

Support of H.R. 5444 Truth and Healing Commission

Saturday, May 14, 2022

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Enrolled Blackfeet

Browning, MT

Living Relative of Holy Family Mission Boarding School fatality
Documentation Dated February 1895.

I have included the link and a screenshot of the Great Falls Weekly Tribune, Feb. 8, 1895 newspaper account of James Lacey who froze to death while running away from the Holy Family Mission Boarding School on Two Medicine, on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana in late January of 1895.

The house he was trying to reach was on Cut Bank Creek and was the ranch of my maternal great grandparents, Joe Cobell and Mary Mountain Chief Cobell. They had 13 children together, my grandmother was the youngest born December 25, 1883. She would also have been about 12 and was attending the same boarding school as Tom Cobell and James Lacey. According to what my grandmother told me, the 6 youngest Cobell children were put in the Mission school after their father, Joe Cobell, passed away in 1890. Although she shared some of her experiences at the Mission, she did not tell me anything of this particular incident. I found this news article when searching my great grandfather Joe Cobell's name in the digitized newspaper collection of the Library of Congress. There are several other accounts, some including the Cobell boy's injuries.

Growing up, I spent my summers on this same place where Joe and Mary Cobell ranched. I remember some things my grandmother, who was 70 when I was born, told me. We sat on the north side of the Cobell ditch, an irrigation ditch that her dad and his hired hands dug. She sat on her chair and I sat beside

her. We looked to the south and west at the Cut Bank river valley, beyond which, in the next river valley over, was the Two Medicine river and the Holy Family Mission.

My family made no mention of this incident, I can only guess my grandmother never talked about it because of shame or the idea to save me the grief. Many people including my grandmother and my own mother (in her earlier years) rarely acknowledged their Indian Blood because of rampant discrimination against the Blackfeet. I wonder if there was survivor's guilt.

A preliminary search for historical accounts of young James' life has resulted in little to no information. I do not know where he was born, his siblings, nor where he is buried. I do know that my grandmother's older sister was Sophia Cobell who married Tom Lacey.

The graveyard at Holy Family Mission, which I have walked, contains many unmarked graves. Do church records exist on graves, attendance or other details of the Mission?

It is possible that the Holy Family Mission was built on land with the permission of Mary Mountain Chief's brother, Chief White Calf. I have yet to obtain any evidence of this transaction or evidence to the contrary.

During my employment at the Blackfeet Heritage Program, I met with the Blackfeet Tribal Elders, whose portraits I rendered, published in the "1907-1908 Blackfeet Heritage Census book edited by Roxanne DeMarce. I documented abuse by nuns at Holy Family Mission, as told to me by some of those elders.

I support the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act" S.2907, H.R. 5444 on the basis of the facts included in this correspondence and the need to find and

establish the true historical events of the boarding school era. I pray for my once young relative and for all those who were removed from the love and security of family and who suffered and/or died under unbelievable and horrible circumstances.

The article titled: "Died in a Blizzard" begins at the bottom of the first, lefthand column of the paper.

Great Falls weekly tribune. [volume] (Great Falls, Mont.), 08 Feb. 1895. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86075243/1895-02-08/ed-1/seq-6/>>

