

Willamette students cataloguing Chemawa photos

By Ron Karten

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SALEM — When Chemawa industrial arts teacher and yearbook and newspaper adviser Charles Holmes walked on in 2011, he left behind a treasure of more than 3,000 photos and more than 50 years of yearbooks and school newspapers collected during his career at the school.

The collection totals some 40 boxes in all.

His wife, Charlotte, bequeathed them to the Grand Ronde Tribe in the names of Tribal Museum Curator/Cultural Liaison David Lewis and Cultural Collections Specialist Veronica Montano.

Lewis then served as gatekeeper and facilitator in turning the processing of the collection over to Willamette University students.

"I saw the value in the collection," Lewis said. "I understand the archival process. I have a wonderful connection with Rebecca, and I made the project available to her and her students."

Lewis is referring to Willamette University Anthropology Professor Rebecca Dobkins, who teaches a Native North American Cultures class, which Lewis has taught when Dobkins worked on sabbatical.

Lewis proposed a joint Grand Ronde-Willamette University project to catalogue and identify the photos.

"The project fits into the bigger picture of the growing connections between Willamette University and the Grand Ronde Tribe, and Willamette University and Chemawa Indian School," Dobkins said.

Montano initially worked to process the photos. She cleaned and put them into protective sleeves and boxes. Since they have been turned over to Willamette University for archiving, Montano checks in periodically to see where they are in the process.

"I know a lot of our Tribal Elders have attended Chemawa," she said. "And a lot of the photos are of the old campus that the Tribal Elders will remember. I think for a lot of people who attended, it will bring back memories. We just hope that they'll enjoy it as much as we have."

Each year, the class includes a research component, Dobkins said. This year, and for a few more to come, it is and will be the Chemawa photo project.

"The project is one that will exist on a number of levels," Dobkins said, "and change over time."

It will include straight research to archive the photos. Studying the yearbooks will play an important role in making identifications and verifying time.

It will include meetings with Chemawa students past and present, and that will likely involve Grand Ronde and other Native American Elders who attended, taught or worked at the school.

Research also is likely to include working with oral histories — both historical recordings and the development of new ones.

On the technical side, the work will include scanning photos and posting them online for interactive



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Emilie Jensen, a senior at Willamette University in Salem, looks through a Chemawa Indian School yearbook from 1961 as she works on an assignment for her Native North American Cultures class in the college's archives on Thursday, Nov. 15. The yearbook is part of a collection that Chemawa industrial arts teacher and yearbook and newspaper adviser Charles Holmes had. The collection was donated to the Tribe after he walked on in 2011.

research.

"As a professor," Dobkins said, "this is an ideal project because it is timely and unfolding."

The plan for this semester is to develop the project in three stages:

- 1) Cataloguing the photos with identifying numbers, key words and descriptions. This year, 28 students each have 20 photos to catalogue, so the current group will have completed almost 600 by the end of class. That will leave plenty for future classes.
- 2) Review the many yearbooks that are currently are on loan to the Willamette University archives for clues about the pictures. Part of that might involve inviting Grand Ronde Elders who attended or worked at Chemawa to help.
- 3) Plan the next phase of the research.

Next year's project depends on what is discovered this year, Dobkins said. "Maybe through oral histories, we'll be able to explore what makes Chemawa a community," she said.

Student reactions to the photos are eye-opening.

The culture that senior Fletcher Haynes, 29, a Spanish major, saw on the Chemawa campus was very similar to the culture he recognizes. He pointed to the sporting events and the spirit events. "It could have been from my high school," Haynes said.

Senior Travis Smith, a political science major, saw differences.

Referring to photos of students helping to build facilities at Chemawa, he said, "Coming from a public school background, we don't build things like that."

For Blanca Gutierrez, a junior majoring in American Ethnic Studies and English, "The pictures pose a lot of questions about changes taking place. The Driver's Education program is gone now. And there are physical changes in the campus buildings."

With the pictures, said senior

Brita Hill, a music major, "it's so much more real."

"It's a very human connection," said Haynes. "Many of the people in the pictures are still alive today."

Senior Emilie Jensen, a biology major, said seeing these real-life experiences in the pictures contradicts "what we've been taught." The pictures help the history she is learning in class "fall into place." She compared it to seeing a photo of a relative she has only heard about before.

"I didn't expect something so hands-on," said senior Chris Tokesh, a bio-chemistry major. "It's been a nice surprise."

"It's exciting to have this," said Dobkins. "It is something very concrete. It's contributing to their learning, and it's doing something that could be valuable. The work is not that glamorous, but it is a direct connection to the community."

"We're looking specifically at issues of change, diversity and resilience. We're looking at the boarding school history. (The project) blows up stereotypes."

"I didn't realize that Chemawa was a boarding school," Jensen said. "It shows how necessary it is to go deeper into a subject to understand it."

"Students come in knowing almost nothing about Native life," Dobkins said. "The last time they studied Native Americans was in fourth grade when they made the dioramas. The course has been a rollercoaster for some when they realize what they've never been taught."

Information gleaned in the class has already given these students a background for understanding the photos.

Junior Mariah Anderson, a psychology major, noted "the impact that Native Americans have had, how smart they were to develop the land the way they did." She added that she has learned about civil rights in five different classes, but none of them talked about civil

rights for Native Americans.

"There's a lot of invisibilization," said Jensen. "It's pretty sad, but it's nice to see the presence of Native Americans throughout the year. It's a good backup for the things we're learning. It's harder to fall back into not knowing."

"(The class) definitely changed my outlook about Native Americans," said senior Linnea Hardlund, a biology major, "especially learning about the different interactions between the government and all the different (ethnic groups) in the country. (The treatment) is not the same at all. You also see what Native Americans bring to the society, and how that will help in the future. Slowly, we're making changes."

Twenty-five from the class, including Gutierrez, have been moved to action. They volunteer as tutors in Willamette's Chemawa Indian School Partnership Program.

"We tutors get a lot out of it," Gutierrez said. "Sometimes, I think we get more out of it."

Junior Caroline Bishop, an archaeology and art history major, is so excited about the subject that she has requested an internship to continue cataloguing photos after the class ends. Last year, she interned at Willamette's Hallie Ford Museum, also working with Native American photos.

"Pictures make more sense," she said. "They bring up interesting things that I want to learn more about."

The purpose of the course, Dobkins said, includes the details but she also wants to make sure that students keep track of the big picture.

"We have a responsibility for learning about the people of the land," Dobkins said.

"This class is a really good example of how Tribes and universities can work together," Lewis said, "especially on projects of historical collections. This is history valuable to the whole area." ■