

# Historic excavation work being done at old Indian school

UNR's Department of Anthropology, in partnership with the Nevada Indian Commission and the Washoe Tribal Historic Preservation Office, is conducting an excavation at the historic Stewart Indian School in Carson City.

The Stewart facility is a 110-acre historic district that is home to more than 50 historic buildings.

Sarah Cowie, assistant professor of anthropology in the university's College of Liberal Arts, is directing the excavation, which also serves as a summer field school that teaches students about archaeology and historic preservation. This collaborative project combines the efforts of professional archaeologists, Native American specialists in heritage, and students from diverse backgrounds.

The Stewart Indian School was open from 1890-1980 with a federal mandate to educate American Indian children, initially from the Great Basin Tribes (Washoe, Northern and Southern Paiute, and Western Shoshone), but eventually accepting children from tribal nations of the region. The intent of the Indian boarding school was not to prepare the American Indian children for higher education, but to educate them enough so they could work in the dominant society, away from their culture and traditions.

Stewart alumni have told Washoe Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Darrel Cruz that in early years, young native children were forcibly removed from their homes to live on the Stewart Indian School campus. This practice was well documented at other Indian schools around the country and resulted in a traumatic time for both the children and their parents.

However, in later years attendance at Stewart was optional and alumni from that period say it was good for some. It provided an avenue for the native population to learn a skill that would allow gainful employment.

The Nevada Indian Commission, a state agency, has been the lead on efforts to preserve the history and legacy of the school. The commission has worked with stakeholders, including the school's alumni, to identify potential cultural tourism use of the buildings and campus. A cultural center and museum are planned, with future plans for a destination experience. The project is in the planning and fundraising phase.

Although the Stewart Indian School site is now owned by the state, it is located on the traditional homelands of the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada.

The public is welcome to visit the site (5500 Snyder Way, Carson City) while the team is working there, Mondays through Fridays, 9am-noon and 1-3pm. They expect to conclude their work Aug. 13.