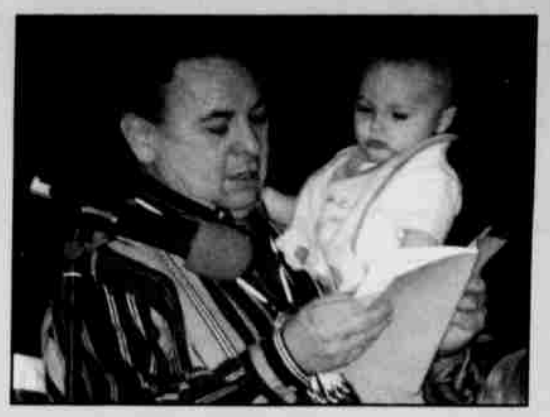
Tribal Council Christmas Party



Left, Tribal librarian and Tribal member Marion Mercier holds open a book while entertaining her grandchildren, Tribal members Joshua Henry, top right, and Ava Fagundes, in her lap, during the Tribal Council Christmas Party held Dec. 8 in the Tribal gymnasium. Leaning over behind Marion is the children's mother and Marion's daughter, Tribal member Candy Henry. Kneeling in the brown sweater at right is Tribal member Sage Torres. At top right, Tribal Council Vice Chairman Reyn Leno holds his grandson, Tribal member Bryson Leno. Below right is Santa Claus, played this year by Tribal Council Secretary Jack Giffen Jr., with Tribal member Ashley Mercier with the big request for Christmas. Below left, a group of Tribal community children sang carols for the Council and the hundreds who showed up for the event.

Photos by Ron Karten

Episcopalians join Grand Ronde Tribe in quest for the Summers Collection

By Ron Karten
Smoke Signals staff writer

Father Albert Krueger, Indian missioner for the western Oregon Diocese of the Episcopalian Church, recently took another step on a difficult journey.

He leads an effort in the church to gain the return of the "Summers Collection" of Grand Ronde artifacts from the British Museum in London.

"It is the most significant, well-documented collection from Grand Ronde," said Lindy Trolan, Cultural Collections coordinator for the Grand Ronde Tribe.

"(The Rev. Robert W. Summers) was an avid collector. He established good personal relationships with the people in Grand Ronde. He took thorough notes and made detailed drawings. Plus, we have notes from his diaries and oral memories from people who knew him. The collection shows the diversity of Grand Ronde lives."

Standing in the way, however, is a British Museum that returns pieces from its sprawling international collection only by acts of Parliament spelled out in the British Museum Act of 1963.

A Tribal delegation, including Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy and then Tribal Council Secretary June Sell-Sherer, learned that in an official 2002 visit to the museum.

Trolan and Cultural Resources specialist Kim Mueller photographed and catalogued the collection on that visit, and the Tribe has continued to pursue repatriation of the artifacts.

Photo by Ron Karten

Cultural Collections coordinator Lindy Trolan

The collection was formed in the hands of Summers, the first Episcopalian priest in the area. He lived and worked in McMinnville from 1873-81. While in Oregon, he purchased, collected and documented hundreds of objects obtained from Grand Ronde Indians.

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

In more than 100 years of holding the Summers Collection, however, the British Museum only has displayed three of some 400 pieces, Trolan said.

She joined Krueger during a workshop at the Nov. 9-11 Episcopal Diocesan Convention held in Salem. She described the collection and Tribal efforts to repatriate these pieces of local and Tribal history.

For the Episcopalians, the effort helps fulfill a resolution proposed by the Episcopal Indian Commission "to provide a window into the historic relationship between Native Americans and the Episcopal Church, and a process of reconciliation between church and Tribes," Krueger said.

The Episcopalian relationship with Indians came about in the mid-1800s when Catholics and Methodists also got involved, Krueger said.

"The U.S. parceled out missionary work to Catholics, Episcopalians and Methodists," Krueger said.

The question nevertheless comes up: What will enable the Tribe and Episcopalians to gain release of these artifacts after the British Museum has possessed them for more than 100 years?

Kennedy, Grand Ronde chairwoman, didn't see the bar as all that high.

"We needed an act of Congress to get the Tribe restored," she said. "What's an act of Parliament after that?"

"It comes down to changing peoples' attitudes," Trolan told workshop attendees, "that they don't own these things."

Krueger said he thinks the Episcopalians may have the inside rail. "The Episcopalians are part of the Anglican communion," he said. "Since the Summers Collection is in the British Museum and the Queen (Elizabeth II) is head of the church, we have a connection."

"Tradition, royalty and the church are important in England," he added. "That's why I'm encouraged to pursue it."

Krueger said he also sees some precedent in the National Museum of Denmark repatriating some 35,000 aboriginal artifacts taken from Greenland when the huge island country was a Danish colony. That exchange began in 1979 when Greenland became semi-autonomous, and the effort to repatriate all artifacts continues today.

He sees another precedent in the work of the Canadian Indigenous Anglicans of Canada led by Native Bishop Mark MacDonald, who prevailed recently on the Archbishop of Canterbury to intercede with the British government to smooth out a problem between British Petroleum and Canadian First Nations Tribes.

"Don't underestimate the power of tradition in England, and how far it can go toward making things happen," Krueger quoted MacDonald as saying after his success with BP.

"It still may not work out," Krueger conceded, "but the walking with is what this is about. It's an unprecedented opportunity for us to walk that walk." ■