

Dobkins tells stories from Chemawa

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

SALEM — The Charles Holmes collection from Chemawa Indian Boarding School came into the hands of the Grand Ronde Tribe in 2012.

The collection had been stored in 40 boxes. It held more than 3,000 photographs and 50 years of school yearbooks and newspapers, maps and film.

Holmes taught industrial arts at Chemawa and also served as student adviser for the school's yearbooks and newspapers during his more than 20-year career — from the 1950s to the 1970s — at the school. His collection, however, spans from 1900 to the 1980s.

After he walked on in 2011, his wife, Charlotte, bequeathed the collection to the Grand Ronde Tribe in the name of then Tribal Museum Curator, now Tribal Historian, David Lewis, and Cultural Collections Specialist Veronica Montano.

From the Tribe, the photo collection went to Willamette University Anthropology Professor Rebecca Dobkins, who presented stories culled from the collection to a full house at Salem Public Library on Wednesday, March 19.

Lewis has worked with Dobkins, sometimes teaching her classes when she is on sabbatical. He turned to her when the collection arrived with the idea that her anthropology classes could help describe and archive the vast number of documents as a teaching project.

Dobkins' lecture, in the library's Loucks Auditorium, was one stop on a traveling lecture tour derived from this treasure trove to educational and civic groups across the Northwest.

Among those in the audience were Lewis and Grand Ronde Tribal Elders and sisters Violet Folden and Gladys Hobbs. Indians from many



Rebecca Dobkins

different backgrounds attended, as well as current and past Chemawa students, their descendants and descendants of staff and teachers who worked there.

Joe Smith of Keizer remembers he "was out there all the time" in the late 1940s when his grandfather was assistant superintendent. "It was just a neat place to be," he said.

Joe Coburn Jr. (Blackfeet) of Salem said that his father was a counselor at Chemawa in 1968-69. For awhile, when the family lived on campus, his brother recruited Indian students. Coburn has maintained his ties to the school ever since, he said.

"It's very important to know your history," Coburn said.

In the personal history department, he remembers when 200 sheep got away from the sheep rearing program and roamed the campus. Students and a black lab shared the job of rounding them up. A hundred or so were eventually corralled on somebody's front porch.

The first part of Dobkins' lecture was a tour through the Northwest and, to some degree, national Native American experience. Dobkins called it Native American History 101. It included historical and anecdotal information about federal Indian policy and colonization.

"It's a pendulum between assimilation and annihilation," she said.

Indian boarding schools like Chemawa taught mainstream cultural ideas like Christianity, on one hand, and forbid Indians from practicing their own culture on the other. The

land allotment policy, the Dawes Act, broke up community lands and divvied them among individual Natives, though in western Oregon the lands ultimately ended up in the hands of timber interests.

In all the years since, Dobkins said, "There has been very little scholarly work published about Chemawa, while unpublished scholarly works and oral histories have accounts of 'heartbreaking' boarding school life," she said. "In these schools, you could expect 25 percent of the students to run away in any one month."

Dobkins presented a short history of Chemawa, from its beginnings in 1880 in Forest Grove. In 1886, thanks to 180 acres donated by the people of Salem, the school moved to its current location on Chemawa Road in the northeast section of the city.

Native students worked in hops fields, building school buildings, tending livestock, cooking and doing other domestic work at the school, ultimately saving enough money to increase the school's acreage to 426 by 1920.

It was not until 1924 that Indians became American citizens.

In the 1930s, when federal authorities attempted to close Chemawa, Tribes protested, fearing that Indian students would face discrimination in public schools and because students had purchased much of the land themselves. The school lived on.

Often, as shown in the photographic record, roles in vocational education programs were not limited by gender.

The school's trade classes were "so highly regarded," Dobkins said,

that they drew European children during the Depression.

In 1939-40, the school reversed direction and taught about Native homelands and modeled classes after Tribal councils. In World War II, the success of Navajo code talkers set the stage for the fight for Native rights.

"Indians expected to be treated with dignity," said Dobkins.

In the 1960s, '70s and '80s, the Holmes papers documented the era of self-determination. The record also shows innovations in Tribal education that included student councils, driver's education classes, a student bank and flight training at Salem Airport.

In 1979, the federal government opened an Indian Health Clinic at the school.

From the 1970s, changes at the school gave students an education focused on Indian issues. Enrollment swelled. Younger Indians followed their older siblings to Chemawa, some for a better education, some to get away from a bad situation at home.

In 2005, Willamette University formed a partnership with Chemawa. Part of the partnership enabled university students to mentor at Chemawa.

The Holmes Collection was another benefit of this partnership, opening a new window into the Chemawa boarding school experience.

The title of Dobkins' lecture is "The Chemawa Indian School, From Assimilation to Affirmation, 1880s-2010s."

"It is the raw material," Dobkins said, "of a massive history of Native lands and peoples." ■

District seeking Budget Committee member

The Polk Soil and Water Conservation District's Budget Committee has one opening for a new citizen member. The appointed citizen member must be a qualified voter of Polk County. The appointment is for a three-year term.

The commitment is a minimum of two evening meetings to plan the budget for the Polk Soil and Conservation District, along with other tasks as assigned by the Budget Committee. Meetings are on May 7 and 21, if needed.

If you are interested in applying, contact Debbie Miller at 503-623-9680, ext. 101, or by e-mail at debbie.miller@polkswcd.com. ■

Land & Culture offers classes

The Tribe's Land and Culture Department offers adult Chinuk Wawa language classes from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Monday at the Chachalu Tribal Museum & Cultural Center, 8720 Grand Ronde Road.

Language classes can be taken for college credit or fun.

For more information, call 503-879-2249. ■

Tourney seeking players 50 or older

The Pacific Northwest Masters Basketball Tournament will be held Monday, July 28, through Friday, Aug. 1, in the Eugene area and will be the first premier competitive Masters Hoops tournament on the West Coast for players 50 and older.

For more information, check out www.EugeneCascadesCoast.com/pacnw-masters on the Internet or visit the Facebook page Pacific NorthWest Masters Basketball.

Also, you can contact ahering99@gmail.com. ■

Fund seeks Hatfield Fellowship applicants

Spirit Mountain Community Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, is seeking applicants for the Mark O. Hatfield Congressional Fellowship.

Each year, a Hatfield Fellow serves as an intern for a member of Oregon's congressional delegation. This year, it will be in the office of U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio.

The Hatfield Fellow is selected from adult Native American candidates who are enrolled members of a federally recognized Tribe in Oregon. If there are no qualified applicants from Oregon, enrolled Tribal members from Washington, Idaho and Montana will be considered.

The successful candidate will intern in Washington, D.C., for nine months and receive a monthly stipend, as well as relocation and travel expenses. The program also pays tuition for the American Political Science Association orientation.

Fellowship applications, which are due by 5 p.m. Friday, April 25, must be completed and submitted via the Internet.

To access the online application process, visit www.thecommunityfund.com. For additional questions, contact Program Coordinator Louis King at 503-879-1462 or e-mail at fellows@thecommunityfund.com or by mail at 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, OR 97347.

The fellowship honors Mark Hatfield for his accomplishments as a U.S. senator, Oregon governor and his mentorship of many leaders in their own communities. ■