

# Iti Fabussa

## Father William Henry Ketcham *Part Two*

In 1900, Father William Henry Ketcham shifted his influence from the mission field to Washington, D.C., where he became a strong advocate at the national level as the director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions.

In the first five years, Ketcham faced three pivotal challenges.

His first, was fighting the government's decision on June 30, 1900, to deny funding for contract schools (Abing 1994, Nieberding 1955).

The government reasoned that if Native American families had to pay for their children's education, it would encourage them to be self-sufficient.

In reality, the government knew families lacked the resources to pay for education and hoped to manipulate future generations through systematic assimilation programming.

Fueled by his passion for the rights of Native American children, Ketcham developed the Society for the Preservation of the Faith among Indian Children which charged membership fees and offered a publication entitled "The Indian Sentinel" for members to learn of mission efforts in Indian Territory (Abing 1994, Nieberding 1955).

Over the next four decades, the Society's dedication to the education of Native students and generous financial support prevented 42 mission school closures.

His next challenge was overturning the Browning policy enacted in 1896 which denied Native American parents the right to decide where their children would attend school, instead placing this decision with an Indian agent.

Ketcham opposed the policy and claimed it "violated the Indians" freedom of conscience (Abing 1994:5).

His efforts were successful and the ruling was rescinded on October 30, 1901 (Abing 1994). His final initial challenge was to reinstate rations to Native American children.

Rations were rights guaranteed by treaty, but the government reasoned that only children attending government schools, not attending sectarian schools or staying home, were entitled to rations.

With the harsh reality of economic hardships and failed crops in Indian Territory, many families simply could not afford to feed their children without the rations and considered sending their children to government schools.

Ketcham strongly opposed limiting Native American families' choice of education. He joined lobbying efforts in Congress and in 1904 the Indian Appropriations Act reinstated rations to children (Abing 1994, Nieberding 1955).

Having won these initial battles, Ketcham turned his attention to serving as an appointed member of the United States Board of Indian Commissioners and investigated problems involving Native American reservations in the United States.

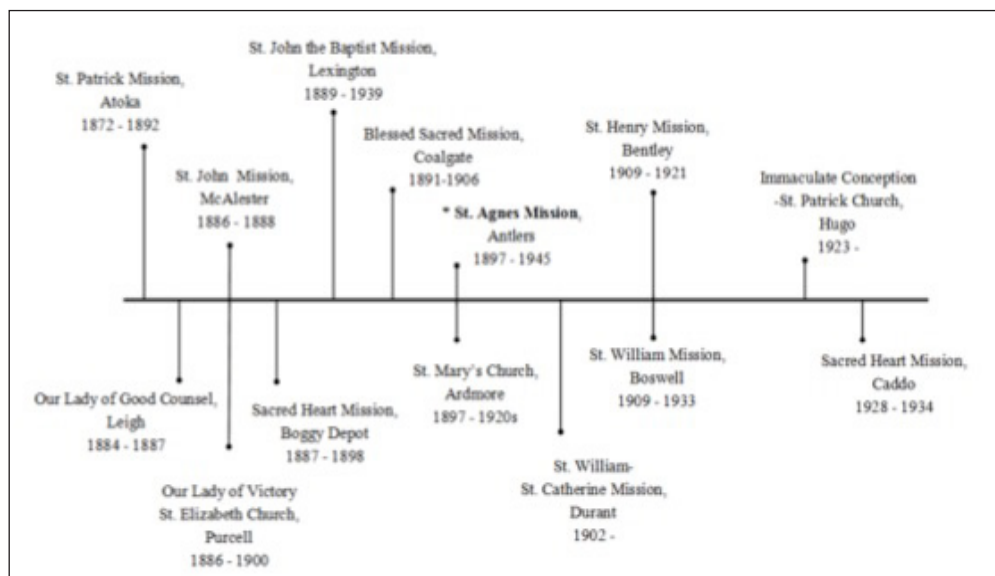
He continued to advocate for Choctaw students and families until his sudden death in 1921, from a heart attack, while working at the Holy Rosary Choctaw Mission in Mississippi. His advocacy will forever be his legacy.

The author would like to publicly thank Mark Thiel, archivist with Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, for his support in researching Father Ketcham and his mission work among the Choctaw people. To learn more about Catholic Indian Missions visit:

<http://www.marquette.edu/library/archives/Mss/BCIM/BCIM-main.shtml>.

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*Part One of Father William Henry Ketcham's story was in the September 2017 issue of the Biskinik.*



The timeline shows the Catholic Missions in the Choctaw Nation. Father William Henry Ketcham sought permission from the highest

Catholic authority in the region to conduct missionary work in Indian Territory exclusively. He secured donations and built a residence, a chapel and St. Agnes Mission school in Antlers. During a time when Native Americans would be punished for speaking their language, Father Katchum mastered Choctaw and worked with first language speakers to develop materials from a Choctaw point of view in the Choctaw language.



Marquette University Special Collections and Archives, Bureau of Catholic Indian Mission Records, Series 09-1-39-06

**Two girls are pictured on a tricycle at St. Agnes Mission, Antlers, Indian Territory. During his lifetime Father William Henry Ketcham was an advocate for Native American children to receive an education. He was instrumental in getting the Browning policy rescinded so Native American parents could decide where their children were educated.**

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