

# The VOICE of PROGRESS

A Conflicted  
Message of  
Resistance in  
the White Earth  
Reservation's  
First Newspaper

Alex Klein

**O**n March 25, 1886, cousins Augustus (Gus) and Theodore (Theo) Beaulieu, two men of mixed Franco-Anishinaabe descent, published for the first time a newspaper on the White Earth reservation. It marked a significant moment in the history of the reservation, as well as in American journalism, yet the Beaulieus are better remembered today for their roles in the dispossession of the White Earth Anishinaabeg.<sup>1</sup> Gus, especially, conspired with lumber companies and federal agents to defraud the people of White Earth and sell off the reservation's land and pine. But as a pioneering source of American Indian journalism, White Earth's first newspaper offers a unique glimpse into the mixed allegiances of those two mixed-bloods, who not only spoke on behalf of the reservation but also exploited it.

Gus and Theo, the publisher and editor, respectively, intended their newspaper to be the mouthpiece of the reservation, a rare, written political advocate for the Anishinaabeg, who had been rendered all but voiceless by years of coerced land cessions, relocation, and unsettled treaty agreements with the federal government. Without objecting to

federal assimilation policy in theory, the Beaulieus used their newspaper to speak out against the unjust implementation of assimilationist programs under the autocratic Office of Indian Affairs (OIA, renamed the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1947). In doing so, they represented their reservation as progressive and able to develop economically without federal interference. Accordingly, they named their publication *The Progress*. The image of "progress" that they depicted on the reservation, however, did as much to disguise Gus Beaulieu's underlying business interests as it did to resist the oppressive rule of the OIA.<sup>2</sup>

Investigations and subsequent histories from the past century have shown that some mixed-blood intermediaries used their familiarity with American politics and capitalism to swindle unwitting Anishinaabeg out of their government-allotted land. In her book *The White Earth Tragedy*, historian Melissa Meyer details the ethnic factionalism that

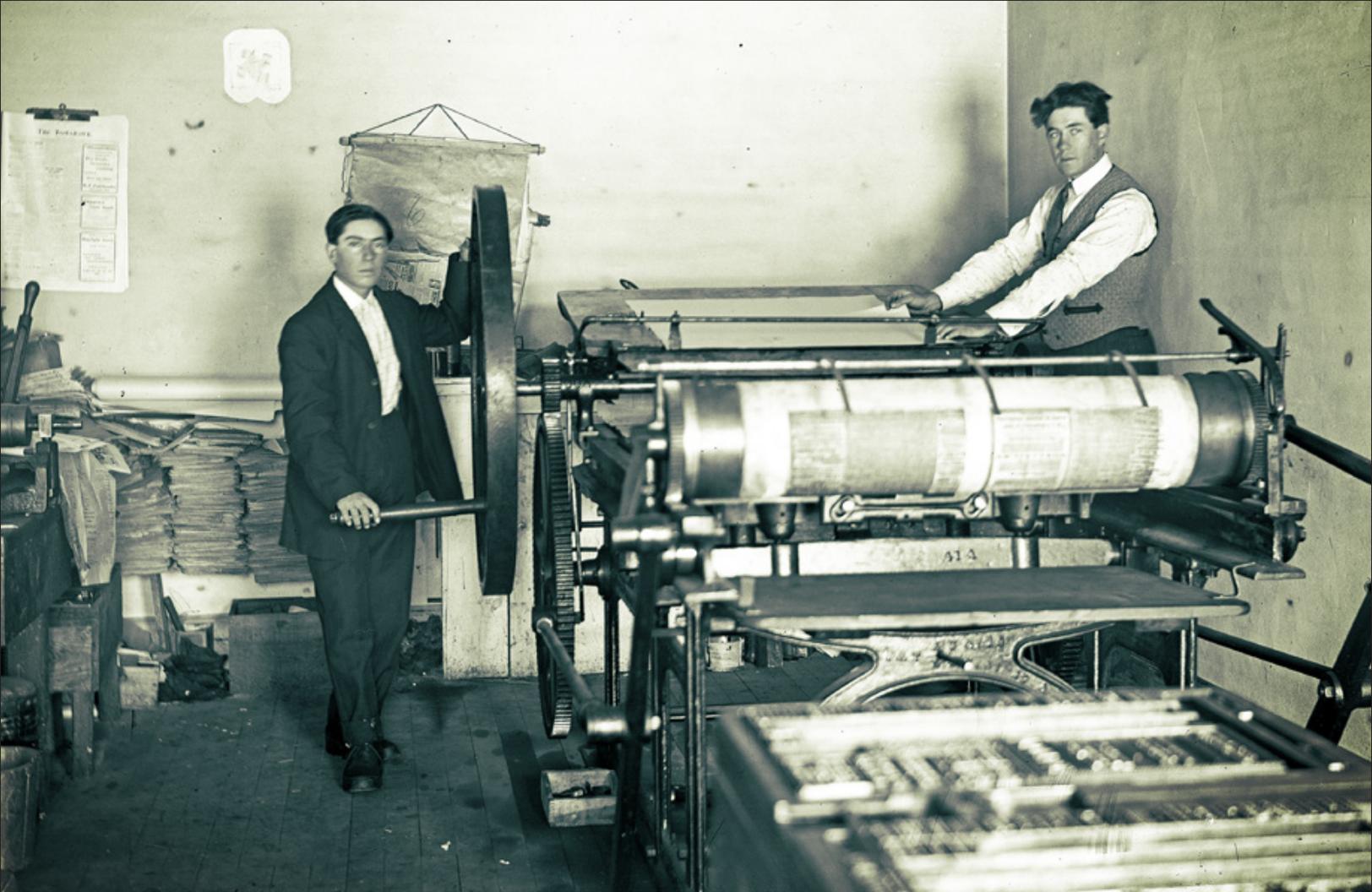


Augustus (Gus) Beaulieu, about 1910.

developed between the reservation's mixed-blood and full-blood communities, noting the two-sided role Gus Beaulieu and other "cultural brokers" played in selling off reservation resources to outsiders.<sup>3</sup> Meyer's account, invaluable as it is, does not acknowledge the radical role the Beaulieus took on in *The Progress* as narrators of and co-conspirators to these events.

By examining the evolution of *The Progress* from its inception in 1886 to its abrupt folding in 1889, one can trace the development and

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Press room of The Tomahawk weekly newspaper at White Earth, about 1910. Both *The Progress* and *The Tomahawk* were published by Gus Beaulieu.

the divergence of the Beaulieu cousins' advocacy for White Earth. *The Progress's* resistance was rooted in its staunch denial of the popular image of American Indians as lazy brutes, incapable of living like "civilized" white Americans. Accordingly, Gerald Vizenor, a modern-day White Earth-enrolled writer, characterizes *The Progress* as an act of resistance and cultural continuance. *The Progress* reclaimed a positive image of Native people, who had until then been represented in the American press through a bigoted, sensationalist lens. In its stead, Theo Beaulieu asserted a sense of Native presence employing the rhetorical tools of those whom he felt oppressed the Anishinaabeg. His writing was defiant, incisive, and quite often very funny.<sup>4</sup>

Yet just as various interest groups spoke of the "savage Indian" in order to exploit Native people, Gus Beaulieu co-opted the paper's narrative of Anishinaabe progress to work toward his own sordid land-grabbing agenda. To report earnestly as an advocate for the Anishinaabeg, Theo chose to reconstruct this narrative, trading in an image of "progress" for one more suited to the diverse set of circumstances affecting White Earth. The conflict within this Anishinaabe voice of resistance exemplifies the friction within White Earth's mixed-descent community, as well as between mixed bloods and full bloods. *The Progress* thus serves as a cautionary tale about the power and obligations of journalists who wrote as mediators on behalf of one culture to another.

**B**efore the ink had dried on the first issue of *The Progress* in March 1886, Indian agent Major Timothy J. Sheehan seized the Beaulieus' newspaper. Without having read a word, Sheehan declared the paper "false and malicious . . . done evidently for the purposes of breaking down the influence of the United States Indian Agent," and ordered Gus and Theo's removal from the reservation. Following a tense standoff that December between Gus and Agent Sheehan, in which guns were drawn but no blood spilt, Gus sued the Indian agent for violating his First Amendment rights, prompting a federal hearing in the spring of 1887.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly the irony of suppressing the Beaulieus' newspaper—a tool of civilization promoted by the

government and a trade taught at Indian boarding schools—was lost on the Indian agent. His actions would have been a more clear violation of the First Amendment were it not for the reality that the White Earth residents whose voices were being stifled were not American citizens but wards of the government, subject to the paternalistic, assimilationist laws designed by the federal government but often loosely interpreted by the reservation's Indian agent. Many people of mixed descent, however, had previously exercised their rights as American citizens, voting in local and presidential elections and paying taxes, though Clem Beaulieu, Gus's father, stopped having to pay taxes when he moved in 1873 from the trading post at Crow Wing to the newly founded White Earth reservation.<sup>6</sup>

Through a series of treaties in the mid-nineteenth century, the southwestern bands of Anishinaabeg were removed from their homelands across Minnesota and Wisconsin and forced onto reservations in northern Minnesota. Though some families

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*Indian agent Timothy J. Sheehan, about 1895.*

of mixed descent were relatively independent, many mixed descent families' livelihoods depended on trade with the Anishinaabeg, supplemented by the federal annuities that came with their tribal association. About one-third of those who were relocated to White Earth—the largest

of Minnesota's reservations—were of mixed descent, descendants of fur trade marriages between often prominent Anishinaabe women and mostly French Canadian but sometimes British American traders that dated back to the seventeenth century. By the time of White Earth's inception in 1867, people of mixed descent generally intermingled within their own community; Gus and Theo Beaulieu were both first cousins and brothers-in-law.<sup>7</sup>

Not all people of mixed descent were as affluent as the Beaulieus, but historically, these people wielded significant power as intermediaries in trade and politics between the Anishinaabeg and European American settlers and their government. Before relocating to White Earth, Clem Beaulieu was one of the most influential men of mixed descent in

*White Earth village and Chippewa Lake, about 1915.*



council with Anishinaabe leaders, as well as the main supplier, along with fellow mixed-descent trader John Fairbanks, at Indian posts in northern Minnesota. Their families were enrolled tribal members, yet their place at White Earth was disputed by several outspoken Anishinaabeg suspicious of the political influence of Clem Beaulieu and John Fairbanks with the tribe. Gus Beaulieu and B. L. Fairbanks followed in their fathers' footsteps, leading business operations and dominating council meetings on the reservation, much to the consternation of the Indian agent. Gus butted heads with multiple Indian agents before Sheehan, and had been ordered off the reservation several times for protesting the agents' dubious management of reservation funds and resources.<sup>8</sup>

At the hearing that followed the seizure of *The Progress*, the inspecting senators, James Morgan of Mississippi and Cushman Davis of Minnesota, puzzled over the Beaulieus' place among the Anishinaabeg, which wavered between benevolent cultural mediators and shrewd and careful exploiters, depending on who was testifying. The chairman of the investigation identified Theo Beaulieu as "a spotted man; for some uses he is an Indian of the Chippewas, and for some purposes he is not." Agent Sheehan contended that the Beaulieus merely used their Indian ancestry to claim annuities and receive free seed and equipment from the agency warehouse. The newspaper was a part of their scheme to weaken his influence on the reservation in order to better gain control of White Earth land and valuable timber stands, which the federal government held in trust. Sheehan received written and testimonial support from other Indian agents; from the commissioner of Indian Affairs, J. D. Atkins; and even from a member of the exten-



*The White Earth homes of Gus Beaulieu (top) and Theo Beaulieu.*

sive Beaulieu family, who attested to the corrupt characters of Clem, Theo, and Gus.<sup>9</sup>

The numerous testimonies that decried Sheehan's tyrannical rule, however, greatly outnumbered claims leveled against the Beaulieus. Among other grievances, Sheehan was accused of removing people from the reservation without notifying them of the cause and withholding provisions to those in need. His son Jerry, a schoolteacher, was said by some to have molested a female student at the government boarding school. The Indian agent's actions exemplified

the all-too-prevalent oppressive abuse of power exercised over the lives of Indian people—whether mixed-blood or full-blood—on the newly established reservations in America.<sup>10</sup>

The senate subcommittee ruled in favor of the Beaulieus by the end of May 1887, deeming Sheehan's seizure of their newspaper unlawful, a violation of the First Amendment, and an abuse of his authority as a government agent. *The Progress* returned to print in the fall. "If this be treason," wrote Theo Beaulieu, echoing the words of revolutionary patriot Patrick Henry, "MAKE THE MOST OF IT!"<sup>11</sup>



## Typical of Minnesota newspapers of the time, White Earth's four-page weekly was marked by its spirited, often-combative political editorials.

was run by Protestant laymen in a resort hotel in upstate New York.<sup>14</sup> In the terse article "Getting Experience," Theo considers the issue of the outside perspective on Indian country:

We learn that an Eastern gentleman spent a whole hour and a half, one day this week, ruminating on the Indian question, and making notes of observations derived from the hotel window.<sup>15</sup>

Outsiders who claimed to be bringing civilization to American Indians became the objects of Theo Beaulieu's satirical editorializing, at times his commentary taking on a more corrosive timbre. In an article headlined "Is it an Indian Bureau? About Some of the Freaks in the Employ of the Indian Service," Theo accuses the OIA of "jobbery, corruption and fraud . . . a curse to humanity and justice." *The Progress* advocated instead for a system of self-government at White Earth and for American citizenship for its residents.<sup>16</sup>

Among the first issues of *The Progress* were Theo Beaulieu's fairly regular responses to the prejudiced reporting of "Indian depredations." Local Minnesota newspapers were explicitly racist and had significant sway for their settler audience keen on Indian land and resources. A distorted image of indigenous people had become all but institutionalized. Editors from nearby Detroit Lakes, Duluth, and Perham frequently characterized the reservation as a home for violent and indolent criminals who had little use for their land and resources, a traditional American rationale for the usurpation of Native resources. According to Theo, their arguments were "simply used to guard the frantic efforts of the ghouls and vultures of outright robbery and fraud, swayed by the ignominious spirit of greed and gain!" *The Progress* represented one small, but potent response to the state's overbearing anti-Indian rhetoric.<sup>17</sup>

Theo wrote to rectify the ethnographic image of the Anishinaabeg

as primitive, unchanging, and therefore disappearing under the tide of Euro-American settlement. He provided in its stead a view from within. During *The Progress's* first winter, the editor ran a series entitled "The Ojibwas. Their Customs and Traditions." While the title may read like the heading of a submission to the Bureau of American Ethnology, Theo presented the Anishinaabe oral tradition in a way that broke down the static understanding of aboriginal cultures established by early American anthropologists in their mission to document the cultural survival of a supposedly vanishing race. As was Anishinaabe custom, Theo related these *adizookanag* (tribal stories) to his audience during the winter, but otherwise the editor adapted traditional Anishinaabe storytelling to fit his modern medium.<sup>18</sup>

In return for a couple twists of tobacco, Theo gathered his "Indian stories" from two tribal elders, Day Dodge and Saycossegay, and then translated these oral tales from

*Wild rice harvest, White Earth Reservation.*



In This Week's Issue,  
**Wainahboozho!**  
 And the First Birch-bark Canoe,  
 A Terrible Ordeal, etc., etc.

# THE PROGRESS.

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VOL. 1.

WHITE EARTH AGENCY, MINNESOTA, SATURDAY, M.

WHITE EARTH D. 25.

## The Progress.

Gus. H. Beaulieu, - - Publisher.  
 Theo. H. Beaulieu, - - Editor.

White Earth Agency, Minn.

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER devoted to the interest of the White Earth Reservation and general Northwestern News. Published and managed by members of the Reservation.

Correspondence bearing on the Indian question—problem, or on general interest, is solicited.

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## The Ojibwas,

### THEIR CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS,

As Handed Down for Centuries,  
 From Father to Son,  
 etc., etc.

By The Sages,

Also from the Grand Sachem and  
 Medicine Seer of the White Earth  
 Ojibwas.

PART IX.

#### WAI-NAH-BOO-ZHO!

FIRST BIRCH-BARK CANOE.—ADVENTURE ON THE SUN'S ISLAND.—SUCCEEDS IN GETTING FIRE.

About one of the first things Wainahboozho talked about with Nokomis, was the absence of fire, as the nights at that time of the year were very chilly, and the family inheritance of skins and furs was somewhat limited, this added to Wainahboozho's discomfort greatly. One morning having slept colder than usual, he said, "Nokomis, it is very cold here at night. I wish we had some fire to warm ourselves," but Nokomis

canoe, and having summoned the aid of his father, the North wind, and his uncles, the South, East and West wind spirits, he was soon gone and out of sight. At day-break the next morning he found himself near the glittering shores of the Sun's island home; he hastily stepped ashore and after concealing his canoe, sat down a moment to determine what course was best to pursue to procure fire. Now Wainahboozho had the power to assume the shape of almost any animal he desired, so he changed himself into a rabbit and he proceeded to drench himself with water and sand, then he lay himself down close to the water's edge, apparently more dead than alive. Presently two of the Sun's pretty daughters came to the beach to draw water with which to shower Nature with the crystal beads of the morning dew. One of them saw the poor, forlorn looking rabbit, and she called her sister's attention to the pitiable object; they could not tell what it was, having never seen anything like it before, however, their hearts were touched with pity and they concluded to take it home to their father's wigwam and beg him to smile on the poor half-drowned creature, so that it might get warmed and revived.

When they got home the Sun

once commenced to howl and call loudly for Nokomis, to "hurry up come to me, I am a fire—hi-ha Nokomis, come quick!" When Nokomis heard this, she rushed out of her wigwam and hurried towards the shore, carrying the pot she had prepared with her, so excited was she that she forgot all about her crutch and a sprained ankle. When she had reached the shore and pulled the canoe of the fire into the pot then she proceeded to try and relieve Wainahboozho from his agonizing punishment. In many places the rabbit skin had burned through. And when, at last, Nokomis pulled it off of his back, great pieces of his own skin and flesh came off with it! Poor Wainahboozho, he was indeed a sorry looking sight after he was relieved of his fire jacket. Nokomis tenderly supported him to reach the wigwam, where she prepared a soft couch of moss and leaves, and upon which he lay down. Then Nokomis turned her attention to the fire in the pot, she went out and brought in some dry sticks, as she had been instructed to do, and soon a bright, cheerful fire was shedding its grateful warmth upon the wigwam. This pleased Wainahboozho exceedingly, and he felt that the great comfort

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canoe, aid of and hi and W gone break himse of the ly ste ing hi to det to purt! Wain WHAT? assume animal himself CE ceeded ter and down NG apper RATES. Preser daugh draw WHY AT Nature the m banks saw t bit, a tentic could never howe

Editor Theo Beaulieu wrote a series of articles aimed at presenting Anishinaabe oral tradition from within, thereby challenging the dominant narrative of the American Indian as disappearing.

Anishinaabemowin to English print. The series consisted mostly of the exploits of Wainaboozho, the Anishinaabe trickster figure and culture hero, who upsets the status quo with pranks and humor but most importantly provides the Anishinaabeg with the resources and knowledge to survive. In many ways, *The Progress* channeled the spirit of Wainaboozho, through its outsider status as an Indian newspaper, through its ability to stir up trouble for the OIA in the name of Anishinaabe liberty, and especially through its editorial humor.<sup>19</sup>

Theo organized the cycle of trickster stories in chronological order, elevating what would have been considered by outsiders to be a "primitive" tradition to the "civilized" status of a literary epic. By juxtaposing these stories of survival against spirited editorials criticizing federal misrule

and the Minnesota press, Theo contested the dominant narrative of the American Indian as disappearing and provided for his reservation audience a specifically Anishinaabe hero of liberation.<sup>20</sup>

Yet at the same time, the lives of Anishinaabeg who, like Day Dodge and Saycossegay, still maintained traditional lifeways were all but absent from this tribal newspaper. Reports from the paper's "Local and General"

Preparing rushes for a mat, White Earth Reservation.





Gagewin (*Everlasting Mist*) with snowshoes, White Earth Reservation, 1918.

section focused mostly on the comings and goings of the reservation's mixed-descent elite. Readers from outside the reservation might notice the Fairbanks family trading with neighboring white communities, newly equipped farmers breaking 40-acre tracts of land, or Gus's

eastern woodlands of the reservation, as well as those Anishinaabe farmers struggling to implement modern agricultural techniques. Though it obscured the true picture of life on the reservation, this selective reporting was itself a strategic method of resistant writing.<sup>21</sup>

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mother, Elizabeth, drinking tea with university professors—images of reservation life that contradicted the federal and popular imagination of Indian savagery. What readers would miss from *The Progress's* local news was the significant portion of full-blood, or conservative, Anishinaabeg still subsisting on the traditional seasonal round in the less-developed

A selective representation of Indian country had been a political strategy from the beginning of American Indian journalism. The first Native-run press, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, founded in 1828 by Elias Boudinot, a New England-educated Cherokee of mixed descent, countered the popular sentiment of removal by providing his readers

with proof of progress, bending the truth in order to create an image of Cherokee who had given up their former way of life and were utilizing their land in a way that justified their ownership. Like *The Progress* after it, the *Phoenix* was constantly at odds with the federal government, which eventually ordered the Georgia Guard, a militia unit created to police the Cherokee territory, to confiscate Boudinot's press in 1835 to prevent any further anti-removal sentiment. Later incarnations of Cherokee journalism after removal to the Indian Territory continued promoting an image of civilization to boost the status of their community in the eyes of their oppressors. Theo Beaulieu claimed he never saw any of the Indian Territory newspapers that followed the *Phoenix*, but, given his hopes of seeing White Earth residents retain their land and gain US citizenship, he clearly felt the need to adopt a similar tactic.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the absence of conservative Anishinaabeg from *The Progress's* "Local and General" section points to a rift within the White Earth community. Wabonaquod, aka White Cloud, the *ogimaa* (paramount chief) of the Mississippi band of Anishinaabeg, lamented, "those who can talk the best get the seed-grain first." The White Earth *ogimaa* saw his educated, mixed-descent relatives receiving most of the benefits of government aid, while full-blood Anishinaabeg, many of whom did not speak English fluently, let alone read it, suffered from unpaid annuities from previous treaties and inadequate agricultural supplies. At the hearing that followed the seizure of *The Progress*, two Episcopal ministers, Charles Wright (Wabonaquod's son) and Enmegahbowh, bemoaned the perpetual lack of seed-grain and farming tools that the Indian agency was supposed to distribute annually. Theo Beaulieu, however, received ample seed and equipment from the agency warehouse, cleverly collecting annuities on his wife's signature after being blocked from the tribal rolls by Agent Sheehan. Wabonaquod eventually went as far as formally requesting the OIA that no more white men intermarry and settle at White Earth.<sup>23</sup>

The Beaulieus' selective representation of White Earth was undeniably self-serving. From its inception, people on and off the reservation had their misgivings about the motivations behind White Earth's first newspaper. Special US Indian agent Henry Heth wrote the commissioner of Indian Affairs before the hearing that followed the seizure of *The Progress*, claiming that Gus Beaulieu's newspaper was "a part and parcel of what is known as the Pine Ring." Theo soon found himself defending White Earth's mixed-descent intermediaries from similar accusations made in the

*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, which put forth that the opposition to the Northwest Commission treaty of 1887 came from certain vocal residents who had a keen interest in White Earth timber.<sup>24</sup>

*The Progress* claimed to represent the best interests of the reservation, but other men of mixed descent at White Earth questioned the sincerity of such a claim. John Beaulieu, Gus's cousin, fingered Gus, along with his father Clem and fellow mixed-blood Simon Roy, for scheming in private councils to get hold of White Earth's most lucrative resource. "The opposition claim to be the progressive young minds of the reservation," said John Beaulieu at the hearing. "On the contrary, they are the ones who have kept the Indians from progressing by their miserable continued opposition to every administration that has ever been put there." John admitted that he himself was "not an expert talker" like his cousin Gus, signifying that he lacked the education and political savvy to advocate effectively on behalf of others.<sup>25</sup>

Gus Beaulieu's knowledge of the pine industry and status in Minnesota Indian territory politics was a source of concern for his cousin John. At age 19, Gus worked as a timber agent for the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, hauling lumber for years after that. (His parents had wanted him to become a priest, but he did not consider it "a good business education.") After a brief stint in the "photograph business," Gus built ties with the federal government, securing an appointment as a US deputy marshal at the Red Lake reservation, then as an interpreter and clerk at the US attorney's office before publishing *The Progress*. Though John Beaulieu did not object to anyone on the reservation speaking out in general against the agency, which he felt had some "room to improve," he believed Gus misused his power the



Minnesota politician Knute Nelson, ca 1895.

same way Gus believed Agent Sheehan had misused his.<sup>26</sup>

The paper's opposition to federal authority, combined with its support for economic development, neatly camouflaged Gus Beaulieu's own economic agenda. Early issues of *The Progress* promoted a bill designed by Fifth District congressman (later governor and US senator) Knute Nelson to bring a track of the Northern Pacific Railway through the reservation. In part, the railway would function to streamline the transport of pine logs. *The Progress* interpreted Nelson's plan as a source of incoming capital for White Earth, as well as an opportunity to further promote industry among conservative Anishinaabeg. Only weeks earlier, however, *The Progress* lambasted a similar bill by Nelson to run a track through the Red Lake reservation, suspecting Nelson of working with Congress to cheat the Red Lake Anishinaabeg out of their valuable pine. This apparent about-face on the same issue of infrastructural development reveals Gus Beaulieu's method of masking his business interests with his newspaper's "advocacy." What read as theft on another reservation, where the Beaulieus had less sway (and Gus no access to the lumber), was construed as progress on their own.<sup>27</sup>

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Despite Theo's participation in his cousin's newspaper, John Beaulieu made no allegations against *The Progress's* editor. Theo Beaulieu's place between Anishinaabe and American society was for the most part one of information and education. Theo served as the superintendent of the Red Lake reservation school until 1881, when he was forcibly removed around the time his cousin Gus accused the Indian agent of falsifying annuity rolls. He then apprenticed at a printing press in Appleton, Wisconsin, publishing his first articles that criticized the OIA and championed the cause of Indian citizenship. In 1886, Theo applied to work at the White Earth boarding school only to be rejected by the newly arrived Agent Sheehan,

whom he had already upbraided in the nearby *Thirteen Towns* newspaper.<sup>28</sup>

The Beaulieu cousins' shared enmity toward Agent Sheehan led the pair to print *The Progress* together, but their reasons for doing so likely varied. Later in life, Theo would describe his relationship with his publisher as "never very . . . mutual." He often disagreed with Gus's "policies," yet at the same time he relied on Gus for the capital to purchase the printing press, and for his sway as deputy marshal, which helped them bring Sheehan to court. Gus divorced himself from the paper in November 1888—before the printing of the paper's second

volume—to focus on his business interests in relation to the upcoming allotment of the reservation. With Theo fully in charge, *The Progress* abandoned its "civilized" façade and adopted an exposé style of writing as a form of resistance. Theo turned his editorial eye toward the deplorable living conditions at White Earth that *The Progress* had previously avoided reporting.<sup>29</sup> During the long winter months of 1888–89, the "Local and General" section was crowded with notices of infant deaths, usually of full-blood Anishinaabe families. Theo then gave voice to Wabonaquod's son, the Reverend Charles Wright.

Real estate office of Theo Beaulieu, 1908.





White Earth delegation to Washington, DC, 1899. Gus Beaulieu is in the second row, third from left.

Wright wrote a letter to the editor in February, detailing the suffering in the Rice River area of White Earth, where the inhabitants had developed minimal agricultural skills and were in need of aid. Wright's letter openly contradicted Sheehan's annual report to the commissioner of Indian affairs (as well as some of the reporting in *The Progress's* first volume, under Gus Beaulieu), in which the agent intentionally overestimated the amount of wheat produced by his wards.<sup>30</sup>

That same winter, Theo reported on the brutality of the White Earth boarding school. *The Progress* had previously supported the Indian education system, believing it to be an essential aspect of adapting to the dominant mode of living in America, but it was not until the paper's second volume that the atrocities of this system were exposed. *The Progress*

brought national attention to the case of Lizzie Seal, a full-blood Anishinaabe girl who had been severely beaten by a teacher at the government boarding school. Agent Sheehan attempted to gather testimony that would exonerate the teacher and keep under wraps this clear instance of boarding school abuse, but newspapers across the country picked up on the story, reporting it as it ought to have been. Rumors circulated that a warrant for Theo's arrest was issued upon the publication of the case, but apparently this was false; more likely it was just the grumblings of an irritated Indian agent.<sup>31</sup>

Weeks after Theo took over the paper, Congress passed the Nelson Act. Distinct from Nelson's railway bills but not unrelated, the Nelson Act served as the state's localized application of the Dawes Act, divid-

ing up Minnesota's reservation land into allotments. Six months later, in July 1889, *The Progress* ceased publication so that its lone editor and manager could attend the upcoming negotiations between the Minnesota Chippewa Commission and the men of White Earth concerning the implementation of the recent legislation.

As part of the allotment process, the act bestowed upon the government the authority to sell unallotted land and surplus pine to outside speculators, a clause that troubled Gus, for he could not expect to manipulate the federal government the way he could Anishinaabeg unfamiliar with Euro-American notions of private property. Gus refused to sign his name to the agreement between the commission and the tribe, but Theo Beaulieu, Wabonaquod, and other Anishinaabe leaders approved the act.<sup>32</sup>

Over the next two decades, as new complications arose with the Nelson Act's policies regarding reservation timber, Gus Beaulieu's political advocacy and entrepreneurial aspirations became more deeply entwined. He continued to speak out as a defender of the reservation's resources, now in the *Tomahawk*, another four-page White Earth weekly that Gus established in 1903, this time without his cousin as editor. That same year, Gus entered employment with the Nichols-Chisholm lumber company, often advertising for his employer in the *Tomahawk* alongside fiery editorials criticizing the federal government and local politicians for their paternalist control over White Earth resources. With allotment distributions then in motion, Gus conspired with the new Indian agent, Simon Michelet, to redistribute the more valuable parcels to those most likely to do business with land and lumber corporations. By the 1920s, Nichols-Chisholm had harvested a total of 150 million board feet of timber from White Earth.<sup>33</sup>

Gus's role in the dispossession of White Earth brings out perhaps the greatest irony of his story. Ever ready to point out the hypocrisy of the assimilationists who claimed to work on behalf of the welfare of American Indians, Gus Beaulieu became his own worst example. He capitalized on two amendments to the Nelson Act, passed in 1904 and 1906. Authored by Moses Clapp, a US senator from Minnesota, the Clapp riders bestowed mixed bloods with the right to sell their allotted land and timber. The distinction between mixed and full

blood at White Earth was more a cultural perception than it was any genetic distinction, and savvy go-betweens like Gus Beaulieu and B. L. Fairbanks used this cultural question mark to their advantage. Conspiring with Agent Michelet, Gus arranged the mortgages of full-blood Anishinaabeg allottees with little knowledge of or interest in Euro-American conceptions of private property, forging their blood status as "mixed," in order to open their land to buyers such as Nichols-Chisholm. By 1909, more than 80 percent of the reservation had passed into outside hands. Today, less than 10 percent is owned by the heirs to the original allottees.<sup>34</sup>

Suspecting collusion between Senator Clapp and the pine companies, Theo Beaulieu worked with Warren K. Moorehead, an archaeologist and member of the OIA board of commissioners, to expose the wholesale dispossession of the Anishinaabeg. Together, the two impelled investigations that looked into Gus and company's sordid affairs. Reverend Charles Wright led a petition in 1911 to remove certain mixed-descent Anishinaabeg from the tribal rolls, including Gus Beaulieu, B. L. Fairbanks, and other members of the Beaulieu family, though not Theo. Federal agents followed up on these early accusations, but no formal charges were ever made against Gus Beaulieu.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, in 1916, one year before Gus's death, Theo Beaulieu's name appeared for one of the last times in a White Earth newspaper: "The latest information that has come to the members of the original [Beaulieu] family is that Theo H. Beaulieu

and others have protested against the selection of the delegation . . . to attend the meeting of the General Council of Minnesota Chippewas," announced the *Tomahawk*. Many of the delegates selected to attend that council were Beaulieus or Fairbankses, as well as other prominent families of mixed descent. In the article, Gus dissociates himself from his former editor's side of the family, whom he derisively refers to as "the Wisconsin crowd."<sup>36</sup>

The power of speaking on behalf of the reservation proved both great and unstable for the Beaulieu cousins. Their words of resistance expressed separate, irreconcilable visions for White Earth, illustrating the two-sided nature of working as mixed-descent advocates for the people of White Earth. No matter Gus's underlying intentions, *The Progress* remains a testament to Anishinaabe resistance and cultural continuance. During its brief run, editor Theo Beaulieu subverted a narrative of progress in order to allow the stories of other Anishinaabeg to be heard. The irony of Theo's own story is that, though he once wrote in protest against the tyranny of the Indian agent, Sheehan, he eventually found himself in a similar position to that of his old foe, decrying in vain the corruption behind the reservation's sole newspaper. □

## Notes

1. William Whipple Warren, *History of the Ojibway People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009), 13, 46–47, 56. Otherwise known as Ojibwe, the indigenous people of White Earth are referred to in this article as Anishinaabeg—the name these people gave to themselves. The g at the end of the name indicates the plural form; *Anishinaabe* is singular. Other names, such as the federally recognized Chippewa (a corruption of "Ojibwe"), were bestowed on them by others. Along with the Ojibwe, the Odawa and Potawatomi also know themselves as Anishinaabeg. According to

### Related . . .

- ▶ Ken Peterson, "Ransom Powell and the Tragedy of White Earth," *Minnesota History* 63/3 Fall 2012. PDF available at [www.mnhs.org/mnhistory](http://www.mnhs.org/mnhistory)

William Warren, an Anishinaabe historian of mixed descent who gathered information from tribal elders during the mid-nineteenth century, these three tribes were once one people living along Lake Superior before separating into different territories toward the end of the sixteenth century. Warren defines the name *An-ish-in-aub-ag* as “spontanées man.”

2. *The Progress*, March 25, 1886, 1.

3. For a deeper analysis on ethnicity at White Earth, see Melissa Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 69–135. The terms “mixed blood” and “full blood” reflect symbolic understandings rather than genetic descriptors. This ethnic distinction referred to cultural attributes such as hair, clothing, lifestyle, and, as Meyer points out, economic ethics. Full bloods generally maintained a communal, subsistence-based lifestyle, while mixed bloods were known to be shrewd capitalists with considerable market knowledge and accumulated wealth.

4. Gerald Vizenor, “Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice,” in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1, 4–5, 8; Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 4, 12; Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 78–96.

5. *Testimony in Relation to Affairs at the White Earth Indian Reservation, Minnesota, hearings before the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Fiftieth Congress, first session and Forty-Ninth Congress, second session, on Mar. 8, 9, 11, 12, May 23* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1981), 361–62 (hereafter, *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*).

6. For more on assimilationist policies, see Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976) and Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001); for the rights of mixed bloods, see *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 7–8.

7. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 36–42.

8. *Ibid.*, 105–6.

9. *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 469–96.

10. *Ibid.*, 196–209, 220–30, 300–15.

11. *The Progress*, Oct. 8, 1887, 1.

12. Gerald Vizenor, *A Brief Historical Study and General Content Description of a Newspaper Published on the White Earth Indian Reservation in Becker County, Minnesota*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 11; Jane Lamm Carroll, “Good Times, Eh? Minnesota’s Territorial Newspapers,” *Minnesota History* 56, no. 4 (1998–99): 224–26; *The Progress*, Oct. 29, 1887, 4.

13. *The Progress*, Oct. 29, 1887, 4.

14. The Lake Mohonk conference brought together Northeastern philanthropists, the “Friends of the Indian,” and some government

officials and apparent experts on Indian country to discuss Indian affairs and present their opinions to the public and the government. Senator Henry Dawes, the main writer of the Dawes Act, was one of the leading members of the conference.

15. *The Progress*, May 25, 1889, 4.

16. *The Progress*, June 9, 1888, 1.

17. *The Progress*, Dec. 17, 1887, 1; John M. Coward, *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820–90* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 4–5.

18. *Adizookanag* are tribal stories told in the winter for the purpose of educating youth and providing profound commentary for present struggles facing the community and therefore are not usually told in chronological order, but rather each story is told when the circumstances call for it. Thus the *adizookanag* are considered animate, despite happening in the “long ago.”

19. *The Progress*, Dec. 17, 1887, 1, and Feb. 4, 1888, 1. In introducing the series, Beaulieu credits Day Dodge as “Grand Sachem and Medicine Seer of the White-Earth Ojibways, now about 90 years of age,” and Saycossegay as one of “the Sages” and also a “Medicine Priest.” If we are to take Theo at his word about Day Dodge’s age, he would have been born well before the Anishinaabeg made any treaties with the government or were removed onto reservations in northern Minnesota.

20. Adam Spry, “‘It May Be Revolutionary in Character’: *The Progress*, a New Tribal Hermeneutics, and the Literary Re-expression of the Anishinaabe Oral Tradition in *Summer in the Spring*,” in *The Poetry and Poetics of Gerald Vizenor*, ed. Deborah L. Madsen (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 31–32.

21. *The Progress*, Oct. 29, 1887, 4, and Nov. 5, 1887, 4. The seasonal round consists primarily of hunting, fishing, and storytelling in the winter; planting, spearfishing, and gathering maple sugar in the spring; net fishing, berry picking, and gardening in the summer; and ricing and hunting in the fall.

22. James W. Parins, *Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820–1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 129–38; James W. Parins and Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., “The English-Language Native Press in the Nineteenth Century,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 18, no. 1 (1985): 17–19; James W. Parins and Daniel F. Littlefield Jr., *American Indian and Alaska Native Newspapers and Periodicals* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), xii; Theda Perdue, “Rising from the Ashes: The *Cherokee Phoenix* as an Ethnohistorical Source,” *Ethnohistory* 24, no. 3 (1977): 211–16; *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 494.

23. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 70, 107–11; “Chippewa Indians in Minnesota,” House Executive Documents 2747, no. 247, 51 Cong., 1 sess. (1890), 108; *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 446, 478–80. Meyer cites religious affiliation as one cultural indicator of ethnicity at White Earth. Full-blood Anishinaabeg more often associated

with the Episcopalian Church, for it employed Native ministers and the Anishinaabe language. In addition, Episcopalianism blended better with the traditions of the Midéwiwin (secret religious society), which many Anishinaabeg still practiced at White Earth. The Catholic Church catered mostly to the families of mixed descent, as they had long been practicing Catholicism before they came to the reservation.

24. *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 393; *The Progress*, Feb. 4, 1888, 4; Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 50–51.

25. *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 327–29, 411–23.

26. “Report in the Matter of the Investigation of the White Earth Reservation,” House Reports 6336, no. 1336, 62 Cong., 3 sess. (1913), 673; *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 414, 423.

27. *The Progress*, Jan. 28, 1888, 4, and Feb. 18, 1888, 4.

28. *Testimony in Relation to Affairs*, 468–70, 496–98.

29. “Report in the Matter of the Investigation of the White Earth Reservation,” 1913.

30. *The Progress*, Feb. 16, 1889, 1, March 23, 1889, 1, and April 13, 1889, 4; *Annual Report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, for the Year 1888*, 146–48.

31. “Testimony of Robert Morrison & Testimony of Julia Shandomt,” Dec. 11, 1888; “Testimony of Paul H. Beaulieu,” Dec. 12, 1888; “Testimony of Mary Andrews, Ida M. Robidoux, Angeline Cogger, Susan McDougall & Rose Vizenor,” Dec. 19, 1888—all box 3, folder 3, Timothy J. Sheehan Papers, Minnesota State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society; *The Progress*, Dec. 15, 1888, 4; *Indianapolis Journal*, Dec. 9, 1888, 9; *Los Angeles Daily Herald*, Dec. 10, 1888, 5.

32. *The Progress*, July 13, 1889, 4.

33. “Report in the Matter of the Investigation of the White Earth Reservation,” 676, 931; Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 150–57.

34. Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 142–48, 153–59, 229.

35. “Records of an Investigation of White Earth Reservation Mixed Blood Indians, 1911–1915,” microfilm roll M444, Minnesota Historical Society Archives; Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy*, 179, 194.

36. *The Tomahawk*, June 22, 1916, 1, and July 13, 1916, 1. This jab at Theo’s ancestry questioned his right to live at White Earth. Earlier treaties with the federal government provided land at White Earth only to certain bands of Anishinaabeg. Most bands from Wisconsin were allotted land elsewhere in Wisconsin and Michigan.

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