

CARLISLE BARRACKS PLANS TO RESTORE INDIAN SCHOOL FARMHOUSE

April 7, 2014 (Carlisle, PA): Officials at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania have announced that a recent study by the Army Corps of Engineers has determined that the farmhouse on post did serve the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (CIIS) from 1887 to 1918. This study determined that the farmhouse was “a significant part of the CIIS, providing food for the school and housing for the farmer and his family, training students to be farmers, and serving as a popular recreational spot for the school.” Furthermore, the study recommended that the farmhouse be added to the existing National Historic Landmark district of the main CIIS campus. The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was the first all-Indian off-reservation government-run boarding school where over ten thousand Native children from nearly one hundred fifty Tribes were sent to be civilized in order to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.”

This announcement signifies a complete reversal in plans for Carlisle Barracks, which had scheduled the farmhouse for demolition in the fall of 2012 to make room for new family housing. Previous evaluations had determined that it played only a “peripheral role” at the Indian School, and should be excluded from the National Historic Landmark designation. However, new research by one of its last residents, Carolyn Tolman, documented the major role it played in the agricultural education and recreation of the Native American students. When descendants of CIIS students learned of its strong ties to the school, strenuous objections were raised through an online petition headed by Dr. Louellyn White, PhD (Akwesasne Mohawk, Assistant Professor, First Peoples Studies, Concordia University). A Farmhouse Coalition was formed to petition the Army as an interested party. Several Native Tribes also voiced their protests, which finally prompted the Army to re-evaluate their decision.

Discussions between the Farmhouse Coalition and Carlisle Barracks leadership including Garrison Commander Lieutenant Colonel Kimberly Peoples, are now underway to determine the best use for the restored farmhouse. There is currently no visitors’ center dedicated to the CIIS experience at Carlisle Barracks. As a symbol of the Indian residential school experience, the farmhouse could fill this role. As Indian tourism grows, it could become a major destination for those who wish to honor CIIS relatives, or for anyone who wishes to better understand the impact residential schools have had on Native cultures and families. Many Native people feel the farmhouse stands as a monument to Indian survival and has the potential to begin healing the intergenerational trauma caused by Indian residential schooling.

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Farmhouse history: <https://sites.google.com/site/thefarmhouseatcarlislebarracks>

CIIS history: <http://carlisleindianschool.org>