



A Story of Siletz

By George Thompson (submitted by the Siletz Tribal Arts & Heritage Society; reprinted from the March 1992 issue of Siletz News)

The following is the text of a manuscript dated Feb. 5, 1950, by George Thompson. It deals with the history of the Siletz Reservation, which was part of Benton County until 1893, and reads as follows:

"About the year 1855 there was a great unrest throughout a section of Southern Oregon where a number of Indian tribes were living. Among the tribes were the Chetco, To-To-To-neys, Coquelles, and other Rogue River bands. All of these Indians were going to be moved to a new home, and after a brief war among the Indians and white settlers and soldiers of the United States, a man by the name of Joel Palmer made treaties with various bands of Indians.

In these treaties the Government agreed to give all the Indians land, a home made of lumber, horses, cattle, and machinery if they would move to the new location. Some Indians agreed, but many did not want to go, because they knew no other lands except their home where there was plenty of game and fish and acorns. When some Indians refused to go the soldiers were summoned and they were forced and in many instances killed in front of their loved ones to show that the Government meant business. What was the poor Indian to do, but go.

In the meantime the Congress of the United States failed to ratify these treaties made by Mr. Palmer, so now, today, the Indians who were forced to move by those

treaties, have been allowed a recovery of 16 and one half million dollars for the wrongs done to them by the unratified treaties of Joel Palmer, agent of the U.S. Government.

I am a Coquelle Indian, my father is a Coquelle, and his father was one of the original signers of the treaty. He had to sign because he was a tribal chief. He was named after our first president, Washington, only the Indians called it Wah-sheeton-ya. So, at my father's passing I shall inherit the honor of being the Chief of the Coquelles, the title held at present by my father. I will tell you now the story of how my grandfather was moved up here to become one of the first Indians at Siletz about 95 years ago. I repeat his words:

"It was summer time, we were all herded down to the edge of the ocean at Port Orford, Oregon by the soldiers of the Government. Some people were crying, others were just quiet – nobody talked. Each person was allowed only one package or pack, generally made up in a basket. Naturally the Indians took mostly something to eat, as they did not know where they were going. The only clothes were what they wore; later on the Government did give us a blanket a piece. We left behind many of the fine canoes, home, tanned hides and other belongings found in an Indian colony at the time.

We were all heart sick, someone said they were going to shoot us and throw us into the ocean – but my father would speak to them and assure them that the whites meant no harm. We were to camp at Port Orford for one night and during that night many Indians disappeared and were never heard of again.

The next day about eleven o'clock we saw a large boat with many sails on it coming straight in from the ocean. It came to within 300 yards from the shore and anchored. Boats were let down and came ashore. Then began the task of loading all the Indians on this ship that had just landed.

After several hours the Captain gave the word that the loading was completed and we were ready to sail. It was our first night at sea; many of the Indians got seasick. Some tried even to jump overboard and swim back. It was an awful night, many were sick and could not eat. As day broke we could not see land then all were afraid, we begged the Captain to turn around, and the sea was getting angry also and the boat seemed to almost capsize with each swell. This went on for five days and nights.

Then one morning when daylight came we could see the land – all were happy again. The water was smooth – we did not know it then but we were in the Columbia River. We sailed up the river to Portland, Oregon, only few large buildings at that time. Here we got off the boat, we were fed and transported to Dayton, Oregon for our last part of the trip.

From Dayton we traveled by ox-team to Grande Ronde, Oregon. Some of the people stayed at Grande Ronde and the rest of us went up to Salmon River. The

Government had provided stations along the way so food was quite plentiful and we could always get soldiers' hardtack. When we reached Salmon River it must have been about September because there was an abundance of fish in the river, someone killed a deer, while others got mussels from the rocks.

Winter was beginning to draw near and my father was anxious to get shelter for his people. When he inquired about the houses for his people the Captain only laughed and said, "You Indians don't know how to live in houses, what do you want with a house?" This made my father angry and he gathered his followers and started south, hoping that maybe we could find some place to build a long house so we could withstand the rain and cold wind.

Then came the measles. It killed many of our people. When spring came we had only a handful of people left, 16 in all. We started up the Siletz River (at that time it was Se-la-Gees) and finally stopped at Euchre Creek and built a longhouse and other small huts so that another winter would find us prepared. There was plenty of camas, fish and deer, and my father said, "we will stay here."

In the meantime the Government was opening up more territory west of Fort Hoskins and it wasn't but a little while

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Memorial Day
Virtual Community Sharing Night

May 25, 2022 at 6 pm via Zoom

Sponsored by the Education and Culture Departments
Contact Nick Viles (nickv@ctsi.nsn.us) or Buddy Lane (buddyl@ctsi.nsn.us) to sign up

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