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THE CARLISLE INDIAN SCHOOL AND CEMETERY

by Elizabeth Parkinson Hoffman

## The Carlisle Indian School and Cemetery

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Along the County Home Road, about one mile from Carlisle, is a small fenced-in enclosure. Within are six double rows of markers each bearing the name of an Indian, a tribe, a date, and an age. In the twilight, at sunset, we visited this little memorial to the "First American." For this small plot and a room in the Historic Hamilton Library are the main visible memorials of the famous Carlisle Indian School.

As the shadows fell, we could see the Indian School as it looked in 1879, when Captain Richard Henry Pratt arrived with the Indians from Fort Marion, Florida, and also those from Western Reservations.

On these same grounds in 1777, the Hessians built the famous guard-house which is still standing. At the close of the Revolutionary War the small settlement which was there took the name of Washingtonburg -- the first place to be named in honor of George Washington. Later Washingtonburg became a Government Army Post. Carlisle grew to be an important town.

In 1863 General Fitz Hugh Lee tarried near the Barracks en route to Gettysburg. From that position he

shelled Carlisle and burned the Barracks which later were rebuilt in 1865. From then until 1879 the Army Post was practically abandoned.

Captain Richard Henry Pratt who for many years worked with the Indians and Negroes at Western Army Stations, had been in command of some Indian prisoners at Fort Marion. There he gained the confidence of the redmen and helped many to start a civilized life. But Pratt's own plan was to have a Governmental School for the Indian, unlike the cruel Reservation Schools, where they would be taught more than the three "R's". The Indian boy would learn a trade by which he could support himself and family; the girl -- cooking, sewing, and housekeeping.

Pratt heard of the abandoned Barracks at Carlisle. He thought the situation splendid for his idea -- being located in the fertile Cumberland Valley and the people receptive to his plans.

In 1879 the Captain appeared in Washington and asked that the Barracks be given to him to try his experiment. After hard and lengthy discussions he was given the Carlisle Army Post. From a biography we quote a letter which he wrote to Mrs. Pratt in August 1879.

"My own dear loving little wife,

I embrace you! I send you a thousand kisses!

Carlisle is ours and fairly won!

General Sherman approves. General Hancock endorses handsomely and the order will be out to-morrow. Now the work begins, and I am so full of it I shall leave you to work out the particulars on your side. You can go there as soon as you wish. Make your own arrangements."

And so it happened that Mrs. Pratt and her three elder children -- Mason, Marion, and Mena; established a home at the Carlisle School while her husband went West to get students for his project.

At midnight, October 5, 1879, Captain Pratt arrived with one hundred and thirty-six Indian boys and girls at the Carlisle Indian School. Then came the Pioneer Days of the Carlisle Indian development.

When Captain Pratt arrived at the Carlisle School he found that the food, clothing and necessary supplies which he had ordered long before, had been delayed. When finally they did arrive they were not satisfactory. But after time had elapsed the officials found that the Indian School had to have the best possible or Captain Pratt would bear down and want to know the reason why.

At first, because the food was of such poor quality and unlike what they were accustomed to, and because they had lived in the "great open spaces" and not confined to small quarters, many Indians died. Medical examinations

were given when the students entered but must have been poor or lax for many died of tuberculosis. Many of the bodies were sent home, but because some were not, the need of a cemetery was felt. So the northeast corner of the grounds, to the west of where the present Stark Athletic Field is located, was selected as the place where the remains of their comrades were to be laid. During the thirty-nine years of the school's existence, as recorded in the School Weekly paper -- The Indian Helper -- the death rate was very low considering the number of students at the school.

Throughout those thirty-nine years many famous Indians went out from this school, some of whom were: Jim Thorpe, born in Oklahoma, the all-around champion in the Olympic games in 1912; Frank Mount Pleasant, the Seneca fleet-footed Olympic runner in the same 1912 games; also the Wheelock Brothers -- Dennison and James -- who made famous the Indian School Band; Rosa Bourassa, a very splendid woman; Tom -- the sweet singer of the Navajoe songs; Norah McFarland -- the Nez Perce Princess who interpreted the sign language for the Congressional Records, and others of much personality and distinction. Among those on the faculty were Angel de Cora of the Winnebago tribe, the famous Indian artist, her husband Lone Star Dietz who assisted "Pop" Warner as football coach for the Carlisle

Indian School Team, and Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Denny, who were also alumni of the school. The Carlisle Indian School athletes will never be forgotten because of their strength, courage, and their take-it-and-like-it smile which made them good and famous sports.

While the School was located at Carlisle, there were three superintendents -- Captain R. H. Pratt, Captain Mercer, and Moses Friedman. In 1918, near the close of the World War, much of the Government property was being turned into hospitals for the wounded who were brought back from France. For this reason August, 1918 saw the close of the school. It happened, by coincidence that the last visitors of the school were Miss Winnefred S. Woods of Carlisle and Miss Elizabeth Hill, later Mrs. W. Sterrett Parkinson, of Pittsburgh, Aunt and Mother of the writer of this article, and, as they left, the Carlisle Indian School was closed and the "keys" were returned from the Indian Bureau back to the War Department of the United States.

Following this the War Department established a hospital here. Later the hospital was closed and The United States Medical Field Service School was established. Enlargement of the Start Athletic Field made necessary the removal of the Carlisle Indian School Graveyard. Pertaining to this the following letter was received July 30, 1936:

"HEADQUARTERS CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA.  
Office of the Commanding General.

July 30, 1936.

Miss Elizabeth Parkinson,  
21 East Pomfret Street,  
Carlisle, Penna.

My dear Miss Parkinson:

In reply to your letter of July 21, 1936, requesting information relative to the Carlisle Indian School Cemetery, I find that the official records of burials, etc., were forwarded to the Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C., for file at the time that the Carlisle Indian School was disbanded.

Our records indicate that interments in this cemetery were begun about 1879 and continued throughout the existence of the Carlisle Indian School. The original site of the cemetery was unsatisfactory in relation to the development of a military post, being virtually in the "back yard" of the post near the garage, blacksmith shop and refuse dump. In October, 1926, the Commandant, Medical Field Service School, made recommendation to the War Department that its removal to a more satisfactory site be authorized. The change was approved and the bodies were removed to their present resting places during the year 1928.

I am inclosing a plot of the cemetery indicating the names of those buried in each grave. These names were obtained from the markers on the old graves at the time the cemetery was moved. Several graves containing bodies but unmarked were found and this accounts for unknown interments. In June, 1935, the sum of one thousand dollars was made available for the use of the Commanding Officer at Carlisle Barracks to erect a fence about this cemetery and to otherwise put it into a presentable condition.

Should you desire any further information relative to this matter it is suggested that you communicate with us again or directly with the Indian Bureau of the Department of the Interior.

Very truly yours,  
(Signed) John Dibble  
John Dibble,  
Major, Medical Corps."

At the head of each grave, as mentioned before, there is a uniform stone bearing the name of an Indian, a tribe, date, and age. As I walked by, I noticed especially these names and wondered who they were, why they came to Carlisle, if they could have helped mankind had they grown to manhood and womanhood.

Periscovia Friendoff -- Alaskan -- died April 29, 1901; age 19 yrs; Lucy Pretty Eagle -- Sioux -- died March 9, 1884, age 18 yrs; Rebecca Little Wolf -- Nez Perce -- died September 18, 1880, age 18 yrs.; Given Bat -- Apache -- died March 21, 1888, age 18 yrs.; Titus Deer Head -- Apache -- died December 17, 1885 -- age 16 yrs.; Olida Tapenaisihelinah -- Apache -- died April 17, 1888 -- age 15 yrs.

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In the center of the plot, enclosed in a semi-circle of hedge, is a granite stone which bears the name of Thomas Marshall. Concerning him, we quote from The Indian Helper April 28, 1899.

"One of the saddest duties that has come to us as a recorder of the historical events at the school is that of telling our readers of the sad death of student Thomas P. Marshall. Thomas was a Sioux from Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota.

Four years ago last fall Thomas came to us from The Friends White Institute, Indiana. He at once entered Dickinson College Preparatory Department and had advanced to the Junior Class in the College proper. It would be impossible to overstate the excellence of Thomas Marshall's character and influence as shown

both in Dickinson College and in the Indian School.

A memorial service, presided over by President Reed and attended by the Professors and students of Dickinson was held in Bosler Hall at which tributes were paid by various members of the College and friends in Carlisle.

Later there will be a memorial service at the school.

Every year since coming to Carlisle, Thomas was elected by the Y. M. C. A. to take charge of the delegation to the Northfield Conference. As assistant to Mrs. Given in charge of the small boys' quarters and as a leader of every good movement, he proved the worth of his character.

He received from home, letters telling of the sickness and death of a brother and sister of Malignant Measles. Soon after he was taken ill and died in a few days. Thus closed

'The life of one most promising and unselfish, also most dear to a loving family and to a wide circle of friends.'

The Indians who are buried in this plot may have felt that their young lives at the Indian School were in vain, but their passing was not vain because their graves in that cemetery will be a memorial to the Carlisle Indian School as long as that plot remains.

In the plans for improving the Army Post, eventually a path will run from the Post to the iron gate of the cemetery. Thus many more travelers will visit this sacred spot and help to keep alive the memory of those red friends in Carlisle.

Linked with this small cemetery is another memorial

in our National Cemetery at Washington at the grave of General Richard Henry Pratt who died in February, 1924. Soon after his death a group of his former Indian students called upon Mrs. Pratt to beg the privilege of raising the monument over a soldier's grave in Arlington. She gave consent upon the sole condition that all gifts be nominal. The modest undertaking was carried out with Emily Peake Dagenett as chairman, and upon the base we may read the words:

"Erected in Loving Memorial by His Students  
and Other Indians."

Thus the spirit of the Indian goes marching on.