

Chemawa

Continued from Page 1A

Indian boarding schools across the United States were founded in the late 1800s to forcefully assimilate Native children into the white, Christian man's image. Richard H. Pratt — founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania and the person behind the off-reservation boarding school system — operated under the motto: "Kill the Indian, save the man."

This mindset would establish decades of abuse, disease, secrecy, trauma and deaths in Native boarding schools, including at Chemawa Indian School in Salem — now the oldest continuously operated and federally run Indian boarding school in the country.

For generations, Native families have struggled to discover what happened to their ancestors and sought public apologies for those atrocities.

The United States government has never apologized for its role in that history or sought to investigate and identify the children buried at these schools. But that might change now.

Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in June called on the U.S. government to investigate the loss of human life and the lasting consequences of Indian boarding schools.

Through December, the Department of the Interior will engage with Indigenous communities to gather feedback and begin the work to protect burial sites.

They are determining how to handle existing and sensitive records, the potential for repatriations of human remains and the management of former boarding school sites.

A report on the investigation will be submitted to the secretary by April 1 and serve as a basis for additional work.

Though it's just beginning, the federal investigation has sparked renewed hope that those affected — including the relatives of the children buried at Chemawa's cemetery — will get the answers and acknowledgment they've sought for decades.

When the announcement of the federal investigation came out, Amanda Ward, Chemawa's superintendent, said she hadn't heard anything about how it could impact Chemawa.

Ward has not been able to comment since then on the investigation and its impact on Chemawa. The Department of the Interior is coordinating all media requests. While the department answered questions from the Statesman Journal regarding the overall investigation, it declined to answer questions specific to Chemawa.

'She never saw Tillie again'

The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition documents 367 Indian boarding schools, 73 of which remain open and 15 of which are still boarding.

That number is much larger when you include day schools, which don't board. According to the Bureau of Indian Education, there are 183 federally funded elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Of those, 53 are operated by the Bureau, and 130 are tribally controlled under BIE contracts or grants.

More than 140 years old, Chemawa is one of only four off-reservation boarding schools run by the federal government.

Located just east of Keizer Station and Interstate 5 in Salem, Chemawa had 337 students enrolled as of last school year, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In Chemawa's first 96 years alone, archives show more than 30,000 children enrolled.

Medina, who is enrolled as Miwok, grew up hearing about Indian boarding schools from her grandmother, Lillian Franklin Atencio.

Atencio and her siblings were born on the North Fork of the Cosumnes River. But in 1916, when their family home in El Dorado County, California, burnt down, the siblings were put into different off-reservation boarding schools.

Atencio wondered her whole life what became of her sister, Medina recalled.

"I can still hear my grandmother say to me that she never saw Tillie again," Medina said.

Information on these schools' histories is often difficult to access, inaccurate and incomplete.

It took decades for Medina to learn Franklin had been sent to Chemawa, where she died four years later in 1922. Recently posted burial records in the Pacific University Archives show her affiliated with what at the time was called the Digger Indians. Records indicate she died of pulmonary hemorrhage.

Since finding Franklin's grave, Medina was able to read some records, which stated her parents were unknown. Medina said Tillie may have been listed incorrectly in some paperwork as her sister, Alverta.

"I think burying Tillie there was probably cheaper than sending her home," Medina said. "Chemawa is so far to send a little girl from California."

Medina said it felt like her and her family's prayers had been answered when the federal investigation was announced. But it still hurts her to think there was no ceremony for Franklin the day she died, or when she was buried.

"I would feel complete, for my grandmother's sake, to bring Tillie home where she belongs," she said.

'Don't forget me'

Upon arrival, children were stripped of their own clothing, washed in a chemical lye bath and put into a uniform. Their hair was cut off and they were given Christian names. They were often punished or beaten for speaking their native language or practicing any tribal traditions.

Families were promised the opportunity of a quality "American" education. But during the schools' first several decades, students were forced to work on farms to help fund their school and, in the instance of Chemawa, were used as labor to construct new buildings.

Their health care was often poor, and communicable diseases ran rampant in the dormitories, resulting in deaths from illnesses like tuberculosis and measles. And many were physically and sexually abused by teachers and staff.

Both of Roberta Lynn "Tow-le-kit-we-son-my" Paul's grandparents were taken from their families at a young age and enrolled in Indian boarding schools.

Her grandfather, Jesse "Black Raven" Paul, was taken from an exile camp where his family was in Tonkawa, Oklahoma. He was sent to Carlisle in 1880, where he would remain for eight years.

Her grandmother, Lydia Conditt, was taken from Kamiah, Idaho, to Chemawa, which was known then, in the early 1880s, as the Forest Grove Indian Training School, located nearly 50 miles north of the current campus.

Black Raven and Conditt knew what the treatment of Native children in such schools was like. So when they saw "Indian agents, coming up the hill to collect their own children years later," Paul said, they hid them in an old piano crate and covered it with firewood.

Still, over the years, Paul's grandmother, great-uncle, two aunts and uncle would attend Chemawa between 1883 and 1925. Most of all the Paul children attended a boarding school at some point.

Paul, part of the Nimiipuu or Nez Perce tribe, learned about these experiences from listening to stories passed down, conducting her own research and looking through saved trinkets and records kept in the family for generations.

Paul, who wrote her dissertation on intergenerational trauma, remembers watching the documentary "In the White Man's Image." She said she "had to run out of the room and go throw up in the Spokane River."

Paul said she's one of the lucky ones. She knows her relatives' names. She knows which schools they went to and when. She has photographs, enrollment records and medical logs.

She has her grandmother Conditt's signature book and calling cards. And she knows what her handwriting looked like.

In a class photo from the late 1880s, Paul's grandmother was the only child out of 33 who historians have been able to identify. Her grandmother's signature book is filled, page after page, with the same message: "Don't forget me."

Paul said she wants others to know these things about their families too. She wants them to be able to heal.

Trauma over generations

Shortly after Paul's 39th birthday, her then-husband told her he was leaving her. Overcome with grief, she tried to take her own life.

Paul recalls her grandfather coming to her that night in a dream and telling her, "It's time to come home." She said she knew she needed to return to her families' ancestral lands and research more about the atrocities they faced.

Paul had lived with depression for years but noted she struggled more than usual around certain dates. She soon learned her ancestors had died in bloody battles, from raging diseases and under the poor treatment of residential schools.

"We know now that we carry it in our DNA, above the gene," Paul said. "(Scientists are) discovering that it is real. I mean, we've known it for generations ourselves, but proving to the science community and others at large that it is there and it is real is part of the journey and telling truth."

As Paul started piecing together information that explained her family's past, she began to heal. Others have not been able to take that journey.

For some, it's because they don't know what happened to their relatives or where their remains are. Churches and governmental agencies have often refused to release records, and didn't use the children's birth names, referring only to them by their Christian-given names.

"We lost parts of our story because Christianity came and said that 'you were born anew,'" Paul said. "They said that you didn't need to know your culture and history."

A quest for answers

Eleanor Hadden's grandmother was at Chemawa for more than three years, from about 1912-15.

Several of her grandmother's siblings attended Chemawa, too, including her youngest brother who contracted tuberculosis at Chemawa and was sent to a Nez Perce reservation hospital where he died.

"She would not start a conversation about (her time there)," said Hadden, who is Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian and lives in Anchorage. "But (if) we asked a question about something, she would give a short story."

Hadden remembers her grandmother describing militarized aspects of her time there, such as climbing internal ranks to be a sergeant. She also got paid to work as a picker at a neighboring hops field.

"Those are the only stories that she talked about," she said.

"And that in itself is telling," Hadden added. "When you don't want to talk about something."

"We really don't know what happened to her physically or emotionally."

Hadden said as her grandmother got older and relied on more medications, "a lot of fears came out," including one about "strange men."

"She was always afraid to be in the room by herself," Hadden said. "It was hard to ask, '(Why) do you think (that)?'"

In 1967, Hadden's mother, Mary Jones, sent a note to Chemawa asking if her aunt, also named Mary, a member of the Tlingit tribe, had attended. She hadn't, but the school provided a list of siblings who did.

Jones decided to go to Chemawa and search through her mother's records — still held, at that time, in the campus archives.

She found letters that her aunt had written home but that were never delivered. There also were letters from their father, some including money, that were never given to her.

"The plan was to try to take the children away from their parents," Hadden said.

Jones died a year ago, having spent the past several decades constructing their family's history and searching for her aunt's remains. Now, Hadden carries the torch.

"She told me it's my job now to finish finding Mary and finish finding the younger brother that's in Nez Perce country," Hadden said.

Hadden eventually found that Mary was taken to Carlisle with her brother Paul in 1924 to 1929. She was 9 when she was sent to Carlisle. She died there in 1929 at the age of 14.

Her body was one of 13 with a headstone at Carlisle marked "unknown." Hadden and her family are on a waiting list to have her remains exhumed and returned.

Hadden said her mother began this search at a time when "nobody was really interested." Nobody believed them, nobody wanted to know, she said.

Now that the federal investigation is underway, Hadden said her first thought was, "Thank goodness. Finally, someone is listening."

Hadden spoke of children at the U.S.-Mexican border being taken from their families. "That happened to us as well ... there just (wasn't anybody) there to really document what was happening," she said.

Hadden wants people to acknowledge the history of Native children and their families.

"Yes, we've been hurt. Help us through the recovery ... instead of judging what social ills are going on now as part of that generational trauma," she said.

"It's hard to know where to start healing. I think it's acknowledging that the United States and churches did these things to us, that's a big one. To understand that they were complicit in what was happening."

"These things should be taught in history, (but) aren't."

'Treated unfairly from the beginning'

Jaliene Singer's grandparents and great-uncle attended Chemawa in the 1950s. Some family members have worked there since.

In the 1990s, her grandfather worked in the "sick bay" where students would go if they weren't feeling well; her grandmother worked in the dorms then moved to the kitchen.

When Singer was a child, she remembers visiting. Her grandma always gave her a cookie.

Singer, 23, who lives in Hillsboro, said her grandparents told her Chemawa was all about discipline and respect. They had both been brought to the school through a

pilot program for Navajo students.

Not all of their experiences were bad, Singer remembers her grandmother saying. Singer's grandmother played in the band. Her future husband played sports.

But they also remembered their culture being taken away. There are reports of children trying to run away. Singer said they were punished for "looking Native."

"(My grandma) told me it was the white man's way and they could not fight it," she said. "I saw a lot of distress and transformation, from being in your homeland then being relocated to start a new life."

She said her family struggled with that trauma.

"But what they kept is their heritage," she said. "Diné people stayed together."

When Singer heard about the burials in Canada — when 215 unmarked graves were discovered by the Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation at the Kamloops Indian Residential School — she thought about those children's families. She said she was filled with anger and confusion.

"The pain and not knowing is the worst," she said. "It made me think about the treatment they endured ... all the lost souls who were unnamed and forgotten."

"The level of disrespect towards humans is revolting," Singer said, adding that some Native people chose to go to the school to become educated, but "what they got was death."

"It should be known that Native people were treated unfairly from the beginning," she said. "The graves of these children should not have happened; their families should not have that as their legacy."

Burials under scrutiny

Even in modern times, the emotions surrounding the school are conflicting.

In 2017, Chemawa was featured by NFL Films for rebounding from a winless, pointless season. That same year, the school was at the heart of an investigation by Oregon Public Broadcasting that highlighted allegations of fraud, mismanagement and student deaths.

It has a waiting list annually and serves as a "choice school" for many in the Native community. Yet in 2019, Oregon U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader and Suzanne Bonamici criticized the school for failing students and the tribes who entrusted their children to the school's care.

And earlier this year, advocates organized a run to raise awareness for the unidentified children still buried there.

Chemawa Cemetery was established in 1886, a year after the school was moved from Forest Grove to its current location. The earliest confirmed burial is from Feb. 5 of the same year. Student Julia Jopps, from the Spokane Tribe of Indians and originally enrolled at Forest Grove, died of pneumonia or possibly tuberculosis.

While it has been through periods of neglect, the cemetery grounds have been protected by a cyclone fence since at least the 1960s, when it was reportedly leveled during a cleanup effort.

Delores Pigsley, chairwoman of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, grew up on the campus in the 1940s and 50s when her parents worked at the school. Her husband and other family members also worked at Chemawa and were later buried in the cemetery.

Pigsley said she doesn't believe any unmarked graves exist beyond the fenced perimeter.

Neither does SuAnn Reddick, a volunteer historian for Chemawa in the 1990s and early 2000s.

About 200 burials have been documented — mostly students, but also school employees and relatives. The exact number varies depending on the source of the list.

Willamette Valley Genealogical Society has a list of names of those believed to be buried at Chemawa Cemetery. A search on Find A Grave can generate another one.

Reddick has her own list she's been working on for nearly 25 years, and it may be the most accurate to date. She's corrected name and death errors and added

See CHEMAWA, Page 4A



LOCAL ADVISORS

Salem Area

<p>Caitlin Davis CFP® FINANCIAL ADVISOR West 503-585-1464</p>	<p>Chip Hutchings FINANCIAL ADVISOR Lancaster 503-585-4689</p>
<p>Jeff Davis FINANCIAL ADVISOR Mission 503-363-0445</p>	<p>Tim Sparks FINANCIAL ADVISOR Commercial 503-370-6159</p>
<p>Garry Falor CFP® FINANCIAL ADVISOR West 503-588-5426</p>	<p>Tyson Wooters FINANCIAL ADVISOR South 503-362-5439</p>

Keizer Area

Mario Montiel
FINANCIAL ADVISOR
Keizer | 503-393-8166

Surrounding Area

<p>Bridgette Justis FINANCIAL ADVISOR Sublimity 503-769-3180</p>	<p>Tim Yount FINANCIAL ADVISOR Silverton 503-873-2454</p>
<p>Kelly Denney FINANCIAL ADVISOR Dallas 503-623-2146</p>	



Edward Jones

MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING



Financial strategies
built just for you.

OR-GC055203-02