

Connecticut Boarding School Target Of New Sexual Abuse Allegations



Peter Carleton -- headmaster at Indian Mountain School in Salisbury from 1977 to 1987. (Courant File Photo)

By **Dave Altimari**

OCTOBER 8, 2014, 6:43 PM

A former student at the Indian Mountain boarding school in Salisbury has filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the school's former headmaster ordered him to live in the basement of his home so that he could sexually assault him at will in the 1980s.

The 19-page lawsuit filed this week at U.S. District Court in New Haven by William Brewster Brownville paints the private boarding prep school for mostly teenage boys as a den of sexual abuse and names at least six former teachers or administrators who either participated in or were aware that then-Headmaster Peter Carleton was "a pedophile who preyed and had for years been preying on vulnerable children in the school's care."

Brownville is seeking more than \$75,000 in damages from the school. Although The Courant does not usually identify sexual abuse accusers, Brownville is named in the lawsuit.

Attorney Antonio Ponvert III, who is representing Brownville, said that his client is coming forward now to try to take control of his life, deal with the demons in his past and hopefully shine a light on the issue for others to follow.

"This was a nest of pedophiles who were allowed to operate for a long period of time with nothing being done to stop

them," Ponvert said. "He is tired of suffering and his hope is that the potentially hundreds of others who have suffered in silence for so long will come forward."

The lawsuit contains the latest sexual abuse allegations involving the school. In 1996, The Courant exposed a string of sexual abuse allegations against Christopher Simonds, a teacher at the school. The allegations against Simonds surfaced after the criminal statute of limitations had expired, and he was never charged. None of the individuals accused in any of the lawsuits still works at the school.

The new lawsuit alleges that Brownville, when he was 13, was also abused by Simonds.

State police conducted a two-year investigation in 1992 and 1993 after receiving complaints of sexual abuse. The state police report on that investigation concluded that children at the school, some as young as 12, reported being given illegal drugs and cigarettes as a way of manipulating them into having sex with their teachers.

The report said that many staff members suspected that some of the middle school's students — in grades 5 through 9 — were being abused, but for various reasons no one made a report with police. Eventually, five lawsuits were filed and settled out of court.

Carleton was the headmaster at the school from 1977 to 1987 during the time that state police concluded there were numerous reports of sexual abuse. The Indian Mountain School has been open since 1922 and is a private K-9 school in the Lakeville section of Salisbury.

Carleton was not accused of abuse in the lawsuits filed in the late 1990s but was accused of failing to stop it. Carleton died in 1996.

The current lawsuit alleges that Carleton was an active participant in rampant sexual abuse and that, among other things, he routinely walked through the shower area commenting on boys' genitals, showed boys pornographic movies such as "Caligula" and plied them with whiskey while encouraging them to masturbate.

The lawsuit claims that when Brownville was 15, in 1986, he and three other boys were ordered to live in the basement of Carleton's on-campus home. At least once a week during the three months that he lived there, Carleton would call him upstairs to his bedroom and sexually abuse him, the lawsuit alleges.

The lawsuit alleges that Brownville was called upstairs and abused at least 15 times. On at least three of those occasions, Carleton's wife got into bed with them and sexually touched and groped Brownville while offering him a Valium, the lawsuit alleges.

The lawsuit also alleges that Carleton had been making boys live in his basement for years, rotating four new ones in every semester. The lawsuit alleges that many administrators and members of the board of trustees were aware of Carleton's actions but did nothing to stop them.

The lawsuit quotes Paul Levin, the former president of the school's board of trustees, as saying that Carleton's behavior was bizarre for a headmaster.

"[Carleton] was very interested in what the boys and girls might be doing with each other sexually. It was very bizarre for a headmaster to talk that way," Levin is quoted as saying. The lawsuit doesn't indicate when or to whom the quote was made.

"Carleton was definitely very kinky. We used to kind of wince and think he was trying to be funny," Levin said. "There's a certain kind of person who gets away with murder through charm."

Current Indian Mountain Headmaster Mark A. Devey said that school officials were "shocked and disheartened" by the allegations.

"Because our first priority is to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the students here, it is deeply disturbing to learn that 30 years ago a student at IMS might have been abused," he said. "We are looking into these allegations and we take them very seriously."

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