

Indian War in 1855 changes plans for wholesale removal to Coast Reservation

Part 2 of 2

By David Lewis

Tribal Cultural Resources director

Even as the Coast Reservation was being proposed by Oregon's Superintendent of Indian Affairs Joel Palmer and mulled over in Washington, D.C., changes in his plans were taking place in Oregon.

The changes were due to pressures brought on by the third Rogue River Indian war. In 1855, Palmer was ready to remove the southwestern Indians to both the Coast and Grand Ronde agencies, but there was another eruption of war between the Tribes and the settlers and miners in southwestern Oregon.

The necessary military support for Indian removal was not available as the military was engaged in the Rogue River area and could not be spared. Regardless, Palmer managed to round up enough local support so that between January and April 1856, 1,500 friendly Indians walked and rode to Grand Ronde Agency from the Umpqua River Reservation and the Table Rock Reservation in the Rogue Valley.

The story of this removal became the inland Oregon Trail of Tears commonly known at Grand Ronde among the descendants of these people. On the journey, it is said, eight people died and eight babies were born.

On the Coast, in 1855-56, the situation became desperate for the military and Palmer as volunteer militias were attacking Indian villages throughout the region, and a confederation of Rogue River-area Tribes was retaliating. This new outbreak of violence caused some Rogue River Tribes to ask for help in retaliation against the militia from the peaceful Tribes. But many Tribes were removing themselves from the small temporary reservations on the coast to Port Orford to protect themselves from the volunteer militias.

By May 30, 1856, most of the Tribes had gone to Port Orford to seek protection from the volunteer militia, many of whom newly gave up their weapons and agreed to remove to the Coast Reservation. In June, the fighting subsided and troops became available to help with the removal. By the middle of June there were about 2,000 Indians in Port Orford.

At the end of June, Palmer requisitioned two steamships to take the Indians to Portland, and then down the Yamhill River through the Yamhill Valley to the Coast Reservation. In all, about 1,400 Indians from the Rogue River, Umpqua, Chetco and Pistol River areas were removed by steamship. Another 250 Indians, the last to surrender, were removed by being marched up the coast to the Coast Reservation, to settle on the lands along the Siletz River and Agency.

Other small groups of Indians — Coos, Lower Umpqua, Alsea and Siuslaw — remained in their homelands at Winchester and Alsea bays, which later became the Alsea Sub-agency.

Before the conflicts, Palmer and the U.S. military began making plans in late 1854 to add another section of land onto the Coast Reservation. In the Molalla Treaty of 1854, Palmer mentions the future Grand Ronde Reservation as such, "On the headwaters of the Yamhill River adjoining the coast reservation" whereby later, after improvements are made, they are "to remove to said coast reservation." This is the only time in the western Oregon treaties that the Yamhill River is mentioned.

In this instance, Palmer was implementing a plan to remove all of the treaty Tribes to temporary reservations until they could be removed to the Coast Reservation. However, part of his plans changed as the Yamhill Valley had an already well-developed agricultural system and established farmstead buildings from previous settlement. The Army bought out many of the settlers of their land claims and established the Yamhill River Agency.

The purchase of the Yamhill Valley lands represented a significant investment by the military. Between Nov. 9 and Dec. 21, 1854, when the Molalla Treaty was negotiated, Palmer, in collaboration with General John E. Wool, commander of the Pacific, decided to add the lands of the Yamhill River Valley to the Coast Reservation.

The addition of the Yamhill Valley is represented in three known sketches of the Coast Reservation. The first is shown in the "Sketch of the Indian Reservation on the Western Coast of Oregon drawn by Lt. Bonnycastle, A.D.C. to Gen. Wool, 1855."

This sketch presents that the Coast Reservation at the south end begins at the town site of Florence and at the north ends at the Nestucca River, about the site of Pacific City. The eastern boundary is a straight line from about 20 miles inland, intersecting the crest of the Coast Range to about the Siletz River, then jogs to the east another 10 miles or so, then turns north for about 10 miles, then turns west and ends in a straight line with the Nestucca River at the coast. The western boundary is the Pacific Ocean.

The shape of the Coast Reservation is not rectangular but instead an inverted "L" shape. In addition, archaeologist David Brauner's map of the Coast Reservation, adapted from Barth 1959, indicates a similar structure of the Coast Reservation, including an additional portion of the lands to the north on the coast. These lands would include portions of the Nehalem Tillamook traditional

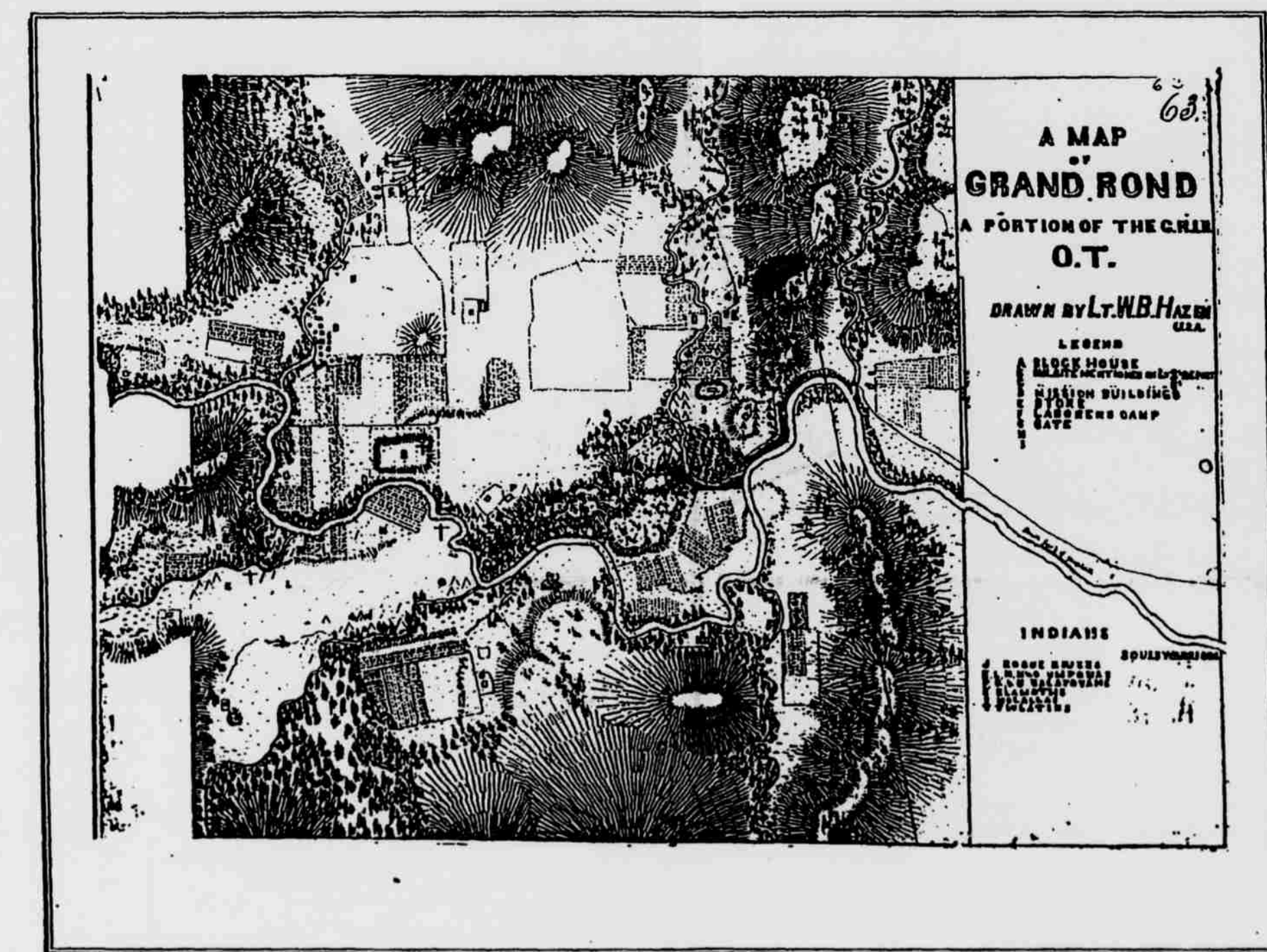


Figure 3.2—The Hazen Map of 1856 (National Archives).

aboriginal homelands.

These maps clearly indicate the intention of the military to include the Yamhill Valley and by extension the Grand Ronde Agency as an integral part of the Coast Reservation.

Archaeologist David Brauner expresses Palmer's plan thus, "... (the removal of) Indians to Grand Ronde Valley as the initial step in carrying out the proposed policy of concentrating all the Indians west of the Cascade Mountains on one large reservation."

In addition, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report for 1865 details why the decision was made to add the Grand Ronde Valley to the Coast Reservation.

"After the removal of Indians to this tract was commenced, it was found that the expense and difficulty of transporting supplies across the Coast range was so great that economy required a location for the interior Tribes on the eastern slope

of the range, and accordingly the rights of the settlers in a small valley known as the Grand Ronde (upon the head of the Yamhill River) were purchased, and that tract (townships five and six south, range seven and eight west) was added to the already large reservation, and an important agency located thereon."

Therefore, Palmer's plans for the removal of the Indians changed with the addition of the Yamhill Valley lands to the Coast Reservation. Because the Yamhill Valley was more developed and had established and accessible routes for supplies, Palmer decided to use the valley as a second temporary reservation for many of the Tribes in the Willamette Valley and southern Oregon and a staging area until the other agencies of the Coast Reservation were prepared for them.

When the Rogue Rivers arrived at Grand Ronde Agency, Palmer then made a decision that they could

stay because these Tribes had been peaceful, maintained their treaty agreements and remained on the temporary reservations at Table Rock and Cow Creek and not joined in the conflicts. In 1857, about two-thirds of the Rogue Rivers moved to the Siletz Agency from Grand Ronde to join their fellow Tribes.

There are two maps from the Grand Ronde Agency which site Rogue River, Umpqua and Shasta villages within the reservation. The Hazen Map (1856) sites the Rogues Rivers and Umpquas in individual villages. The Nesmith Map of 1858 shows Shasta and Cow Creek (Umpqua) villages grouped around the William Kuykendall estate. The 1858 date of this survey tells us that some of the Shastas and Umpquas that were intended for permanent removal to the Siletz Agency of the Coast Reservation remained in Grand Ronde Agency and reservation after the 1857 date when many

people did move to Siletz.

Following the removal of the Indians to the agencies, Palmer, in collaboration with the military, established at the Coast Reservation a means of protecting the Indians from encroachment by murdering settlers and militia. To protect the Indians "... Three forts were established around the boundaries of the Coast Reservation. They were Fort Umpqua, at the mouth of the Umpqua River, Fort Hoskins in Kings Valley and Fort Yamhill near Valley Junction. They were located at strategic points to intercept any Indians leaving the reservation."

The removal of the Tribes to the Coast Reservation was concluded by 1857. On June 30, 1857, the Grand Ronde Reservation was officially designated as such by a Presidential Executive Order. The Siletz Agency was not fully developed until early in 1857 when Agent R. B. Metcalf took charge. In the summer of 1856

when the Indians began to arrive, there had been no development of the valley, despite Palmer's previous stated intentions, and Indians had to fend for themselves in 1856-57. About two-thirds of the Rogue River Indians went to the Siletz Agency as their permanent home.

There was established a four-agency system on the Coast Reservation. In the south was the Alsea sub-agency. In the middle was the Siletz Agency, the Yamhill pass was protected by Fort Yamhill at the Grand Ronde Agency, and there was a Salmon River sub-agency just northwest of Grand Ronde. Grand Ronde Agency served the Salmon River sub-agency and the Siletz Agency served the Alsea sub-agency. The Coast Reservation included all four agencies with four military forts that protected the passes into the reservation. This protection was as much meant to keep the Indians on the reservation, but also to keep the whites from coming on the reservation and killing Indians.

By 1855, most of the treaties with the western Oregon Indians negotiated by Palmer had been ratified by Congress. The ratified treaties included Tribes from the Columbia River, the Willamette Valley, the Cascade Range, the Umpqua Valley and southwestern Oregon. But the Coast Treaty had not been ratified.

By 1861, Congress had begun to adopt policies of not negotiating treaties with Tribes as it was a costly undertaking which created an enormous financial overhead for the government. Then the Civil War erupted and ended treaty making for the duration of the war. After the Civil War, Congress ended treaty making with the Act of 1871.

On Dec. 21, 1865, President Andrew Johnson signed an executive order removing the Yaquina Tract from the Coast Reservation. This split the reservation lands into two parts where Siletz Reservation was in the north and the Alsea Reservation was in the south.

Congress officially created the Siletz Reservation on March 3, 1875. At this time the final southern tract was removed and the Alsea Agency closed. Most Indians removed to the Siletz Reservation, but many stayed and joined their off-reservation brethren. Most of the Nehalem Tillamook were removed to Grand Ronde as they requested. The Siletz Reservation maintained lands up to the coast with Cape Foulweather and Cascade Head as the south and north boundaries, respectively.

In 1894, following the Dawes Allotment Act, Siletz lost the remainder of its coastal acreage. In 1895, the ceded lands were opened for white settlement. At this time it appears the Siletz Reservation maintained administration over the Salmon River and Siletz River allotments.

Historical accuracy of information

Through many of the historical sources there appears to be much confusion as to the exact details of the status of the Coast Reservation, the Coast Treaty, the Siletz Reservation, the Siletz Agency, the Grand Ronde Agency and the Grand Ronde Reservation.

Historians, anthropologists and other scholars have variously assigned these titles to this history and region regardless of the actual status at the time. Even in government documents, entities like the "Coast Reservation" are given an explanatory subtext like "(Siletz reservation)," which makes a historical and legal leap away from the actual circumstances.

This is important as it sets the tone for future historical attribution of which Tribes may claim the Coast Reservation as their original permanent reservation. These explanatory subtexts need to be interpreted as reference marks for readers of the BIA or COIA annual reports and members of Congress.

It remains a question as to why the words "agency" and "reservation" are used interchangeably. This is a problem which continues to confuse historians and anthropologists today. In Oregon, the agencies were treated as smaller Indian administrative areas within the larger Indian reservation.

Historically, it appears impossible to separate Grand Ronde from the Coast Reservation until 1875 when the sub-agencies (Alsea, Salmon River) were terminated and many of the people moved to Siletz and Grand Ronde and the agencies became completely separate reservations. Before 1875, the agencies were combined under a single reservation, even though the framework of the Grand Ronde Reservation was laid early by its Executive Order of 1857.

Administratively, Grand Ronde and Siletz were managed, up to 1956, as one reservation or agency. At times, the administrators were moved around such that either Siletz, Grand Ronde, Chemawa Indian School (Salem School, Harrison Institute) or Portland area offices were the administrative centers.

There may have been individual Indian agents who ran the daily affairs of each reservation or agency, or school, but there was one supervisor over them all. In this era, Grand Ronde and Siletz had Tribal Councils and took charge of much of their own affairs, but the BIA administration treated them as one agency.

In fact, in the pre-Termination era (1944-56), Siletz and Grand Ronde agencies were hyphenated together (Grand Ronde-Siletz Agency). This accounts for the well-known history of intermarriage between Grand Ronde and Siletz members. ■