

# Unraveling a shattered history

Historians piece together remnants of the past in an attempt to give burial grounds the respect they deserve.



SuAnn Reddick

Story by Shannon Keaveny

A dilapidated and rusted fence borders the Chemawa Cemetery on the Chemawa Indian School property, northeast of Salem. The fence curves downward into a slew.

Inside the fence, Douglas firs tower over the two hundred gravesites, which are minuscule in comparison.

Green grass shadows the small metal plates with student names, tribal enrollments, and dates of birth and death engraved.

For the passerby, the only obvious indication of a graveyard is the looming wrought-

iron sign that says, "1886 Chemawa Cemetery."

Most of the students buried here died while attending the school before 1940 as part of a government forced assimilation plan for Native American children.

Many died of consumption and the Spanish flu.

There are reasons a body was not returned to the family. In those days, it took 6 weeks to transport a body by train. For this reason, a burial at the school was a better choice.

Often letters to the family took too long to arrive. Many children were orphans.

When the Spanish flu epidemic hit the school, children died almost weekly. The govern-

ment quarantined dead bodies to prevent the virus from spreading. The bodies were usually quickly buried.

In 1960, the long-neglected and overgrown lot was bulldozed in an effort to clean it up.

Tombstones disappeared in the nearby slew. The cyclone fence, today in dire need of being replaced, was installed. Sheep were put inside the fence to keep the grasses down.

For reasons not historically documented, school faculty and students took almost immediate action to recreate the cemetery.

The only remaining documentation of grave locations was a map from 1940.

Based on the map, students and faculty reconstructed the matrix of graves with strings and stakes.

Students made new grave-stones with metal plates. A new map was created in 1960.

SuAnn Reddick, Chemawa Indian School volunteer historian, doubts the accuracy of the 1940 and 1960 maps due to many reasons.

"When the students copied the names, they made errors. Registered names and tribal enrollment at the school were also incorrect or misspelled at times," she said.

Also, according to Reddick, birth and death dates are sometimes wrong.

People, like Reddick and fellow historian Cary Collins, have made it their mission to give each grave a correct name.

"It's a real project to untangle the information and make it as accurate as possible," said Reddick.

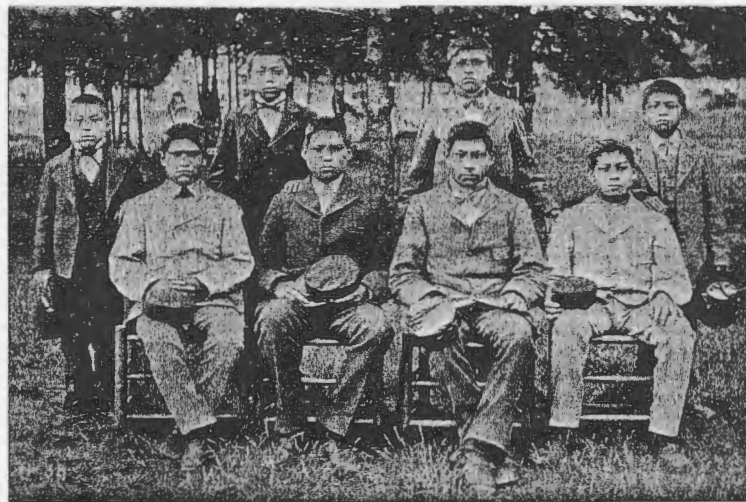
Reddick also suspects the graveyard may have at one time been larger.

She believes this because some student records indicate a student died at the school, but there is not a gravesite to go with the name.

Fitting names with graves is often through the process of elimination.

"There are different sources

## Can you identify these students?



The photograph above is the first Chemawa Indian School all-boys class from Warm Springs, taken in 1880. Chemawa Indian School Historian SuAnn Reddick needs to put names with faces. In some cases, the tribal identity may be incorrect. The students names and tribal identity, according to Chemawa Indian School records, are: Benjamin Miller (Wasco), Jerry Hollaquila (Wasco), George J. Plute (Palute), George Pinouse (Wasco) William Skitus (Wasco), Frank Meacham (Wasco), and Melville Rex (Wasco). Some of these students may have died at the school and be buried at the Chemawa Cemetery. If you know who is who, contact SuAnn Reddick at (503) 472-4005 or [cissuann@viclink.com](mailto:cissuann@viclink.com). Photo taken by Davidson. To view a larger picture, stop by the Spilyay Tymoo office.

that appear valid. But, ultimately, tribal rolls and memories will have the final say," said Reddick.

But progress has been made. Much of that progress is creating public awareness and finding funds to maintain and support the Chemawa Cemetery Restoration Project.

Last May, a memorial was held at the cemetery to reclaim the history of the children who never returned from Chemawa.

"It was a poignant realization that these children are being remembered for the first time," said Reddick of the memorial. "The whole restoration project is about healing. Families are wounded."

Volunteers for the cemetery are planning another memorial this year and would like to make it an annual event.

Just weeks ago, volunteer students spent a Sunday cleaning

up accumulated garbage around the cemetery.

Currently, the only cemetery maintenance funding is a limited allowance from the BIA.

Also, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI), a non-profit promoting tribal sovereignty, has taken up the cause.

In 2001, ATNI passed a resolution dedicated to finding the means to restore gravestones and repair the cemetery grounds, retrieve information and share with tribes as historical data, and develop a permanent maintenance program for the cemetery.

In 2002, another resolution was passed that included ATNI's belief that the cemetery should fall under the protection of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990.

NAGPRA states that Native American human remains

placed on federal lands during a death rite or ceremony are protected.

In 2003, ATNI passed another resolution that plans to create a Chemawa Committee, which would address efforts to find more funds and legal protection for the cemetery.

Reddick plans to circulate former student names, still shrouded by mystery, among Northwest tribal elders.

She hopes doing this will facilitate the process of families reclaiming their history.

"Tribal memories are critical to the project," she says. "I hope more people get involved and we are able to receive grant money to support our efforts."

Please see the photo of former Warm Springs students above. To contact SuAnn Reddick, call (503) 472-4005 or email [cissuann@viclink.com](mailto:cissuann@viclink.com).