

treaties were negotiated until all land in the valley belonged to the settlers or the government.

Plans were made to have the Indians go to eastern Oregon originally, but the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, Joel Palmer, thought the Willamette Valley Indians could not survive there. Because the area west of the coast range was considered totally useless for settlers, he suggested, and Congress created, the Coastal Indian Reservation in 1855.

Soon after it's creation, and before the Indians could be resettled, the Rogue Indian Wars broke out in southern Oregon.

When a treaty was negotiated with the tribes involved, they agreed to resettle on the Coastal Reservation.

Resettlement began in 1856, and southern Indians - the Rogue, the Sixes, the Shasta, and other tribes - were moved north to the Siletz Agency, 9 miles upriver from the ocean.

Reservation life was not easy. There was never enough food or shelter. Housing different native cultures together led to outbreaks of violence. The southern Indians were not ready for the cold and wet climate of the central coast, and many of them died during the first winter on the reservation.

The reservation extended from Cape Lookout in Tillamook County to near the mouth of the Umpqua River on the south.

At the reservation in Siletz, control of the Indians rested with the Indian Agent. His staff included a farmer, doctor, miller and teachers, and the government presented a program of "civilization" to teach the Indians, who were to learn English, become farmers, and become Christians. These goals persisted in the 20th century.

The Indians worked at clearing brush in the area, and fenced the areas where they planted their crops. In 1864, the men split more than 24,000 fence rails to enclose the reservation fields. They also built fences around 30 acres of family gardens. By 1865, they had developed Chasta Scoton Farm, Upper Farm and lower Farm.

The federal school on Government Hill at the Siletz Agency emphasized the English language as well as manual labor, with girls learning cooking, sewing and housework, and boys studying blacksmithing, carpentry and farming. Some of the students went on to the Chemawa Indian School, established near Salem in the 1880's.

Buildings on Government Hill included a superintendent's house, school, store, cannery, council hall, and shops, several of them built during the Depression. Some buildings remained into the 1950's, abandoned and covered with blackberries.

In the early 1860's, Royal A. Bensell was a soldier on the Coastal Reservation. His diary, "All Quiet on the Yamhill," gives a first-hand view of what life was like for the Indians on the reservation.

"There is on the Agency, including sub Agencies Alsea and Hill's and Meckerson's, 800 Indians, great and small," Bensell wrote. "The Siletz agent plants about 75 acres of wheat and 5 of potatoes. From this meagre amount of poorly tilled land, the Agent realizes about 600 bushels wheat and 200 bushels potatoes. This produce is supposed to supply all demands for subsistence. Meat, if they receive any, is obtained by hunting. Fish are plenty in the spring only...Not a single improvement of any kind can we find to illustrate energy or interest in the Indian welfare. A flowering mill, built several years ago stands unkempt, molding, and moss covered...."

"The whole affair speaks of neglect," he continued. "Poor Indians, this is your reward for trusting the 'Boston man'."

By 1866, however, even the relative security of the reservation for the Indian was coming to an end. In that year, much of the land around Yaquina Bay was opened for white settlement.

The Whole World is My Oyster: the Opening of Yaquina Bay

Sailing vessels were coming into Yaquina Bay by the 1850's to supply the Coastal Reservation.

The supplies were unloaded at Depot Slough, 14 miles upriver, and were packed the rest of the way to the reservation on the back of an Indian or a pack animal.

In the late 1850's and the 1860's, a trade developed in the harvesting of the native Yaquina Bay oyster. One oyster bed, near the aptly named Oysterville, was a square mile long. It's oysters grew so close together that they did not get very big, and were noted for their superior taste.

In 1864, Ludlow and Company of San Francisco sent a ship with Richard Hillyer as captain into Yaquina Bay to harvest these oysters, and soon a ship belonging to J.J. Winant of San Francisco arrived to join in the oyster harvest. Winant had taken the precaution of signing an agreement with the government to harvest a specific amount of oysters, while Ludlow and Co. had relied on the idea that as an American company, it had the right to take fish from American waters, and refused to sign any lease.

As a result of this argument, federal troops arrested the oyster fishermen and ordered Ludlow's crew off the reservation. In his diary, R.A. Bensell wrote:

"I visit Capt. Hillyer and also those in his employ, explain my orders, and forbid further shipment of oysters. Was treated very gentlemanly, even kindly. Should they persist, I am authorized to use force and arrest Captain Hillyer...Ate a hearty sailor's dinner aboard the Doyle. I learned this evening it was the intention of Hillyer's employees to drug my detachment and commence loading in the morning. I think they will miss that...."

When Hillyer loaded oysters the next morning, Bensell placed him under arrest. A lawsuit was filed by Ludlow and Co, against the federal government and Bensell for arresting Hillyer, but the courts settled in the Indian agent's favor, saying that if the government had the right to set up the reservation, it had the right to keep people from taking it's resources.

As Winant had the lease, he was able to take the oysters. But this whole affair was made moot by the opening of the Yaquina Strip in 1866.

Homes had been built on Yaquina Bay before 1866. An agent for Winant and Company, Solomon Dodge, had established the settlement of Oysterville in about 1863. Bensell describes it in these words:

"Oysterville is built on the steep side of a very high bluff, indeed it seems to be clinging to the mountain side. A very narrow trail leading from house to house. The shore is lined with floats and boats, and these floats are crowded with Squaws, busy 'culling'."

The early white settlers in the region had high hopes for Yaquina Bay, and believed it would rival San Francisco. Because of this belief and the pressure that came from it, a 20 mile strip of the reservation was finally opened to settlement by order of Congress in 1866. On that day, Bensell, George R. Megginson, and Josiah Copeland made the first claim on Yaquina Bay, at Depot Slough, where they planned to build a sawmill. The settlement of Yaquina Bay area had begun.