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It also piqued interest in area bookstores, who wanted to make local history more accessible. Ratty said Karen Emmerling, owner of Beach Books in Seaside, “planted the seed” for “Broken Arrow.”

Emmerling said customers at Beach Books were showing an increasing interest in the Tillamook Rock Lighthouse and the early Native American tribes of Oregon’s coast region. She said she felt there wasn’t a reliable source for information from a local perspective.

“These were suggested topics that we felt, as a bookstore, there was a need for and an interest in,” Emmerling said. “Brian has taken those on and done a great job with creating these two books, which have been very beneficial for us to have.”

Emmerling has carried Ratty’s books in her store since at least 2014, and said the relationship between local authors and local booksellers is important to preserve history.

“I think it’s important that (authors) have an outlet where their works can be seen by a larger audience,” Emmerling said. “There is definitely an interest from tourists in books that are written either about the local area or by local authors.”

Ratty also said that part of a local author’s job is to write books that can educate and interest tourists and locals who are curious about the roots of their community.

“Booksellers wanted to do the same thing (as “The Tillamook Rock Lighthouse”) with local Indian tribes,” Ratty said, adding that the Native American names of Oregon’s geographical regions and landmarks often spark curiosity in both tourists and locals. “They wanted to know, ‘where do these Indians come from and where are they now?’”

Answering these questions posed unique challenges to Ratty, and conducting research during a pandemic didn’t help. Because in-person interviews and physical copies of documentation were hard to come by, Ratty needed to vet other sources. He turned to the internet and a few rare books to fill in the gaps.

“My golly, you couldn’t go to a library, you couldn’t go to a museum, you could hardly get any face-to-face with any experts,” Ratty said. “My wife and I really did enjoy writing it, but it was awfully hard to (talk to) anyone. ... What you read on the internet, that doesn’t make it right. An out-of-date book doesn’t make it right. But it’s better than most.”

He put an emphasis on the history, myths and legends of the Native American tribes,

wanting to focus on taking a look into their culture and how they told their own stories.

“It was fun to research and we wanted to write a book ... my goal was to keep the story moving,” Ratty said. “But really it’s a story of many voices. ... I knew that everything was not 100% right or wrong, it is full of myths and legends.”

One of those legends was the Thunderbird, an important symbol to Native American tribes along Oregon’s North Coast, Ratty said.

He worked with artist Douglas Zilke, based out of British Columbia, to create the cover art for “Broken Arrow,” a Thunderbird and whale symbol. Though Zilke isn’t Native American himself, he specializes in Native American art. Ratty said the title for “Broken Arrow” came from a movie he watched as a child.

“I remember as a kid seeing a movie where they had a fictional tribe, and the movie was called ‘Broken Arrows,’” Ratty said. “Our government uses ‘broken arrow’ as a term for nuclear activity and chaos. To Indians, ‘broken arrow’ means conflict and distrust.”

Ratty said he has seen the history of local tribes gain a lot of respect, both in the importance of their culture

and the integration of Native American tribes and white settlers. He noted that the tribes’ skills in canoe making, frontier justice and dance can still be seen in traces of Astoria and other coastal

communities.

“I think respect is more important than anything,” Ratty said. “The Indians were like a lost culture. They have a big place in our history. ... Long before the white man came, they had a vibrant culture. Not all of it good, but not all of it bad. ... If we forget our history, we are destined to repeat it.”

Emmerling believes understanding these first people can help coastal communities better understand themselves.

“(“Broken Arrow”) has just an important understanding of the indigenous people that lived in our community before us,” Emmerling said. “I’m happy that we have had someone who has that passion for history and that ability to do the research and write the books so that those stories can be carried on.”

Ratty said the first printing of “Broken Arrow” was the first of his books to sell out in two weeks. The second printing of “Broken Arrow” came in late August and is available at local bookstores from Ilwaco, Washington, down to Tillamook.

“I’m surprised at how well it’s doing,” Ratty said. “It’s going to be around here for a while.”

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Brian Ratty,
author of ‘Broken Arrow’



Library of Congress

A photo taken in 1901 of a display of Northwest coast Native American artifacts.