



Growing up with Josephine County

The Daily Courier celebrates 125 years by holding up a mirror to the people and their times

March 11, 2010
Section E

The times: 1848-1900



■ **AUG. 14, 1848:** Congress creates the Oregon Territory. At the time, the region was occupied by British and French-Canadian fur traders and a handful of settlers who traveled via the Oregon and Applegate trails.

■ **SEPT. 27, 1850:** The Donation Land Claim Act is enacted by Congress to promote homestead settlement in the Oregon Territory. The act granted 160 acres to every unmarried white male citizen who was 18 years or older, and 320 acres to every married couple.

■ **SPRING 1851:** Gold is discovered on Josephine Creek in the Illinois Valley, luring thousands of miners to the area.



■ **SEPT. 10, 1853:** The Rogue River Tribe of Indians signs a treaty with the United States ceding their lands in Southern Oregon in exchange for a reservation and \$60,000.

■ **1855-56:** Ongoing hostilities between the Rogue River tribes, miners and settlers escalate into war. Many people are killed.

■ **JAN. 22, 1856:** Josephine County is recognized by the Territorial Legislature. It takes its name from Josephine Rollins, the first white woman to live in the area.

■ **FEB. 14, 1859:** Oregon becomes the 33rd state.

■ **1861:** The Civil War begins after 11 southern slave states declare their secession from the United States and form the Confederate States of America. Led by Jefferson Davis, they fought against the United States (the Union), which was supported by all the free states and the five border slave states. Oregon was a free state.



■ **MAY 20, 1862:** President Abraham Lincoln signs the Homestead Act, giving would-be settlers title to up to 160 acres of surveyed government land.

■ **NOVEMBER 1874:**



Hunter Elijah Davidson discovers the Oregon Caves near Cave Junction.

■ **1883:** The Southern Pacific Railroad terminus arrives at a small settlement called Grants Pass. The first downtown building was constructed.

■ **1885:** Grants Pass usurps Kerbyville and Wilderville to become the Josephine County seat. The Grants Pass Courier publishes its first edition.

■ **1886:** The first bridge is built across the Rogue River at Grants Pass.

■ **JULY 1, 1897:** Amos E. Voorhies and C.S. "Champ" Price take over partnership of the Courier. Two years later, Voorhies takes full ownership of the Courier.

A four-week look at who we were, 1848 to present

Welcome to the Daily Courier's 125th anniversary edition. The first edition came out April 3, 1885.

To celebrate, the Daily Courier is

publishing stories about and photos from the histories of both Josephine County and the Daily Courier, since they've been so intertwined over the many years. The newspaper has been "Growing up with Josephine County" for most of the county's existence. Their stories are being told in four

special sections that will appear on Thursdays from March 11 through April 1. The sections will appear chronologically, with the earliest events in the first one. Reporters were split into two-person teams to cover four different eras and turned loose. They were excited as they uncovered tidbits, such

as the sacred rock of local Indians, and wrote about interesting happenings, such as the county's most sensational murders.

We hope readers enjoy the sections and savor the tidbits on this stroll through history.

— Dennis Roler, editor

'Holocaust' led to Indian massacre

On a Monday in 1855, the Indians decided they could take no more

By Stacy D. Stumbo
of the Daily Courier

For thousands of years the inhabitants of Josephine County believed in a supreme being called the Children Maker.

This creator oversaw the American Indians who called the Rogue River Valley home. The Takelma, Latgawa, Shasta Costa, and Tututni were among them. Although the Children Maker's people shared the Athapaskan language, as with many families, they had their own battles. But, the arrival of white settlers and a gold rush would give them the fight of their lives.

From first contact, the habits and beliefs of the native populations were at odds with the whites. French-Canadian fur traders called them "coquin," meaning "rogue." The name stuck.

Many natives succumbed to disease brought by the newcomers. Women were frequently stolen and enslaved by miners. Children were murdered without remorse.

Historian Nathan Douthit estimates the native population in southwest Oregon in 1850 to be about 3,800, though there may have been more than 9,000 prior to the arrival of miners, trappers and settlers. By the end of in 1856, only 590 remained.

"It was a holocaust," said Agnes Baker-Pilgrim, the oldest living member of the Takelma tribe. "There is no other word to describe it. So many people were killed needlessly."

After some Rogue Valley tribes signed a treaty on Sept. 10, 1853, ceding their claim to Southern Oregon, instead of the situation improving, things got worse. A volunteer militia called the "Exterminators" formed and



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Agnes Baker-Pilgrim, 85, stands in front of a monument at the burial site of a Takelma Indian woman that was discovered during construction of Taprock Northwest Grill in 2009. Baker-Pilgrim is the oldest living Takelma Indian. Baker-Pilgrim said the river was significant to her people in life and in death. She bears three vertical striped tattoos on their chin — a puberty rite practiced by Takelma girls before reservation life ended the practice.

violence became an almost daily occurrence.

Circuit Court Judge Matthew Deady happened on a massacre of a group of Grave Creek Takelma at the Bates House near present-day Sunny Valley after they agreed to a supplemental armistice in 1853.

He recalled the group was given a feast before being locked in a cabin and told they

would be killed unless they returned with the head of Tipsu Bill, the leader of another band. They performed the ugly task, Deady said, and were rewarded upon their return by being executed and dumped into a mass grave.

Within the year, according to pioneer George Riddle, a young Indian boy was lynched at the Six Bit House in Wolf Creek.

Several invalids, women and children who were Takelma speakers were massacred on Cow Creek. Three tribesmen were lynched at Fort Vannoy.

On Monday, Oct. 8, 1855, the Indians of the Rogue decided they could take no more.

J.A. Lupton, a settler who had been elected to the Territorial Legislature, put together a group of about 40 volunteers

who descended on a village on Little Butte Creek near what is now Eagle Point. They killed between 40 and 80 villagers, mainly old men, women and children. The survivors straggled into Fort Lane and the Table Rock Reservation to inform their brethren about what happened. While some refused to break the terms of a treaty they had signed two years earlier, others sought retribution.

"My people fought back because they believed the creator made this land for them," Pilgrim said. "To them, the water was sacred. Their table was set with salmon and they could enjoy berries and camas bulbs. The miners came and all they cared about was digging for gold."

According to "History of the Pacific Northwest Oregon and Washington 1889," early the next morning a war party killed a teamster near the reservation. They then proceeded down the Oregon and California road and attacked a pack train near Jewett's Ferry, killing one man and seriously wounding another. From there, they moved to Evans Ferry, where they killed two more men.

In a letter to Congress, C.S. Drew, who led a regiment of the Oregon Mounted Volunteers, said the tribes divided their force into several parties, and made their attacks at different points throughout the area almost simultaneously.

When they reached the Jones house near present-day Grants Pass, J.K. Jones was fatally shot and his wife was wounded. Seeing her husband dying, and the Indians cutting him to pieces, she fled toward some brush, Drew said.

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Treaty held no sway with Indian chief Tecumtum

By Stacy D. Stumbo
of the Daily Courier

As their numbers dwindled due to disease and warfare, many members of the Rogue River tribes resigned themselves to the fact that their lives would never be as they were before European contact. In 1853, they entered into a treaty with the U.S. government that established the Table Rock Reservation and ceded their claim to lands in Southern Oregon in exchange for \$60,000.

Not all tribal members agreed to the terms.

Tecumtum ("Elk Killer"), also known as Chief John, headed the Etch-ka-taw-wah band of Takelma who lived along the Applegate River. He refused to sign the treaty, and told a government official, "This is my country; I was here when the trees were very small. ... My

heart is sick with fighting, but I want to live in my country. If the white men are willing, I will go back to Deer Creek, but I will not lay down my arms and go to the reservation; I will fight."

Tecumtum's people fled to the mountains, and hostilities escalated. In the fall of 1855, one of Tecumtum's sons and another member of his band were lynched by a mob of whites in Eureka, Calif. Not long afterward, a company of volunteers from Jacksonville attacked a peaceful Takelma village just outside the reservation, massacring dozens of old men, women, and children.

For more than a year, Tecumtum's band resisted subjugation and removal. His was the last group of Rogue River Indians to surrender.

In the summer of 1856, he and more than 200 of his people walked 125 miles north to the

Siletz Reservation. Two years later, he and his son Adam were sentenced to imprisonment at the Presidio, the federal prison in San Francisco, for plotting an uprising. While being transported by the steamer Columbia, the pair attacked their guard and blew the lights out in steerage. The captain, two ship's officers and five passengers subdued them. Tecumtum was stabbed in the hand and shot through the nose. Adam was shot through the leg. The limb had to be amputated before they reached San Francisco.

After his daughters begged for his return, Tecumtum was released to the Grand Ronde Reservation in 1862. On June 6, 1864, the Oregonian newspaper reported that Chief John, "known and dreaded for several years on account of his desperate hate of the whites, died of old age at Fort Yamhill."

In this section: Indians, gold and a newspaper's birth

By Patti Richter
of the Daily Courier

Long before there was the Grants Pass Daily Courier in Josephine County, there were plenty of skirmishes and battles that took place between the settlers and American Indians who were already living here.

In the first section of "Growing up with Josephine County," readers will get an idea for what life was like in this region both before and after the county was formally established in 1856.

Settlers and miners were making their way to this area before 1850, but it

was the Donation Land Act of 1850 that attracted larger numbers of people to the area. Miners were drawn to the Illinois Valley, especially the Waldo and Kerby areas, in hordes trying to cash in on the local gold rush. Although Creek yielded about \$40,000 worth of gold in 1873.

That influx of people also started to increase tensions between settlers and the American Indian tribes in the area. There were several brutal massacres, battles and more before — and after — a treaty was signed in 1853.

Settlers soon formed communities and Waldo was the first county seat for

Josephine County. Next came, Kerby. But the third and final county seat went to Grants Pass, a decision made in an 1886 election. The town had almost doubled in size in the three years prior to that after the Oregon & California Railroad decided to make Grants Pass one of its stops. Stores, saloons and hotels began to spring up along Front Street (which is now G Street) next to the railroad tracks to provide services and goods to train passengers.

The Grant's Pass Courier (the town still used an apostrophe in its name back then) made its debut on April 3, 1885. The owner-publisher-editor of the

weekly newspaper, which published on Thursdays, was J.H. Stine. The newspaper's first office was at what is now Fifth and G streets. In those first 15 years, it had several different homes up and down Front Street.

The name was changed to the Rogue River Courier by its second owner, W.J. Wimer in 1886.

During the newspaper's first five years, the Courier had six different editors. Amos E. Voorhies and C.S. Price bought the paper in 1897 and Voorhies became sole proprietor two years later.

The Voorhies family still owns the newspaper today.