

## Willamette University Celebrates Indian History On Founders' Day

WILLAMETTE continued  
from front page

"white-only" school.

And Bob Tom was on hand again to hear Conner talk about: "It is All Connected: Lewis and Clark, Jason Lee, the 1855 Treaty, Our Ancestors and Our Future."

The problem then, and it may still sound familiar today, is that Lee and his fellow missionaries aimed "to introduce Indians to white man's ways."

Conner had already given talks at the Chemawa Indian School where she lived for a time when her mother worked there, and the Atkinson School of Business that day, and following Pelton's introduction, she began speaking to a group of more than 100 at the university's Hudson Hall, including some 25 students that came over from Chemawa.

Connor's connection to the university is long standing. In 1984, she earned a Masters of Business Administration from WU's Atkinson School of Business. In the 1950s, her mother, Leah Conner, attended Willamette, and her uncle, Gilbert Cecil Conner graduated from the school in the 1940s. He is also a member of Willamette's football Hall of Fame.

"Our people were fascinated by all the people who came through," she said. Two hundred met (Lewis and Clark) in song and welcome.

More than that, however, Northwest Indians were traders and negotiators, and saw opportunity in the 33 expedition members arriving from the east.

"One member lost his horse in a stick game," said Conner.

In truth, the Lewis and Clark group were not much of a match for the Indians in either trading or negotiating, and while circumstances ultimately have proved difficult for Indians, looking back today, said Conner, "It's funny that gaming is one way that we'd find our way back out of poverty."

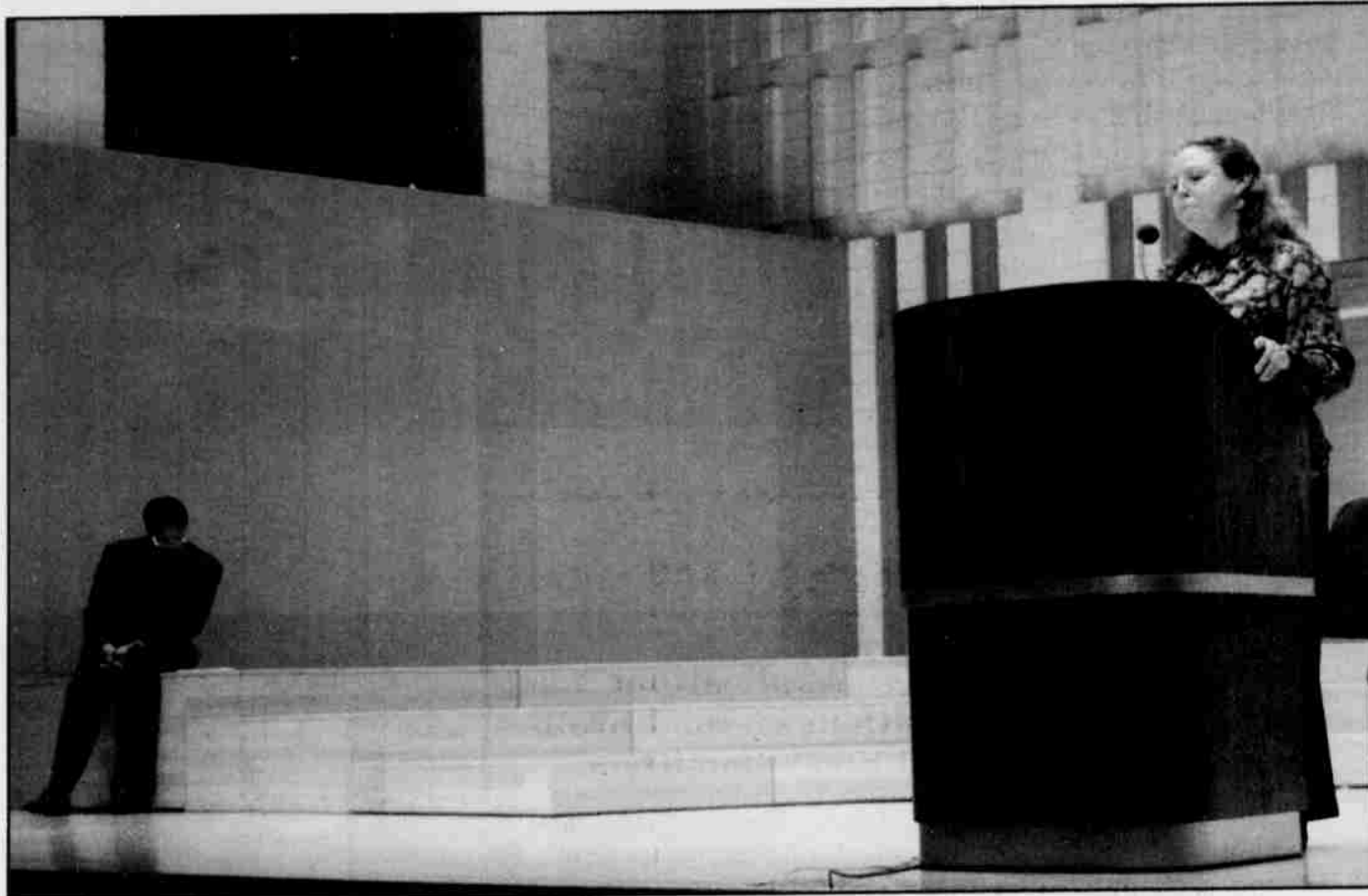
"Lewis and Clark were the latest group to pass through (Northwest Indian Country), and they were mostly smelly. They were not in the land of Thomas Jefferson anymore. They were visitors and we knew that they needed our help. We needed to spend time with them to figure out how we could help."

"We'd heard of them and we knew they had some trade goods that we could use." She mentioned metal teapots among those sought after trade goods.

"We wanted to know what they were doing here and where they wanted to stay. The best way to find that out is to get close."

"One of the men took Clark in," she said, "and served him salmon soup. Lewis and Clark, on the other hand, had brought 66 dogs to consume."

"When Lewis and Clarke came, we were civilized but we weren't sure about them." With Lewis and Clark eating dogs and the Indians serving salmon, "who is civilized and who is a savage?"



Photos by Toby McClary

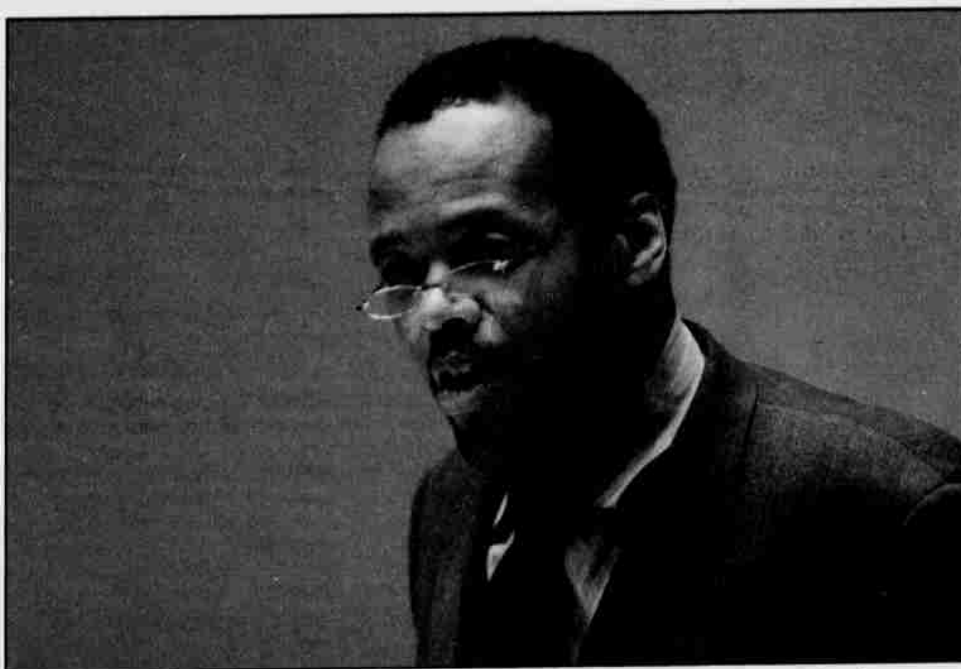
"It is all connected because it is about the same land that the Creator gave to us." — Bobbie Conner covered a lot of territory in her talk, going back 10,000 years in some cases, and talking about present issues in others.

"We took such good care of others, including missionaries, but nobody even tried to help us survive the diseases." She named a doctor who "gave inoculations to white kids and let ours die."

"The Creator had given us a wonderful place to live, to trade and do commerce," she said. "Indians

to decide whether to kill them or not," said Conner.

As we now know, they decided against it, but the question comes up again about Indians' willingness to serve in the military. "Why serve in the army before we were given citizenship or the right to vote?" asked Conner.



**Both Sides Now** — Willamette University President M. Lee Pelton said that he wanted to "build positive relationships" with Tribes in his introduction to the second edition of "Indian Country Conversations."

did not consider the Lewis and Clark group enemies. They were strangers.

"It was in our nature to be kind. How could we have known that there would be dams? And all that followed?"

"The things that we always thought were gifts — water, timber, fish, animals — became commodities," said Conner.

"By the time our people (of that time) became Elders, they had gone from being great leaders to being talked down to like children."

But the Indians did know that something was potentially up because "the Nez Perce had a council

The answer, she said, is that "no piece of paper is as important as the treaty we have with the land. Our devotion to our landscape is deeper than anything anyone can do to us."

"The reason we're here today at all," she said, "is because our people made good choices."

Part of this, she said, is the wider view of life that Indians hold. "We know that salmon have visited many other people — Russians, Japanese — before coming back."

And while the Lewis and Clark expedition opened the door to near destruction for American Indians, Conner noted that the European "opening" of the west was not re-

ally as big a part of Indian history as many would like to think. They were in the Northwest for less than two years, she said, of some 10,000 years of Indian history. Even a few hundred years of colonization is small in the span of Indian life here.

Conner said that another side of the story is emerging today. The Plateau Indians "knew that our lives would be changed forever (by this expedition)." Referring to an old prophecy that foretold the arrival of the explorers, Conner said that it indicated that "if we survived, we would be strong again."

From the Euro/American perspective, said Conner, "Lewis and Clark provided proof that the Pacific Northwest should be part of the U.S. and not England. That proof enabled Britain to give up their claim to the Northwest and that was a remarkable accomplishment."

"To Indians, however, it meant that the prophecy would be fulfilled."

"Lewis and Clark did their jobs remarkably well," she said. "And the people who founded Willamette University and the Chemawa Indian School also intended to do good. It's our job now to see that they did."

In the lecture, Conner told many stories, but at the bottom, she said, "it is all connected because it is about the same land that the Creator gave to us."

"All the non-Indians that were there got a sense of what they missed from their education system," said Bob Tom. Conner's talk also raised a question for him: "What is the Tribe's responsibility to the cultural competency of its members?"

Credit for the Indian Country Conversations program goes to Rebecca Dobkins, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Curator of Native American Art for the university. ■