



## The Farmhouse at Carlisle Barracks: A Major Site of Memory for Descendants of Carlisle Indian Industrial School



### Northeastern Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee

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*This is the earliest known photograph of the farmhouse being considered for demolition. It was taken by John Leslie, a Native student.*

June 27, 2014

Ms. Sandi Cianciulli  
250 Bryants Roads  
Norristown, PA 19401

Dear Sandi,

As of August 29, 2012, Lt. Col. William G. McDonough III, Garrison Commander of Carlisle Barracks asserted, "The farmhouse is one of dozens of buildings to be demolished and replaced with modern family housing... [they] have structural, foundation, plumbing, and electrical issues... [and] are scheduled for demolition in the coming months."

Joanne Shenandoah (Wolf Clan), Grammy Award-winning Oneida singer, composer and actress gave the following statement: "Many Iroquois young people were brought to Carlisle and the influence of this era is still felt today. Of course, we all know about the legendary Jim Thorpe. Carlisle also was the place where the Pan Indian Movement was born. It brought many Native nations together and this is where they began to defend their rights. I feel that this important part of our history [the Carlisle farmhouse] should be told and kept intact for future generations."

In response to McDonough, a coalition of Carlisle Indian School Descendants,

Relatives and Friends, submitted a letter which refutes most of McDonough's claims: "This current level of poor and inadequate maintenance is being used by Carlisle Barracks as an excuse for the demolition of the structure, when this deterioration can be directly traced to a failure of maintenance by the United States Army Garrison...it is obvious [they] have failed in [their] regulatory, legal and ethical responsibilities."

This is not the first time tensions between the historical significance and the exigent needs of the U.S. Army War College have resulted in a devastating loss for descendants, most notably in the 1930s was the moving of original graves of 186 children who died at the school to make way for an entrance road. Now with deep budget cuts greatly impacting the Department of Defense personnel and assets, how likely are they to set aside funds to maintain 100+ year old buildings?

McDonough also claims that all relevant agencies and interested parties were contacted regarding the demolition, including 25 federally recognized tribes. The coalition is doubtful that tribes who may have been consulted were informed of the historic and cultural relevance of the farmhouse to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Given recent research regarding the structure, the coalition has requested a re-initiation of the Section 106 process per the National Historic Preservation Act, which requires consultation with interested parties. In arguing for the historical significance of the building, the Coalition points to a 1918 publication by Carlisle Indian Industrial School that clearly discusses the use of this building for classes and housing by Indian students, including Jim Thorpe. As the story goes, Jim Thorpe was walking from his agricultural class at the Farmhouse when he was discovered by Pop Warner as he sailed over hurdles in his farm boots and overalls. The Coalition also points out that there is documented proof that the farmhouse played a role in Carlisle's Civil War history and was used as a social club for the segregated African American Soldiers during World War II.

2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of the closing of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School; a landmark in Indian history. Even though there are so many mixed and varied emotions Indian people associate with Carlisle, it is the place where our ancestors struggled with their changing times. So little of their painful and remarkable legacy is left to preserve on this site. Whether these memories are cursed or praised, they represent a critical turning point in Indian history and mark a time when they learned to work together in a way they never had before. Carlisle is where the seeds of such organizations as the National Congress of American Indians and the Assembly of First Nations began to take root.

It is also where a generation was awed by the pure athletic prowess of a proud group of Indian boys who defeated all the traditional powerhouse football programs of the day, such as Harvard, Yale, and Army. Today, as sports franchises around the world struggle with contract tug-of-wars, drug and bad behavior scandals by today's athletes, it is refreshing to remember there was a time when there was a team who gave us perhaps the greatest, purest moments of team glory in the history of football. 100 years ago last year, the mightiest football team in the nation was comprised entirely of Indian athletes from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

Therefore, we, members of the Northeastern Jurisdiction Native American Ministries Committee, composed of Native American United Methodists, non-Native United Methodists and Native traditionalists ask that the Army repair pre-demolition damage done to the Farmhouse before re-evaluation decision and properly maintain the building during the re-evaluation process. We also ask the Army to seriously and thoughtfully consult with interested and affected Federally recognized, State recognized, non-recognized Tribes and individuals as to an agreed use of the building. Suggestions from our entity for culturally sensitive uses are a visitor's center containing helpful CIIS tour information as well as a resource center where students and scholars could spend hours researching CIIS historical photographs and documents.

We owe a debt of gratitude to each hero that became subjects of an "experiment" in a little town on the other side of their world, far away from anything they had ever known, some of whom gave their lives.

If we can be of assistance in others ways, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Ms. Cynthia Ann Kent, Chair  
NEJ Native American Ministries Committee

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