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CARLISLE INDIAN SCHOOL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Narrator's Name: Mrs. Ella Ruggles  
Secretary to Mr. Peel, Clerk of Carlisle  
Indian School at the time of its closing.  
Work years: 1916-1918.

Tape Number: #1

Date of Interview: November 26, 1980

Place of Interview: Mrs. Ruggles' living room, 529 N. West St.,  
Carlisle, PA

Interviewer's Name: Helen Norton

For: Cumberland County Historical Society

Q: We talked about this before -- about what brought you to Carlisle in the first place.

A: Came under Civil Service, to work at the Carlisle Indian School, and I was secretary to the Chief Clerk.

Q: Was that frightening, scary, to come so far away from home?

A: Yes, it really was very scary because it was the first I'd been away from home, so far away from home, for such a long time. I came from Punsatawney in Jefferson County, practically out of high school.

Q: You'd wanted to go to Washington (D. C.), wasn't it?

A: I'd wanted to go to Washington, but it seems there were no openings there, and this opening came up, and I had a telegram asking if I would accept employment (at CIS). And after consulting with my people at home and my commercial teachers, I decided to take this employment. I came in the end of November, 1916.

Q: Did you know anything about the School before you came?

A: Hadn't the slightest -- hadn't even heard of it, to tell the truth. I really had never heard of the Indian School.

Q: What were your first impressions?

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A: Well, the first night, if I could have gotten to the railroad station and there'd have been a train, I guess I would have gone home. I guess I was getting homesick and everything was so different from what I expected.

Q: What was that?

A: I really don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect to find as many elderly employees as I found. I was the youngest one on the school grounds, and while everyone was very, very nice to me, it was just the fact that I had never been away from home under any similar circumstances. And the work wasn't hard.

Q: What was the job like?

A: Well, I took a lot of dictation from him, and I made out all the employee checks practically, and each, well, any Indian student that had money, they, I, had an account with him, and one week the boys would come into town and the next week the girls would come into town, if they had any money to spend. They would want to draw money out of these accounts. I would write the checks and keep the accounts straight. And if they got any more (money) in from the reservation or their parents or whoever sent it, that was entered into their accounts. Of course, when they drew out, why, that was taken off. It was just, in a way, general office work.

Q: What then would the children -- well, they weren't children, were they?

A: Well, they weren't real small ones, no. They were all beyond first grade, I'd say.

Q: There were some younger ones?

A: No, uh-uh.

Q: No, I mean, were there some at that age? (first grade age)

A: No, they were all older. I really don't know what the first grade was they came to here, you know.

Q: The ones you met, for the most part, were how old?

A: Well, I'd say, mostly in their teens.

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Q: Early teens, or --?

A: Well, all ages, you know.

Q: Yes.

A: Course you know that their ages didn't go exactly like ours, I mean, they weren't as advanced at twelve years as our twelve year olds, because of coming from the reservation and not having the civilization that we had.

Q: Did most of them, as far as you know, come from places where there were schools before, so that they spoke English?

A: Well, in my time they did, but at first they didn't, at least not much; I guess they had quite a hard time at first. As I said, my experience was really with the last two years that they were here.

Q: But your husband had been there earlier. . .?

A: Not working there, no. No, he didn't work there. Because he and his father and brother had a painting business in town and, when his father retired and his brother went to the war, why, well, he did other odd jobs and then he happened to know the man who happened to have charge of the painting department, and at first he was just a civilian employee, but then, after the war, the War Department took it over, and he took Civil Service and then he was under Civil Service from then on. And he was there for a little more than forty years. And he retired from there when he was compelled to at seventy years. As I said, the last two years of the School was my experience there, and all I know beyond that is what people have told me.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you about -- when you mentioned that you were the youngest of the employees, what were the other workers -- what were they like? Had they been there for . . .?

A: Oh, yes, some had been there for a number of years. (Laughs) Some were what you'd call "old maids", you know, and well, there were Mr. and Mrs. Denny, they were Indians, and so was Jake Duran that I told you about.

Q: He's the person you went out to see in California, who was, who still is, working. . .

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A: Oh, no, no. At that time, yes, he was helping to run an Indian School out there. Now again, I can't say that name. I mean the place that he was. He went to Oklahoma first, and then he was transferred out there.

Q: He went to another Indian School in Oklahoma?

A: Yes, and then he was transferred out there. Well, as I said, his wife had graduated the nursing program at a Philadelphia hospital. Another Indian employee out there was a nurse. I really don't know where she had gone to school, but as I said, she was there when I got there. But Jake's wife was working in Philadelphia up until they got married. Now, Mrs. Denny, she worked in the office; she had charge of what they called the Outing Program. I know from some of the articles (in local papers) have mentioned the Outing (Program). Mr. Denny was the disciplinarian in the small boys' quarters. Most of the other shops, the head man was a town man or not an Indian. Mr. Charlie Carns had the paint, and Mr. Bolze was a shoemaker, had the shoe shop. And the two Albert girls had the laundry; no, Miss Albert had the laundry, and the Seewright sisters were in the sewing room where the girls learned to sew.

Q: Were they local people?

A: Yes, they were all local people, and Mr. Herr was in the carpentry department. They were all local.

Q: Did they live on the . . . ?

A: Well, the Seewright girls didn't. They had their place in town. But Mr. Bolze and Herr, but Mr. Carns didn't. Now Leroy Carns is his son. He retired. I don't know what all he did after he left. He was gone. He didn't stay too long. He was more or less of a temporary employee. And, anybody else, Magdalena Shump, a part-time employee for a while, she was in the office, and so was Carns.

Q: So that the people who lived there, on the School (grounds) with you, you had apartments?

A: Yes, I had an apartment, one room, at first.

Q: What kind of community -- what kinds of things did you do at the end of the day?

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A: Well, this one building, they called it Teachers' Quarters -- those that didn't have apartments had rooms down there. That's where the dining room was, and the kitchen, and all the employees that didn't have their own place ate there. And they had a nice big living room, and they had a piano in the living room. And we'd go in there after a meal, like in the evening. I played the piano. They'd sing; Mr. Peele, he'd play the violin. You just sort of made up your own entertainment.

Q: Mr. Peele was the Clerk?

A: Yes, he was the man I worked for. And I always say that he and I, we closed up the School, 'cause we were the last ones there. Yes, we were the last ones here, although I was married then but I was still here in Carlisle. I didn't ask to go anyplace else. I was going to stay and work for the head nurse (of Army Hospital), and, well, when my husband and I decided to get married, I didn't know how long I'd work, so I worked for the construction quartermaster who came in to convert the place to a hospital; that was his job. And I worked there from the beginning of September to the beginning of February (1919). Course we didn't have retirement then like we do now, and that ended that. Course I was closely connected with the Post after the Army took it over because my husband kept on working, and, as I said, he finally took Civil Service, and he was head painter there when the School closed. I guess he was going to work for the construction quartermaster, too, but then he was in the last draft of the war when they started taking older ones, and was supposed to have left on the 12th of November, and, of course, the Armistice was signed and saved him. So that was that. So, I don't know what to tell you. If you ask the questions. . .

Q: Right. There were two things that came into my mind while you were talking. Well, what happened when the word came that the School was going to be shut down?

A: Well, most everyone was flabbergasted. I think it was the least anybody thought about, you know. Although Mr. Peele had known it for a couple of months, but he didn't say anything until official word came from Washington. Because, at one time, oh, I don't know how long I'd been there, but I still wanted to go to Washington, and I asked whether he would recommend me for a transfer. "No, we need you here," he said. So I didn't say anything more then about it. The

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way he broke it to me was he asked if I still wanted to go to Washington, which was after I was going with my husband (who later became my husband). I said, "No, you wouldn't let me go when I wanted to go; I don't want to go now." Well, soon after that he broke it. There may have been a few who thought something was going to happen, but most were just flabbergasted. The majority of them had no idea it was going to happen.

Q: Well, how did Mr. Duran feel? And Mr. Denny?

A: Well, they just transferred to other schools.

Q: Were they, at this time, employees of Civil Service or the BIA?

A: They were from the BIA.

Q: They had been to the School themselves?

A: I think so.

Q: In earlier days?

A: Yes, in earlier days.

Q: How did the students feel about it? Did you know?

A: Well, I imagine some of them were happy that they could go back to their homes. I really didn't see much reaction from them.

Q: You didn't have too much contact?

A: Children. It was really quite a hassle until they got everybody shipped back and everything cleared away. It's really hard to remember. It's been so many years since it did happen.

Probe: I was just wondering how it felt when something earth-shattering took place, like the day that Kennedy was shot, the atmosphere of a place changes.

A: Well, it changed there, too, you know. It was quite a decision for people to make. A lot of the people had thought they were settled there, especially some of the older employees. I mean older in age, as well as in service. Well, I showed you that picture and you could see how old some of them were (a group

picture of the teaching and administrative staffs at the School in 1917), but everybody was just doing their jobs. As I said, Mrs. Whistler, her name was Verna Dunnigan, with her musical ability and everything she got in with the town people. This Belle Riechel, she was a teacher, but she and Verna Whistler were close buddies. They did a lot together. And I would say they had more of a connection with the town than the majority of the employees. Those who had their homes there, and their homes to look after after work and we hadn't; we just found something to do.

Q: Do you know whether any of the students remained in the area or enlisted or left or . . . ?

A: There were a number of boys who enlisted. I don't know how many, but I know some of them did. I don't think many of the girls stayed in this area. I had nothing to do with them. It was the employees. Some of them went to their original homes (students) and really didn't know what they were going to do, but quite a number were transferred to other Indian Schools. I wish I had that information, you know, for my own benefit, but you know at times like that you don't always think of everything.

Q: About holiday time, what was the atmosphere like? Were there Christmas celebrations?

A: Oh, yes. The students always had a program night with refreshments. Well, they put on plays and things during the year, and, of course, the employees always went to those things, and where anybody could help, they helped. And now that was one thing that Mrs. Whistler (Dunnigan) and Miss Reichel usually had charge of.

Q: Were people asked out, for holiday dinners, that sort of thing?

A: Yes, sometimes they were, but we always had a special dinner like now the first Thanksgiving dinner. I'd been there almost a year, I don't remember where I went, but the first Christmas I went over to Newport where I visited Reverend Kershner, the United Church of Christ minister, who was a very close friend of ours. Well, I went over there quite often on weekends because after Saturday noon I was free, and I would go over there. At that time, you could get a train almost any hour of the day. And I would go over there Saturday afternoon -- come back Sunday evening. And the second Christmas I was in



Lancaster with my sister. So I really didn't eat a holiday meal there, but I know that they had everything, and the children would have the same thing.

Q: Were summers very different from the winters?

A: Well, they really didn't have classes. But they found something for them to do. If they didn't go on the Outings, you know. But I really don't know just how many might have gone on the Outings. People around in the community would take them. But they all had chores to do, and some of them would go home for vacations.

Q: How many would have a bank account? Would it be more or less than half?

A: I don't think it would be many more than half would have a bank account.

Q: Would money they would earn in the Outing Program also go into. . .

A: I can't really tell you about that, how the Outing worked.

Q: I was wondering whether the bank accounts they had would include that money as well, or whether that money. . .

A: That I really can't tell.

Q: Mainly then, the money that you knew about was money. . .

A: That they got from home, from relatives, yes. I just don't know what they'd give on the Outing. How much they would get, or, uh, course they always got their room and board so to speak. They always had that.

Q: I haven't been able to find too many families who had students as Outing persons.

A: Well, they didn't take them here in town. They mostly went to farms, out in the country, as I understand.

Q: Well, the boys would come in to play football. They must have been able to get out when they really needed to play football, or play with the kids or something.

A: Oh, yes, they had their recreation right there on the grounds, too, you know.

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Q: Was there swimming? Or skating?

A: The only skating we had was the pond that was sort of between the School land and what's the Church of God Home now. The old entrance, that's where they'd skate. Where the trolley came out.

Q: What was it that was being quarantined that time you returned from your vacation? Chicken pox?

A: Smallpox!

Q: And did everyone stay there and recuperate there? And you had to stay?

A: Oh, yes, after I got back. And as I said, my husband was working then as a civilian employee, and, of course, he had to stay. They had a doctor there, but he. . . like a general doctor. I doubt he would do any serious operation on anyone himself.

Q: He wasn't a town doctor?

A: No, I don't know where he came from, but he was under Civil Service, too. He wasn't a specialist, I don't think, but the reason I think about him is that he did a lot of testing for glaucoma.

(Here follows a discussion of symptoms of glaucoma, which Mrs. Ruggles suffers from. She is saying that the treatment was eye drops as far as she can remember, and that there were periodic tests for glaucoma among the Indian School pupils at the time she was employed there. She did not know whether or not the tests were occasioned by the students having a tendency to develop glaucoma.)

A: As I said, I worked there such a short time that I just couldn't take everything in.

Q: When you would be walking in town, would you often meet either the boys or the girls?

A: No, I never did.

Q: Did they have to travel in groups?

A: Yes, they did have to go in groups with a chaperone. They were watched pretty closely when they were off the grounds.

One thing I enjoyed so much was the band. Oh, they had a marvelous band, and they had a parade every year out there. They had uniforms. Now whenever they would have a parade, they would take the flag down, you know. They wore their uniforms and went over to the parade ground and that was really a sight to see.

Q: What kinds of things would they play?

A: Well, all the popular. . . you know like in the Army, more like the Army music. Marches, you know, and they'd parade.

Q: Were there smaller groups? I know the Carlisle band sometimes breaks up into smaller groups to. . .

A: Well, I think they had an orchestra. They would have dances out there, too. Usually on a Saturday evening, so they could get together.

Q: Were staff invited to those, as well?

A: Yes, you could go. Yes, it was really quite an experience.

Q: Did you go to some dances?

A: Well, I didn't dance, but I was learning. Then I started going with my husband, and he didn't dance so that ended my dancing. But we would go and watch. It was just a chance to get together so you wouldn't be alone. I have always done fancy work even before I left home, but I did more embroidery work then, and I just kept busy. And there was one employee in particular, now she really could have been my mother as old as she was, though she wasn't quite as old. She had gray hair. She wasn't quite as old as she looked. Sally Hagen. And she and I were close. She was a teacher. I don't remember what grade she taught.

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Q: How frequently would they have those dances?

A: About once a month. I was trying to think what they did with the piano. So many of the buildings have changed. I think there are only two or three that haven't been torn down. Well, where the print shop was is the Officers' Club now.

And there are a couple of buildings along in there that are still there where the officers live, and I don't know whether they call that the Guest House, or not, where we employees, single employees, stayed. On the right, beyond that new building. Well, right across from what was the stables, where the theater is now. See, then they didn't have cars. We rode in the herdig, they called it the herdig. Would take people in town or bring them out. I guess they spelled it H-E-R-D-I-G. I never did hear the word before, but that's what they called it. It was an enclosed vehicle. I forget how many would get in it. It was on the order of a bus, but it wasn't our modern bus.

Q: It was four-wheeled?

A: Yes, four wheels.

Q: Could one horse pull it?

A: No, you had to have two, and they would come into market on Saturday mornings. Anybody wanted to come in to market, they would bring you in in the herdig. And many a morning I'd come in for something. Oh, we got our meals over there, but if we had something extra that we wanted to have we could have it. That was an experience for me because I'd never been to a market like that before, and there aren't too many of them, I don't think, and I don't think there were at that time, but that was just something that was traditional in Carlisle. Where the new court house is. And then they built one back of Bixler's. Market was Saturday and Wednesday. Saturday was the big one.

Q: Did the students get to go into market?

A: No, not that I know of.

(Here is some conversation about cataracts and eyeglasses. Mrs. Ruggles had removed her glasses, and I was concerned she might be flagging. From cataracts, we got onto glaucoma again, which ailment, as perhaps suffered by the students interested me. Mrs. Ruggles explained that glaucoma, untreated, leads to blindness.)

Q: So that happened, could happen, to the children?

A: It could happen. I don't know that any one of them really ever went blind from it, not that I knew. But it could happen. I mean, the point is that you don't know you have it.

There's no. . . until you go and have the doctor examine you. . . because unless you get acute, then there's pain and much discomfort.

Q: Well, I wonder if it was something peculiar to the children that made him. . .

A: Well, that I don't know; I imagine it was. Nobody really knows the cause of it. The water just doesn't drain the way it should. It builds up in there and causes the pressure.

Q: When the children were at school. . . your office was situated so that you could see students going back and forth?

A: Yes, you could see right down over the campus from this office. It's right about in the middle of where you go in and keep on going, you know. And right from there you could see them have their evening parade.

Q: Now how did the women fit into the evening parade?

A: Oh, they didn't, just the. . . well, no, the girls did, too. That's right. Not every evening, mostly just the boys in the evening, but they drilled the girls, too. The boys wore their uniforms.

Q: Who did the drilling?

A: I think Jake Duran did a good bit of it. And, of course, the band master had charge of the band and drilled them. Mr. Cyril was the one I remember, who was there when I was there. He came to be pretty well known in town.

Q: I wondered, too, whether people from Washington, from the Bureau, did they make periodic visits?

A: Yes, they came up; I have no idea how often. They came up from the BIA.

Q: Would parents visit?

A: I don't recall.

Q: So often I'll hear when I've talked to people about students, that they'll be described as an orphan. Mr. Flickinger and Mr. Arthur Martin would refer to students as orphans, and I wondered whether it was they'd been in school so long they'd

lost track of their families, or . . .

A: That I couldn't say.

Q: But the ones you dealt with, their bank accounts had. . .

A: Definitely had relatives; had some attachment to their homes.

Q: Did you make arrangements for all the students for passage here and there when the school closed?

A: I think they had to do that, to see that they got to wherever they wanted to go. As I said, some of them would go home over the summer vacation, if they had the means to do it. But there were always quite a number who couldn't go and had to stay right there. But they always had something for them to do. It isn't as if they had their regular classes, but kept them busy anyhow.

Q: When they would come to apply to Mr. Peele (Chief Clerk) to put in or take out money, how would that work?

A: Well, he did that; I don't know how he did it. I don't think they had to say what they were going to use it for. They would get it on the day they were allowed to go into town. They weren't allowed to have a lot of money on them at any time, but they had a place sort of like the PX where they could buy candy and things like that.

(I told Mrs. Ruggles about Mr. Flickinger's parents' store, of which she knew nothing, and of Mr. Warner's warning young Mr. Flickinger off of the playing field with his pies and cakes.)

A: Mr. Warner wasn't there as Athletic Director when I was there. I don't know who was.

Q: Was that important while you were there?

A: Oh, yes, there were athletics all the time. There were regular athletics and band practice every so often. You know, it was run just like a regular school.

Q: About the bank accounts, you'll probably think I'm obsessed. Do you remember whether some of them were large, or small?

A: Yes, there were some of them, most of them were like medium, not too much money. I don't remember dollar amounts. But then you have to remember that a dollar when a whole lot further then.

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Q: Well, I was just wondering if there were any "rich kids on campus", that kind of thing?

A: Not too rich, I don't think.

Q: Was an allowance ever made for the ones who had nothing to spend?

A: That I don't know.

Q: What was Mr. Peele like?

A: Well, he was a very jolly person. I liked Mr. Peele very much. He always seemed to look on the bright side of things, very jovial, very nice to work for.

Q: What was his relationship to the commander, the headmaster of the School?

A: He was the Chief Clerk?

Q: But Mr. Peele was not the head of the School?

A: Oh, no, no. Superintendent.

Q: How did they get along?

A: Well, as far as I know, they got along.

Q: It must have been hard for the Superintendent when they closed the School.

A: No, it didn't bother him at all because he could join the Army. He was glad to be relieved. John Francis, Jr. was the Superintendent's name at the close, and he had already left the service here to Mr. Peele.

Q: And for how long a period was he the only . . .

A: Aaah. Let me see, several months. When Mr. Francis did leave, definitely, was in the spring of 1918.

Q: Did he leave before word came down that the School was going to close?

A: Yes, he was gone and no replacement came. Then Mr. Peele was in charge.

Q: Did that give people. . .

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A: It may have given some people a hint, I don't know. As I said, I don't know how many people had even given it a thought, 'cause I hadn't heard any gossip about it, and it came as a complete surprise to me. It was an experience, one I won't forget. It was very sad for some. I'd say for the majority of them. They all gradually disappeared.

Q: How long was the hospital functioning after the School closed?

A: Let me see, I forget. I think it was the end of the war.

Q: It was a relatively short time, wasn't it?

A: Yes, before the hospital some of the employees and some of the children could do that, you know, knit scarves, socks, sweaters, gave it through the Red Cross.

Q: Did the Red Cross have a chapter out there?

A: Not that I know, just through the one in town.

Q: Were there any other war-related efforts, like benefits?

A: Well, they put on a couple of plays for war bonds and things like that. They were putting on a play for a benefit, I guess, when I met my husband because he was in the play. I don't remember what he was in it anymore, but he had something to do with it. They charged admission for that, and anybody that wanted to from town could go out and see it. I believe it went on for two nights as I recall. I forget who else was in it, but it was definitely home talent.

(Here I mentioned to Mrs. Ruggles, James Garvie and also Lillie Yuda, sister to Henry Flickinger and wife of Oneida Indian Montre-ville Yuda. Mrs. Yuda, at one time, would play piano for some of the band students who were to perform solo pieces. Mrs. Ruggles didn't know any of those people.)

Q: After the closing of the School, did people maintain ties with Carlisle; did they come back?

A: I would imagine so; I really can't say for sure.

Q: Did anyone ever get in touch with you who had been an employee out there?

A: No one beside Sally (Hagen). Course, I was always friendly



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with Whistler. Course she got where she got because she taught in the Carlisle Schools, you see. Here I got married and stayed at home.

Q: When you say whe got where she got, what do you mean?

A: Well, she was very well thought of in Carlisle, and a lot of people knew her because of that, where they didn't know me.

Q: Well, Mr. Martin knew who you were, and that you worked for Mr. Peele. And so did Mr. Flickinger.

A: Did he? I didn't know that anyone else in town knew it. A lot of this is only coming out now. May I ask what you're going to do with all this?