Original Site Of Old Blockhouse Will Become Interpretive Site

■ One of a kind project at Fort Yamhill will focus on archaeological and Tribal history.

By Toby McClary

In 1856, the Coast Indian Reservation was established when the United States Army forcibly relocated Native Tribes of the Willamette Valley and moved them to Grand Ronde, Oregon. Civil War general Philip H. Sheridan supervised the construction of what eventually became Fort Yamhill. Through archaeological digs and a verbal history from legends of the area, the story of Fort Yamhill will soon be told.

The Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) will join forces to bring the history of Fort Yamhill back to life.

"I think it's great that OPRD and the Tribe are working together on this project," said Park Manager Eric Timmons. "It will allow a more accurate story to be told from all perspectives."

What was once a military camp that supervised traffic between Willamina and the Oregon coast, and served as a buffer zone between the created Grand Ronde Reservation and the local settlers, is now an open, grassy field with a historic background just waiting to be uncovered.

OPRD has been working with archeologists for several years, uncovering foundations, digging for artifacts and putting a timeline on the many events that took place at this historic site. Original bricks from the fireplaces that were built in the houses were among the many things uncovered at Fort Yamhill. The bricks are believed to have come from Ballesville, now known as Ballston, Oregon, around 1850 and can presently be seen at the Fort Yamhill site.

There were at least 24 buildings associated with Fort Yamhill including the officer's quarters, a kitchen, a mess hall, the barracks housing the 200 plus soldiers, a store and of course, the blockhouse. The blockhouse, which was used as a jail, is believed to have been in a location north of the officer's quarters before being moved to a more central location of the fort.

"Rumor has it that the blockhouse was moved so the soldiers could keep a better eye on the Native camps below," said Timmons.

In 1911, the blockhouse was moved to the town of Dayton, Oregon, where it still stands today. It was sold for $2.50.

Perhaps one of the most interesting stories on the site is that of an abandoned house that still remains on the Fort Yamhill property. The 22x59 foot structure was built on officers' row in the 1850's. Though the house has been remodeled and upgraded by the many families that have occupied it since, there are still many original architectural designs that have remained throughout the years. Some of them include the original bay window, the original doorways and some of the original support beams. The house is currently being restored and will be relocated to its original location in the next few years.

There were a total of six buildings on officer's row, four that were completed and two that were unfinished. Each building housed an officer and his family. In 1866, ten years after the fort was built, the fort was abandoned and disassembled. All of the buildings on the property were auctioned off to the public.

Fort Yamhill holds major significance in Oregon's cultural history. There are no other historic military sites in the state of Oregon that directly interpret the relationship between the United States Government and Native Americans. Fort Yamhill Park will focus on the cultural history of the site through experiences of the soldiers, relocated Tribal members and the interaction between the two.

"The park is intended to provide an archaeological history of Fort Yamhill," said Tribal Engineer Eric Scott.

Photos by Toby McClary

Original Site — Park Manager for Oregon State Parks Eric Timmons (above) stands on the grounds where the blockhouse once stood in the mid 1800's. The blockhouse served as a jail in Fort Yamhill and overlooked the Native camps below. Spirit Mountain can be seen in the background. Timmons holds an original brick (right) that was made in the 1850's and used for a fireplace in one of the officer's quarters. The bricks are believed to have come from Ballesville, which is now known as Ballston, Oregon.

Early in 2004, Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski announced an initiative titled "One Park A Year." The plan is to open one new state park, either for recreation or heritage or both, every year for the next ten years.

In June of 2004, ground breaking for the Hares Canyon State Park in Washington County took place, the first new state park in Oregon since 1972.

"Oregon's state parks represent some of the most important, beautiful and natural landscapes in Oregon," said Kulongoski in a 2004 speech. "Our state parks are places where we can work together to assure that our collective cultural heritage is protected and presented in a well-rounded and culturally sensitive way." With the help of the Grand Ronde, he added, Fort Yamhill will be developed in a balanced and fair way that does justice to Fort Yamhill's cultural significance to both Indians and non-Indians."

The grand opening of the Fort Yamhill Park is scheduled to coincide with the arrival of the Lewis & Clark Corps of Discovery in March of 2006.

The construction, which is all being done by the Tribe's construction company, Round Valley, LLC, will include walking trails, restoration of the officer's quarters, relocation of power lines, access road, flagpole and fence reconstruction and a new entrance road and campground managed by CTGR.

The new entrance road will turn off of Highway 22 about a half mile from Kissing Rock. It will enter the Tribe's 137 acres near the old Bailey property. The road will then wind around the property near the new campground and pow-wow grounds, which will be ready for the Annual Pow-wow in 2006, and finally end at the parking lot on the Fort Yamhill property. The access road will be about 3,200 feet long.

Despite the unfortunate events that took place at Fort Yamhill in the mid 1800's, the Fort Yamhill Park will open up an opportunity to explain the daily life of military personnel as well as the hardships of the Native Americans on the reservation. ■

Grand Ronde Royalty Makes Appearance On AM Northwest

Photos by Toby McClary

TV Stars — On Tuesday, August 16, the Grand Ronde Royalty was invited to sit in on the set of AM Northwest in the KATU studios in Portland. Many of the parents were in attendance as well as Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy (above). After the show, the Royalty posed for a picture with AM Northwest hosts Helen Raptis and Ken Ackerman.