

# Tribal grant aids in restoration of structure

Work on Officer's Quarters continues as State Parks looks to improve Fort Yamhill experience

By Dean Rhodes  
Smoke Signals editor

A \$100,000 Spirit Mountain Community Fund grant awarded to the Oregon State Parks Trust in 2009 for its "Fort Yamhill: Connecting Place and People" project has helped in the renovation of the "Officer's Quarters" building at Fort Yamhill State Park.

On Friday, Oct. 28, members of Oregon State Parks Trust's Board of Trustees toured Fort Yamhill State Park and were given a detailed breakdown of work done on restoring the Officer's Quarters building — the only original structure remaining onsite — and archaeological field investigations that will allow for the eventual relocation of the building to its original spot at the fort.

"Spirit Mountain Community Fund's grant was very significant," said B. Bennett Burns, co-chair of the nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing Oregon's state parks. "We couldn't have done it without them."

The 90-minute tour concentrated on the Officer's Quarters building, which used to sit atop the hill at Fort Yamhill State Park, looking down on the Grand Ronde Agency, where the ancestors of Grand Ronde Tribal members were sent in the mid-1850s after signing seven treaties with the federal government.

Fort Yamhill was built in 1856 on the border of the Grand Ronde Reservation and was meant to act as a buffer between new settlers to Oregon and Tribal peoples, said Fort Yamhill interpretive ranger Matt Huerter.

The one company stationed at Fort Yamhill included between 60 and 70 soldiers who controlled the only road in and out of the Grand Ronde Reservation. The U.S. Army built a gate across the road and only allowed those with business

with the Grand Ronde Agency or the fort to pass.

When the fort was constructed, six Officer's Quarters buildings sat atop the hill at Fort Yamhill, authoritatively looking down on the agency and Tribal members who had been moved to the reservation. Fort Yamhill consisted of 28 structures, a parade grounds and 200-foot flagpole.

Huerter said Lt. William Hazen initially constructed "cottage-style" buildings for the fort's officers to live in in 1856, spending about 25 percent of the construction budget available.

However, Lt. Phil Sheridan arrived a year later and did not like what he saw. He redesigned the cottages with more classical accents and expanded their size, using up the other 75 percent of the budget.

Both Hazen and Sheridan went on to become Civil War generals who competed intensely throughout their careers. Huerter said their lifelong rivalry may have started at Fort Yamhill.

Sue Licht, a preservation architect, briefed Oregon State Parks Trust trustees on the work that has been done to the Officer's Quarters building, which was moved down from the hilltop and used as a farm building and residence.

Workers have taken out a wall installed in the 1920s, as well as stairs that were constructed in the hallway. As material was removed, the building returned to a more interpretive state and provide clues about its original use, Licht said.

"It was exciting to get the fluff out of here and see the original space," Licht said.

For instance, a fireplace used to sit in the middle of two rooms. The front room probably was used by Sheridan to entertain guests and the back room was probably his private living quarters. A well-worn



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

People look around the Officer's Quarters building at Fort Yamhill State Heritage Area to see the restoration work that has been completed on the structure during a tour organized by the Oregon State Parks Trust on Friday, Oct. 28. Spirit Mountain Community Fund has been a key donor for the "Fort Yamhill: Connecting Place and People" project.

rut in the wood in the back room where the hearth would have been indicates that Sheridan probably spent a lot of time pacing back and forth in that spot, trying to stay warm.

Other restoration work on the Officer's Quarters building included recreation of a porch and installation of a bay window.

Licht said a recent discovery of a painting of Fort Hoskins in Philomath, which was a sister fort to Fort Yamhill and built by the same people, provided clues to what Fort Yamhill probably looked like.

"There were no photographs of Fort Yamhill, so what do you restore it to?" Licht said about the importance of the Fort Hoskins painting.

Excavations atop the hill where the Officer's Quarter used to sit also provided important clues. For example, the sandstone foundation included a jutting "V" shape, which indicated there used to be a bay window that overlooked the road in and out of the Grand Ronde Reservation.

After the fort was abandoned in 1866, the buildings were auctioned off and for the next 121 years families farmed some of the land and Douglas fir trees and blackberries overran the rest. In 1971, the fort was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Oregon State Parks purchased the Fort Yamhill property in 1988 and opened Fort Yamhill State Heritage Area in 2006.

The goal, said Dennis Wiley, Oregon Parks & Recreation Department Willamette District manager, is returning the Officer's Quarters building to the top of the hill, which

will help give park visitors a better idea of how intimidating the stark whitewashed buildings might have been to the Native peoples living in the valley.

In addition, Oregon Parks hopes to create ghost buildings at Fort Yamhill to give visitors a better idea of how large Fort Yamhill actually was since little above-ground physical evidence remains. There are also plans to rebuild the Blockhouse, which now stands in Dayton and is in such poor condition that it cannot be moved back to Fort Yamhill.

"It is a lot bigger than I imagined," Burns said as she looked over the excavated site where the Officer's Quarters used to sit.

Wiley said the state will continue working with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde on telling not only the military history of Fort Yamhill, but also the complementary Tribal history.

"Fort Yamhill's history is intertwined with the history and culture of the Grand Ronde people and their relationship to a military fort located on the edge of their reservation. The 'Fort Yamhill: Connecting Place and People' project will bring this unique, important historic site back to life, providing visitors with a deeper understanding of the fort and how it affected the people living nearby," said Oregon State Parks Trust in its funding application to Spirit Mountain Community Fund.

The state Parks & Recreation Department pledged to include ongoing maintenance and upkeep as part of its Fort Yamhill Heritage Area budget. ■

**Tribal Council  
Christmas Party  
Dec. 4, 2011  
@ the Tribal Gym**

Noon - 1 p.m. — Visit with Santa  
(Please bring your camera)

1 p.m. — Meal

2 p.m. — Children singing

Please bring children's hats or gloves for the  
Willamina Tree of Giving to put with the  
children's gifts.

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## CULTURAL GATHERINGS

- NOV. 19: **RESTORATION CELEBRATION POWWOW.** Chinook Winds Casino Event Center, 1777 N.W. 44th St. LINCOLN CITY, OR. 1-800-922-1399, ext. 1230.
- NOV. 22: **28th CTGR RESTORATION CELEBRATION.** Grand Ronde Tribal gymnasium, 9615 Grand Ronde Road. GRAND RONDE, OR. 503-879-1418.
- DEC. 3: **LCC POWWOW.** Lane Community College gym (Bldg. 5), 4000 E. 30th Ave. EUGENE, OR.

If you or anyone you know has information on cultural events happening, Smoke Signals would be glad to list it in our Cultural Gatherings. Please e-mail [news@grandronde.org](mailto:news@grandronde.org) or write to Smoke Signals, 9615 Grand Ronde Road, Grand Ronde, OR 97347.