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## Examining Our Past: Millersville's History with the Carlisle Indian Industrial School

Bryanna Nase

### Abstract

*The Carlisle Indian Industrial School (CIIS) is the first and most famous of the Indian boarding schools that swept our nation from the mid-19th century into the late 20th century, and Millersville was one of its partners. My research aims to identify those students who came from the CIIS to Millersville and their experiences at both campuses. I searched our school catalogs and cross-referenced their names with the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center and identified eighteen students from the CIIS representing fourteen different nations who attended Millersville. While further research is needed to understand multiple aspects of Millersville's relationship with the CIIS, my research raises multiple questions about the students' autonomy in deciding to attend Millersville, and the possibility of Millersville financially profiting from its entanglement with Indigenous assimilation. Moreover, these are likely the first Indigenous people who attended Millersville, giving us a greater understanding of our institution's history and legacy.*

### Examining Our Past

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School (CIIS) was founded on Richard Henry Pratt's (1892, June 23-29) idea to "kill the Indian...and save the man." The CIIS and other boarding schools did this by fully removing Indigenous children from their homes to educate them in white American culture. After a time at the boarding school, students were often sent to other institutions for further education, such as Millersville State Normal School. My research seeks to identify those students who came to

Millersville from the CIIS and piece together their lives at both institutions<sup>1</sup>. This is important in understanding Millersville's part in our country's greater assimilationist history.

By searching the Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center for mentions of Millersville in student files and the CIIS newspaper, I found student files consisting of entry and departure records, Millersville course records, CIIS administrative paperwork, and letters from students, administrators, and family members. I then

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<sup>1</sup> The names of the students identified have been withheld to protect privacy. This decision is based on ethical considerations and sensitivity to the students and their descendants. For more information, please

see the Millersville Institutional Legacy Initiative: <https://library.millersville.edu/archives/MI LI>.

verified students' attendance at Millersville by cross-referencing their name with our student catalogs from the year(s) they attended. This identified upwards of eighteen students from the CIIS who attended Millersville in two distinct cohorts; two students attended Millersville's regular term from 1889-1891, and the remainder attended Millersville's regular and summer terms from 1914-1917. These students represent fourteen different nations: Chippewa, Comanche, Creek, Eastern Cherokee, Iowa, Kiowa, Miami, Nez Perce, Oneida, Pawnee, Sioux, Umatilla, Winnebago, and Wyandotte. None of these students graduated from Millersville; the most time any of them spent here was two years.

Students often left the CIIS and Millersville to help their families. One student left because "their mother fell ill and needed the student's assistance" (Letter to Superintendent O.H. Lipps, 1917, March 19). Another student faced financial pressure to pause their studies at Millersville, reasoning to "go home and try to make enough money for next year's tuition" (Letter to Superintendent O.H. Lipps, 1916, February 14). Despite this familial loyalty, CIIS administration strongly advised students to remain at the CIIS during term breaks. In one instance, it took eight letters between the superintendent of the CIIS, a student's father, and the superintendent of La Pointe Indian Agency before the student was allowed to return home. Both superintendents agreed that "it would hardly be an advantage to [the student] to be in such a home as the one that is maintained by [their] parents" (Lipps, O.H., 1914, August 8). This demonstrates the racist views held by CIIS administration and their fight for near total control over a student's education and whereabouts.

Other students lacked the institutional support from the CIIS and Millersville to continue their studies. John DeHuff (1916, April 19), then acting superintendent of the

CIIS, criticized one student for dropping out of Millersville after only two to three weeks, writing of the student's "notorious failure" and how "[they] had the chance of a lifetime at Millersville and deliberately threw it away without asking any advice from the authorities of this school." Another student decided to leave Millersville after repeated chastisement for meeting up with mixed-gender groups of friends (Harbold, P.M., 1917, April 13; Faculty of the State Normal School of the 2nd District, Millersville, Pennsylvania, 1917). This student later reached out to request their diploma from the CIIS, and then ceased contact with both institutions.

This research also illuminates student social life at Millersville. One student wrote the CIIS to request permission for their cousin to spend a weekend on Millersville's campus, writing, "Saturdays and Sundays are the two days when most of the students go to their homes for the two days, so I would like to have her come for company...Saturdays and Sundays are always the two days that I feel lonely since [my roommate] left" (Letter to O.H. Lipps, 1914, July 23). The student's roommate had also come from the CIIS for Millersville's summer term and left after only one week. While this loss of a roommate hindered the student's social well-being, it encouraged them to make friends at Millersville; the student spent a week in Kutztown with a newfound Millersville friend, writing "...I was invited to go to visit a minnester's (*sic*) family... I met his daughter here as a student and we have been good friends" (Letter to Superintendent O.H. Lipps, 1914, August 3). Attendance at Millersville allowed Indigenous students to meet new people, which aided—intentionally or unintentionally—in the assimilation of Indigenous students. These two may have been innocent friends, or the minister's family may have had an ulterior motive in

inviting an Indigenous student to their home for a week.

Students were also active in the literary societies on campus. The two students who attended Millersville during the regular term from 1889-1891 were heavily involved in the Normal Literary Society, delivering recitations, acting on committees, and participating in debates. In one event, these students debated on opposite sides of the statement: "The Indian received justice from the U.S. government" (*Minute Book of the Normal Literary Society...*, 1890, March 1). This is one of the first events these students formally participated in with the society, and it is unclear if they chose their positions on the topic or were assigned a side.

While we know some students left Millersville out of financial need, it is currently uncertain how students funded their education. Two students had their full Millersville tuition paid for by the CIIS Charity Funds, while another student considered selling half of their acreage to continue their studies (Pratt, R.H., 1889, October 29; DeHuff, J., 1915, August 24). Furthermore, at least one student had to pay out of pocket for their Millersville board and tuition (Lipps, O.H., 1915, January 13). This implies that Millersville financially benefitted from its institutional connection to the CIIS instead of financially supporting those students.

Through this project, we have caught short glimpses into the lives of Indigenous students who once walked our campus, but there is still more to understand of Millersville's entanglement with and support of the CIIS. Now that we know who some of the students were, further research must be done to understand how our actions impacted their lives on campus and beyond.

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