

# A Timeless Seneca Christmas: Our Living Story at Seneca School

By Stacy Durych, Seneca Elementary School

When I first walked into Seneca Elementary School, something inside me shifted. The light streaming through the wide windows, the echo of children's voices, and the feeling that the building itself was alive with stories—it all washed over me at once. I remember thinking, 'This feels like home. Not a workplace, not a building, but a home. A place with a heartbeat.'

That feeling has only grown as we've embarked on our Historical Timeline Project, our ambitious and creative effort to tell the continuing Seneca story from 2000 through 2025. By the spring of 2026, our hallway will transform into a living gallery lined with student-painted canvases and historical placards, each piece sharing a moment in time and incorporating Paiute language words that honor our community and the land we stand on.

This project also blossomed into our upcoming holiday program, "A Timeless Seneca Christmas," on Thursday, December 18, with an open dress rehearsal at 1:30 p.m. and an evening performance at 6:00 p.m.

Our students will share five original skits: three from Seneca's past, one from the present, and one imagining the future we dream for our school.

My co-teacher, Raney Anderson, knows this building in a way only someone who walked these halls as a child can. She attended Seneca from kindergarten through eighth-grade before going on to Grant Union High School. Watching her reconnect with the school as an educator, and watching her share her memories with our students, is like watching the past reach into the present to guide the future.

Our field trip to the Grant County Library and the Grant County Courthouse Recorder's Office brought our research to life. At the library, the scent of old paper mingled with excitement as students flipped through bound newspapers. One student found a 2003 article about a Seneca talent show that featured another student's mother performing a hula-hoop dance, a perfect moment of past meeting present. Another newspaper revealed the school's long-loved stick-horse rodeo, complete with hay bales and music. We still have those same stick horses, and we used them again this past June at our end-of-year celebration. I'm deeply grateful to Chris, the librarian, who opened the library on her usual day off just for us. Her generosity made that magical day possible. At the courthouse, Joleen gave us a behind-the-scenes tour of beautifully bound records documenting Seneca's history. She even helped us locate materials from 2000–2025 to support our timeline work. Seeing time literally written and preserved before us was unforgettable.



Our community continues to wrap around this project in remarkable ways. Longtime rancher Jack Southworth offered us his copy of the original timeline book, filled with photos, interviews, and research. Former teacher Adele Cerny, who taught at Seneca for 33 years, welcomed me with warm spice cake fresh from her oven and gifted us her entire digital archive. Meeting with her felt like a moment when past and present sat together at the same table.

That same sense of continuity lives within our staff. Skip Ryder, our custodian and cook, feels Seneca is home—the place he hopes to retire from. His fiancée and her daughter both attended Seneca, another beautiful circle completed. Lacey, our secretary and educational assistant and a Seneca alum, fills our hallways with creativity through her imaginative bulletin boards and displays. And Principal Dr. Janine Attlesperger, now in her fourth year leading our school, is helping us build something beautiful—strengthening connections with the Paiute community and supporting our efforts in Paiute language revitalization, which will be woven into our historical timeline and curriculum.

This November, we again hosted our beloved Feast of Gratitude on Tuesday, November 25. Students, teachers, and PTA members cooked and served a Thanksgiving meal for families and community members. It's one more example of Seneca's time-honored traditions and the way we show appreciation for one another.

Every day, I'm reminded that we are not simply documenting history—we are living it. We're researching it, painting it, performing it, discovering it, and passing it down. We're not just teaching; we're helping preserve a legacy, one built by everyone who walks through these doors. This holiday season, I invite you to come be a part of our living story—where history, heart, and hope come together in one timeless celebration. Join us for "A Timeless Seneca Christmas," on Thursday, December 18, with an open dress rehearsal at 1:30 p.m. and an evening performance at 6:00 p.m.



Seneca Elementary students investigate history at the Grant County Library and the Grant County Courthouse.