

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor



Mailing Address
5366 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

Phone: (775) 687-8333
Fax: (775) 687-8330

SHERRY L. RUPERT
Executive Director

Physical Address
Stewart Facility – Building #3
5500 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

STATE OF NEVADA INDIAN COMMISSION



Stewart Indian School Living Legacy Project

History

The Stewart Indian School was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District on September 18, 1985. The site (approximately 110 acres) is currently managed by the State of Nevada. The areas of significance identified in the nomination include architecture, education and American Indian culture. The District is an extremely well preserved example of a U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs rural boarding school and is distinguished by a unique collection of vernacular buildings dating between 1910 and 1944. The Stewart Indian School, the only non-reservation Indian boarding school in Nevada, operated from 1890 to 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 led to the acceptance of children from tribal nations throughout the West. The intent of the Indian boarding school was to educate and assimilate American Indian children so they could take their place in the greater society and away from their culture and traditions. Stewart Indian School represents this federal effort to assimilate American Indians through education of children at boarding schools.

American Indian boarding schools are part of the historical experience for almost all American Indian Nations. Initially, non-reservation boarding schools, like Stewart, served as the primary weapon in the federal education arsenal to eliminate native culture in one generation and resolve the “Indian Problem.” The federal government used non-reservation boarding schools to Americanize Indian children by removing them from their homes and tribal environment, teaching them to read and write in English, developing skills or a trade for economic support, and instilling a Christian work ethic. The Stewart Indian School was one of twenty-three non-reservation boarding schools established by the federal

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor



SHERRY L. RUPERT
Executive Director

Mailing Address
5366 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

Phone: (775) 687-8333
Fax: (775) 687-8330

Physical Address
Stewart Facility – Building #3
5500 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

STATE OF NEVADA
INDIAN COMMISSION

government to educate American Indian children in the tenants of western civilization and was one of twelve non-reservation boarding schools that survived massive federal closures in the 1920s and 1930s. Over the next forty years the school became an important hub in the federal Indian education system in the west. Students hailed from over 336 different hometowns including all of Nevada’s Indian colonies and reservations, and reservations from every western state. The history of the Stewart Indian School speaks to both the American Indian experience as well as a unique application of federal education policy.

The Stewart Indian School is a significant example of vernacular architecture that reflects the vocational training undertaken at the school. The distinctive architectural style was conceived by Frederick Snyder, the Superintendent at Stewart from 1919 to 1934 after visiting a chapel in Arizona which was made out of native colored rock. Under the tutelage of Hopi stone masons, the students helped to construct many of the contributing stone buildings. The irregular boulders, stone lintels, and flat horizontal shape of the buildings that Snyder built, mimicked many of the National Park Service structures erected in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the “rustic” style. When Superintendent Frederick Snyder arrived in 1919 he provided firm leadership during his fifteen year tenure. Snyder transformed the campus from a failing school to a horticultural and architectural showpiece.

The Stewart Indian School may be the best surviving example of a vocational training campus. While many boarding schools, like Chilocco, focused on farming and agriculture, an extensive agricultural program was never the primary focus at Stewart because of the lack of water and infertile land. Instead the Stewart Indian School provided training in vocational trades like masonry, domestic service, carpentry, metal working, and cattle ranching, which was consistent with the current occupations of most American Indians in Nevada. Stewart Indian School prepared a substantial number of Washoes, Western Shoshones, and Paiutes for work off of reservations as domestic servants or farm or ranch hands. Boys worked as blacksmiths, stone masons, carpenters, harness makers, cobblers, tailors, mechanics, and farmers. Male students also maintained herds of cattle and dairy cows, worked in the dining hall and bakery, and helped manicure the school grounds. Female pupils labored in the laundry, kitchens, hospital, sewing rooms and chicken coops, and also worked on dorm-cleaning crews.

The political reforms of the mid 1930s are often referred to as the “Indian New Deal.” During the Indian New Deal, the Stewart Indian School became a model of Progressive-era education. The publication of the Meriam Report, officially titled *The Problem of Indian Administration* in 1928, prompted the Indian Service to reevaluate the reservation system and the educational opportunities offered to Indian children. The policy was part of the “New Deal” that President Franklin D. Roosevelt’

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor



SHERRY L. RUPERT
Executive Director

Mailing Address
5366 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

Phone: (775) 687-8333
Fax: (775) 687-8330

Physical Address
Stewart Facility – Building #3
5500 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

STATE OF NEVADA INDIAN COMMISSION

promised Americans in the depth of the Great Depression in 1932 including work relief, emergency relief and agricultural programs. The cornerstone of the Indian New Deal was the Indian Reorganization

Act of 1934 which was crafted by Commissioner of Indian Affairs, John Collier (1933-1945). This act gave tribes and communities the ability to form their own tribal governments, encouraged tribal institutions, and reversed longstanding policies of land allotment to individual Indians.

Due to her Indian activism and children's reform, Commissioner Collier appointed Alida Cynthia Bowler as the first female superintendent in the Indian Service. Under her leadership, the Stewart Indian School embodied the reform ethos of the Indian New Deal. In response to the desires of Nevada's Indian communities, Bowler started a livestock training program at Stewart and on the reservations and encouraged native languages, arts and crafts, and traditional dancing until the end of her tenure in 1939.

The Stewart Indian School retains a high degree of integrity that reflects its position as a flagship campus for the Indian New Deal policies of the 1930s. While the National Historic Register designation was for state significance, the Stewart Indian School is most likely nationally significant for its association with Progressive American Indian education, and for its vernacular architecture related to the vocational training at Stewart. Since its establishment in 1890, the Stewart Indian School has educated roughly 30,000 American Indian children from across the western United States until its closure in 1980.

The Legacy of the Stewart Indian School

The closing of the Stewart Indian School occurred in 1980 and the land conveyed to the State of Nevada in 1982. The quitclaim deed explicitly states as Provision 10, "The State of Nevada wishing to perpetuate the 90-year history of the Stewart Indian School will reserve Building 1 and Building 3 to house and display the crafts, artifacts and the memorabilia relating to the Stewart Indian School." Further, it is stipulated "If at any time the Secretary of the Interior determines that the Grantee has failed to observe the provisions of this transfer agreement and that the failure has continued for at least one year, he may declare a forfeiture of the conveyance and the title conveyed shall thereupon revert to the United States." Therefore, compliance with the deed provision is necessary or the entire conveyance to the state shall be reverted to the United States, a very real risk the Nevada Indian Commission strives to remain proactive and does not take lightly.

As the historic buildings of the Stewart Indian School era decline, so do the remaining alumni who inhabited the historic hallways. The eldest of the alumni (now in their mid to upper 90's) with so many memories and so much history are aging rapidly and dying along with their memories and collective

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor



Mailing Address
5366 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

Phone: (775) 687-8333
Fax: (775) 687-8330

SHERRY L. RUPERT
Executive Director

Physical Address
Stewart Facility – Building #3
5500 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

STATE OF NEVADA INDIAN COMMISSION

wisdom. We must save these stories and preserve their contributions for future Nevadans. Equally, we must save the legacy of the Stewart Indian School as a tribute to Nevada history. And most importantly, we must accelerate the project to capture these authentic historical accounts before it is too late.

The Nevada Indian Commission's initial action to preserve some oral histories of alumni was included in the interpretive trail implemented in 2007. The Stewart Indian School Trail is a self-guided cell phone walking tour of the campus that includes 20 audio recordings of select alumni and former employees of the historic school who tell their stories and share the treasures of this largely unknown and seldom taught history with visitors of today.

The scope of what the Commission has envisioned for the Stewart campus short term includes a permanent Cultural Center located in a rehabilitated building formerly used as the school's Administration Office and Student Union (Building 1). An on-campus facility will provide visitors, alumni and students with the story of the school's history. Exhibits depicting the daily life of the Indian student at Stewart would include musical band instruments, uniforms, athletic trophies and awards, the school's hall of fame, school photos, art and other memorabilia. Initiation of a school resource center and oral history projects are also envisioned for the Cultural Center.

The Cultural Center will provide approximately 5,545 square feet on three levels. The first level is planned for primary display areas to exhibit museum and archive collections with office and reception space. The upper level provides environmentally controlled storage space for collections along with additional display area for special collections and office space if needed. The lower level will provide educational space for cultural classes. The area surrounding the Cultural Center provides a lush grassy landscape, which can be developed to provide a location for ceremonial activities, outdoor performances and an educational native ethno botanical landscape and garden.

The long-term vision provides sustainability to the Cultural Center, ensures the history is maintained and additional Stewart campus buildings are rehabilitated by creating a cultural heritage destination. This is a place where families and international travelers can come and spend the entire day or purchase a package to participate in an overnight experience to see what it was like to live at the Stewart Indian School. A select group of buildings could be rehabilitated and restored for visitation and interpretation, giving each visitor an opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of a Stewart Indian School student. One could visit the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center, dine in the dining hall, visit a classroom and then view a play, reenactment or a movie in the campus auditorium before retiring for the evening in a dorm room of the period. The learning opportunities for the public and tribal communities are numerous and would include restoration components of the traditional (lost) arts, tribal histories, tribal demonstrations, youth summer camps and artist retreats (traditional and contemporary).

BRIAN SANDOVAL
Governor



SHERRY L. RUPERT
Executive Director

Mailing Address
5366 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

Phone: (775) 687-8333
Fax: (775) 687-8330

Physical Address
Stewart Facility – Building #3
5500 Snyder Avenue
Carson City, NV 89701

STATE OF NEVADA
INDIAN COMMISSION

Future native and non-native generations will benefit from this initiative. The history and the lessons that are to be shared at the Stewart Indian School Living Legacy are compelling, largely unknown and seldom taught. Yet it is a history that is essential to understanding American Indians and their relationship with government and education. It is an era of our shared American history.

For more information please see our website at www.StewartIndianSchool.com or contact:

Sherry L. Rupert, Executive Director
State of Nevada Indian Commission
5366 Snyder Ave., Building #3
Carson City, NV 89701
Phone: (775) 687-8333
Email: srupert@nic.nv.gov