

Tribe set out to reclaim Tomanowos in 1999

TOMANOWOS continued
from page 3

to his property. He built a shed to protect it.

Hughes, who lived a hardscrabble life, charged people 25 cents to view the meteorite and it soon became the talk of the Portland area. Visitors from Oregon City and Portland would take a streetcar line to its terminus and then walk two miles to see the space rock.

However, after being sued by Oregon Iron and Steel and three successive trials, Hughes was forced to return the meteorite to the company, which hired men with horses to move it along the Willamette River at the junction with Tualatin. It was then loaded on a barge and shipped to Portland to go on display at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition.

At the exposition, New York philanthropist Mrs. William Dodge, on a hot August day, became entranced with Tomanowos as it was unveiled from under an American flag.

In February 1906, with cash provided by Mrs. Dodge, the American Museum of Natural History purchased Tomanowos and took the meteorite away from its land and peoples, sending it to New York City.

In New York, spectators lined the streets to watch a horse team haul Tomanowos to the museum that overlooks the western edge of Central Park on April 14, 1906.

Tomanowos was about 2,600 miles from its home and people. The connection between the Clackamas Chinooks and their descendants and Tomanowos would lay dormant for 93 years as Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde members faced other, more immediate hardships that ultimately tested their mettle — the continued loss of reservation land in the first half of the 20th century; the Western Oregon Indian Termination Act in 1954; a 29-year fight for Restoration, which occurred in 1983; and the re-establishment of the Tribe and its cultural history.

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to the Tribe, Tomanowos was no longer just a "space rock," but a big star in New York City, being viewed by millions of visitors annually. It also was set to become the centerpiece of the new Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Hall of the Universe at the American Museum of Natural History.

Reclaiming Tomanowos

In 1999, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, citing the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, began legal proceedings to regain possession of Tomanowos.

Tribal representatives visited the museum, seeking culturally sacred artifacts, and filed a NAGPRA claim for Tomanowos before leaving New York City. According to some reports, museum staff "freaked" at the prospect of losing one of its most popular specimens.

The early 20th century court testimony by Susap and Sol Clark tied, through oral histories, To-

Name: Tomanowos (the Willamette meteorite)

Original weight: Probably about 20 tons

Current weight: 15.5 tons

When did it land: Probably 13,000 years ago.

Where did it land: Southern Alberta region.

Type of meteorite: It is an "oriented" meteorite, meaning its alignment when entering the Earth's atmosphere was stable and it stayed pointed in a single direction instead of spinning and tumbling through the atmosphere.

Composition: 85 percent to 95 percent iron with the remainder being nickel. Tomanowos is among a relatively rare specimen of meteorites; about 7 percent of all meteorites found are irons.

How long has it been in New York City: Since 1906.

manowos to Clackamas Chinook Chief Wochimo and other members of the Tribe.

After nine decades, the possibility of Tomanowos returning home was resurrected.

The NAGPRA claim's timing couldn't have been worse for the museum, which opened the Rose Center for Earth and Space, which includes the Cullman Hall of the Universe, in February 2000. Be-

cause of Tomanowos' weight, the center was constructed around Tomanowos.

Not surprisingly, the museum sought to have a court rule that Tomanowos belonged to it.

The following year, in June 2000, the Tribe and museum reached an agreement, signed by then-Tribal Chairwoman Kathryn Harrison and museum President Ellen Futter, allowing Tomanowos to remain

at the museum. The agreement saved the Tribe substantial legal fees, which could then be spent on other necessary Tribal services.

The museum, in return, installed displays explaining the meteorite's scientific history and Native American religious significance. And, most importantly, the museum agreed to annual visits by Tribal members to hold a spiritual ceremony with Tomanowos.

The museum also established an internship program that allows young Tribal members to work at the American Museum of Natural History every summer, learning about Tomanowos and expanding their horizons while living in New York City.

Starting in 2001, Tribal members have visited Tomanowos every summer, except in 2009, when the depressed economy prompted both organizations to take a one-year break.

Appropriately, on the 10th anniversary of the agreement, Harrison and Tribal Council member June Sell-Sherer accompanied the Tribal contingent to New York City, where Harrison spoke about the "power" she feels when in Tomanowos' presence.

Sell-Sherer was on Tribal Council in 2000 when the agreement was struck.

"This is an ongoing tradition now for the Tribe," Sell-Sherer said. "It's part of our culture."

Even more apropos, Futter remains as president of the museum and attended anniversary events.

Ceremony Day

Monday, June 14, was a pleasant, early summer day in New York City: partly cloudy, not too hot and the sticky summer humidity had yet to envelope the city.

With a private ceremony with Tomanowos scheduled for 5:30 p.m. that day, rejuvenated Tribal members used the time to visit another



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Public Affairs Director Siobhan Taylor shows off a paddler that sits inside the canoe that was gifted to American Museum of Natural History President Ellen Futter, left, during a breakfast at the museum on Tuesday, June 15. The canoe was carved out of alder wood by Tribal member Travis Mercier. On the right is Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison.



Tribal Council member June Sell-Sherer, left, takes photos of artifacts from various western Oregon Tribes during a collections tour at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City on Tuesday, June 15.