



30th Restoration commemorative issue

NOV. 22 continued
from page 2

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 the Western Oregon Indian Termination Act was enacted by Congress, the 69,100-acre reservation granted to the Grand Ronde Tribes in 1857 had dwindled to about 400 acres. Congress passed the termination act under its plenary powers and without any vote or consent by the Grand Ronde Tribe.

The federal government pursued Termination because it wanted to free Tribes from any further federal management, which had kept the Grand Ronde Tribe in poverty conditions from the beginnings of the reservation. Two years later, in 1956, all Tribal land had been sold. Federal services, such as health care, ceased, and all accounts were settled between the Tribe and the federal government.

Tribal members, then numbering 882, each received a one-time check of \$35 – a payment that was supposed to replace their identity and pay for their rights under the treaties.

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.

Or, as Elizabeth Furse, former Oregon Congresswoman and director of the Institute for Tribal Government at Portland State University, said, "It was right after the war at a time when the U.S. was trying to save money. The federal government did not want to be in the Indian business."

Termination also had the added consequence of opening vast Indian lands to development by timber and farming interests.

Furse said it was no coincidence that the head of the U.S. Department of the Interior at the time was former Oregon Gov. Douglas McKay, who had many friends in the timber industry who coveted the lumber on Native lands in Oregon, particularly the Ponderosa pine owned by the Klamath Tribe in southern Oregon.

Without federal support systems, the Grand Ronde Tribe languished and many Tribal members moved away in search of jobs. Tribal Elder Dean Mercier moved to Brookings in 1959 to feed his family while Tribal Elder Leon "Chip" Tom moved his family to Colorado as part of a federal relocation program.



Photo courtesy of Kathryn Harrison

An early post-Restoration Tribal Council included, seated from left, Kathryn Harrison, Dean Mercier and Russ Leno, and standing, from left, Frank Harrison, Merle Leno, Darrell Mercier, Mark Mercier, Candy Robertson and Henry Petite. The Tribal Council met in the dining room of St. Michael's Catholic Church in those early days.

"People had to relocate to survive," recalled Tribal member Margo Mercier.

The relocation program tried to get Native Americans to assimilate into the dominant culture and through several generations of inter-marriage dilute Native blood so much that there were no longer Indians, thereby ending the government's trust relationship and responsibilities.

Within homes and families, individuals worked hard, predominantly in the logging industry, and families helped each other maintain Tribal traditions. Those who remained in the Grand Ronde area fondly recall a tight-knit community.

"We were more or less trying to survive," said Tribal Chairman Reyn Leno. "There was no money in those days. There were hard-working people here. Everybody worked."

Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy remembered her grandmother, Pauline Johnson, preparing lamprey, collecting berries and weaving baskets, as well as speaking Chinuk Wawa.

Several Tribal members recall Elders speaking Chinuk Wawa not as an educational exercise, but to ensure the younger members of the family didn't know what they were saying.

"We would go around and visit in those days and soon as the old folks got together they would start talking jargon," recalled Tribal Elder Russ Leno. "They would be laughing and pointing at us."

Reyn Leno remembers learning a few words of Chinuk Wawa from his grandmother. Knowing some Chinuk Wawa words was a qualification to eat at the family dinner table.

Annual, well-attended picnics held at the Tribal cemetery on Memorial Day brought Tribal members who had moved away back home at least once a year.

Seeds of Restoration

As the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans reached a crescendo in the mid-1960s and Native Americans started insisting on social justice as

well, President Lyndon Johnson officially spoke out against Termination as a federal policy in 1968. His successor, Richard Nixon, supported Indian self-determination as a federal policy.

The work of Grand Ronde Restoration had the humblest of beginnings. The year was 1972 and Nixon sat in the White House while the Vietnam War continued in southeast Asia.

Tribal members Marvin Kimsey, Margaret Provost and Merle Holmes attended a meeting held by the Association of Urban Indians in Lebanon and were subsequently inspired by other Tribal restoration efforts, such as the Menominees in Wisconsin, which became the first restored Tribe in the nation in 1973.

The trio of Tribal members – now known as a housewife and two truck drivers – didn't know exactly what had to be accomplished to achieve Restoration and there was no ready source of funding for such a time-consuming effort. During the first few years, Tribal Restoration was an after-hours, part-time project.

All that remained of the once-large Grand Ronde Reservation was the Tribal cemetery of approximately 2.5 acres that contained a 24-by-24-foot green shed. In June 1975, the Temporary Council of the Grand Ronde Indians started meeting. The first Treasurer's Report delivered by Vicki Lawrence said the Tribe had a balance of \$2.27 in its bank account.

Between 1975 and 1979, few substantive gains were made, but those four years produced a core group of Marvin Kimsey, Merle Holmes and Margaret Provost, as well as Patti Martin, Vicki Lawrence, Darrell Mercier, Dean Mercier, Russ Leno, Les Houck and others who began laying the foundation of Tribal Restoration.

It also produced long-lasting alliances with Furse and Wharton of Oregon Legal Service's Native American Program and Congressman Les AuCoin, Sen. Mark O. Hatfield and Oregon Gov. Victor Atiyeh.

And a milestone of sorts occurred in 1979 when the first seven acres of new

Tribal property – the front part of the cemetery – were purchased for \$3,250 per acre with money made at Tribal fundraisers. It came with an office building that soon became the nerve center of Restoration efforts.

Also in 1979, the Tribe received a \$90,000 grant from the Administration for Native Americans, which allowed it to hire five full-time employees to work on Restoration.

Tribal Elder Kathryn Harrison returned to Grand Ronde in 1980 with Restoration experience under her belt, having helped the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians on the Oregon coast secure federal recognition in 1977.

"The biggest issue we had was money," Harrison recalls. "Every general meeting was a bake sale or a raffle. People were buying things from each other to raise money. The Elders always gave us their full support. I remember Esther LaBonte; she was on Social Security and every month she gave us \$20."

The effort drafted Tribal children, too. Dean Mercier brought in his daughter, Jackie Mercier Colton, who drove in from Amity to help. She, in turn, drafted her children. Mike and Doug Colton remember picking huckleberries at South Lake for making jam that would be used to sell fry bread on the side of the road.

Children also served as waiters and waitresses at pancake feeds at which their parents were cooks.

Former Tribal Council Vice Chair Angie Blackwell, daughter of Candy Robertson, remembers being the dishwasher at many of the fundraising potlucks.

As the 1970s continued, a growing core of Grand Ronde Tribal members worked on Restoration and spent long days and nights in the crowded cemetery office, with neither heat nor plumbing, one phone line and a donated typewriter.

Their work was intent on satisfying the congressional criteria for federal recognition, namely that the Tribe ex-

See NOV. 22
continued on page 5