958; repr., Norman, Okla., 1983), 3–18. For more on both Culbertson and the American Fur Company, see Lesley Wischmann, *Frontier Diplomats: Alexander Culbertson and Nativist-Siksina' among the Blackfeet* (Norman, Okla., 2004).

9. Some on the Blackfeet Reservation believe that Malcolm Clarke raped Owl Child's wife, and that this assault was the real cause of the murder.

10. For the best account of the campaign and its tragic culmination, see Paul Andrew Hutton, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (Norman, Okla., 1985), 180–200.

See also Robert J. Ege, *Strike Them Hard: Incident on the Marias, 23 January 1870* (Bellevue, Nebr., 1970); and Dave Walter, *Montana Campfire Tales: Fourteen Historical Narratives* (Guilford, Conn., 1997), 33–50.

11. The fire destroyed the East Glacier Park home formerly occupied by Horace and Helen. At the time of the conflagration, the house had passed to Horace's granddaughter Joyce Clarke Turvey and her husband, Irv. *Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune*, Apr. 29, 1962.

12. *Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune*, May 15, 1932; undated reminiscence by Bessie C. Wells, folder 1, HPC, MHS.

13. Quoted in Claire Lamont, “Meg the Gipsy in Scott and Keats,” *English*, 36 (Summer 1987), 139–40.

14. Joyce Clarke Turvey, “Helen Pioto-powaka Clarke,” in *History of Glacier County, Montana*, ed. Joyce MacCarter (Dallas, 1984), 87.

15. Frederick Allen, *A Decent, Orderly Lynching: The Montana Vigilantes* (Norman, Okla., 2004), 185–97; A. C. McClure, “Wilbur Fisk Sanders,” in *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, 8:25–35.

16. Wilbur Fisk Sanders to Helen P. Clarke, March 26, 1876, folder 2, HPC, MHS.

17. *Helena City Directory*, copies at MHS; James Upson Sanders journal, boxes 2–5, James Upson Sanders Papers (hereafter James Sanders Papers), MC 66, MHS.

18. Martha E. Plassmann, “A Double Heritage,” folder 18, box 4, Martha E. Plassmann Papers, MC 78, MHS. Helen had three full siblings—Horace (1848–1930), Nathan (1852–1872), and Isabel (1861–1935)—as well as a half-sister, Judith (1861–1897), from Malcolm's second marriage.

19. “Henry” to Helen P. Clarke, Jan. 11, 1884, folder 2, HPC, MHS.

20. Jack Holterman, in an unpublished manuscript, gives careful consideration of Helen's Piegan name, including its spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. Another variation offered by Blackfoot scholar Marvin Weatherwax is “Comes Walking from a Distance.” Jack Holterman, “The Homing Bird,” manuscript in author's possession; Marvin Weatherwax, interview by author, Browning, Mont., Oct. 7, 2006.

21. This explanation appears in multiple sources, the earliest of which is an undated obituary (presumably from 1923, the year of Helen's death) in the *Grass Range (Mont.) Review*, in “Helen P. Clarke” Vertical File, MHS. See also David Hilger to Mrs. Lou Stocking, Mar. 18, 1934, folder 1, HPC, MHS.



Blackfeet Indian Reservation, looking across St. Mary River to Chief Mountain, September 10, 1912

22. George Heldt to Francis Clarke, Sept. 18, 1872, folder 2, HPC, MHS. See also clipping from Isabell Lewis Tabor, *Great Falls Yesterday: Comprising a Collection of Biographies and Reminiscences of Early Settlers* (Helena, Mont., 1939), copy in "Malcolm Clarke" Vertical File, MHS; and *Helena (Mont.) Weekly Herald*, Sept. 26, 1872. More than 125 years later, grandniece Joyce Clarke Turvey located Nathan's grave near the town of Ulm, Montana, and erected a memorial on the site. See *Glacier (Mont.) Reporter*, Dec. 17, 1998.
23. Rex C. Myers, ed., *Lizzie: The Letters of Elizabeth Chester Fisk, 1864-1893* (Missoula, Mont., 1989), 107.
24. For recent treatments of these conflicts, see Nathaniel Philbrick, *Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (New York, 2010); and Elliott West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (New York, 2009).
25. L. W. Cooke to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Mar. 7, 1895, file 13968, box 1183, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75 (RG 75), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NARA).
26. *Great Falls (Mont.) Daily Tribune*, July 5, 1914.
27. Clark C. Spence, *Territorial Politics and Government in Montana, 1864-89* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 201. Women did not win the vote in general elections in Montana until 1914.
28. *Fort Benton (Mont.) River Press Weekly*, Sept. 20, 1882.
29. See, for instance, the *Seventh Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Territory of Montana, for the Year 1885* (Helena, Mont., 1886), 59.
30. *Helena (Mont.) Weekly Herald*, Nov. 13, 1884. For his part, Railsback did not go gently, insisting two days after the election that—contrary to reports—he would not concede until his defeat was assured. See *Helena (Mont.) Weekly Independent*, Nov. 6, 1884.
31. Undated newspaper clipping, "Helen P. Clarke" Vertical File, MHS.
32. Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy* (New York, 1991), 181-84; Anthony J. Podlecki, *Pericles and His Circle* (New York, 1998), 109-17.
33. *Monterey (Calif.) New Era*, Jan. 1, 1902. Why this story (which was written by a Helena correspondent) appeared in a California newspaper is unclear.
34. For more on the Dawes Act, see Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (1984; repr., Lincoln, Nebr., 2001).
35. Alice Fletcher served as the first female allotting agent when in 1883—before the passage of the Dawes Act—she was charged with allotting the Omaha Indians of Nebraska. Between 1889 and 1892, she allotted the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. For more on Fletcher, see Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1988).
36. See David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence, Kans., 1995).
37. *The Red Man*, 10 (Jan.-Feb. 1890); *Great Falls (Mont.) Leader Daily*, Aug. 28, 1890.
38. *The Indian Helper*, 5 (Jan. 10, 1890).
39. Quoted in Berlin Basil Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias: A Study of Indian Removal and the Legal Aftermath* (Oklahoma City, Okla., 1965), 206.
40. Report of irregular employees in the field, June 1, 1891, file 20061, box 738, RG 75, NARA; Helen P. Clarke to T. J. Morgan, Jan. 18, 1892, file 2671, box 817, *ibid.*; Helen P. Clarke to D. W. Browning, Aug. 8, 1894, file 30638, box 155, Special Case File 147 (hereafter SCF), NARA.
41. *Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, 52nd Cong., 1st sess., 1892, H. Exec. Doc. 1, pt. 5, 357. For more on the tribe and their experience with allotment, see R. David Edmunds, *The Otoe-Missouria People* (Phoenix, Ariz., 1976).
42. This was part of a speech made by Deroin when he and a tribal delegation visited Washington, D.C., in April 1895. Quote from pp. 214-15 in Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias*.
43. *Report of the Secretary of the Interior* (1892), pt. 5, 358.
44. Arthur Tinker to Secretary of the Interior, Nov. 7, 1891, file 40239, box 154, SCF 147, NARA; Helen P. Clarke to T. J. Morgan, Sept. 7, 1891, *ibid.*; Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias*, 218. On women employed by the Indian Service, Cathleen D. Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: The United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2011); and Lisa E. Emmerich, "'Right in the Midst of My Own People': Native American Women and the Field Matron Program," *American Indian Quarterly*, 15 (Spring 1991), 201-16.
45. Helen P. Clarke to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Dec. 12, 1893, file 46539, box 155, SCF 147, NARA.
46. Helen P. Clarke to T. J. Morgan, Dec. 7, 1891, file 44211, box 154, *ibid.*; Helen P. Clark to W. F. Sanders, Jan. 29, 1892, box 2, Wilbur Fisk Sanders Papers, MC 53, MHS. For more on the Poncas, see also Joseph H. Cash and Gerald W. Wolff, *The Ponca People* (Phoenix, 1975).
47. Helen P. Clarke to D. M. Browning, Aug. 8, 1894, file 30638, box 155, SCF 147, NARA. Emphasis in the original.
48. Helen P. Clarke to General Palmer, Apr. 10, 1897, file 22923, *ibid.*
49. Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, 290-94. See also William E. Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival* (Seattle, 1984).
50. For a recent account of this struggle, see Andrew C. Harper, "Conceiving Nature: The Creation of Montana's Glacier National Park," *Montana The Magazine of Western History* (hereafter *Montana*), 59 (Summer 2010), 3-21. Others insist that the government threatened to withhold the Indians' rations until they consented to the lower price. See, for instance, Darrell Kipp, interview by author, Browning, Montana, Oct. 7, 2006.
51. See Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York, 1999), 71-100. See also Dave Walter, *More Montana Campfire Tales: Fifteen Historical Narratives* (Helena, Mon., 2002), 105-24.
52. Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias*, 216; Acting Secretary of the Interior to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Nov. 13, 1897, file 48098, box 155, SCF 147, NARA.
53. Helen P. Clarke to Thomas H. Carter, Apr. 10, 1897, file 22923, box 155, SCF 147, NARA. Emphasis in the original.
54. Petition to Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 22, 1897, file 914, *ibid.*; transcript of council of Ponca Indians with Thomas P. Smith, July 18, 1898, file 34993, *ibid.*
55. Helen P. Clarke to James U. Sanders, April 19, 1899, folder 4, box 1, James Upson Sanders Papers, MHS; Helen P. Clarke to William A. Jones, file 18247, box 155, SCF 147, NARA; Chapman, *The Otoes and Missourias*, 218-19.
56. *Choteau (Mont.) Montanian and Chronicle* clipping, June 27, 1902, "Helen P. Clarke" Vertical File, MHS. The twenty thousand dollars was the sum total of the various claims Helen filed with the government at different times.
57. *Helena (Mont.) Montana Daily Record*, Sept. 26, 1903.
58. The most complete account of Monteath's misadventures can be found in Michael F. Foley, "An Historical Analysis of the Administration of the Blackfeet Reservation by the United States, 1855-1950s," Indian Claims Commission, Docket Number 279-D: 1974, 272-347. See also Thomas R. Wessel, "Historical Report on the Blackfeet Reservation in Northern Montana," Indian Claims Commission, Docket Number 279-D: 1975, 94-141.

59. *Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune Daily*, Oct. 21, 1903.

60. For Monteath's quarrel with Horace Clarke, see file 56641, box 2363, Letters Received, RG 75, NARA. Horace unsuccessfully sued Monteath for five thousand dollars claiming "intent to injure and humiliate." For Monteath's opposition to Helen, see T. O. Power to Commissioner of Interior, Mar. 12, 1904, file 18191, box 2479, Letters Received, RG 75, NARA.

61. Petition from Reservation Blackfeet to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Oct. 22, 1907; and Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Big Rabbit Woman et al., Oct. 31, 1907, both in file 85710-1907-162, box 44, Blackfeet, E-121, PI-163, 1907-39 Central Classified Files (hereafter CCF), RG 75, NARA. Anticipating the Piegans' disappointment, the commissioner wrote a private note to Roblin urging him to find some related work for Helen, perhaps in taking family histories. There is no evidence she was ever thus employed. Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Charles E. Roblin, file 85710-1907-162, box 44, *ibid.*

62. Undated [1909?] and untitled document, folder 3, HPC, MHS.

63. For an excellent account of Hill's promotional efforts in Glacier, see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 59-92.

64. See Steven L. Grafe, ed., *Lanterns on the Prairie: The Blackfeet Photographs of Walter McClintock* (Norman, Okla., 2009); and William E. Farr, *Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet: An Impressionist at Glacier National Park* (Norman, Okla., 2009).

65. For more on this transitional period, see Paul C. Rosier, *Rebirth of the Blackfeet Nation, 1912-1954* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2001), 13-53.

66. *Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune*, May 15, 1932.

67. Helen P. Clarke to J. H. Sherburne, Dec. 1, 1910, folder 3, box 10, Sherburne Family Papers (hereafter Sherburne Papers), K. Ross Toole Archives, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula (hereafter UM); Helen P. Clarke to J. H. Sherburne, Jan. 11, 1916, folder 24, box 33, *ibid.*

68. Helen P. Clarke to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Oct. 4, 1913, file 12004-1913-312, box 32, CCF, RG 75, NARA; C. F. Hanke to S. B. Hege, Jan. 16, 1914, *ibid.*

69. Helen P. Clarke, application for a patent in fee, Dec. 13, 1913; and Helen P. Clarke to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Oct. 4, 1913, both in *ibid.*

70. [Unknown] to Helen P. Clarke, May 31, 1922, folder 7, box 40, Sherburne Papers, UM; J. L. Sherburne to Helen P.

Clarke, Feb. 7, 1919, folder 6, box 38, *ibid.*

71. Mary O'Neill to Helen P. Clarke, May 28, 1910, folder 2, HPC, MHS.

72. Helen Fitzgerald Sanders, *The White Quiver* (New York, 1913).

73. *Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune*, May 15, 1932; Warren L. Hanna, *Stars over Montana: Men Who Made Glacier National Park History* (West Glacier, Mont., 1988), 184.

74. Transcript of Helen Clarke eulogy given by Father Halligan, Mar. 7, 1923, folder 4, HPC, MHS.

75. Undated reminiscence by Bessie C. Wells, folder 1, *ibid.*

76. Helen P. Clarke to Edwin M. Royle, Feb. 15, 1911, folder 2, *ibid.*