

30th Restoration commemorative issue

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exercised ongoing governmental functions; proving the Tribe consisted of a community of Indians belonging to a formerly recognized Tribe; and that the Indians still lived in their aboriginal territory, maintaining their customs and language; and were poorer than the surrounding adjacent nonIndian population.

With the help of a \$9,000 grant, Jackie Provost, Margaret's daughter, was hired as secretary and conducted a census of Tribal members, going door-to-door to determine how many Tribal members lived in the Grand Ronde area. In addition, a trailer purchased from Russ Leno for \$50 was set up at the cemetery to help families register.

Meanwhile, Margaret Provost sought the support of other Tribal leaders, attending powwows and cultural events. The Tribes, including the Warm Springs, Siletz, Coos/Siuslaw/Lower Umpqua and Cow Creek, wrote letters of support to Congress and persuaded the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians to allow the Grand Ronde Tribe to join before being federally recognized.

To meet the federal criteria, Tribal members held governmental meetings, powwows and cultural ceremonies. They worked to certify blood quantum, document those who still spoke Chinuk Wawa and collect income numbers. In 1980, the first Grand Ronde Royalty was crowned with Queen Jackie Provost and Princesses Margie Lafferty and Jackie Mercier Colton.

Locally, Tribal members dispelled unsubstantiated rumors and overcame opposition from neighboring communities, garnered the support of other Tribes and convinced Congress that Restoration would not be a Pandora's box, opening the way for illegitimate claims.

"There was that doubt," Kathryn Harrison recalls. "People hadn't heard of us. They thought Grand Ronde was in eastern Oregon."

Amongst all this, Tribal members pursued grants for funding and held fundraising activities, such as roadside fry bread stands and selling homemade jam made by Tribal Elders.

To garner community support, they contacted churches, clubs and scores of organizations. Before steady funding arrived, Marvin Kimsey quit his job to devote more time to the effort.

Tribal Elders, such as Ila Dowd, Velma Mercier, Wilson Bobb and Esther LaBonte, held bake sales and donated money.

Margaret Provost recalls that every time there was a meeting, there would be a bake sale.

"If things didn't sell, they bought from each other," she says.

A nonprofit corporation was formed, and by June 1982, the Tribe had raised \$250,000 to fund Restoration efforts.

The hours were long and the work tedious enough that sometimes Restoration workers thought about quitting.



Jackie Mercier Colton Whisler

"When things went wrong, I would ask Margaret, 'Whose idea was Restoration anyway?'" Harrison recalls.

But Tribal members pressed on.

Restoration testimony

Furse and Wharton represented the Tribe as legislative liaisons. Slowly, momentum built toward a date in Washington, D.C., before Congress.

Meanwhile, an interim Tribal Council was elected, composed of Chairman Marvin Kimsey, co-Chairman Wink Soderberg, Secretary-Treasurer Jackie Colton (Whisler) and members Kathryn Harrison, Merle Holmes, Dean Mercier, Eula Petite, Jackie Provost and Margaret Provost.

By 1982, Harrison, who had worked on the Siletz Restoration effort, had become lead community organizer, mustering support for federal recognition and convincing opposition groups of the inherent justice of Restoration.

Opposition from fishing and timber organizations was first neutralized and then turned into support. Community concerns about losing land and increasing tax rates were quelled through educational meetings. In the end, the Restoration effort received more than 100 letters of support from community members, business owners, state and county representatives, and Elders of the Tribe.

Restoration leaders, such as Merle Holmes, Dean Mercier and others flew to Washington, D.C., on their own money to meet lawmakers and lobby for Restoration.

Congressman AuCoin, impressed with the Tribe's ability to enlist community support, submitted the Grand Ronde Restoration Bill on Sept. 14, 1983, while Sen. Mark Hatfield did the same in the Senate. Oregon Gov. Vic Atiyeh and assorted Polk and Yamhill county commissioners voiced their support for a restored Grand Ronde Tribe.

In October 1983, Marvin Kimsey, Jackie Colton, Kathryn Harrison and her children, Frank and Karen, along with Furse made their historic trip to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.

Karen was a 16-year-old junior at Wilamina High School when she testified.

Harrison, now 89, remains proud



Merle Holmes

that three-fifths of those who went to Washington, D.C., to testify on behalf of Tribal Restoration were members of her family.

They all spoke convincingly on behalf of restoring the Grand Ronde Tribe to federal recognition.

"They testified on the issue of justice," Furse recalled. "It was very impressive testimony."

The Restoration Bill passed through the House of Representatives with 57 letters of support and none in opposition. It sailed through the Senate under Hatfield's legislative guidance, receiving approval on the chamber's consent agenda on Nov. 11, 1983.

All that remained was the president's signature. Grand Ronde Tribal members had to wait 11 agonizing days for that to happen.

President Ronald Reagan signed Bill HR 3885 on Nov. 22, 1983. The restored Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde began with 2,200 members.

"We were elk hunting and we heard the announcement on the radio," Margaret Provost said. "It was very exciting."

Kathryn Harrison drove her car up and down Grand Ronde Road, honking her horn and yelling, "We did it ... we did it!"

A small crowd of Tribal members gathered at the Tribal cemetery and toasted the event with celebratory shouts.

"It was the happiest day of my life," recalls Margo Mercier.

That was 30 years ago.

In that time, several of the key players in the Tribal Restoration effort have walked on.

Merle Holmes walked on in May 2004

at the age of 70.

Jackie Mercier Colton Whisler was taken away shortly after the Tribe's 24th Restoration anniversary in December 2007 at the age of 56. Her father, Dean Mercier, walked on July 6, 2011, and Russell Leno walked on Dec. 7, 2010.

Other important participants in the Restoration effort are still with the Tribe, Elders now in their 60s and older: Kathryn Harrison, Margaret Provost, Candy Robertson, Patti Tom Martin and Marvin Kimsey, to name a few.

Post-Restoration success

In the almost 11,000 days since Restoration, those Tribal Elders have watched the restored Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde grow from owning only a 2.5-acre cemetery to obtaining almost 10,000 acres for a reservation to building Tribal Community and Governance centers to opening Spirit Mountain Casino and Spirit Mountain Lodge.

They have watched the Tribe become the largest employer in Polk and Yamhill counties.

They have watched the Tribe build its own Health & Wellness Center that provides medical services to Tribal members and residents of the surrounding community.

They've watched as new Grand Ronde Tribal members have been born, learned their heritage and culture, and matured into proud Native Americans.

They have watched housing built, allowing Tribal members to return to the reservation. They have watched an educational facility go up to teach Chinuk Wawa.

They have watched a new generation of Tribal members take the helm and guide the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde toward prosperity, self-sufficiency and control of their collective destiny.

"I think one of the real strengths that the Grand Ronde people have is that we know that our destiny is in our hands," Kennedy said. "We no longer want to be in a position where someone else has the key to whether we survive or not. We will determine our own destiny."

Harrison, who served on Tribal Council for more than 20 years and never lost an election, best summed up the years since Restoration for the Tribe.

"We are living out the dreams of our Elders and our ancestors," Harrison said.

(This article includes previously published information from "Standing Tall: The Lifeway of Kathryn Harrison" by Kristine Olson and the 1985 Grand Ronde Reservation Plan, as well as Smoke Signals articles written by Tribal members Chris Mercier and Angela Sears and longtime staff writer Ron Karten. In addition, it includes information and quotes from interviews conducted with Tribal members and Elders, as well as other key players in the Restoration effort, during the summer and fall of 2008).