



"Continuance" © Uzuri James, 2024. This sketch portrays the humanity of Native girls who attended the Greenville Indian School, 1916.

The Trial of Native Girls

A Readers Theater Script

with selections of documents from the National Archive. The words used in this script come from interviews and statements written by people who lived in Greenville, California, in 1916.

Roles:

1. **Narrator (performed by teacher or student)**

School Staff:

2. **Edgar Miller, Superintendent of Greenville Indian School, also called “The Mission”**
3. **Miss Hancock, Matron, Greenville Indian School**
4. **Omar Bates, school clerk**

Medical staff:

5. **Dr Morel**
6. **Mr Lanahan, Dentist**
7. **Dr Philbrook, Coroner (Leads inquest trial to determine cause of death)**

Federal staff:

8. **Cato Sells, Commissioner of Indian Affairs**
9. **L.A. Dorrington, Special Agent of Indian Affairs**

Religious staff:

10. **Reverend GE Reader, Missionary**
11. **Reverend Green**

Students:

12. **Katherine Dick**
13. **Edith Buckskin**
14. **Rosa James**
15. **Aelouise Stonecoal**

Community members:

- 16. Mr Taylor**
- 17. Mrs Groves¹**
- 18. Mr Green, Probation Officer**
- 19. Mr Peck**
- 20. Mr Pratt**

- 21. Mr Bristol, Juror**

The Jury of Today (1-4 people in each jury):

- 22. Jury of History**
- 23. Jury of Terms**
- 24. Jury of Behavior**
- 25. Jury of Culture**

Part One

16 speaking roles in Part One:

Narrator, Aelouise Stonecoal, Rosa James, Edith Buckskin, Katherine Dick, Edgar Miller, Edith Hancock, Cato Sells, Reverend Reader, Mr Philbrook, Mr Green, Mr Taylor, Mr Pratt, Mr Peck, Roxy Grove, Mr Bristol

Narrator:

On October 13, 1916, a 13 year old girl, Aelouise Stonecoal wrote her father a letter, while living at the Greenville Indian School. English is not her first language. She is a Mountain Maidu and Pit River Indian, from Northeastern California.

Aelouise:

Dear father, I like to come back there some time this week. I am thinking about my family. I fight Ella Carson yesterday and I and Edith Buckskin cried every night in bed. I dream something- that I was very sick, home sick. I like to come back there. I feel bad every night and all the girls fight. We have 91 girls and boys, 49. Tell that to my brother and my sister. Inez Jack like to come back home-tell her grandma. She is home sick. This is all that I know for this time from Miss Aelouise Stonecoal. ²

Narrator:

Two months later, Superintendent Edgar Miller, of the Greenville Indian School, sent a telegram to the Indian Office in Washington DC, dated December 9, 1916.

Edgar Miller, Superintendent:

Five girls deserted December Fifth.

Pursuit failed to locate them.

Molly Lowry found dead this morning near Westwood, thirty miles from school.

Aelouise Stonecoal lower limbs frozen badly. May have to be amputated.

Coroners inquest tomorrow at Westwood.

Will wire further information later.³

Narrator:

Three days later, Superintendent Miller sends his first letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Edgar Miller, Superintendent:

Sir: It is my sad duty to report that the two runaway girls, whose feet were frozen, Edith Buckskin and Aelouise Stonecoal, were operated upon at the school hospital Tuesday and are getting along as well as can be expected. The doctor says that they are doing well so far.

Aelouise had both lower limbs amputated between the knee and the ankle. Edith had the fore part of both feet amputated.

Both girls seem to rest well and are in excellent spirits. It is needless for me to say that everything possible is being done for these girls with the hope that they will have a chance to pull through this terrible ordeal.

Very respectfully, Edgar Miller⁴

Narrator:

The School missionary, Reverend Reader writes a letter in support of Miller.

Reverend Reader, School Missionary

There are many complex problems peculiar to the work here and Indian characteristics require wisdom and patience.⁵

Narrator:

In response to these letters, Cato Sells, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, assigns special agent, Dorrington, to fully investigate the circumstances pertaining to the death of Molly Lowry.

Cato Sells, Commissioner:

You are requested to go to Greenville at your earliest convenience.... Make a full report and include in your recommendations the punishment, if any, which should be given to the three older girls alleged to be responsible for the runaways.⁶

Narrator:

The Commissioner encloses a copy of the coroner's inquest for Agent Dorrington to review. During the inquest, Mr Philbrook, County Coroner, interviewed Edith Buckskin, Aelouise Stonecoal, Katherine Dick and Rosie James, five days after they ran away from the school.

These are the transcripts from the Coroner's Inquest:⁷

Mr Philbrook:

What is your name?

Edith Buckskin:

Edith Buckskin

Mr Philbrook:

How old are you?

Edith Buckskin:

14

Mr Philbrook:

When did you leave the one that died?

Edith Buckskin:

Tuesday. In the evening.

Mr Philbrook:

Where did you leave the one that died?

Edith Buckskin:

At clear creek. On top of the hill. I told them to come with me but they wouldn't do it. They said they were going to sleep and I could go on and they stayed. I saw the other two girls coming up and we went on.

Mr Philbrook:

Where did you start for, Susanville?

Edith Buckskin:

Yes, sir

Mr Philbrook:

Did you know there was snow on the mountain?

Edith Buckskin:

No sir. When we got up on top of the mountain there was snow.⁷

Mr Philbrook:

Was the little girl that died very cold when you left her?

Edith Buckskin:

No, sir. She was sleeping when we came to the road.

Mr Philbrook:

Did she have anything over her?

Edith Buckskin:

She just had a sweater over her. They had sweaters on when I left them.

Mr Philbrook:

Aelouise, did you have a sweater when you left?

Aelouise Stonecoal:

Yes sir, a red sweater.

Mr Philbrook:

Edith, what did you leave the school for?

Edith Buckskin:

They strapped me, that's why.

Mr Philbrook:

Who did the strapping?

Edith Buckskin:

Miss Hancock

Mr Philbrook:

Did she strap any others?

Edith Buckskin:

Just Katherine and I

Mr Philbrook:

What did she strap you for?⁷

Edith Buckskin:

I don't know. We crawled out of bed that morning and she strapped us and she didn't tell us what for. She always mean to me, that's the reason I left.

Mr Philbrook:

Did you tell the other girls to go?

Edith Buckskin:

No, they wanted to come. I told Aelouise to stay but she wouldn't.

Mr Philbrook:

What is your name?

Katherine Dick:

Katherine Dick

Mr Philbrook:

Why did you get strapped?

Katherine Dick:

She thought I didn't get up early enough after the bell rang.

Mr Philbrook:

What is your name?

Rosie James:

Rosie James

Mr Philbrook:

Why did you leave the school?

Rosie James:

I left because the others did.

Mr Philbrook:

Did you have a bundle of clothing?

Rosie James:

Yes, but left it somewhere.⁷

Narrator:

Superintendent Miller listened to the deposition of the girls, during the Coroner's inquest, and then testified, himself.

Miller:

There is no strapping ever done in the school as the rules are against corporal punishment...I do not believe these girls are telling the truth when they say they were strapped. Everything to them is a strap. We have never had any trouble with any of them except Edith and she is a very bad girl.

Narrator:

A juror at the inquest had questions.

Mr Bristol, Juror:

When did the girls leave there?

Miller:

They left Tuesday evening about 6:30. The lights in the building went out for perhaps 20 minutes and they evidently made plans to leave when these lights went out. They went into the clothing room and took two sweaters a piece and two dresses apiece and when the lights came on we discovered their absence.

Mr Bristol, Juror:

How long before they were found?

Miller:

3 days

Narrator:

Although Rosie and Molly had families living nearby in Greenville, all five girls left the school and made the trek over the mountain, with the intent of reaching Susanville. They left Tuesday evening and Edith was found Friday evening, at Mr McCleary's cabin. Her feet were so frozen she could not put on shoes. She was taken to the school hospital that night. But the next morning, on Saturday at 11:30, 3 men picked up Edith from the hospital and took her in a "rig" to locate Molly.

Mr Green, local man:

We located the body. ⁷

Philbrook:

When did you find the other three girls?

Mr Green:

Mr MCleary told us he had a squaw in his cabin and I took the team out to the ranch. Mr MCleary said that the two other girls, Katherine Dick and Rosie James, left his cabin in the morning. We tracked the girls to the ranger station, found them there.

Philbrook:

Did they tell you there were two other younger girls?

Mr Green:

Katherin Dick did. She said she left them sleeping under a Christmas tree at the foot of Clear Creek.

Philbrook:

Did anyone else know they were down there?

Mr Green:

The doctor and nurse did.

Philbrook:

Why was it not noised around so more men would go and search?

Mr Green:

Because it was night and the man we did wake up refused to go and we thought it best not to waste time waking up people when it was doubtful they would go.

Mr Taylor:

The information we got from the girl was that the two girls pulled a limb down over them and went to sleep under a Christmas tree at the foot of a hill. When we got there we found they were not there. By the time we got to the top of the hill the search light was nearly out. So we thought we had done all we could and got into the buggy and came home.

Philbrook:

When did you go back to look?⁷

Mr Green:

About 11:30 on Saturday.

Narrator:

Superintendent Miller asked the local men a follow up question.

Miller:

Did Edith Buckskin act like she wanted you to take her in?

Mr Green:

No she did not..

Narrator:

Green offered further explanation.

Mr Green:

It was no negligence on our part that the younger girls were not found, as we had been informed they were sleeping at the foot of the hill. There must've been 5 or 6 in town that knew it and I do not consider with the information that we had that there is any just reason to blame us for them not having been found before, as we were not looking for someone whose whereabouts were not known.

Mr Bristol, Juror:

We, the jury, do hereby find that Molly Lowry came to her death by exposure and freezing.⁷

Narrator:

On January 5th, Agent Dorrington arrived in Greenville to begin his investigation, one month after Molly's death. He reviewed the transcripts from the Coroner's Inquest and then led his own interviews. Dorrington left Greenville, 3 days after arriving. He asked Superintendent Miller to complete the formal report with his own findings and collect statements. Later on, Dorrington finalizes the report and sends it to the Commissioner, on January 22, 1917. The 145 pg report includes his interviews of the girls, letters and statements by various community members, all marked as "exhibits" of evidence.¹

Among the findings, this is not the first time Aelouise has run away from school.

Joseph Pratt (local man):

We the undersigned, certify that during the first part of October, 1916, we made a trip to Peck's Ranch, about three miles from this school, for the purpose of getting Aelouise Stonecoal, a runaway pupil of this school, and taking her back to the school. We asked her why she ran away and her reply was that the Carson girls, also pupils of this school, enticed her away and left her; that she did not know the way back to the school so went to the rancher's house, that the other girls took with them a suitcase and hid it in the barn. There were several barns between the school and Peck's Ranch but she could not tell us which barn she referred to.

We turned her over to the Matron and told her what she told us. The Carson girls were brought before the Matron and questioned about running away and about the suitcase and about enticing Aelouise to go with them and then running away from her. The Carson girls denied this and said they never knew Aelouise ran away until after she was missed; that they did not leave the grounds; and that they did not own a suitcase nor had one in their hands that night; and that Aelouise's statements were fictitious.

We understand that Aelouise left the school several times other than this and told neighbors various tales that afterwards proved to be untrue. ⁸

Mrs Peck (local woman):

This is to certify that Pratt and Stanley came to my house one evening during the first part of October, for the purpose of getting an Indian girl who ran away from the school and came to my home. This girl told me her name but I have forgotten it. I was told her name was Aelouise Stonecoal and recalled her telling me this was her name. She told me she was 13 years old and that she left the school with the other girls but that she left them. She came to the house alone. She told me her father lived in Honey Lake and that her mother died in confinement. She said she liked it at the school but the other two girls enticed her away; that the Mission people treated her well and she did not want to go. She was crying when she told me this. I prepared some supplies for her and then got word to the Mission. She was at my house not more than an hour when Pratt and Stanley called for her and took her back to the school. ⁹

Roxy Grove (local woman):

I have to say that the Stonecoal girl came up here sometime ago, with the intention of deserting the school, as she said the girls did not treat her right by trying to quarrel with her. She told me she "did not get enough to eat." She said "only half a slice of bread

was allowed for each meal.” Also the dining room watcher did not give the child enough time to eat. ¹⁰

Miss Hancock, Matron of Greenville Indian school:

One evening shortly after returning from supper, I missed Aelouise. I inquired for her among the girls and looked in all the places frequented by them but could not find any trace of her. I immediately reported it at the office and when returning spent a few minutes looking around for her on campus. I was in front of the building for twenty minutes. One of the girls told me that Aelouise had returned and gone to the “Inner Circle,” the religious society to which most of the girls belonged. As she was not a member, I thought they may be mistaken, but going in, I found Aelouise on her knees with the others.

After they were dismissed, I called her and asked her where she had been. She at first denied having gone out, said she was in the reading room when the girls came in. But finding it useless to maintain this, with so many witnesses to the contrary, she finally told me that she and the Carson girls had run away. That they were going and had coaxed her to go with them.

These girls do not speak or understand English well and were very quiet...She was gone only a short time and came back alone.

I explained to her the dangers she might’ve encumbered and told her I was glad she had returned.

She said she ran away because she did not get enough to eat but promised that she would never go away again.

I am enclosing a statement from the girls written by myself as they are unable to write it for themselves.

Very Truly,
Miss Hancock ¹¹

Part Two

8 Speaking Roles:

Narrator, Dr Morel, Miss Hancock, Agent Dorrington, Katherine, Rosa, Aelouise, Lanahan

Narrator:

As ordered by the Commissioner in a telegram sent January 4, Agent Dorrington begins his investigation of Molly's death to "carefully find out if culpability attaches to anyone for her death." He is unable to interview Edith Buckskin. It was believed Edith would just lose a few of her toes, but on January 2nd, Edith died. Edith's death is not listed as the focus of the investigation.

Dr Morel:

While Edith's operation was simple, as compared with that of Aelouise, her condition was not good and she was not able to rally from exposure.¹²

Narrator:

Furthermore, Dr Morel submits a signed statement.

Dr Morel:

I consider Aelouise Stonecoal mentally deficient.¹²

Narrator:

Superintendent Miller had started collecting statements in December, before the formal investigation began. On December 26, Miss Hancock, the School Matron, submitted a statement to Miller which Agent Dorrington included in his report.

Edith Hancock (Matron):

These girls are a very willful and irresponsible class, and I believe at times the wild spirit overrules them and that they will run away irregardless of all efforts on the part of those in charge of them to make them comfortable and happy.

Two of these girls were of defective mind. Both being far below normal at all times and one of them appeared demented at times. She had on two other occasions wandered away from the grounds but had returned after going a short distance.

Three of the girls who deserted had not been punished since I had been in charge of them. The two older ones who testified to having been strapped, I had punished lightly that morning.¹³

Narrator:

Agent Dorrington does not interview the girls until January 8, the day before he leaves Greenville. He begins with Katherine Dick, who is reportedly back at school, in the “best of health.” Katherine states that she is 15 although records show she is 16. She has been attending the school for five years. ¹⁴

Dorrington:

Why did you leave?

Katherine:

Because I did not like the Matron. She got after me all the time and scold me all the time for nothing. She whip me two times.

Dorrington:

When did she whip you?

Katherine:

She whip Edith and me that morning and she whip Edith and me one week before that.

Dorrington:

Why did the matron whip you?

Katherine:

Because we were in bed later than we had to be.

Dorrington:

Did Miss Hancock scold you or say anything to you girls when she came and found you not dressed?

Katherine:

No she did not say anything, she just went and got the strap and came back and whipped us.

Dorrington:

You said that you left because you did not like the Matron, is that the truth Katherine?¹⁴

Katherine:

I don't like her then, but I like her now. She is a good Matron.

Dorrington:

Do you and the other girls want Miss Hancock sent away?

Katherine:

No we want her to stay. We all like her now.

Dorrington:

Is Miss Hancock the only Matron that ever gave you a whipping?

Katherine:

Miss Pavelk whipped me once for doing something she thought was wrong.

Dorrington:

Was she wrong?

Katherine:

No she was right.

Dorrington:

And you think Miss Hancock did right in whipping you girls?

Katherine:

I think she did right for whipping us that morning. Annie Reeves was not dressed and she whipped her too.

I don't hate her any more. I don't want her to go away. We told her that we was sorry. I am sorry and am never going away again.

Dorrington:

Who was the first to say anything about going away?

Katherine:

Edith...Molly heard me ask Rosa to go and she said she was going too if I was going away. Molly is my cousin. So it was decided that the five of us would go that night after supper. ¹⁴

It was not cold the night we left. There was not any snow. We knew the road to Susanville. We thought it would take 2 or 3 days.

We walked all night and near morning, slept under trees. We walked Wednesday until afternoon when we stopped to rest and all the girls but Rosa and me went to sleep. Rosa and me thought we heard someone coming and we called the other girls to wake up and come on, but we could not wake them up, so Rosa and me went on and hid..we kept hid. We thought we could catch up with the girls later, but we did not see them again-only Edith. We saw her walking along the road alone. That was Thursday. Edith told us she had left Aelouise and Molly asleep. She could not get them to come. We didn't see Aelouise until Westwood (at the hospital).

Dorrington:

Where did you three girls sleep that night?

Katherine:

At a white man's cabin. He rubbed Edith's feet with some kind of medicine.

Dorrington:

What did you do the next day?

Katherine:

The next morning Edith could not get her shoes on, so Rosa and I went on and left Edith at the cabin.

Dorrington:

Why did you not wait for her so you all could go together?

Katherine:

We was afraid they would catch us and Edith told us to go on and she would come later.

Dorrington:

Did the cabin man ask you where you came from and where were you going?

Katherine:

He did not ask us anything that night...the next morning we told him there was two more, that they had been left behind asleep.

Dorrington:

Where did they catch you and Rosa?¹⁴

Katherine:

They caught us late at night. They had Edith with them.

Dorrington:

Katherine, don't you like this school and don't they treat you and the other children well?

Katherine:

I like the school now. Mr Miller is awful good to all of us children. I am never going away again. I am going to be good.

Dorrington:

Did you ever talk to any old Indians about the school and about going away?

Katherine:

No

Dorrington:

Now tell me the truth, Katherine. Did Miss Hancock hurt you any?

Katherine:

No, she didn't whip like matrons a long time ago. Miss Hancock just whip easy like I told you. She no hurt a bit.

Dorrington:

Then you would not have left because Miss Hancock whipped you if Edith had not asked you to go?

Katherine:

No I would not go if Edith don't ask me. ¹⁴

Narrator:

Dorrington interviews Rosa who is also reportedly back at school, "in the best of health."¹⁵

Dorrington:

Rosa, how old are you?

Rosa:

14

Narrator:

Records state that Rosa is actually 15 and has been attending the school for 6 years.

Dorrington:

Why did you leave the school?

Rosa:

Katherine asked me to go home with her. I guess the devil made me go.

Dorrington:

Don't you like the school and everybody here?

Rosa:

I like the school and I like everybody. I like the Matron and I like Superintendent Miller.

Dorrington:

Do you have plenty to eat here at the school?

Rosa:

Yes, we have lots to eat, all we can eat.

Dorrington:

Rosa, isn't it a fact that you and little Molly had planned to leave the school just before Thanksgiving?

Rosa:

Yes, we talk about going away but we don't go then...I guess the devil got me to think that way.

Dorrington:

Rosa, where is your home?

Rosa:

Here, near the school.

Dorrington:

Where does Molly live? ¹⁵

Rosa:

She lives here near the school.

Dorrington:

Do you know why she left?

Rosa:

Molly heard Katherine ask me to go and said she would go too if Katherine and me was going. Molly is Katherine's cousin.

Dorrington:

Why did you head for Susanville and avoid Westwood?

Rosa:

We were afraid somebody see us.

Dorrington:

Did you ever talk to any old Indians about running away?

Rosa:

No.¹⁵

Narrator:

Agent Dorrington visits Aelouise, in the hospital, in "pitiful condition," with both legs amputated four inches below the knee. She seems unwilling to talk with Dorrington and takes a great deal of "coaxing and coaching." At times, all he can get is a spiritless "yes" or "no." ¹⁶

Dorrington:

Aelouise, do you feel like talking to me this morning?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

Aelouise, was it cold when you left?

Aelouise:

No.

Dorrington:

Did you get any clothing before you left?

Aelouise:

I got a sweater.

Dorrington:

Did you take anything to eat with you?

Aelouise:

Molly and Katherine got bread in the kitchen.

Dorrington:

Why did you not all stay together?

Aelouise:

They go away and leave Molly and Edith and me when we sleep.

Dorrington:

What did you do when you found Edith had gone and left?

Aelouise:

We try to go too but Molly cannot walk. I try to carry Molly. She too heavy. We fall down. I try hard to carry her but fall down all the time.

Dorrington:

What did you do then?

Aelouise:

I don't know anymore, we sleep under Christmas tree.

Dorrington:

Did you know that Molly was dead?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

When did you first find out Molly was dead?

Aelouise:

I try to wake her up I cannot. Then I try to carry her and find she is dead.

Dorrington:

Why did you leave the school?

Aelouise:

Edith tell me to go.

Dorrington:

Did you get enough to eat at the school?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

Were the Carsoner girls good to you?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

Did any of the Carsoner girls run away with you?

Aelouise:

No.

Dorrington:

Was everyone at the school good to you?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

Aelouise, did you write this letter?

Narrator:

Aelouise is shown a letter she wrote to her father.¹⁶

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

Was the letter sent to your father?

Aelouise:

No. The Matron give it back. She no send it.

Dorrington:

You say in this letter that you and Edith Buckskin fight with Ella Carsoner. Is this true ?

Aelouise:

No.

Dorrington:

Did you cry anytime at night because you wanted to go home?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Dorrington:

Did you dream that you were sick?

Aelouise:

Yes.

Narrator:

Dorrington concludes that Aelouise is not “really accountable for what she does or says.”¹⁶

Miss Hancock, the Matron, submits a new statement for Agent Dorrington. He documents that she “very feelingly” discusses the incident.¹⁷

Miss Hancock:

Complying with your request, I am making a statement concerning the girls and the punishment I gave them.

The girls here are less dependable, more thoughtless and willful than any others I have seen.

I have always been able to win and control them by showing them I cared a great deal for them. That I was always absolutely just and truthful with them and by always

explaining why I required certain things of them that were for their good. But when I talk to these girls about the manners, morale, care of themselves, so many of the things that I am compelled to talk to them about, they do not take it pleasantly but call it "getting after them."

Two of the girls who ran away had been quite a trial because they would not get up in the morning in time to make a proper toilet before breakfast. I wakened them with the bell but they would not get up. I had talked to them repeatedly about it explaining it was necessary for their health, that they were here to acquire proper habits, among those washing, combing their face and brushing their teeth before breakfast.

I had told them then I should be obliged to punish them if they did not get up earlier and finally felt compelled to do something as their will for tardiness was having its effect upon the other girls, especially the smaller ones. They too were acquiring the same bad habit so I told them that if I found them in the dormitory in their gowns again, at the moment to line up for breakfast, I should be obliged to paddle them. I thought that it may serve as an incentive to get them up for at least one morning. But the next morning when I went in and found them, I went back to my room and got what I call my paddle, a piece of leather 12 inches long and about 2 inches wide, cut in the shape of a paddle.

I struck each one twice across the shoulders. I struck them lightly as the punishment was not for the purpose of hurting them but thought that the principle it involved might have its effect.

The girls were in the process of dressing and had on long underwear, skirts with flannel waists and flannel gowns.¹⁷

Superintendent Miller:

This is to certify that I do not believe the whipping by Miss Hancock, with a strap paddle, was given in any anger or feeling other than to correct the girls of the habit of laying in bed instead of getting up for breakfast. ¹

Narrator:

Field Dentist, William Lanahan, submits a signed statement.

Lanahan:

Having performed dental operations upon Molly Lowry and Aelouise Stonecoal, I am convinced that these girls were enticed away by the three older girls, who, in my mind, should be held strictly responsible for the welfare of the two girls mentioned

above, especially when it is considered that these two girls were feeble minded and have little or no mind of their own.¹⁸

Part Three

5 Speaking Roles :

Narrator, Superintendent Miller, Agent Dorrington, Commissioner Sella, Omar Bates (school clerk)

Narrator:

In his report to the Commissioner, Agent Dorrington notes that Miller refers to Molly's death as a "terrible misfortune." He notices an inaccuracy in Miller's first statement. Miller had claimed the girls left when the lights were out, but evidence showed the lights were burning.

Miller repeats the opinion, expressed by others, that Molly was "deficient." He explains that she only lived 3 miles from the school and could've gone there instead of heading to Susanville. Miller states Aelouise wanted to turn around, at one point, but Molly told her "I'd rather die than go back to that school."

Miller calls Edith Buckskin a "trouble maker" under the influence of "Inez Jack." Inez Jack was staying at Greenville, after being kicked out of Sherman Indian School in Riverside. Miller explains Inez was being treated at the school hospital for an ailment related to her eyes but once she was found sleeping in the same bed as Edith. He reports that Inez had been talking to the "Susanville people" about the school, making them "dissatisfied."

Miller recommends the older girls be punished by expulsion or transfer to a state reformatory. He calls attending the school a "privilege."¹

Miller:

All Indians were questioned and all efforts made to track the girls, but they evidently kept back into the woods, out of sight.

The girls struck out in the timber where no one could catch them with an hour's start. When they left the school, the weather was cool, but not freezing. There was no snow and full moonlight.

There is no reason for deserting, but these girls are an especially hard lot to control as the "call of the wild" comes to them. Last year we had 5 desertions. This year seven. In 1915, during one month, there were 27 desertions.

It is often impossible to locate runaways in this country. Oftentimes the old Indians will hide secret runaways and we will not see them for weeks.

Edith Buckskin is the worst character we have in the school. I tried to get rid of her last year, anticipating trouble from her, but Mr Bates advised me to keep her, saying she had no home.¹

Narrator:

A letter written from a concerned Native relative of Edith Buckskin, Will Norman of Susanville, was not included in Agent Dorrington's report. This letter was received by the school clerk, Omar Bates, on December 14. Omar Bates summarizes Norman's letter and sends this summary to Miller. At the time, Edith was still alive, but not well, from exposure.¹⁹

Omar Bates (School Clerk):

Dear Sir (Superintendent Miller):

This is to acknowledge receipt of a letter from Will Norman to you concerning Edith Buckskin.

Will Norman is a distant relative. He made application for an allotment for her, and she lived with his family part of the time for several years. However, it is as you tell him, she should be kept in school five or six years more. Just as sure as she is returned here she will be debauched. Will Norman would have no control over her and she would run wild.

Mattie Tom, the grandmother of Edith, has many friends among this place, and she is continually giving them stories of how badly the children are treated in school. She is an ignorant old woman and believes what she tells. I have told a number of persons where Edith was found, why she was placed in school, and why she should be kept there, and usually they agree with me that she should be kept in school.

Very respectfully,

Agent Dorrington:

It seems reasonable to find that the school is unusually well conducted; that same is given the personal and constant supervision of Superintendent Miller that the food is ample that the children are treated with utmost kindness and consideration; that no just cause or reason for deserting existed at the time the girls left school; that the animosity of Edith against the school was due to the influence of Inez Jack. Aelouise is horribly crippled and doomed to nothing more than a miserable existence. Our duty to her is to keep her at the school. The thought of her being allowed to enter the homelife of her family, where she would be a burden, should be forever scorned.

Katherine Dick and Rosa James were tools in the hands of Edith, and they are guilty of willful abandonment of their companions in time of need. Edith has received her "award."

Miller and Hancock are not in any way to blame. They should be fully exonerated.

The strap incident is the only thing the school can be criticized for....it gives our whiskey enemies a chance to lay a slim foundation for detrimental stories.

I recommend that the Commissioner devise some appropriate punishment for Katherine and Rosa, keeping in mind that they were entirely under the influence of Edith Buckskin, and for that reason, were not really responsible for their actions.¹

Narrator:

There was another letter that was not included in Dorrington's report and there is no reference to it in his findings. The letter was sent from Miller to Dorrington, dated December 6, one day after the five girls ran away.

Miller:

I have a Matron, Miss Hancock, who reported here September 24th and who is proving to be very inefficient in this place. She seems to be physically unfit for the duties of Matron, has no force, does not control the girls, works without system, has the girls up in the air all the time and seems otherwise unlikely and undesirable. She is a smooth talker and tries to get results through talking instead of working. The girls are running everywhere and I am afraid of serious results with the boys in case these conditions continue.

Miss Hancock was a Matron, at one time, at White Earth. I understand she did good work there. I do not believe the woman is just right and that is why I feel sorry for her at times. She seems unconscious of her surroundings at times and does not seem to realize the responsibilities of her position as she should.

Please advise me in the matter...I can no longer allow these conditions to continue or I will have a mess on my hands. We had so much trouble last year and I am satisfied we would not this year if the Matron were at all competent.

Your advice will be appreciated. ²¹

Narrator:

Three months later, in March, Miller wrote another letter to the Commissioner.

Miller:

I felt that perhaps a better way to end this affair would be for you to write a personal letter to these girls, calling attention to the practice here of deserting.²²

Narrator:

The Commissioner writes a letter to Rosa, Katherine and Grace Dick (who did not run away but kept silent about the plan to run away). He addressed the letter to "My friends."

Commissioner:

My friends, I hope that the sad deaths and serious bodily injuries resulting from this desertion from the school will be a lifelong lesson to you and that you will realize how important it is to obey the rules at school and be faithful to your teachers and those who have your interests at heart. Your friend, Cato Sells²³

References

National Archives
Civil Records
Record Group 75
Box 39

Content from primary and secondary sources, of the National Archive, have been woven into the readers theater script. These are the selections from documents in the order they appear in the script.

- ¹ Investigation- Greenville Indian School- Desertion of Katherine Dick, Edith Buckskin, Rosa James, Elweza Stonecoal, Mollie Lowry, Report by Special Agent Lafayette Dorrington, Reno Agency Records, National Archives (San Bruno, California), 1917.
- ² Letter from Elweza Stonecoal to her father, October 13, 1916.
- ³ Superintendent Miller to the Indian Office, DC, December 9, 1916.
- ⁴ Superintendent Miller to Cato Sells, December 22, 1916.
- ⁵ Reverend Reader to Cato Sells, December 26, 1916.
- ⁶ Cato Sells to Agent Dorrington, January 4, 1917
- ⁷ "The Case of the Death of Molly Lowry," Coroner's Inquest, Deposition, 1916.
- ⁸ Statement from Joseph J. Pratt, Exhibit K, January 10, 1917.
- ⁹ Statement from Mrs Peck, Exhibit L, January 1917
- ¹⁰ Statement from Roxy Grove, Exhibit J, January 1917
- ¹¹ Letter of Edith Hancock, Exhibit M, January 1917
- ¹² Statement of Dr Morel, Exhibit H, January 1917
- ¹³ Miss Hancock to Miller, December 26, 1916
- ¹⁴ Evidence of Katherine Dick, Exhibit E, January 1917
- ¹⁵ Evidence of Rosa James, Exhibit F, January 1917

¹⁶ Evidence of Aelouise Stonecoal, Exhibit G, January 1917

¹⁷ Hancock to Dorrington, Exhibit N, January 1917

¹⁸ Statement of William Lanahan, January 1917

¹⁹ Will Norman to Omar Bates, December 14, 1916

²⁰ Bates to Miller, December 1916

²¹ Letter from Miller to Dorrington, December 5, 1916

²² Letter from Miller to Cato Sells, March 1917

²³ Letter from Cato Sells to Rosa James and Katherine Dick, March 1917

**Many variants of the names, Molly and Aelouise, are used by various characters in these transcripts. Their family's preferred version of their names is consistently used to avoid reader confusion.*

Script by: Rebecca Lowry, MSW (2024)

