



1583 – ENTRANCE TO INDIAN TRAINING SCHOOL, CHEMAWA, NEAR SALEM, OREGON.

Pacific University

Students pose at the entrance of Chemawa Indian Training School near Salem in 1905.

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contact during their tenure. Speaking their native language was met with harsh consequences, and they were trained primarily to be domestic workers and forced to convert to Christianity.

“This is a terrible story of trauma,” Vaughn said. “The goal was ultimately to create a generational break, so children wouldn’t identify with their tribal roots.”

However, there’s another important part of the story, and that is how the students found a way — or rather a variety of ways — to persevere, resist and demand autonomy.

### ‘Transformation from within’

As Vaughn points out, “resistance takes

all manners and forms.” Running away was a common practice, although it was dangerous, even potentially lethal, for children. Some students fought to maintain their traditions and native languages; others relied on creative expression and faith in themselves and their heritage.

According to information from the National Endowment of the Humanities, “American Indian boarding schools were creating to change native students; however, native students, through their leadership and political involvement, eventually changed the schools.”

Many children experienced their first contact with members of other tribal nations, which led to a rise of Pan-Indianism and the cultivation of connections and support networks across nations.

“This allows for better collective action,” Vaughn said, referencing the Occupation of Alcatraz, from November 1969 to June 1971.

This protest was conducted by Indians of All Tribes, Inc., a group made up of Indigenous people from various first nations. As the first intertribal protect action to focus that nation’s attention on the situation of native people in the U.S., it is still recognized as one of the most important events in contemporary history, according to the National Park System.

Today, there are still four functioning boarding schools, including Chemawa. They operate in a different way than they used to, embracing indigenous heritage, languages, traditions and culture.

“That transformation, again, came from

within,” Vaughn said.

The museum has already received comments from patrons’ whose families were impacted by the forced removal of tribal children and the boarding school system. One woman recognized a family member in part of the exhibit.

“We have been hearing from people we didn’t know had this as part of their history,” Vaughn said.

In addition to the exhibition in the upstairs gallery, the museum also has an interactive, educational component housed in The Cedar People Gallery downstairs. According to Vaughn, they are recommending the exhibition for people 13 and older, or that parents see it first and then decide how to interact with their children about the material.