

Still life: Lewis talks about Prohibition

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

SALEM — Grand Ronde Tribal Elders remember their parents and grandparents making and selling alcohol during the era of American Prohibition.

They sold it to outlets in McMinnville, Salem and Portland.

Elders remember that Tribal people held parties in private locations. They remember families keeping a batch in the house.

And they remember their families using the money they earned from production to buy clothes and other necessities.

While the country in general spent some 13 years living with alcohol prohibition (1920-33), David Lewis, Tribal Museum curator and cultural liaison, used the stories that Elders have told to describe almost 100 years of Prohibition for the Grand Ronde people. He also pulled information from the National Archives in Seattle, he said.

Lewis told the stories to a group of 30 on Thursday, July 26, at the Willamette Heritage Center Dye House. "One hundred years of prohibition at the Grand Ronde Tribe" was the third in the museum's five-lecture "History Pub at The Mill" series.

The lectures — mostly concerning Prohibition — were coupled with draught beer served at the back of the room.

Prohibition came to the reservation far earlier than 1920, when the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution imposed it on the rest of the country.

The Grand Ronde Prohibition era came out of a series of treaties signed with the federal government in the 1850s that ended with Tribes and bands from throughout western Oregon being forcibly marched to Siletz and Grand Ronde, where they were held for many of those 100 years almost as prisoners.



Photo by Ron Karten

David Lewis, Tribal Museum curator and cultural liaison, discusses the history of Prohibition on the Grand Ronde Reservation during a July 26 presentation at the Willamette Heritage Center in Salem.

Also during that time, many Grand Ronde people developed cottage industries. Traditional knowledge led to basket-making, wood carving and canning all kinds of wild foods. Among these cottage industries was the unofficial production and sale of alcoholic products.

Lewis described Prohibition-era Grand Ronde as a time when alcohol prohibition came with prohibitions affecting nearly every part of Tribal lives.

Natives in Grand Ronde, as elsewhere, could not practice their language, dress or culture.

Intermarriage with white people was prohibited.

"The early reservation was pretty strictly controlled," said Lewis.

"David's presentation turned the customary view of American Indian history (by the non-Native community) on its head," said Willamette Heritage Center Executive Director

Peter Booth.

"Typically, scholars and others portray Native people as either warriors or as victims. This does a great disservice to the people of the past in that it steals their humanity. As David demonstrated, the earlier residents of Grand Ronde took a horrible situation and actively took advantage of whatever they could in order to do the best they could.

"In this situation, they were already under pressure from prohibition before the rest of Oregon's population. They already had experience at making homebrewed wines and other alcohol. So, once the rest of the state was dry, the Grand Ronde wine makers had a market. What a story."

State and local police did not have jurisdictional authority to make arrests on the reservation, so investigating reservation stills

was left to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which had no budget to fund investigations, Lewis said.

There was a report that the BIA hired a private investigator to look into the illegal activity, but there was not much will to stop the activities. Reservation stills fed speakeasies in Salem at the Reed Opera House, Capitol Towers and "a malt shop on State Street," as a member of the audience said.

Many details about the times are unknown. "We are trying to get memories of our people out there, what actually happened," Lewis said.

Alcohol production for the Grand Ronde Tribe also became part of the cultural history of the Tribal people. It included summers when families picked hops in area hop yards, he said. Farmers separated workers into Tribes or communities during picking season so that after work, families camped out and played ball and watched movies together.

Though the constitutional amendment prohibiting alcohol was repealed with the passage of the 21st amendment in 1933, Prohibition hung on in Grand Ronde, and many other Native American reservations, well into the 1950s when the federal government washed its hands of its obligations to Native peoples. That was the decade of Termination, 100 years after treaties had been signed.

"The Tribes were controlled and managed for 100 years," Lewis said. "They had come from a time when they owned everything to a time when they owned nothing."

As Prohibition came to an end for the Grand Ronde people, "the situation on the reservation was grim," Lewis said. "Many in the Tribe were forced to leave with nothing to show for living 100 years in the U.S." ■

Committee & Special Event Board meeting days and times

Below is the most current information on the meeting days and times for Tribal Committees and Special Event Boards:

- **Ceremonial Hunt Board** meets as needed. Chair: Shonn Leno.
- **Cultural Trust Board** meets at 4 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month in Modular No. 2. Chair: Perri McDaniel.
- **Culture Committee** meets at 1 p.m. the first Wednesday of the month in Modular No. 3. Chair: TBD.
- **Education Committee** meets at 5:15 p.m. on the first Monday of the month in the Adult Education Building. Chair: Jon George.
- **Elders' Committee** meets at 10 a.m. the third Wednesday of the month in the Elders' Activity Center. Chair: Gladys Hobbs.
- **Enrollment Committee** meets quarterly in Room 204 of the Governance Building. Acting Chair: Robert Schmid.
- **Fish & Wildlife Committee** meets at 5:30 p.m. the second Tuesday of the month at the Natural Resources Building. Chair: Harold Lyon.
- **Health Committee** meets at 10 a.m. the second Wednesday of the month in the Tribal Wellness Center. Acting Chair: Patti Tom-Martin.
- **Powwow Special Event Board** meets at 5 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the Tribal Community Center. Chair: Dana Ainam.
- **Rodeo Special Event Board** meets at 6 p.m. the first Thursday of the month at the Tribal Rodeo Office. Chair: Harold Lyon.
- **Social Services Committee** meets at 4 p.m. the second Monday of the month in the Social Services Conference Room. Chair: Jenny Sanchez.
- **Timber Committee** meets at 5 p.m. the second Thursday of the month at the Natural Resources Building. Chair: Bob Mercier.
- **Veterans Special Event Board** meets at 4 p.m. the first and third Tuesday of the month in the Tribal Community Center. Chair: Dakota Whitecloud.

Adult Members' Trust and Minors' Custodial & Rabbi Trust Funds

Effective Aug. 20, 2012, investments in the Adult Members' Trust Fund and the Minors' Custodial and Rabbi Trust Funds are updated each business day. If you are a trust participant and/or if you are the parent/guardian of a minor member, you can access and review your balance and your minor child's balance by visiting www.401Save.com.

To log-in, the initial User ID is your (or your child's) Social Security number, and the initial Password is "00" followed by your (or your child's) membership number. Once logged in, you can customize your User ID and password for security purposes.

If you have any trouble logging in to or using the system, contact the 401Save Call Center at 1-888-700-0808 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Pacific Time, Monday through Friday. ■

Youth Center seeks volunteers

The Tina Miller Community Center Thrift Store, 110 B. St., Willamina, which helps fund the after-school and weekend youth community center located in the old high school gym, is seeking volunteers who can help run the store, in addition to donated items and customers. The store accepts clothes, books, knickknacks, etc., as donations.

It is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and closed on Sunday and Monday.

Donations also can be left at the Wildwood Hotel and Restaurant in Willamina. For more information on volunteering, call 503-876-7897. The youth center and thrift store that funds it are nonprofit and 100 percent self-sustaining and volunteer-run. ■