

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, November 6, 2023

The Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska Seeks the Repatriation of its Children from Carlisle

(Winnebago, NE) On October 16, 2023, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska (the Tribe) submitted a repatriation request letter to the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of the Army (DOA), and the Office of Army Cemeteries (OAC) for the return of two of its children from the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery (Carlisle Cemetery), in Carlisle Pennsylvania pursuant to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

In 1895, two of the Tribe's children, Edward Hensley, and Samuel Gilbert, were sent to the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (Carlisle) from the Omaha and Winnebago Agency located in present day Winnebago, Nebraska. Samuel died two months after his arrival and Edward died four years after his arrival. Carlisle officials failed to notify the Tribe of either of the boys' deaths and instead buried both boys in the original Carlisle Cemetery. In 1927, Army officials dug up the remains of nearly 200 Indian children, including Edward and Samuel, who died at Carlisle and reburied them at the current Carlisle Cemetery, where they are buried today.

"Our precious children hold a special role within our Tribe," said Winnebago Tribal Chairwoman Victoria Kitcheyan. "The Tribe is committed to bringing Edward and Samuel home so they can be at peace and so our people can begin to heal from the trauma of all that took place."

In 2023, generations of tribal members gathered at Little Priest Tribal College in Winnebago, Nebraska to discuss the return of Samuel and Edward. Many generations of tribal members shared about the effects that Indian boarding schools have had on themselves, their families, and their communities. Members of past Winnebago Tribal Councils were also present to discuss how many past Tribal Councils made efforts to bring the Tribe's children home from Carlisle. As such, the Tribe maintains that its role is to facilitate the return of Samuel and Edward on behalf of all its members.

OAC has characterized the return of children from Carlisle Cemetery as pursuant to OAC policies for the return of servicemembers from OAC cemeteries. The Tribe maintains that it is entitled to repatriation of the remains of Samuel and Edward pursuant to NAGPRA and that internal OAC policies are inappropriate to apply. The Tribe believes that Samuel and Edward have been waiting to come home for over 100 years and looks forward to the expeditious repatriation of the boys, in accordance with NAGPRA.

The Army responded to the Tribe's request but has thus far failed to provide an answer to whether the Army would repatriate the boys pursuant to NAGPRA.