

## TRIBAL HISTORY

### A Piece of Siletz History

by Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Director

*This article is the fourth in a series of brief articles. Each one covers a different era or time period in our history, jumping slightly forward in time with each article. The last article was about the fur trade and early exploration of our homelands by Europeans. This one details some of the effects resulting from the early period of permanent settlement.*

#### Part Four - The Early Settlement Period

As was related in the previous article, most white contact with our people before 1845 or so was fleeting, consisting of traders, trappers, and explorers of different sorts, with some areas feeling the impact of the occasional cattle drive from California to the Willamette Valley.

The exceptions to this limited type of contact were the groups along the Columbia, Willamette, and Umpqua rivers, where fur trading forts, missionary stations, early farms, and grist and lumber mill operations associated with those settlements were congregated. Our people in areas where contact was more frequent apparently didn't outright object to strangers using some of the land and resources, wanting mainly to just have their rights protected.

There shouldn't have been much need for concern. In 1787, the U.S. Congress passed the "Northwest Ordinance" or "Utmost Good Faith" law, which should have guided frontier policy with Indian tribes. It promised that Indian people in areas of interest to the United States would be protected in their rights and property and that Indians would not be invaded or disturbed unless by just and lawful wars authorized by Congress. Congressional timing in subsequent legislation, however, did not always follow the spirit of the more well-meaning Northwest Ordinance.

The United States and Great Britain hammered out an agreement in 1846 that determined the territorial boundaries recognized by the two governments (the current border between Canada and the United States). Neither country seemed to take into account that they were talking about our lands.

The U.S. was able to push the boundary that far north, in part, because so many U.S. citizens had already traveled the Oregon Trail to settle, primarily in the Willamette Valley (about 900 in 1843 and another 3,000+ in 1845). The boundary dispute settlement with Great Britain encouraged even more

settlers to make the trek, so that by August 1848, Congress passed the Organic Act, which created the Oregon Territory.

Joseph Lane was installed as the first Governor of the territory and had additional responsibilities as the Superintendent of Indian Affairs. His first duty in Indian Affairs was to attempt a census (find out who the tribes were, where they lived, how many members belonged to each tribe, etc.) so that he could develop an Indian policy. The census project alone was a monumental task when you consider that the Oregon Territory, when it was created, encompassed what is now Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

Before Gov. Lane could get too far with developing policy, Congress acted again. In September 1850, Congress

passed the Oregon Donation Land Act, which promised title to large parcels of land in Oregon to U.S. emigrants. Congress directly threw all hopes of orderly settlement away with the passage of this act. Although individuals had already claimed some land under the temporary land laws, their claims weren't guaranteed to be recognized until the passage of the ODLA.

Under the Oregon Donation Land Act, settlers claimed about 2,500,000 acres of our lands. Many settlers were not opposed to violent eviction or outright

murder of our people if we occupied the best locations. Resistance to this brutality helped many of our tribes gain a reputation of savagery and it became common practice, if not "sport" in some districts (particularly Southern Oregon), to shoot at all native people who came into view.

Congress, though probably not particularly concerned about the situation, made a feeble attempt to repair the error of giving away Indian lands without any treaties ceding those lands to the United States. It passed an act creating the Oregon Superintendency of Indian Affairs. The Office of Superintendent was established and Anson Dart appointed to that position. Congress directed him to get the tribes most directly in the path of settlement (Western Oregon) to sign treaties, agreeing to cede all of their (our) lands and move to the Central Oregon desert, where a permanent reservation would be established for them (us).

These are some of the events and situations leading into the treaty-making period of 1851-1855, which the next article will describe in detail.

