

DEPRESSION OF SPIRITS

BY: Thomas Doty

At the mouth of the Siletz River there are islands in the bay, stumps and logs carved by harsh coastal weather. From a distance, the islands rise through fog and hauntingly resemble Old Time Indian burials. This sight is a grim reminder of thousands of Native Americans who were shipped and force-marched hundreds of miles to a skeletal cluster of shacks and shelters that comprised the Siletz Indian Reservation of 1856. Government troops executed those who refused to leave their homelands. They were often shot in front of friends and relations to graphically illustrate that the U.S. Government was serious about relocating Native Americans. Many died along the way of various diseases, and many more died during the first winter from starvation, exposure and sadness. Ten years later, the dying had hardly slowed. In the words of a Shasta elder: "Many of my people have died since they came here. Many are still dying. there will soon be none left of us. We are sick, at heart."

We are sad when we look on the graves of our families."

In 1856 the Siletz Reservation was nothing more than a strip of coastal green on a map of the Oregon Territory. Along with the nearby Grand Ronde Reservation, it contained nearly a million and a half acres set aside for the resettlement of Native Americans, land which at the time was considered unsuitable for White settlers. But that didn't last long. As White's began to move into the region, the reservation was chiseled down bit by bit through a combination of land policies and acts of Congress. Then in 1954, the reservation was officially terminated.

Within a year of the reservation's formation, Indian life became a melting pot of diverse cultures. Kalapuyans were moved in from the Willamette Valley, Shatas from northern California, Tekelmas from the Rogue Valley, Umpquas and Cow Creeks from the Umpqua Valley, and a variety of tribal peoples from coastal locations: Tututnis, Chetcos, Tillamooks, Coquilles, Chinooks, Siuslaws, Coos, Lower Umpquas... and a scattering of the original inhabitants: Yaquinas, Alseas and Siletz. Leaving their homes of thousands of years behind them, with only a basket of food each and the clothes on their backs, and often, as in the case of the Tekelmas, leaving behind the tragedies of war, the trip to the reservation was long and sad. Captain E.O.C. Ord wrote of the removal, "It almost makes me shed tears to listen to their wailing as they totter along."

At the reservation, housing was nearly nonexistent. The new arrivals became sick from food unsuited to their usual diets. Many were fed flour normally sold as cattle feed, swept from the floors of Willamette Valley mills. Nightly bed checks kept track of who was where. Forts were built along the boundaries to prevent escapes. Family members were located in different areas. Indeed, early reservation life resembled life in a prison, rather than in a community. Within a few years, a alarming number of Indians, particularly those from southern Oregon and northern California, had died from a "depression of spirits."

Yet as the coastal weather kept shaping the islands at the mouth of the Siletz River, so did a small group of Indians, under the most extreme repression of their cultures, begin to reshape the rich traditions of their ancestors.

NATIVE AMERICAN FIREFIGHTERS

WASHINGTON -- The Bureau of Indian Affairs mobilized 280 Native American firefighting crews to battle 43 fires on Indian lands in Oregon and California, where lightning set raging blazes which started the end of August through September.

The BIA forestry division in Washington reported that fires on Indian lands, primarily on the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon, burned a total of 5,100 acres.

Warm Springs lost 1,000 acres of timber, according to BIA estimates. The 20-man crews consisted of BIA and tribal Firefighters as well as Indian volunteers. The fires they fought, both on and off Indian lands covered 636,000 acres.

"The Native American firefighters did an outstanding job," said Marshall Cutsforth, the BIA's division chief for forestry. "They displayed bravery, professionalism and an exceptional safety record."

The Interior Department estimates that lightning strikes totaled between 15-20,000 per day. The weather situation was compounded by two prior years of drought in the fire areas of southwest Oregon and California.

Decreasing winds and cooler temperatures aided firefighters in containing blazes.

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

By: Walt Klamath

The week of October 11th through October 17th was "Fire Prevention Week". This seems like a good time to bring up some observations this writer has witnessed.

Please put your mailbox numbers where they can be seen easily from BOTH directions. Most numbers are on the mail-delivery side only. In case of lanes where several mailboxes are together, put 4" letters on TOP of your mailbox. Follow through by putting the same kind of numbers on your house. This will save precious minutes in an emergency, especially in the rural areas. The Fire Department is already working against extreme odds, so it is very important that the address is clear and visible without hectic searching. The time factor cannot be stressed too much.

If anyone suspects a fire or any other emergency situation, no matter how small, dial **emergency #911**. The Fire Dept. would rather be called early for a possible emergency than wait for a larger development. The Fire Department also answers emergency medical calls. They have trained personnel called E.M.T.'s (Emergency Medical Technicians). The fact is that on most emergency calls the E.M.T.'s will be the first to arrive on the scene.

If "you" should have to dial #911 to report an emergency, after you've given the operator your address DON'T hang up the phone.....leave it hanging. Should there be a situation where you can't talk, or continue talking, the emergency central has a system that will lock in your call so that it can be traced to its origin. This procedure takes about five minutes or so to complete.