

Earliest appearance of the Siletz family name, DePoe

By Drew Viles

Recently, Lane Community College granted me a sabbatical award. A part of my sabbatical research focused on the Siletz family name, DePoe.

I’m grateful for support of the Siletz Tribe in pursuing this project. Bud Lane, Siletz Tribal Council vice chairman and Siletz language and traditional arts instructor, wrote a letter of support for my sabbatical application and Robert Kentta, Siletz Tribal Council treasurer and Siletz Tribal cultural resources director, reviewed a draft of this article and made many valuable corrections and suggestions. Thank you, Bud. And thank you, Robert.

Here is what I have been able to discover about the following topic: The earliest appearance of the Siletz family name DePoe in the written record.

The name “Depot Charley” occurs in print in the year 1868 as part of a federal accounting of Indian Service payments: “Depot Charley, Indian” was paid \$12.50 for “rafting lumber from saw mill to Siletz Agency, distance 8 miles from November 12 to November 16, 1866.”¹

Sometime between his arrival to the Coast Reservation in the summer of 1856² and this 1866 financial report, the Siletz leader Ki-sa – son of Che-wes-cla – had come to be known by the English name “Depot Charley.”

A question arises: “How and why did Ki-sa come to be called ‘Depot Charley.’” A 1933 newspaper article written by the famous U.S. author and newspaper publisher Joseph Medill Patterson and based upon a report given him by Robert DePoe (son of Charles DePoe) provided the first recorded answer: “Depot Charley” came from Ki-sa’s association with the railroad depot in Toledo, Oregon.³

The next published account theorized that the DePoe family name originated after the marriage of Ki-sa’s mother to a French fur-trapper or trader.⁴

Two schools of thought have agreed that Ki-sa’s English name derives from “Depot Slough,” a body of water near present-day Toledo, Oregon. However, one group stated (in the early 1940s) that the area adjacent to Depot Slough provided Ki-sa with a favorite place to hunt⁵ while the other expressed certainty (in the late 1950s) that Ki-sa’s work at or near Depot Slough (after the fashion of his employment chronicled in the 1868 document quoted above) provided him this geographic namesake.⁶

This number of conflicting accounts counsels caution. It would be wise for me to analyze more thoroughly the history of this name so as to discover more fully its features and its characteristic before offering an opinion concerning these competing claims and histories of the name’s origin.⁷

The first use of Ki-sa’s English name in print testifies to this leader’s adjustment to life on the Coast Reservation far from his ancestral home on the north side of the Rogue River at its mouth. This report also makes it obvious that “Depot Charley” was an industrious person willing to do hazardous work. He was also willing and able to successfully manage the demands of government employment.

On first glance, the name’s next appearance in print, which appeared on the occasion of Ki-sa’s incarceration in the Corvallis, Oregon jail, seems to call into question his successful adjustment to the requirements of early reservation life. The following 1872 report in a Willamette Valley newspaper sets forth the details:

“Too-too-tena Jack’s sister and her Indian, ‘Depot Charlie,’ are in the Corvallis jail for threatening to kill Thomas Boyle. The trouble grew out of the killing of Too-too-tena Jack at Yaquina.”⁸

Historical context helps to unlock the nuances present in this short account.

On 5 July 1872, Too-too-tena Jack, a Siletz headman, had been the victim of a

homicide committed by Thomas Boyle in Newport.⁹ Boyle, upon the direction of his English-speaking neighbors, quickly fled from Newport to Corvallis. The idea was to avoid an “Indian outbreak” on the Oregon coast by removing the perpetrator of an outrageous homicide from the vicinity.¹⁰

A month later, “Too-too-tena Jack’s sister¹¹ and her Indian, Depot Charley,” having trekked across the Coast range, arrived in the Willamette Valley and were ready to confront and kill Thomas Boyle in his place of temporary sanctuary.

It is well worth noting that while the political and juridical powers of the indigenous peoples had suffered severe curtailment in decades immediately preceding Minnie and Charles DePoe’s 1872 incarceration in Corvallis, the new colonizing order had not extinguished the cultural impulse to bring malefactors to account for their crimes.

In 1868, for example, Siletz leaders advanced a treaty stipulation in the case of Frank, a Siletz man, murdered by a white settler. According to Siletz Indian Agent Ben Simpson, “When I found the Indians very much excited both in consequences of the Indian that had been killed and in seeing so many white men around, I proceeded immediately to explain the whole affair to them. I told them that the man [George W. Ballard] who had killed the Indian, Frank, was in the skukum house in Corvallis and that he would remain there until he could be tried by the law. They seemed to think that I should have killed him at once, as General Palmer told them, when he made the treaty with them, that after that time, if a white man killed an Indian, that he would be killed immediately.”¹²

It’s possible – even likely – that the unnamed leaders who advocated for the prosecution of Frank’s murderer included Charles DePoe, who four years later sat in a Corvallis jail for his continued advocacy of this same treaty provision: punishment of white citizens who killed Siletz people.

While the murder of Too-too-tena Jack was left unprosecuted, Boyle was arrested a few weeks after the murder and jailed on the charge of selling whisky to Siletz Indians. “Boyle was taken to Portland, indicted, arraigned and bound over, on the whisky charge, upon the testimony of this same brother-in-law of Jack, and a sister of the deceased.”¹³

Although Boyle, freed from jail on a \$1,000 bond posted by his supporters¹⁴ was

eventually found not guilty of the whiskey charges by a Portland jury,¹⁵ the dogged determination of the victim’s Siletz-based sister and brother-in-law effected a degree of justice in the form of Boyle’s temporary incarceration—not to mention the time and expense Boyle spent mounting a defense to the criminal charges.¹⁶

The view of Ki-sa, once an employee in the pay of the Indian Service at Siletz, sitting in a Corvallis jail cell points to the person that “Depot Charley” had become. “Depot Charley” – despite a move to a reservation – had remained faithful to his duties and responsibilities as a leader of his people. His ability to serve the agents of the new colonizing order had not extinguished his abilities to fulfill obligations as a leader of his people and protector of their treaty rights.

“Depot Charley” remained a leader of his people but in totally opposite ways. The record of his service as an employee of the Indian Service indicates his ability and willingness to adjust to the changing requirements of reservation life, thus providing a model for others at Siletz.

The record of his arrest clearly indicates his willingness and ability to carry on with indigenous cultural practices. Both accounts indicate that fearlessness formed part of Depot Charley’s character. Also, Depot Charley can be seen, obviously, as a person of power and initiative.

In addition, comparison of these two early mentions of “Depot Charley” in print reveals an interesting linguistic pattern: “Depot Charley, Indian” (1868) closely mirrors the phrase “her Indian, ‘Depot Charley’” (1872). “Indian” appears either directly after or directly before the name “Depot Charley” in these two early accounts.

This might be said to be a coincidence. And yet, “her Indian” seems an odd turn of phrase – and it appears obviously contrived. Someone obviously had a choice here and their choice was to say it in this particular way: “her Indian, ‘Depot Charley.’” This case opposes the financial report in which the rule was to label all indigenous persons as “Indians” while leaving the racial identity of others unstated.

12 [Fagan, p. 400, p. 484].

13 [Ibid, p. 402.]

14 [Seattle Archives]

15 [Seattle Archives].

16 Two general historical lessons may be observed at this point: First, indigenous cultural practices have long persisted at Siletz even during times of catastrophe. Second, white settlers have long acted in ways that thwarted the claims for justice and equality put forward by Siletz people. Because many people witnessed firsthand Thomas Boyle taking Too-too-tena Jack’s life (by shooting him at close range with a pistol) and because Thomas Boyle’s presence in Corvallis resulted from the decision of settlers in Newport to safeguard the larger community by temporarily exiling Boyle, it is impossible to conclude that the journalist was not aware of the killer’s identity. The question arises: If the newspaper reporter knew that Thomas Boyle had killed Too-too-tena Jack, why not say it? The journalistic decision to expunge the killer’s name from the report reflected the larger settler strategy of exonerating white men of crimes committed against Indians. In the larger view, this strategy worked to shield Boyle from criminal prosecution; on a smaller scale, the strategy prompted the journalist to leave the identity of Too-too-tena Jack’s murderer unstated

1 [House of Representatives, 40th Congress, 2nd Session. Executive Document No. 71. Disbursement for Indian Service. Letter from the Secretary of Interior, Transmitting a Tabular Statement of Disbursements for Contingent and Miscellaneous Purposes for the Indian Service for the Year Ending June 30, 1867. January 6, 1868—Referred to the Committee on Appropriations and ordered to be printed.]

2 Youst, Lionel and William Seaburg. *Coquille Thompson, Athabaskan Witness: A Cultural Biography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002, p. 49.

3 Patterson, Joseph. “Some Lincoln County History.” Yaquina Bay News. 4 May 1933. Newport, Oregon.

4 This following excerpt was written by Ben Hur Lampman and is said to have appeared originally in *The Oregonian* on 9 September 1936. My source is the article Lampman published under the name “How Depoe Bay Was Named” as included in *Pioneer History of North Lincoln County*, Oregon. Volume 1. Edited by Earl M. Nelson (The Telephone Register Publishing Company: McMinnville, Oregon. 1951): “... DePoe was a Siletz Indian, of the tribe so named, and though it is said that he was a full-blood, the name would indicate French admixture—the blood, perhaps, of some adventurous trapper or trader who took him a wife in the wilderness” (149).

5 Both Coquille Thompson and Wolverton Orton, according to handwritten notes of J.P. Harrington, adhered to this view. John Peabody Harrington papers: Southwest Oregon Athapaskan, 1942.

(Reels 26 and 27). Accession #1976-95. National Anthropological Archives. Smithsonian Institution. <http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=harrington%2C+john+p.+1942+reel+27>

6 A picture of an historical marker “Placed by Centennial Comm. & Lincoln Co. Hist. Soc. 1959” appears on page 288 of book edited by Dorothy and Jack Sutton named *Indian Wars of the Rogue River* (published by the Josephine County Historical Society, Grants Pass, Oregon: 1969) and reads as follows: “Siletz Depot U.S. Army. Supplies into Siletz Indian Agency landed here from ocean-going ships thence overland. Waterway became known to all as ‘Depot Slough’ as shown on maps. A young Indian employed here as ‘Depot Charlie.’ He later was allotted land not far west from Cape Foulweather where he settled with his family. Thus ‘Depoe Bay.’” The author remembers reading this historical marker situated on the west side of the highway from Toledo to Siletz himself in the 1970s. It has since been removed.

7 Such a discussion of past answers would be, of course, only the first step in a longer process of offering my own answer to the question. It seems wise for me at this point to both be patient and glad – glad that we can say with certainty that the name originated in the 10 years before 1866! Also, I am glad to be able to identify with certainty, too, that the question, “Why and how did Depot Charley get that name,” is the sort of question that has been consistently asked and pondered for over eight decades without a settled answer appearing in print.

8 “Pacific Coast News, “The Albany Register,” 2 August 1872, p. 3

9 *History of Benton County, Oregon; Including Its Geology, Topography, Soil and Productions, Together With the Early History of the Pacific Coast, Compiled From the Most Authentic Sources; A Full Political History, Comprising a Tabular Statement of Officers of the County Since Its Formation; Incidents of Pioneer Life and Biographical Sketches of Early and Prominent Citizens; Also Containing the History of the Cities, Fagan, David. History of Benton County, Oregon: Including Its Geology, Topography, Soil and Productions, Together with the Early History of the Pacific Coast, Compiled from the Towns, Churches, Schools, Secret Societies, Etc. A.G. Walling: Portland, 1885, p. 401.]*

10 [Ibid.

11 While the newspaper report failed to mention the name of Too-too-tena Jack’s sister, Robert Kentta, Siletz Tribal cultural resources director, has informed me that this person’s name is Minnie.