

Robert Lee John – 1938-2011

Robert Lee John, 73, of Salem, Ore., died Sept. 30 in Sublimity, Ore.

He was born Sept. 29, 1938, to Clark and Eva John at Chemawa Indian School in Salem.

He was a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

He attended Lane College in California and married Nora Kinion on June 29, 1957, in Newport, Ore. He worked as a diesel auto mechanic.

He served in the U.S. Army, receiving an honorable discharge as a PFC-E3 at Fort Knox, Ky.

He is survived by his daughters, Julie John and Deanna Rodiger; son, Robert (Pam) John Jr. of Stayton, Ore.; brothers, Leroy John and Ronald John of Salem, Lindsey John of Redmond, Ore., and David John of Lapine, Ore.; sisters, Elizabeth John and Glylene Jones of Siletz, Ore., and

Josephine Gonzales of Salem; four grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

At the request of the family, no service will be held. An online memorial book is available at weddle-funeral.com.

Weddle Funeral Service in Stayton is handling arrangements.

Elouise Cobell – 1945-2011

Elouise Cobell, an enrolled member of Montana's Blackfeet Tribe who led a 16-year landmark legal fight to get the federal government to pay an estimated 500,000 American Indians for mismanaging their trust accounts, died Oct. 16 at Benefis Hospital in Great Falls, Mont.

A great-granddaughter of Mountain Chief, one of the legendary Indian leaders of the West, she had been diagnosed with cancer weeks before her class-action lawsuit was given final approval by a federal district judge in Washington on June 20.

Born on the Blackfeet Reservation on Nov. 5, 1945, with the Indian name Yellow Bird Woman, Cobell was one of eight children.

Her survivors include her husband, Alvin Cobell of Blacktail, Mont.; a son, Turk Cobell and his wife, Bobbie, of Las Vegas; two grandchildren, Olivia, and Gabriella; a brother, Dale Pepion of Browning, Mont.; and three sisters, Julene Kennerly and Karen Powell of Browning and Joy Ketah of Seattle.

In 1996, Cobell and four other American Indians filed a lawsuit against the federal government demanding that the government give American Indians an accounting of billions of dollars it received for oil and gas leases and other uses of individual Indian lands held in trust by the United States.

After a long, tenacious fight, the Obama administration agreed to settle the lawsuit in December 2009, creating a \$3.4 billion fund to, among other things, make payments to individual Indian money account holders. This was the largest class-action settlement with the government in American history.

After finding government records of the Indian accounts inadequate to support an accounting of all items of the Individual Indian Trust, a federal judge declared the Indians could never receive a full accounting of their funds and other trust assets. He then urged the parties to engage in direct negotiations at the highest levels, negotiations that led to the historic settlement.

The settlement was ratified by both Houses of Congress and approved by the president of the United States. It then went back to the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia for final approval and judgment, which was entered on Aug. 4, 2011.

Cobell served as lead plaintiff in the lawsuit and tirelessly led the effort from Browning, quietly raising millions of dollars for expert witnesses and other major costs associated with the litigation. In part, Cobell used funds from her own 1997 Genius Grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Fellows program to fund the cost of the lawsuit.

Later she spent long arduous hours lobbying members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate to support the compromise settlement and enact appropriate legislation to make it the law of the land. Her efforts ultimately led to the enactment of Public Law 111-291.

Elouise's roots were solidly in the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, where she was born and raised. Early on, she brought accounting and business expertise to work for the Tribal governing body where she observed firsthand the federal government's failure to uphold its trust responsibility owing to the Indians who called for the protection of their land assets and to secure appropriate compensation when these valuable land assets were utilized by other parties.

It was this knowledge that influenced Elouise to assume the leadership role she took on in an effort to correct these wrongdoings and bring an acceptable level of justice to Indian people.

Her family shared the many sacrifices made by Elouise in pursuit of justice for Indian Country. The entire family also should share our collective gratitude for her undeniable determination to correct the historical financial wrongs that were inflicted on many American Indians.



In 2005, she received a Cultural Freedom Fellowship from the Lannan Foundation, an award that cited her persistence in bringing to light the "more than a century of government malfeasance and dishonesty" with the government-run Indian trust.

Two years later, she was one of 10 people given an AARP Impact Award (for making the world a better place) and in 2004 the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development presented her with the Jay Silverheels Achievement

Award. This year, she was named Montana Citizen of the Year by the Montana Trial Lawyers Association.

In Mexico City, she received the 2002 International Women's Forum award for Women Who Make a Difference.

Cobell was one of the founders of the Native American Bank, based in Denver. Her professional and civic experience and expertise includes serving as co-chair of Native American Bank NA and as a former trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian.

She served for 13 years as treasurer for the Blackfeet Indian Nation in Montana. She also served as executive director of the Native American Community Development Corp, the bank's nonprofit affiliate.

With her husband, she operated a working ranch that produced cattle and crops. She was active in Montana agriculture and environmental issues, founding the first land trust in Indian Country. She also served as a trustee for the Nature Conservancy of Montana.

She graduated from Great Falls Business College and attended Montana State University, from which she later received an honorary doctorate. She also has honorary degrees from Rollins College and Dartmouth College.

In memory of Elouise Cobell

By Forrest J. Gerard, former Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs and member of the Blackfeet Tribe

The Cobell family, the Blackfeet Tribe and Indian Country have lost a tireless and intelligent leader whose perseverance contributed to the \$3.4 billion congressional settlement of Cobell v. Salazar. Her non-monetary contributions are immeasurable.

When Cobell v. Salazar reached the political congressional arena, Elouise adroitly recognized the political axiom that "politics is the art of compromise." And while many affected Indians considered the so-called settlement as a mere pittance for the government's mismanagement of their land asset, Elouise recognized that if the affected Indians were to receive any settlement at all, it would be necessary to accept a compromise award.

She displayed mature leadership under these circumstances and fought hard for the compromise settlement. She fully understood that the compromise settlement would be controversial. She soldiered on as a leader, however, and traveled extensively in Indian Country to meet with the affected parties to try and help them understand why the actual settlement did not reach the level of what they believed would be fair.

Need caregiver information?

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