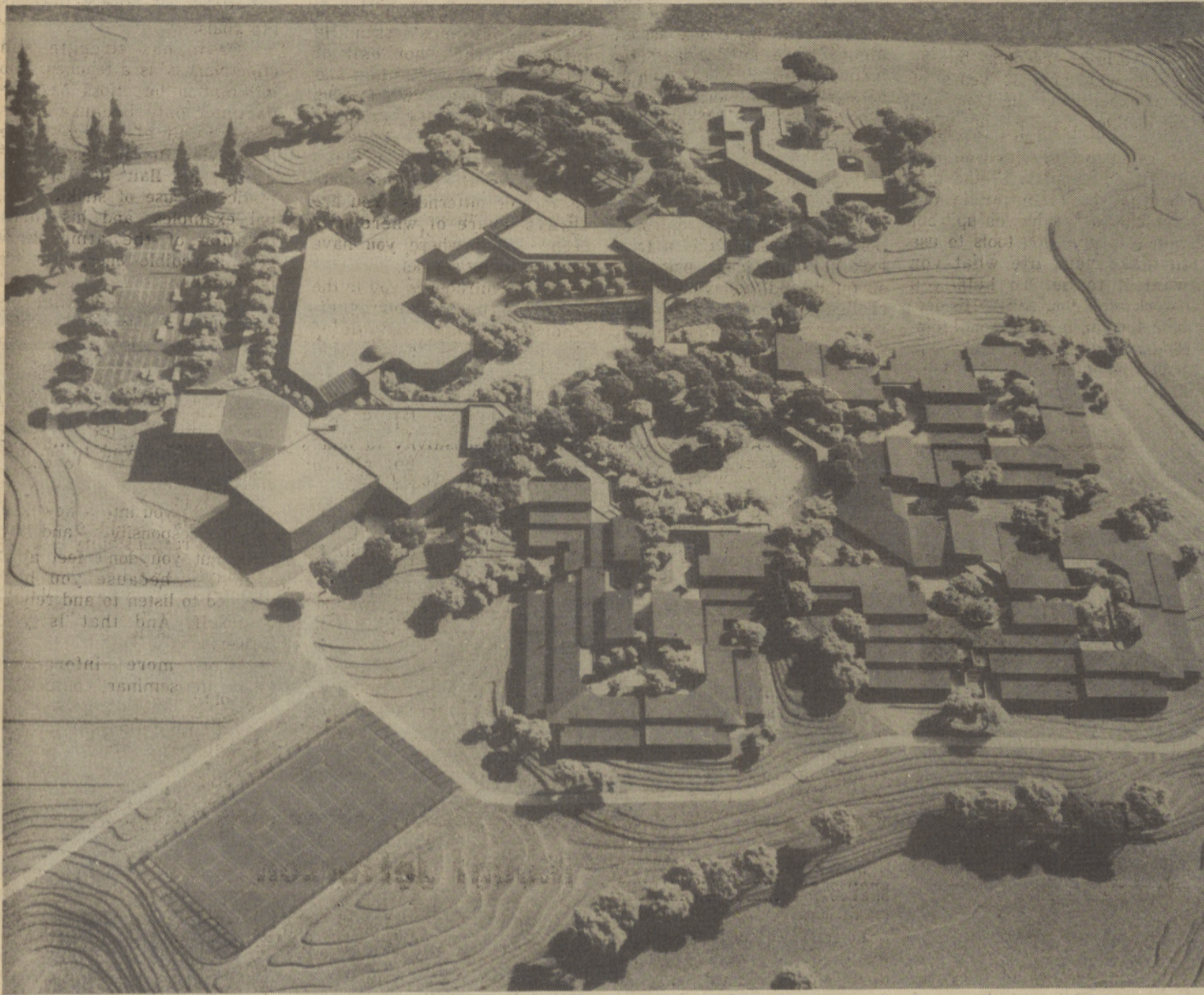


New Facilities, New Goals Chemawa

Part I



By Olney Patt, Jr.

The original Chemawa Indian School was established in Forest Grove, Oregon in 1880 with a federal grant of \$5,000. When fire destroyed a sizeable portion of the school in 1884, it was relocated to its present site 5 miles north of Salem, along the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Since then, it has become the oldest continuously operated Indian school in America, and at least partly responsible for the education of some 37,000 Indian students.

Through the years, Chemawa's buildings have been rejuvenated and remodeled to comply with state health and safety standards, but, by 1975, old age had gotten the upper hand and many of the buildings were vacated and condemned. Safety inspectors noted many cases of structural weakness - the combined work of dry rot, water seepage due to timeworn plumbing, and the constant vibration of daily train traffic through the middle of the school grounds.

In 1975, Martell, the architectural firm was contracted to do a building evaluation study. Their findings: "The primary concern at Chemawa is non-compliance with minimum life safety and health requirements; they cannot be waived. Another serious concern is the indications of structural failure in critical areas in some buildings and the question of structural adequacy of all of the buildings. Most of the subject buildings are 50 years

old or more, some are more than 70 years old. The buildings are obsolete, dilapidated, drab and, except for two or three, they provide a depressing atmosphere. The buildings were poorly designed and built with an almost total disregard of life safety requirements. These buildings have stood for 50 to 70 years, but as they have deteriorated, the margin of safety in the structures has become less and less. Most of the roof structures were improperly designed to begin with. They do not comply with standard engineering practice and code requirements. If the Chemawa Indian School must continue in these buildings for another 5 or 6 years, then it must be recognized that corrective work costing from \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 should be made immediately."

In conclusion: "In general, except for the new roofs, correction of the deficiencies listed in this report will not improve the deteriorated condition of the buildings nor will it relieve the accelerating maintenance problems."

But the study was merely a formal verification of what Chemawa officials had recognized as early as 1969: the existing facilities would have to be replaced if Chemawa Indian School was to continue operating.

Justifications and Specifications

By 1971, plans and specifications submitted by Chemawa administration and Advisory

Board members - (students are also represented on the advisory board) as well as student need and population estimates from agencies within the Northwest area - were being considered by officials of the Division of Planning, Design, and Construction (P.D.C.) at the head office in Washington, D.C., the regional office in Albuquerque, N.M., and the Portland Area Office.

In a memorandum to John F. Carmody, head of P.D.C. in Washington, D.C., (dated 9-28-72) then-superintendent of Chemawa Al Ouchi outlined the specific needs of the Northwest tribes as requested by the advisory board and tribal leaders. It became clear that it was not the wish of Northwest tribal leaders to construct a replica of the old school; the desired capacity of the new school grew to 1,000 students: 600 high school and 400 post-high school. (Ouchi also pointed out that, should House Bill Number 15902 be passed, a large number of Klamath Indians would become eligible to attend Chemawa. These students had not been included in the population estimates.)

In testimony given before the House Appropriations Committee on April 8, 1976, Chairperson Virginia Brown of the Chemawa Advisory Board made four points in justifying the rebuilding program: 1) Chemawa was built for the Northwest Indian students and has for many years been utilized by Navajo and Alaskans

to the detriment of the Northwest Indians. 2) While other schools in the Bureau were being constructed and rebuilt, Chemawa was allowed to deteriorate to its present condition. 3) The public schools are unable to meet the needs of all Indian children. There is still a critical need for residential facilities such as Chemawa for Northwest Indian students and that need has not diminished. 4) That sending Indian students out of the Northwest where parents have not input into the school system is not the answer.

Health Facilities

Also taxed for space and facilities was the Student Health Center. They were not, however, forgotten, as this letter from Virginia Brown, to John R. Heinz, Director of Chemawa Health Services, indicates:

"Dear Mr. Heinz: It remains the position of the Chemawa Advisory School Board that ultimately the new Chemawa School will require a capacity for 1000 students. At this point in time planning and construction are geared to a 600 student high school. With the accomplishment of this phase it is our intention to begin planning for a post-high school, vocation-technical, junior college phase. This will be in addition to the high school and will accommodate approximately 400 students with dependents. Eventually, the Board sees Chemawa as a regional training center for

Indian people. In terms of self-determination we view such a facility as essential. With this program functioning we foresee a large student dependent population. The Board remains unchanged in its view that the Indian Health Service should plan now for a facility that will serve approximately 2,500 Indian people and provide for the changes in population we foresee."

The same year, the Chemawa Advisory Board adopted Resolution No. 1975-1, which ended: "... the undersigned agree with the programs described in the Chemawa Health Facility Planning Document dated November 1973, as revised September 6, 1974, for the design and construction of a replacement health facility in conjunction with that of the new school complex..."

Five Year Plan

John R. Heinz, member of the Chemawa Task Force on Career Education reported that "Preliminary surveys of students, parents, and alumni have revealed considerable interest in a career education approach. Older alumni recall when Chemawa's school day was one-half academic and one-half direct experience. Current students would like to see opportunities for application of the academic curriculum. Parents express dissatisfaction with the school as a spin-off of the frustrations of their children. These frustrations go beyond the academic program but are nonetheless part of the entire school environment." He further stated that, "To best plan for the future this school must become more consumer oriented and realign itself to meet current and projected needs of the people it serves."

During the 1975-76 school year, Chemawa was in the process of updating its curriculum to meet the needs of the students; it took the first and lightest step in a 5 year plan, as proposed by the task force. During the course of those five years, Chemawa will gradually shift its emphasis from that of a conventional high school to that of a career training center for Indians. When that shift is completed, the curriculum will contain 30 main course offerings some of which are: Health Occupations preparation, business education, college preparation, technical trades preparation (construction trades, metal, wood, mechanics, graphics, electricity), forest products industries, alcohol and drug abuse advisor training, food service occupations, fire fighting, law enforcement services, small business administration, range management, wildlife management studies, child care services, agricultural enterprises, cosmetology, recreation, building maintenance and repair, fine arts, tribal political studies (or leadership training-Indian/rights and responsibilities), data processing, reservation economic development, reservation human resource development, and fisheries management (aquaculture, hatchery operation, conservation, and stocking programs).

Interim Facilities

While this planning was going on, one nagging question presented itself at the end of the 75-76 school year: how to

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