

Chiloquin's flame claims Klamath land

by Stephen Most

[Stephen Most, a playwright, writing instructor and long-time student of Native American cultures, is an associate editor of PNS who writes frequently on Indian affairs. He is the author of a soon-to-be-produced play on the Indian Modoc wars.]

CHILOQUIN, OREGON (PNS) — On a hilltop above Chiloquin, Oregon, Edison Chiloquin, grandson of a Klamath chief, threw hay, a pinecone and willowsticks into a firepit and set them ablaze.

From his pouch he sprinkled a mixture of kinni-kinnick (Indian tobacco), berries and seeds into the fire. To participants in the ceremony he said the fire was sacred and will keep burning until the land of his grandfather's people is restored to them.

Edison Chiloquin is the only Klamath to refuse payment for tribal territory liquidated since the 1954 Termination Act. A check for \$108,000 waits for him in the U.S. National Bank of Portland; Chiloquin leaves it there.

"To me the land is sacred, the money can't replace it," he explained.

Of the 1.3 million acres acknowledged as Klamath country by an 1864 treaty signed by his grandfather, Chief Tselakin, Chiloquin wants a 640-acre parcel "put back in the status of the original treaty lands to be recognized as Klamath Indian land for all time to come."

That parcel, known as the Arrowhead, is bounded by a three-and-a-half mile bend of the Sprague River and represents what was once the center of the Plaikni (Klamath) Nation. It was the site of his grandfather's village, Ktai-Tupaksi (Standing Rock).

Told of the perpetual fire there, Robert Mezger, forestry management expert for the U.S. National Bank, remarked, "They'll have a long time to wait."

AN IDEAL FOREST

Chiloquin, 52, has already waited a long time. The Termination Act gave all Klamaths listed on tribal rolls before 1954 the choice of individually selling their claim to part of the reservation or retaining land under a trust arrangement.

Twenty-two percent of the Klamaths eligible chose land instead of cash; Chief Tselakin's grandson was among them. When U.S. National became trustee over the remaining tribal lands fifteen years ago it announced plans to develop an "ideal forest over a thirty year period," eventually yielding as much as 40-million board feet annually.

The shareholders in this multimillion dollar estate had no say in what the bank did with Klamath land since the trustees, Mezger maintained, "have to take responsibility for what happens." While the bank made \$92,000 a year for managing the ponderosa forest, the trust's beneficiaries received less than \$1,000 a year each.

Meanwhile the federal termination money was having a devastating impact on the Klamath community. Per capita payments of \$43,000 to the 78 percent of the tribe which had sold its claims created bitter resentments between those born before 1954 and their younger brothers and sisters, who received nothing.

Intoxicated by the windfall, young Klamaths dropped out of school and left home. Wheeler-dealers rushed to Chiloquin to sell refrigerators to people whose homes lacked electricity; luxury cars and snowmobiles to a people as unaccustomed to saving money as to storing food.

While some Klamaths squandered vast sums, others, receiving no payments, were unable to make a living. The murder rate among Klamaths shot upward. Sudden affluence proved as destructive to Indian lives as infected blankets had a century ago.

In 1969 the Klamaths who had not sold out their membership in the tribe voted to end the trust agreement with the bank. They intended to set up another trust that would better serve their interests by putting the profitable management role in the hands of the shareholders, rather than the bank.



Edison Chiloquin sprinkles kinni-kinnick (Indian tobacco) into the perpetual fire. (Photo by Charon Duncan.)

However, U.S. National responded to the threat by exercising a little-known option in the original agreement entitling it to dispose of the trust by returning the land to the Indians or by selling the land and paying the shareholders in cash.

Without consulting tribal leaders, the bank sold the land to various parties including lumber companies and the U.S. Interior Department. The latter incorporated parcels into the Winema National Forest and a wildlife refuge.

Elnathan Davis, secretary of the Committee to Save the Remaining Klamath Lands, said at the time, "People who grow up on this land feel like it is a part of us, a mother to us. If this land is sold it is the end of us as a tribe — we're lost."

The gradual destruction of the Klamath Nation — the chipping away at its once vast lands — has continued since the 1864 treaty guaranteeing them sovereignty.

Under that treaty the Klamaths ceded thirteen million acres of what is now southern Oregon and northeastern California to the U.S. government. Still the Klamaths were more fortunate than many tribes having a reservation on the same land they had inhabited for at least 10,000 years.

The Dawes Act of 1887 further cut into tribal holdings by converting the communally held land into 160-acre parcels which individuals could sell. By 1950 white businessmen had purchased nearly a fourth of the Klamath reservation.

The 1954 Termination Act virtually liquidated the reservation by paying off tribal members who voted to receive money rather than hold share of their land under a trust agreement.

With all but 145,000 acres of land sold off by 1960, the Klamath culture — rooted so deeply in land — had nearly disappeared. What remnants remain threatened to vanish with the 1969 sale of the remaining land by the U.S. National Bank for \$51.4 million.

From that sale came the \$103,000 per capita the bank paid members of the trust. All except Edison Chiloquin accepted the money, and the Klamaths were again embroiled in an orgy of spending.

Instead of money Edison Chiloquin wants the Arrowhead parcel — now owned by the U.S. Forest Service — maintained perpetually as Klamath land. His plan is to "preserve the culture of my tribe by re-creating my grandfather's old village of my people at Ktai-Tupaksi (Standing Rock). I want traditional Indian people to be able to live there in the traditional way while the knowledge of the old ways is still in our mind and heart."

Chiloquin refuses to buy land with the now \$108,000 held in his name because by doing so he would waive treaty rights to government funding for health and educational services.

Instead he intends to work out a deal whereby Crown Zellerbach Company would accept the money in exchange for a 640 acre parcel to be given to the Forest Service. The Forest Service would then relinquish title of the Arrowhead land to Chiloquin.

In the meantime, the National Forest has promised the Chiloquins a temporary land use permit, enabling them to put up tipis and sweat lodges but not permanent structures such as earth lodges.

Bob Chadwick of the Forest Service told the press he likes the idea of this land being a "living Indian museum," but his conditions — that there be a governing body and public access roads — ensure that the ancestral lands would become a tourist attraction beyond control of traditional leaders.

In keeping with his museum concept Chadwick insisted that 640 acres would be more than required. A few acres for buildings and a parking lot are as much sacred land as the forest can spare.

But the Chiloquins are confident they can obtain the land legally, if not by an exchange then by a congressional bill promised by Representative Al Ullman (D-Ore.), should all else fail.

As the only Klamath who has not sold his land and treaty rights, Chiloquin says he will live to be a hundred if necessary to preserve his claim. To dramatize his purpose, he and his supporters have set up tipis and lit a fire. They plan to keep it burning until they receive title to the land.

Major Pierre L'Enfant.

Another painting shows a Black on his knees as an American general shares his meal with a British officer during the Revolutionary War, and a portrait of the Boston Massacre depicts Crispus Attucks with a stick in his hand attacking a group of armed British soldiers.

"As a Black American, I am shocked and terribly offended that the building symbolizing the democratic government of the American people is without art works properly recording the achievements of Black people throughout our

nation's history," Rangel said. The Congressman said his feelings that the building's current art collection is insensitive to Black Americans is shared by George M. White, architect of the Capitol. At a meeting with Rangel, White agreed that changes in the collection should be made and offered his cooperation.

Rangel, former chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, has also expressed his concern in letters to the chairman of the Congressional committees administering the Capitol's collection of art works on American history.

"It is particularly embarrassing that during the Bicentennial celebration, those visiting the Capitol are unable to see the important contributions of Black Americans to this nation properly represented," Rangel said.

"The thousands of people of all races who will come to Washington this year should not be left with the impression that a deliberate effort was made by their government to exclude portrayals of Black Americans from the walls of the Capitol."

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

The March for African Liberation Day, Saturday, May 22, 1976 will support liberation and freedom for our people in Afrika and America. The march will show that Black Portlanders have not forgotten the police killings and other injustices our people suffer in Portland. The march will begin at 12:30 at the corner of N. Gantenbein and N. Shaver Street. It will be followed by a rally at Irving Park, on N.E. 7th and Fremont Street.

The public is invited to attend the annual open house held at Tucker-Maxon Oral School, 2860 S.E. Holgate Boulevard on Monday, May 17th. Tours to observe teachers and children in their classrooms start at 6:15 p.m. The final tour starts at 8:30.

Open House at Tucker-Maxon provides an opportunity for the public to observe children with severe to profound hearing losses who are learning to communicate through the use of speech and speechreading.

A retirement tea honoring two Faubion teachers is scheduled for Thursday, May 20th, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the cafeteria at Faubion Elementary School at 3039 N.E. Portland Boulevard.

Mrs. Harriett Eckman, third grade teacher and Mrs. Virginia Yount, second grade teacher at Faubion will be honored. Both are retiring at the end of the school year. Former students, teachers and friends are invited.

Special "Memory is Survival" Bicentennial salute continues at Jewish Community Center, 6651 S.W. Capitol Highway. Special slide-tape presentations Saturday and Sunday only at 7:30 p.m. Admission \$3.50 Saturday, May 15th program hosted by Neighborhood House, Failing School Alums and Ex-Newsboys Association. Sunday, May 16th host is B'nai B'rith Lodge. Both evenings open to public.

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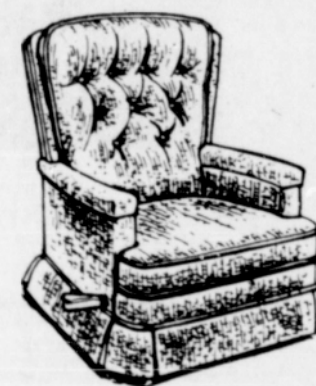
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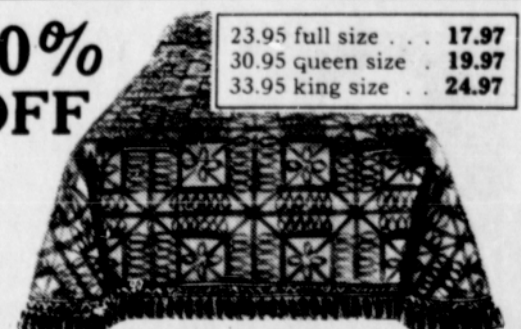
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