

25th Restoration

commemorative issue

Nov. 22, 2008, marks 25 years since Restoration

Anniversary a time to remember members who made it happen

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Nov. 22, 2008, marks the most important day in modern Grand Ronde history: the 25th anniversary of President Ronald Reagan signing House Resolution 3885, which became Public Law 98-165, the Grand Ronde Restoration Act.

President Reagan's signature officially ended 29 years of the federal government not recognizing what many Grand Ronde Tribal members knew deep in their hearts — that they were Native Americans, and the federal government had responsibilities to uphold because of that status.

"The fact that the federal government doesn't extend recognition doesn't mean that you're not a Tribe, or not indeed a government," says Don Wharton. In the late 1970s, he founded Oregon Legal Service's Native American Program, which assisted terminated Oregon Tribes pursuing Restoration.

"The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde existed as a Tribe and a government; they just didn't have federal recognition."

At its Silver Anniversary of Restoration, members of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde have much to celebrate and be thankful for.

Spirit Mountain Casino unveiled in May 2008 its fourth major expansion since opening in 1995. The proceeds from that successful gaming enterprise provide the financial foundation for important educational, health and social benefits for more than 5,100 Tribal members today.

Culturally, the Tribe is resurgent. More and more Tribal youth participate in powwows and learn to speak Chinuk Wawa in school. Tribal members young and old learn traditional crafts, such as basket weaving and making hand drums, through Cultural Resources classes.

The Tribe is constructing a traditional plankhouse at the new Uyxat Powwow Grounds near Fort Yamhill State Park and plans are under way to build a cultural center/museum to display Tribal artifacts and teach visitors about Grand Ronde history.

And there's much to look forward to as Tribal Council and Tribal

members seek to improve Tribal services and diversify the Tribe's economy continuing into the 21st century.

Remembering the Restoration effort, the almost 30 years of Termination and the tortured history of the 26 Bands and Tribes that form the foundation of every living Tribal member is apropos at 25.

Tribes rounded up

In the early 1850s, the ancestors of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde signed seven treaties with the federal government that ceded most of western Oregon, from the California border to the Columbia River and up the Columbia River Gorge to Mount Hood in return for promises of a reservation.

Members of several Native American Tribes and Bands were rounded up by the U.S. Cavalry and walked under armed guard to the Table Rock Reservation near present-day Medford in 1854-56. The area was a temporary gathering place for Native people before the 33-day, 265-mile journey north to the Grand Ronde Indian Reservation that occurred in February and March of 1856.

Chief Bogus, Tribal Elder Nora Kimsey's grandfather, died on the march to Grand Ronde, which occurred during cold and wet conditions. In all, eight Tribal members died and eight were born on what would become the Rogue River Tribe's Trail of Tears.

Grand Ronde ancestors who lived in the Willamette Valley spoke dialects of Molalla, Kalapuya, Clackamas, Chinook and other languages from neighboring Tribes. Those from the Rogue River Valley spoke dialects of Athabascan, Penutian and Hohan. In all, Reservation residents spoke more than 25 different dialects from at least four different language families when they arrived in Grand Ronde.

The only Native language in common was Chinuk Wawa, which became the primary language for most reservation residents. While many of the ancestral languages were spoken for generations after relocation, eventually Chinuk Wawa became the common Native language for the Tribe and today is the recognized Native language for Grand Ronde.

Despite relocation to the supposed safety of the Grand Ronde Reservation, the assault on the Tribes' ways of life continued unabated.

The 69,100-acre Grand Ronde Reservation granted by President Franklin Pierce's Executive Order



From left, Tribal members Marvin Kimsey, Margaret Provost and Merle Holmes started the Tribe's Restoration effort in the early 1970s.

in 1857 survived only until the value of the timber and mineral resources were recognized.

The 1887 General Allotment Act divided 33,000 acres of the reservation — almost half — into 270 allotments of land to Indians at Grand Ronde. The goal was to make farmers out of Indians and the act allowed Tribal members to live on their land tax free while it was held in trust. At the end of 25 years, the land was to be transferred from trust status to fee status and become taxable in an attempt to allow the Native families to eventually own the land.

However, most of the allotments went out of Indian control with "alarming rapidity," according to the Tribe's 1985 Reservation Plan. "This was true not only at Grand Ronde, but across the nation wherever allotments had been made under the General Allotment Act."

In 1901, following negotiations initiated by federal Indian Inspector James McLaughlin, the federal government declared 25,791 acres "surplus," and purchased it from the Indians for \$1.10 an acre or a per capita of \$72. Much of that land was then sold to local timber interests.

Many of the allotments that remained in Tribal member possession were eventually lost as indecipherable tax laws pushed some Tribal members to forfeit their land, while others sold out, raising money to survive.

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1936 enabled the Tribe to again purchase land to build homes for Tribal members on the reservation. Six ranch properties and one building site totaling 537 acres were purchased by the Tribe with IRA funds.

For those who stayed, life was hard.

Tribal Elder Nora Kimsey, 99, remembers making baskets to take to McMinnville in a horse-and-buggy to trade for clothes. She remembers long trips to Dallas to purchase groceries, as well as washing clothes in local creeks and catching crawfish and boiling them in tin cans.

Many Tribal members were sent to Indian schools and adopted by non-Native families, threatening the Tribe's heritage by disconnecting the youth from their history. However, many who attended Chemawa Indian School in Salem, such as Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison, report that it was one of the great formative experiences of their still-young lives.

In 1954, when Termination became the law of the land, the 69,100-acre reservation granted to the Grand Ronde Tribes in 1857 had dwindled to less than 600 acres. Two years later, federal services, such as health care, ceased.

Tribal members, then numbering 822, each received a one-time check of \$29.40 — a payment that was supposed to replace their identity.

Termination era

Termination came in the name of freeing Indians from reliance on the federal government, allowing them to join the fabric of American life on an equal basis with other Americans, but it also meant that the Grand Ronde people would no longer be acknowledged as Indian people, and would have no rights on their reservation lands.

For almost 30 years, Tribal members were virtually a landless people in their own land.

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