

Bringing The Summers Collection Home; Hund

Collection continued from front page

The four-member Tribal delegation included Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy, Tribal Council Secretary June Sell-Sherer, and Cultural Resources staffers Lindy Trolan and Kim Mueller.

The story goes back to Reverend Robert W. Summers, an Episcopal priest who lived and worked in McMinnville from 1873-1881. While in Oregon, he purchased, collected and documented hundreds of objects from Grand Ronde Indians.

When Summers was nearing death, he reportedly gave the collection to a friend, the Reverend S.C. Freer, for safekeeping. Freer had a connection at the British Museum and on September 6, 1900, Freer passed the collection on.

Except for three pieces that were on display when the delegation arrived, the 300-piece collection has been meticulously packed in boxes nearly all of this time. Though the collection is accessible to public scrutiny by request and has previously been viewed, most of it has in the last century rarely seen the light of day.

"To our knowledge," said Trolan, "(the three) are the only objects from the collection that have ever been on display."

"I was very disheartened to learn that this collection has not been on display in the museum but has been in storage," said Sell-Sherer. "It saddens me to know that these



Londoners — A delegation from Grand Ronde, including Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy (second from left) and Tribal Council Secretary June Sell-Sherer (middle) recently made a trip to London, England with Culture Department staffers Lindy Trolan (far right) and Kim Mueller (second from right) to view Grand Ronde Tribal items from the Summers collection that are being kept in a "storehouse" of the British Museum in London. While visiting the collection, the Grand Ronde delegation met with Museum Curator Dr. Jonathan King. King is in charge of the museum's Department of North American Ethnography.

precious artifacts that mean so much to our people have not been open for public viewing."

The delegation had to request each piece individually. "They brought the boxes out one at a time," said Mueller. In five days, Trolan and Mueller photographed and documented every piece.

In addition, by checking through the museum's database, the team discovered another 900 objects from Oregon.

NIGHT BEFORE A SPIRITUAL QUEST

"That night (before viewing the collection) I didn't sleep at all," said Kennedy. "I asked myself, 'Why can't I sleep?' Then I knew why. When I looked at the first articles, a part of me knew why. June and I were the first Grand Ronde people to see and touch this article that our own people had made and used more than 100 years ago. I honestly felt like crying. This wave of emotion came over me. I don't know what that feeling was. To know that this was your great, great aunt that made this... It was a spiritual thing."

Nearly fifteen years ago, Grand Ronde resident and Oregon State University graduate student Dennis Werth used drawings to help describe for the Tribal Council many of the pieces in this collection. That was the first that Kennedy knew of the collection, but even then she asked, "What

are we doing to get this (collection) back?"

It was not until two years ago, however, that Trolan opened an email dialogue with Dr. Jonathan King, Curator, North America Department of Ethnography of the museum, leading to the five-day visit at the beginning of December.

QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP

The relationship between the Tribal delegation and museum directors was more than cordial.

"They were very sympathetic," said Kennedy.

"They didn't deny the fact that (the collection) belonged to the Grand Ronde people," said Mueller.

At the same time, in Great Britain as elsewhere, the legacy of colonialism remains both as indefensible as it is hard to eliminate. At one time, it was an article of faith that the sun never set on the British empire. During (and after) that long period of colonization, the British Museum has received artifacts from these colonies.

"They were also firm that the law of the land is that everything (in the museum) belongs to the people (of Great Britain), and that nothing has ever been returned," said Kennedy. In short, she added, "It would take an Act of Parliament to change that."

Even knowing that, the Tribal delegation traveled to London to deliver the message: "We're here to repatriate our artifacts," Kennedy told her hosts.

CULTURE IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

When it came to looking at, picking up and turning over the actual items, Kennedy said, "I felt like generations of my people were there with me."

Items of greatest interest to Kennedy were the pipes. "I didn't know we had or used pipes here," she said.

"The bowl carved in bone," said Kennedy. "It had to be a whale — the detail of it. It's just beautiful — the cutouts on the handle — the faces on it. It had carved faces... Everything I saw just amazed me."

My great grandfather was a



Photos courtesy of the Cultural Resources Department

Emotional —

Seeing pieces of the collection like this purse (the larger picture at left is the back of the purse and the smaller picture at right is the front) had an emotional impact on members of the Tribe's delegation that visited the British Museum in London. "When I looked at the first articles, a part of me knew why. June and I were the first Grand Ronde people to see and touch this article that our own people used more than 100 years ago. I honestly felt like crying. This wave of emotion came over me," said Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy.

