

## The 2020 WVGS Chemawa Cemetery Project



In 1990 Willamette Valley Genealogical Society began a project on Chemawa Cemetery. Members read the cemetery, collected death certificates and newspaper obituaries, searched microfilm records in Seattle at the National Archives, and looked at funeral home records. Results were published in our quarterly publication, Beaver Briefs in 1993 and 1994.

Chemawa Cemetery was part of the Chemawa Indian School, established in 1880 in Forest Grove, Oregon and then moved to Salem, Oregon in 1885. Over more than a century in existence, the

cemetery has had numerous attempts to clear it of brush and poison oak. In 1960 the area was leveled. Cement bars were affixed with copper plates at each grave listed on a master plat plan created in 1940, with students at the school completing the project.

In 1990 there were over 200 graves with about 193 identified. Find A Grave now lists 214. Not all are students' graves (the 1918 Flu pandemic took a toll). Many young Indian children with tuberculosis were sent to the school. Also, employees and their family members were buried there.

Marsha Small used ground penetrating radar (2016) on the cemetery grounds and reported that "her surveys indicate there are possibly hundreds of unmarked burial sites at Chemawa". This is not surprising. The cemetery is neglected and over-run once again with poison oak. The grave markers that remain have many errors.

In 2019, WVGS members Doug Crosby, Nancy Henderson, Ann Hill, Anne May and Liz Tice began work on updating the information that WVGS published in 1993/94. The Chemawa Indian School was unwilling to help or look for records, saying it is under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In the internet age, we have been able to find more obituaries, death certificates and use other sources such as Ancestry.com for censuses to include new information.

We are posting the database for Chemawa Deaths to our website for use by anyone interested in the Chemawa Cemetery. Contact WVGS at [wilvgs@yahoo.com](mailto:wilvgs@yahoo.com) for more information or copies of the original publication.