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Stories From a Sacred Place: The Story of Isaac Longshore

Joseph Cress The Sentinel Aug 7, 2017

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Grave markers at the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery.

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Michael Bupp, The Sentinel

Isaac Longshore said his last goodbyes on a street corner in downtown Carlisle.

It was about 9:30 a.m. on Monday, June 24, 1918. Little more than an hour later, he would be dead at Carlisle Hospital, the victim of a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Witnesses to the suicide said Longshore stood about 10 feet from the edge of the curb dressed in a yellow suit, a Panama hat and a neck piece fashioned from Indian beads.

Adele Minnich was walking home from a store when the former Carlisle Indian School student turned to her and said “Goodbye, little girl.” Those were the only words he had for her. His hand was in a pocket as she continued east down Louther Street.

Meanwhile, two men in a car were heading north on Hanover Street. Their path would converge in the instant Longshore pulled out a revolver, held it to his right temple and pulled the trigger. The Sac and Fox Indian collapsed into the intersection.

An Evening Sentinel reporter — his name lost to history — responded to the scene along with Carlisle police. By then, a crowd gathered and Longshore was loaded into a taxi and rushed to the hospital. He died around 10:40 a.m.

Previously classified as an unknown, Longshore has been identified as one of the Indian school students buried in the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery. This August will mark the first time in history the remains of some students will be disinterred and returned to tribal lands. Longshore will not be among them.

Odd behavior

Ninety-nine years ago, after the suicide, Wallace Denny told The Sentinel Longshore had arrived in town that Sunday to visit the school. Denny was in charge of the boys’ dormitory on the campus at Carlisle Barracks.

“He (Longshore) behaved very queerly, had his hair pulled down over his forehead and seemed particularly anxious as to the outcome of the war,” the newspaper reported.

Longshore had asked Denny whether he believed World War I would be the last great war of human history. There was no mention of how Denny responded.

Based on this firsthand account, the newspaper speculated Longshore was suffering from dementia or maybe “he went crazy on religion” during his absence from the Indian school.

Charles Berg, a North Hanover Street merchant, told *The Sentinel* he saw Longshore pace back and forth in front of his shop several times that Monday around 6 a.m.

The *Sentinel* reported that Longshore was a student at the school for just over two years and worked at gardening. “Neither his whereabouts nor vocation have been known to school authorities since he left the institution two years ago,” the article on the suicide reads. It was the practice of the newspaper to report the details of such deaths.

Off to school

The first off-reservation boarding school in the U.S., the Carlisle Indian Industrial School was a social experiment designed to remove Native American children from tribal influences, to teach them a trade and to assimilate them into the white man’s culture. This training included outings — off-campus opportunities to work for host families.

Dickinson College has an ongoing project where Indian school student records stored at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., are scanned into a searchable digital resource center at carlisleindian.dickinson.edu. The file on Isaac Longshore has about 60 pages of material including his student information card, medical records, outing reports and letters between staff and his mother.

Born 1898 in Oklahoma, Isaac was the son of Charlie Longshore, a white man, and Annie Longshore, who was part Cherokee and part Sac and Fox. From about age six to about 13, he attended three schools in Oklahoma before returning home in 1911 to help his family.

On Jan. 6, 1914, Isaac Longshore underwent a physical before boarding a train for Carlisle. The medical records list the 16-year-old as being in good health with the exception of diseases “incident to childhood” identified in a later report as measles and pneumonia. His heart, lungs, eyes, ears and throat were classified as “normal” by the attending physician.

When Isaac departed for Pennsylvania, he left behind his parents, two brothers and four sisters. He arrived in Carlisle on Jan. 8 weighing in at 127 lbs. and standing almost five-foot-six-inches tall.

'Been good?'

While the June 1918 newspaper report mentioned that Longshore was trained in gardening, his student records show him working an outing for the William Taylor family of Robbinsville, New Jersey, from about April 1, 1915, to Sept. 1, 1916, before heading out a week later to another family in New Jersey.

On Jan. 11, 1915, Indian School superintendent Oscar Lipps received a letter from Annie Longshore. "My son Isaac ... has been there for a year; has he been a good and obedient boy and is he trying to learn?" the mother asked. She also wanted to know if her son had ever indulged in alcohol while at the school.

She described the financial situation at home as "very hard" and asked if Isaac could be allowed to return home over his summer vacation in 1915. Annie wanted her son to learn how to be a bookkeeper.

"A supervisor in charge" responded to the Jan. 11 letter by saying that Isaac "has really improved in many respects since he came to Carlisle." Staff had kept a close watch over him "making him a much better boy" and "he has not been intoxicated during the time (he) has been enrolled here. As far as it is known he has not touched liquor of any kind."

David Dickey worked as a field agent in charge of monitoring students on outings. On Feb. 16, 1916, he completed a report on Longshore that classified his conduct as "excellent," his health and cleanliness as "good" and his ability and economy as "fair." Isaac, 18 at the time, was making about \$15 a month doing general farm work for a married couple while living in a second-floor room.

Request unfulfilled

A month later, on March 16, 1916, Annie Longshore wrote another letter to Lipps asking that her son be released from school to help her with the heavy work on the farm including plowing. She was a widow and was getting too old for the strain.

Annie even asked school officials how much money she needed to send to pay for her son's transportation back to Oklahoma. But instead of going home, Isaac remained on outings in New Jersey up until he ran away on Nov. 16, 1916.

“We do not know just where he is now,” the superintendent wrote the mother on Nov. 24. “His employer reported that he (Isaac) was keeping company with a girl who did not have a very good reputation and I thought it best to recall him to the school. For some reason, he did not want to come back to the school so he ran away.”

Annie was assured by staff that her son would be found. In early December, she received a letter from Isaac who wanted to return home, prompting her again to make the request and to offer money for transportation.

It turned out that Isaac had also sent a letter to the superintendent saying he would only return to the Indian school if he was allowed to go home. “Isaac has grown up into a very large and strong young man,” the superintendent wrote the mother on Dec. 11. “(He) does not drink and is a splendid worker. I hope he will help you when he gets home. His only trouble has been an over-fondness for girls. This was what has gotten him into trouble.”

Records show that Isaac Longshore was discharged from the Indian school in late December 1916 and returned home in early January 1917. Beyond that, there are no other records on Isaac Longshore in the student file.

The Sentinel on Aug. 15, 1927, published a story about workers exhuming the remains of Indian school students at the site of the old burial ground at Carlisle Barracks.

“The excavators found a skull with a bullet hole in it,” the story reads. “It was the skull of the Indian who committed suicide while in Carlisle. He had been in poor health and it is believed grew despondent.”

The suicide referenced in this story may have been the suicide of Isaac Longshore.

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Stories From a Sacred Place Day 3: Disinterment at the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery



Stories from a Sacred Place

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