

Stewart Indian School offers little-known U.S. history

By Susan Winlow, Daily Republic

CARSON CITY – A strong wind bullied through the Carson Valley last weekend. It whistled and pushed itself through the trees, which isn't too difficult since you can see a lone tree from 10 miles away.

Sand, dirt and knee-deep brushy stuff is the norm in this high desert.

However, that terrain changes as you turn into the parking lot of the historic Stewart Indian School, situated on 240 acres on the Stewart Indian Colony (reservation) three miles southeast of Carson City on Snyder Avenue. The central part of the large campus – operational from 1890 to 1980 – is a treed oasis, punctuated by the unique stone masonry that makes up most of the buildings. About 60 stone buildings, according to Nevada Indian Commission information, were built over a 16-year period starting in 1919 by students learning stone masonry from their teachers, who included Hopi stone masons.

The government-mandated school's original goal was to train and educate Native American children and assimilate them into white society. School curriculum offered some reading, writing and math, but focused on vocational training in the trades such as agriculture and the service industry. It opened with 37 students from the Washoe, Paiute and Shoshone tribes and by 1919, 400 students called the school home during the school year. As the student population rose, more buildings were built.

Sherry Rupert, the executive director of the Nevada Indian Commission, created the Stewart Indian School Trail in September 2008 with several purposes, she said.

“First is to preserve those precious memories and oral histories of the school,” she said. “Second is to bring awareness to this widely unknown history of the Native American boarding schools.”

Rupert rethought her sentence and added, “unknown to the public.”

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