

# Forces of 19<sup>th</sup> century create memories that spur Tribe to today's success

## Book discussion shows changes between then and now, what future may hold

By Diane Rodriguez

Charles Wilkinson and the Siletz Tribal Council continued their book tour with *The People Are Dancing Again* by holding a discussion with Tribal members on Aug. 12 at the Siletz Community Health Clinic.

Wilkinson chose to focus his remarks on events in the 19<sup>th</sup> century "when you had so many forces coming at you and so many things happening." The removal of Tribes to the Coast Reservation needs to be placed in Siletz history, he said, and also in national history.

"This is social engineering of a kind that has hardly ever been seen in the U.S.," he said. "This series of events, taking all Indians in Western Oregon and moving them to this reservation, what a presumptuous thing for the U.S. to think of doing. Tell them to leave everything behind and it'll be fine. Never mind that you've got 20 different language groups, have peoples with similar cultures but different ones. We're going to throw them together and it'll be just fine. And so they just did it."

Wilkinson then shared details about the removal from the Umpqua Reservation in January 1856 and from the temporary Table Rock Reservation, people who walked to the Grand Ronde encampment – 263 miles from Table Rock, most of them barefoot – in February 1856.

He also talked about the removal of Tribes from Northern California and Southern Oregon to Port Orford, Ore., where at one point about 1,700 Indians had been gathered. Many made the trip to the Coast Reservation by sea, but others were forced to march up the coast on what became the Siletz Tribe's Trail of Tears.

This group of ancestors included Tyee John, his men and their families. Tyee John was the last person to surrender his rifle in the Rogue River War, after the Battle of Big Bend in 1856.

"Tyee John was enormously respected by the (U.S.) military for his leadership and military tactics, for his understanding of the rules of war," said Wilkinson. "You could stop fighting and have talks and see if you could have agreements. They knew of Tyee John also as a dangerous man because they knew he didn't want to move north. They punished people with the Trail of Tears march."

Wilkinson also reminded those attending the event that by 1875, 90 percent of Tribal members had died, mostly from European diseases, some during the war and others during removal.

### Heartbreak continues with loss of land

The Rogue River Treaty of 1853 was the "first ratified Indian treaty in the whole American West" said Wilkinson. It established the Table Rock Temporary Reservation.

An executive order signed by President Franklin Pierce in 1855 established the Coast Reservation, a 1.1 million-acre piece of land that ran 105 miles from north to south, 23 miles from east to west on the southern end and 12 miles across on the northern end.

"You Tribal members should realize you accomplished one of the greatest Indian reservations with this one. This is some of the most valuable land in the United States of America," said Wilkinson.

By 1865, agricultural interests in the Willamette Valley were increasing pressure to establish a port at Yaquina Bay. Despite the fact that a number of Indian villages were in the area, Sen. James Nesmith of Oregon said no Tribes were living at Yaquina Bay at the time.

These things helped lead President Andrew Johnson to sign an executive order opening 200,000 acres – about one-fifth of the original reservation – to settlement. This move now is considered to be illegal, however, because only Congress can change Indian treaties. Presidents cannot do this unilaterally.

The taking of land was just beginning. In 1875, about two-thirds of the original reservation – 700,000 acres – was removed.

"A bill was put through by Sen. John Mitchell of Oregon. The state was rich with forests, including Siletz forests, which were sites of the greatest theft of federal public lands in history," said Wilkinson. "After this event, Sen. Mitchell was indicted and convicted in timber fraud cases. He died in jail awaiting appeal."

Although Mitchell entered it in the congressional record as such, Tribes never

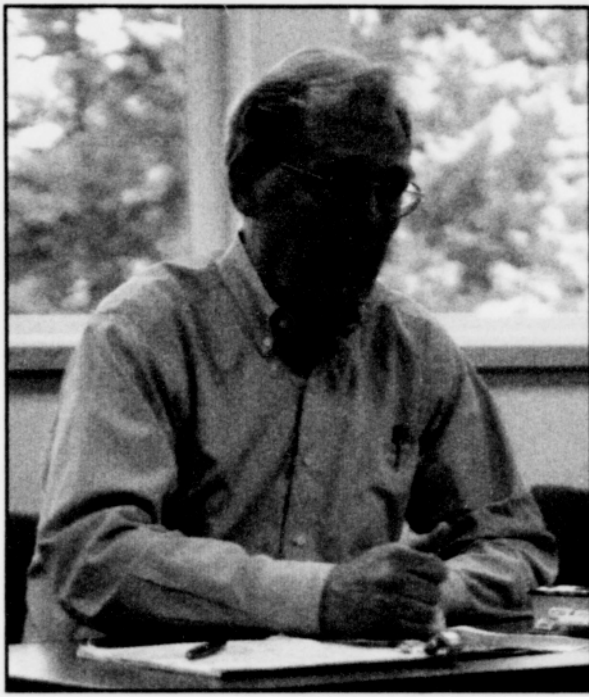


Photo by Diane Rodriguez

Charles Wilkinson at the Siletz Clinic

gave "meaningful, voluntary explicit consent" to give this land away, Wilkinson said, despite pressure from federal officials.

The Allotment Act approved by Congress in 1894 followed congressional policy to make Indians into farmers. Of the 225,300 acres involved, only 43,000 acres were set aside for individual allotments and 3,200 acres for a timber reserve for the Tribe. Then 179,000 acres – 79 percent – was declared "surplus" and opened for non-Native settlement.

Termination in 1954 removed the last of the land from the Siletz Tribe and Tribal members.

"No Tribal members testified in the (congressional) hearings about termination. People thought it was inevitable," said Wilkinson. "Very few people voted for termination in local meetings. There's no evidence people were invited to appear at termination hearings."

### Positives from the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Wilkinson concluded by discussing two positive things for the Tribe.

"You should be really proud of the military capability of your ancestors at the time. The U.S. brought its full military weight upon your people," he said. "At the Battle of Big Bend, the Tribes had the military surrounded. One hundred military reinforcements turned the tide. It's amazing what they did to try to hold onto their homeland."

Wilkinson also praised the village community of the time.

"At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the village system was still operating with full vibrancy. I came to respect this so much. The first two chapters in the book are about the village system. It's such an admirable set of societies – true sustainability, true community closeness and a 10-day Nee-Dash dance."

### Access to legal system an issue, but it's changing

Most of the discussion following Wilkinson's presentation was about the land the Tribe once had.

Tribal member Marietta Cook reminded folks that reservation land wasn't really farm land at first. Families made a run at having successful commercial farms, Wilkinson said, even though state reports indicated this wasn't arable land for farming.

"Allotments didn't have to be for farming," he added. "Tribal members were able to select the best lands along rivers, along tributaries and in meadows."

Bob Scott, husband of Tribal member Lorna Scott and father of Tribal member Joe Scott, asked if there is any record of this loss of land being corrected in the courts.

"A big part of Indian history is the near-total lack of access to attorneys from 1825 through the 1950s, when tribes were being separated from their land," said Wilkinson. "There was no money for attorneys and a lack of understanding of the larger system and how to use it."

In 1972, Wilkinson started working for the Native American Rights Fund, the "first non-profit Indian law firm ever. We received many calls from Indians wanting to get their land back. They were barred by statutes of limitations in pursuing their cases."

Lorna Scott mentioned how things are changing for Tribal members.

"When I was first teaching about 45 years ago, I was teaching about Africa and Tribes seeking independence. Not a single person of their Tribe had a college education," she said. "Now, we have Tribal members who are attorneys, who have degrees in anthropology, linguistics. Our own people, through improving opportunities for education, health, housing ... that the Tribal Council has done for our people, is beginning to bear fruit."

### Taking the long view

Tribal Vice Chairman Bud Lane used an analogy to illustrate the point of land lost and possibly to be reacquired some day.

"It's the moral – if someone steals your bike, they may have your bike for the time being. But morally, though, it's still your bike. We have to hang onto the moral rights to our lands and pass it on. It's our affinity for our lands, they really are ours, even if they were taken by hook or by crook," he said. "In 1855, we had 20 million acres. In 1955, it was all gone. The possibility of a settlement is always out there for me, maybe for our kids or grandkids. We take the long view of things."

## Management opportunities now available at both Tribal RV parks

The Siletz Tribal Business Corporation currently is seeking bids from Tribal members on RFPs for the contract manager positions at the Hee Hee Illahee RV Resort in Salem, Ore., and Logan Road RV Park in Lincoln City, Ore., that will commence Jan. 1, 2012.

All interested parties can contact Stephen Larrabee to get more information on the RFP, which is due by Oct. 31. The complete RFP can be found on the STBC website – stbcorp.net.

Larrabee can be reached by e-mail at slarrabee@stbcorp.net and by phone at 541-994-2142 or toll free at 877-564-7298.

## Landscaping opportunity is now available for Chemawa Station

We currently are looking for bids from Tribal members on an RFP to provide landscaping services at the Chemawa Station property for the 2012 calendar year.

All interested parties can contact Brenda Bremner or Stephen Larrabee to get information on the RFP, which is due Sept. 30. The complete RFP can be found on the STBC website – stbcorp.net

Bremner can be reached by e-mail at brendab@ctsi.nsn.us and by phone at 541-444-8204 or 800-922-1399, ext. 1204. Larrabee can be reached by e-mail at slarrabee@stbcorp.net and by phone at 541-994-2142 or 877-564-7298.