

## **An Abstract of the Thesis of**

Richard W. Alves for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History presented on May 24, 2010. Title: Melee at the Edge of Empire: The Manifestation of the Reservation System in Southwest and Western Oregon 1850-1875.

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Jeff Sklansky

The purpose of this thesis is to explain why the reservation system manifested so disappointingly for the Native American groups of Southwest Oregon. It seeks to characterize the struggle that raged in Southwest Oregon from 1850 to 1856 between three main groups there: indigenous peoples, white squatters and miners, and Indian Office officials. It shows how rapidly changing demographics affected Indian-white relations in Oregon, especially with regard to the implementation of Indian Office reservation policy. This paper hopes to answer why the actual reservation system strayed so far from its ideological base, relying especially on letters and reports between Indian Office officials. It basically argues that the reasons for the Indian Office's departure with its original theories are complex and multifold; they include the contradictory nature of Indian Office promises and the Land Donation Act, broken promises and treaties by white officials, local white neglect of dictates from distant bureaucratic bodies, and ultimately the escalation of racial and territorial hostilities into all-out violence and war. In short, this paper chronicles the relationship between federal reservation policy and the Native American peoples of Southwest Oregon from roughly 1850 through the second reduction of the Coast Reservation in 1875. It interrogates the changing nature of this relationship, and attempts to answer why it played out the way it did in Southwest and Western Oregon, as well as elsewhere throughout the West.

Key Words: Indian Office, Indian policy, Indian wars, Land Donation Act, miners, Native Americans, reservation system, Rogue River, Southwest Oregon, squatters

Corresponding e-mail address: [alvesr@onid.orst.edu](mailto:alvesr@onid.orst.edu)

Melee at the Edge of Empire:  
The Manifestation of the Reservation System  
in Southwest and Western Oregon 1850-1875

by

Richard W. Alves

A PROJECT

submitted to

Oregon State University

University Honors College

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History (Honors Scholar)

Presented May 24, 2010  
Commencement June 2010

Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in History project of Richard W. Alves presented on May 24, 2010.

APPROVED:

---

Mentor, representing History

---

Committee Member, representing History

---

Committee Member, representing History

---

Chair, Department of History

---

Dean, University Honors College

I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University, University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

---

Richard W. Alves, Author

### **Acknowledgement**

This project would not have been possible for me were it not for the help of several key individuals. First, I have to thank my parents for their support and because they are the reason I was able to attend college and write papers like this in the first place. I must also thank Brian, my close friends, and especially Jamee, for being supportive and putting up with my strange thesis-and-stress induced antics over the last few months. Furthermore, I owe a great thanks to all of the authors of the secondary works that this project references. The scholarship of E.A. Schwartz was especially valuable to this thesis, both in the way his book and dissertation pointed me to several pertinent primary sources, and informed my understanding of the chronological narrative of the relocation of the Rogue River peoples. Finally, I'd like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisors: Drs. Jeff Sklansky, Ben Mutschler, and Stacey Smith, all from the OSU History Department. They each read several drafts of the thesis in its various forms and provided integral feedback that helped me greatly with research and writing.

Table of Contents

Maps and Photographs.....i

I. Research Focus..... 1

II. Historiography.....9

III. Methodology of Paper..... 19

IV. Analysis of Primary Source Documentation.....20

V. Plans with Unintended Consequences: the Emerging Reservation System and its Implications for Indian Removal Policy in the Northwest and Oregon 1850-1856  
.....31

- Traditional Indian Policy of the United States..... 32
- Emergence of the Federal Reservation System.....34
- Emergence of the Reservation System in Oregon Territory.....38

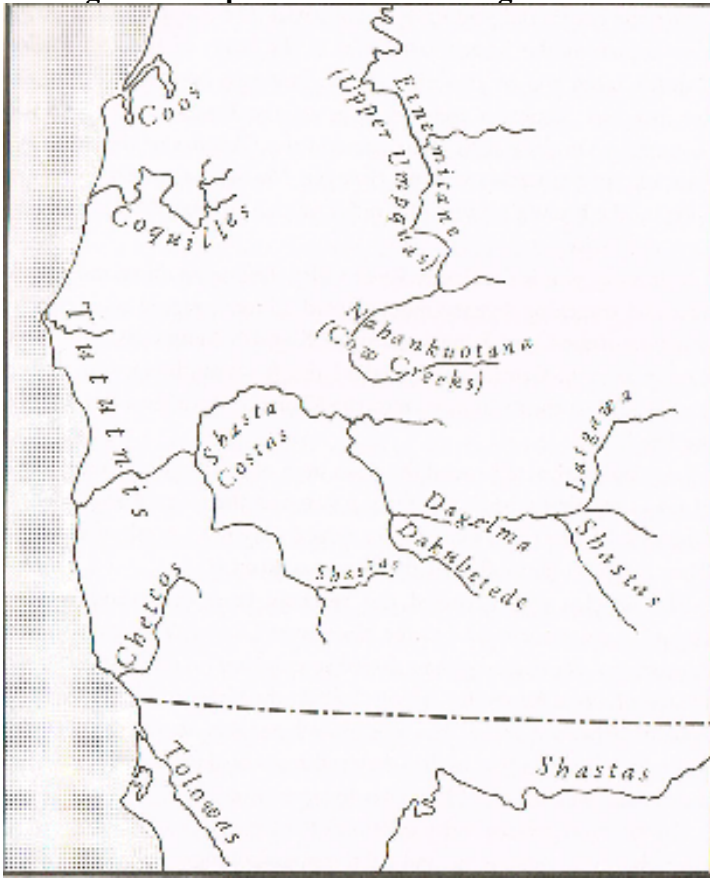
VI. Main Events in the Interaction of Reservation Policy and the Rogue River Indians 1850-1875  
.....45

- Joseph Lane’s Confrontation with the Rogue River Indians (1850).....46
- Jo Lane’s Campaign for War and Anson Dart’s Treaty Attempts (1851).....48
- Joel Palmer’s Treaties with the Rogue River Indians (1853).....49
- Palmer’s Plans for Oregon’s Indians and the History of the Table Rock Reservation (1854-1855)  
.....52
- The Rogue River Indian War and Removal (1855-1856).....56
- Change and Acculturation on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations (1857-1865)  
.....64
- The Yaquina Bay Removal (1865).....70

• The Alsea Removal (1875) and the Road to Allotment.....	72
VII. Conclusion.....	77
VIII. Bibliography.....	79

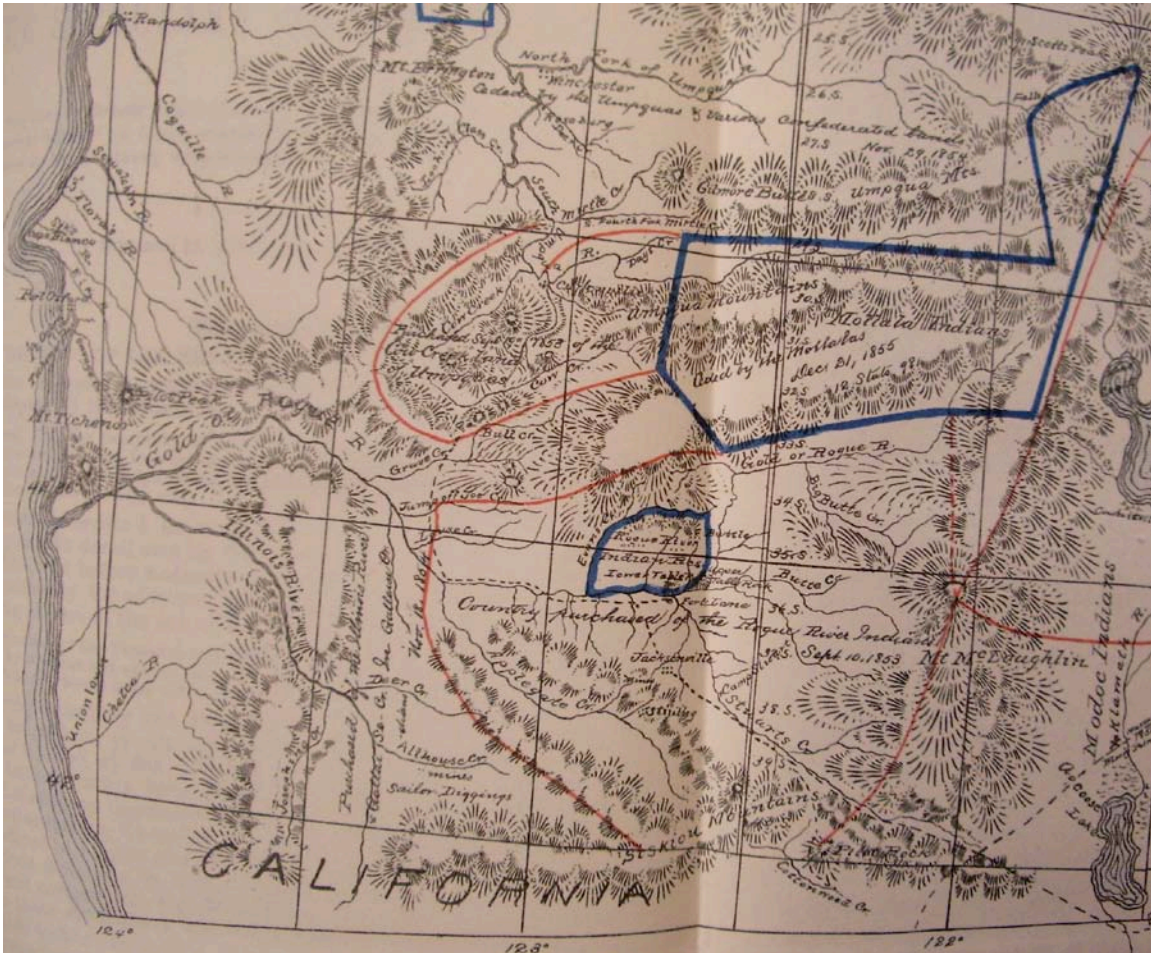
**Maps and Photographs**

**1. Indigenous Peoples of Southwest Oregon**



<sup>1</sup> "Indigenous Groups in Southwestern Oregon." Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 7.

## 2. Late Nineteenth Century Indian Office Map of Southwest Oregon



This map of Southwest Oregon shows the cessions and reservations in the interior in early 1855. The areas outlined in blue are the Table Rock Reservation to the South, and lands never sold to the U.S. federal government to the North. The areas outlined in red are the areas ceded to the government in Joel Palmer's September 1853 treaties with the Rogue River peoples.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "Indian Territorial Cessions in Southwest Oregon," in U.S., Senate, *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior*, 53<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1893, S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144.



### 3. Jacksonville, Oregon circa 1853

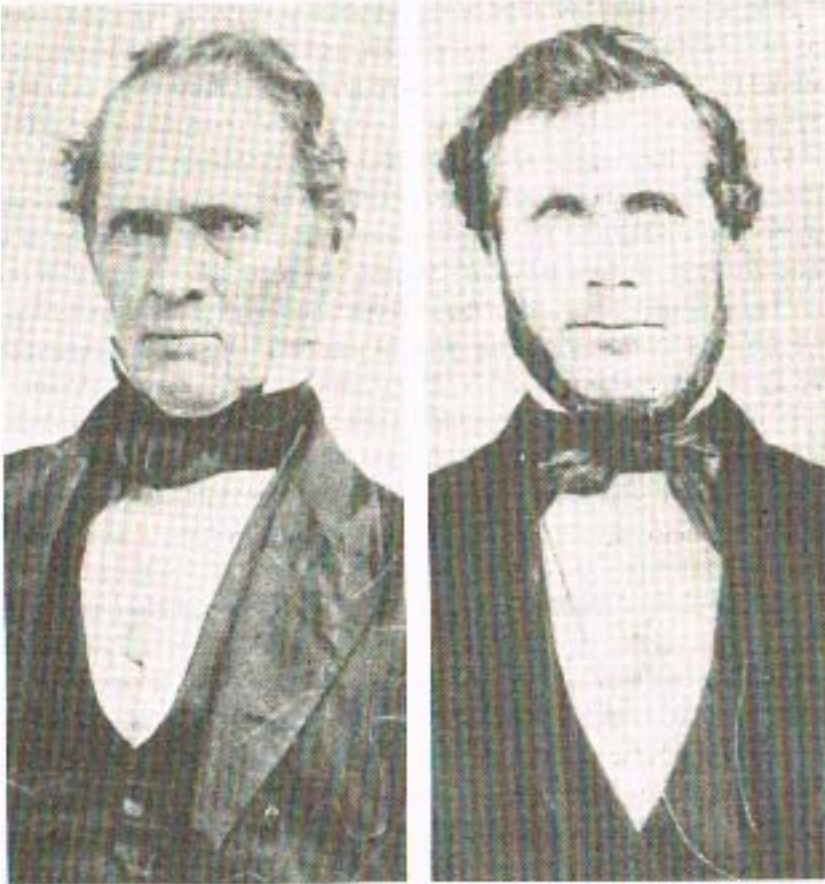


3

---

<sup>3</sup> "Jacksonville circa 1853." Southern Oregon Historical Society.

#### 4. Joseph Lane and Joel Palmer



Joseph Lane (left) and Joel Palmer (right) had great bureaucratic roles in the wars and relocations of the Rogue River peoples 1850-1856.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> "Joseph Lane and Joel Palmer." Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 28.

## 5. Southwest Oregon During the Rogue River Indian War (1855-56)



This map of Southwest Oregon shows the locations of several of the most important events in the Rogue River Indian War. They include the Oregon-California Trail running between Yreka and Roseburg, the Table Rock Reservation, Jacksonville, the battle of “Hungry Hill,” Big Meadows and Big Bend on the Lower Rogue River, Gold Beach, and Port Orford.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “Southwestern Oregon 1855-56.” Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 47.



## 6. The Rogue River Canyon

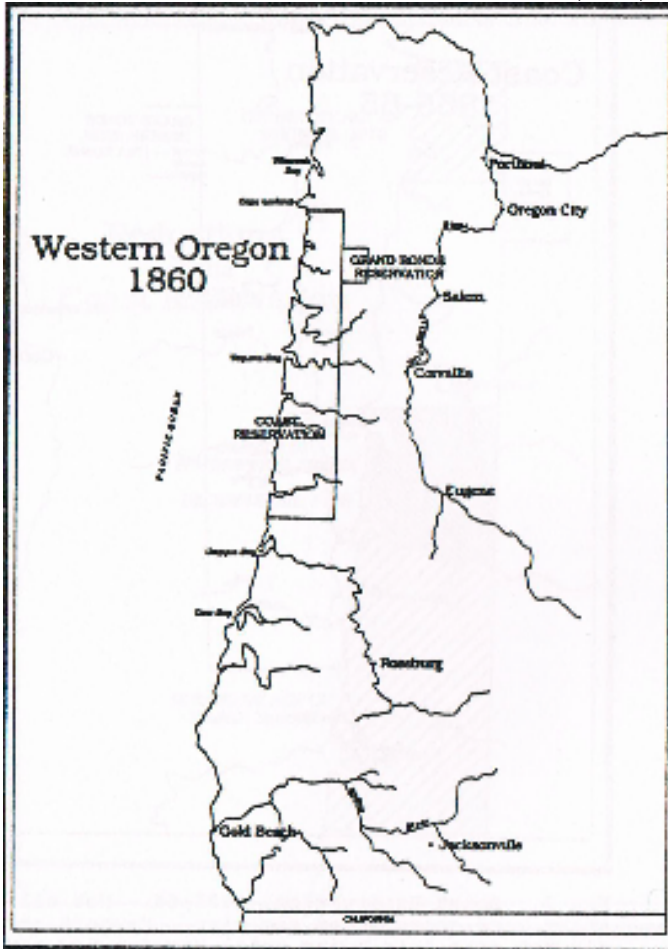


This picture of the Rogue River Canyon shows the dense forests and steep rows of hills that cover most of Southwest Oregon.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> “The Rogue River Canyon.” Photo by author, August 2008.

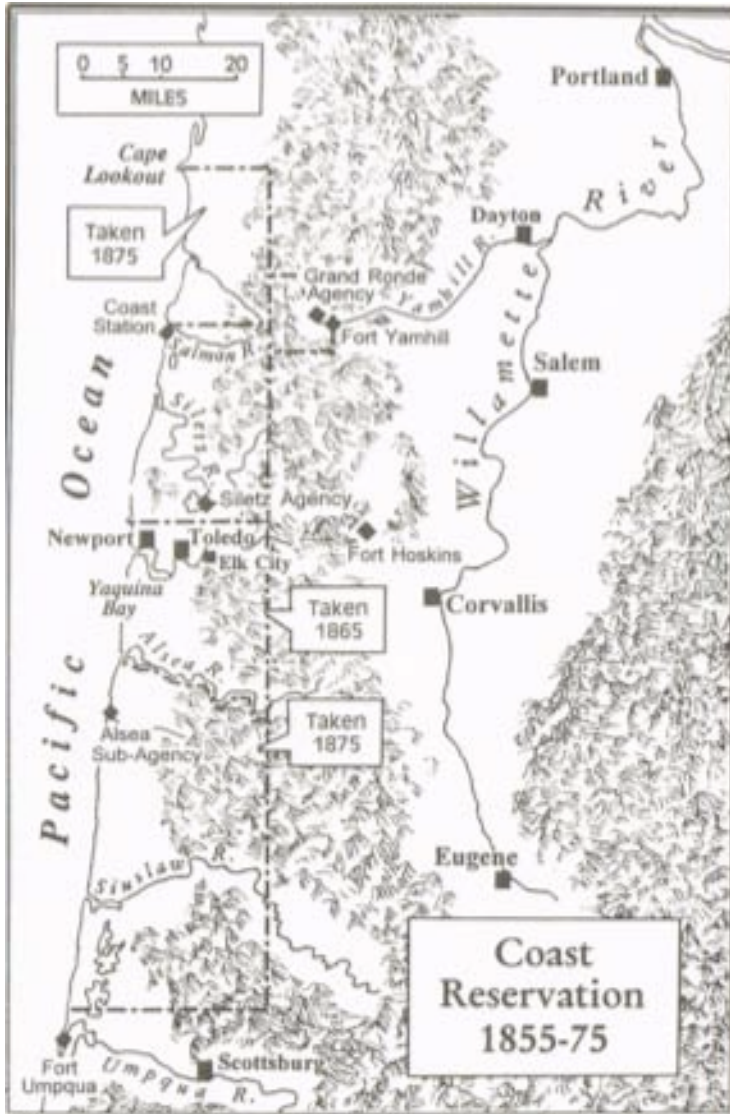
## 7. The Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations (1860)



This map of Western Oregon shows the original Coast Reservation before its reductions in 1865 and 1875. The small rectangle to the East of the Coast Reservation is the Grand Ronde Reservation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Western Oregon 1860," Schwartz, "Blood Money," 2.

## 8. Coast Reservation Reductions and Removals



This map of the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations shows the reductions taken from the Coast Reservation in 1865 and 1875. It also shows the reservations' proximity to the Willamette Valley, as well as the white towns that sprung up on former reservation lands.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Coast Reservation 1855-1875." Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 162.

## Research Focus

The indigenous peoples of Southwest Oregon faced an uncertain future in 1850. While they had remained relatively isolated from much contact with whites in the densely forested valleys of Southern Oregon, their way of life would change rapidly in the 1850s due to a series of events that brought white miners and squatters by the thousands into their traditional hunting and gathering territories. The U.S annexation of Oregon Territory in 1846, the discovery of gold in Northern California in 1848 and the subsequent rush of 1849, the U.S. acquisition of California from Mexico in 1848, and the Land Donation Act of 1850,<sup>1</sup> all combined by 1850 to bring an estimated 12,093 squatters, and several thousands more travelers onto and through the lands of the Native Americans of Oregon Territory.<sup>2</sup> The same 1850 census reported 92,597 whites living in California.<sup>3</sup>

The miners who flocked to the gold fields of Northern California and Southern Oregon also faced uncertainty; their sole purpose for migrating was to prospect enough gold in order to return to the Willamette Valley or to the East and start new lives.<sup>4</sup> The squatters and farmers streaming into Oregon and California in the 1840s and 1850s were also looking to capitalize on what they saw as untapped resources; many migrants wanted not gold, but land on which to

---

<sup>1</sup> The Land Donation Act of 1850 was enacted on September 27, 1850, and guaranteed 160 acres of land to any white man over eighteen who moved out to Oregon Territory. Married men were guaranteed 320 acres of free land. The act was one of the chief catalysts for the surge of white migration to Oregon in the 1850s; one of the main points this paper will stress with relation to the Land Donation Act is that it was opposed both in spirit and law to the national Indian policy that was simultaneously being worked out amidst an environment of unrestricted white speculation. While the federal government ideally hoped to ‘buy’ lands from Indian groups before allowing white migration there, the Land Donation Act gave away lands never bought from Indians for free. The irony of these two major policies in Oregon in the 1850s is reflected in a host of later ironies that stemmed from trying to simultaneously create a reservation system while still promoting white migration and ‘settlement’ of new territories in Oregon.

<sup>2</sup> E.A. Schwartz, “Blood Money: the Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath” (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991), 71.

<sup>3</sup> The populations of Oregon and California were increasing at incredible rates in 1850. While only 2,735 white people were estimated to have settled in California from 1840 to 1848, 89,000 white emigrants arrived in California in 1849 and 1850 alone. Thus, well over ninety percent of the white population of California reported in 1850 had arrived in the previous two years. White settlement in Oregon never reached the same scale as the gold rush years in California, but the white population of Oregon Territory was still growing extremely fast: roughly 6,300 whites came overland to Oregon in 1847-1848, while 6,450 arrived in 1849-1850 (E.A. Schwartz, “Blood Money: the Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath” (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991), 70-71). The slightly lower white population reported in Oregon in the 1850 census (12,093) is probably due to high numbers of white Oregon men who rushed to California in 1849, as well as inaccuracy of census counts in isolated white settlements.

<sup>4</sup> The miners who flocked to Southern Oregon and Northern California in the late 1840s and early 1850s were originally looking to stay there temporarily, not permanently. They were generally traveling through the area in search of gold hot spots. Thus, most confrontations between whites and Indians in Southwest Oregon during this period were not about settlement and land, but control over the trails between gold fields and white communities like Jacksonville or the Willamette Valley.

practice the intrinsically “American” values of self-sufficient agrarianism: “settling” and “improving” a plot of land for the subsistence of a household.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Washington D.C., Indian Office bureaucrats were deciding the theoretical future of federal Indian Office<sup>6</sup> policy. Federal Indian Office officials had several vague ideological goals that they hoped to achieve by removing the Indian populations of the West and confining them to reservations; the most important of these theoretical goals were to negotiate treaties with native peoples for the ‘sale’ of their lands before those lands were squatted on by whites, to leave reserves of land for Indian groups closed to white settlement, to convince Native American groups of the benefit of relocation to these reserves, to relocate such groups with minimal bloodshed on all sides, to educate Native Americans in the ways of Euro-American culture, and ultimately to assimilate indigenous peoples into white American culture. Despite promoting such paternalistic, ethnocentric, yet seemingly benevolent ideals, Indian Office Officials in the 1850s had few concrete plans for actually implementing the removal of Indian groups that did not compromise the professed ideals of the Indian Office.<sup>7</sup>

Real reservation policy emerged in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s out of the ideological and physical clash between indigenous peoples, white squatters, and Indian Office bureaucrats. While the theoretical ideals of Indian Office officials would not have seemed favorable to the

---

<sup>5</sup> Terminology is often loaded with ‘Native Americans’ as well as with ‘whites’ in the context of Westward expansion. Historians must be aware of cultural bias not only in the labels they use for various people, but also in the actions (or lack of actions) attributed to them. The verbs used to characterize each group of people or individuals should reflect their true interests and goals in promoting their own survival and control. Since no group is passive, it is important to assign correct labels that accurately reflect different groups’ different goals. While ‘Native Americans’ is currently the most academically and socially acceptable term for the indigenous peoples of North America, this paper also employs several other (possibly outdated) terms for Native Americans throughout, both for the sake of variety and to provide an ideological context regarding white conceptions of Native Americans during the 1850s. Such terms include words and phrases like ‘Indians,’ ‘indigenous peoples,’ and ‘native groups,’ among others, and are consistent with the terminology used by recent secondary works in the field. While each term for ‘aboriginal peoples’ carries with it certain imperialist attitudes and connotations, it becomes apparent in this paper that it is not only necessary to use different labels for ‘Indians’ in different situations, but also that the connotations of such labels can actually contribute to a clearer understanding of Indian-white relations in different places and times. Similarly, terms like ‘settlers’ and ‘pioneers’ for white migrants connote a heroic westward march into territory not previously ‘settled’ by humans. The obvious irony of such words is that the vast lands of the Western United States in the 1850s were occupied and had been occupied by thousands of distinct Indian groups for thousands of years. Thus, this paper generally tries to avoid terms like ‘settlers’ and ‘pioneers,’ instead sticking to terms that either reflect white action (‘white miners,’ ‘squatters,’ ‘invaders,’ ‘white soldiers,’ etc.), or that mirror terms for Native Americans (‘white Americans,’ ‘Euro-Americans,’ ‘whites,’ etc.).

<sup>6</sup> The Indian Office gradually became known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs following its 1849 transferal from the War Department to the newly created Department of the Interior. They are generally used interchangeably in the secondary works concerning reservation policy in the 1850s, and are therefore used interchangeably in this paper as well.

<sup>7</sup> When the Indian Office resorted to (or condoned) violent force to implement reservation policy, it neglected two of its greatest theoretical concerns: minimizing violence and upholding treaties. Unfortunately for the Indian populations of the West, the Indian Office eventually would oppose many of its ideals in favor of forced compliance with removal plans.



Rogue River peoples when compared to the spatial, cultural, and ideological freedoms they had traditionally enjoyed up to 1850; the actual implementation and real development of Indian Office policy met several major goals of its visionaries at the expense of many of their ideals. In short, the brutal realities of implementing reservation policy in Southwest and Western Oregon ended up even more disappointing for the indigenous peoples than the paternalistic promises of Indian Office idealism.

When compared to the near-extirmination of the Indians of the Willamette Valley in the 1830s and 1840s (mostly due to epidemics like malaria), contact between whites and the Rogue River peoples was relatively minimal prior to 1850. The indigenous groups of Southwest Oregon, however, were not total strangers to whites prior to 1850, as they had been trading with white seamen and trappers since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Nor were the Rogue River Indians spared the horrors of white diseases, although their more gradual exposure probably spared the lives of many who would have died, had the area been populated as rapidly and densely as the Willamette Valley.<sup>9</sup> From 1850 to 1857, however, the Rogue River Indians were removed from their original villages and hunting and gathering territories, losing about 8,000 square miles of traditional lands to white squatters and the U.S. federal government in Southwest Oregon.<sup>10</sup> In addition, according to a count on the Coast Reservation in 1857, they were reduced in number to 1,943 war survivors.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the process of implementing Reservation Policy in the 1850s in Southwest and Western Oregon resulted in the deaths of thousands of indigenous peoples to war, starvation, and disease. The final outcome of such policies, although they accomplished the formulaic Indian Office goals of treaty, relocation, and reservation, strayed

---

<sup>8</sup> E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath, 1850-1980* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Parrish, an Indian Office agent in Port Orford, on the coast of Southwest Oregon, reported in 1854 that some local Indians had told him of a smallpox epidemic that swept through the area about thirty years earlier, as well as a wave of measles eighteen years before. Thus, known epidemics hit at least the coastal Native American populations of Southwest Oregon in about 1824 and 1836. Beyond this, there are few reports of epidemics of white diseases among the Rogue River Indians before they moved onto reservations (Parish to Palmer, 10 July 1854, in U.S., Senate, *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior*, 53<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1893, S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144, 31); E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> E.A. Schwartz, "Blood Money: the Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath" (PhD diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991), 351.

<sup>11</sup> Metcalfe to Nesmith, 15 July 1857, in U.S., House, *Message from the President of the United States*, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1857, H. Ex. Doc. 2, Serial 942, 645; E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath*, 149.

far from the more benevolent (although condescending and paternalistic) theoretical aspirations of Indian Office officials. This paper will focus on answering why the removal and reservation process strayed so far in reality from its theoretical ideals, ‘accomplishing’ its goals at the ultimate price of unfulfilled promises and thousands of Native American lives.<sup>12</sup>

The uprooting of millions of Native Americans and thousands of native cultures is certainly *the* great tragedy of American Indian Removal, ranking with chattel slavery as one of the most violent chapters of American history. Yet, an interrogation of a more pointed tragedy, the wide gap between the idealistic rhetoric and actual manifestation of Indian Office policy itself, can shed light not only on what white officials of the 1850s thought of Native Americans, but also on what indigenous peoples, encroaching whites, and Indian Office officials each had at stake in the battle for control of the frontier, both in Southwest Oregon and the West as a whole.

The goal of this paper is to provide satisfactory answers to the following questions: what was the interaction between the Rogue River Indians, local squatters and miners, and Indian Office officials really like in Southwest Oregon 1850-1856, and why did the emerging reservation system have such disastrous results for the Rogue River Indians, both in Southwest Oregon and on the reservations of Western Oregon? A short answer is that Indian-white interaction in Southwest Oregon soured from 1850 to 1856 due to the rapid arrival of thousands of new whites in Rogue River Country every year from 1846 on, Indian difficulties with disease and subsistence because of the intruders, white neglect or non-ratification of treaties signed with indigenous peoples, and the growing perpetuation of thefts and violence committed by desperate parties on all sides. Ultimately, the reservation system that emerged in Southwest and Western Oregon out of this struggle ended disastrously for the Rogue River Indians because of general hostilities between them and local whites exacerbated by disconnect between the centralized Indian Office

---

<sup>12</sup> Most basically, reservation policy achieved its goals of confining the Rogue River peoples onto reservations, turning them into agriculturalists and wage earners, allotting their lands for private ownership, and eventually assimilating them into white modes of life. In the process, however, the Indian Office failed to uphold its promises to respect the treaties it created, to compensate Indians for their lands, to provide annuities to Indians on reservations, and to preserve peace between whites and Indians in Southwest and Western Oregon.

in Washington D.C. and its under-funded and unorganized bureaucracy in the Far West. The inability of the distant Indian Office to monitor the quality of the implementation of reservation policy at the edge of the American empire was the main problem for Indian agents trying to maintain peace in Oregon as squatters arrived by the thousands expecting free land. Before delving deeper into the struggle in Southwest Oregon that produced the brand of reservation policy that arose there in the 1850s, it is important to first identify the main groups involved in the struggle and explain their main identities and interests.

The term ‘Rogue River Indians’ is an umbrella term that includes indigenous peoples who originally inhabited the waterways of Southwest Oregon, west of the Cascade Range, and south of the Coos estuary and the Lower Umpqua River. The main waterways inhabited by “Rogue River Indians” include the Rogue, Upper Umpqua, Illinois, Applegate, Chetco, Sixes, and Coquille Rivers, as well as their tributaries and nearby lakes. Although different groups within the label ‘Rogue River Indians’ spoke a host of different languages (including Athapascan, Kusan, Takelman, and Shastan)<sup>13</sup> and were organized in small, relatively isolated seasonal villages of 40-100 members<sup>14</sup> rather than in large nations or tribes, they still shared a similar way of life and culture that had evolved out of thousands of years of intermixing multi-cultural and multi-lingual groups in Southern Oregon.<sup>15</sup> Thus, ‘Rogue River Indians’ is an inexact and artificially imposed term, defined mostly by geography, partially by culture, and partially by language.

While it is impossible to accurately estimate the population of the Rogue River Indians prior to contact with whites, Oregon historian Stephen Dow Beckham puts the population of the

---

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People: the Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Douthit, “Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations Across a Cultural Divide,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* vol. 95, no. 4 (1994): 474; E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath*, 13-14; Dennis Gray, “The Takelma and Their Athapascan Neighbors: A New Ethnographic Synthesis for the Upper Rogue River Area of Southwestern Oregon” University of Oregon Anthropological Papers, no. 37 (1987).

<sup>15</sup> Schwartz, in *The Rogue River Indian War*, says that the indigenous groups of Southwest Oregon were “members of a multilingual complex of interlocking cultures” (5). For an exhaustive ethnographic inquiry of the Rogue River Indians see Dennis Gray’s “The Takelma and Their Athapascan Neighbors: A New Ethnographic Synthesis for the Upper Rogue River Area of Southwestern Oregon.” For a general ethnographic and anthropological look at the Rogue River Indians, see the chapter “Meaning Unknown” in E.A. Schwartz’s dissertation “Blood Money” (21-55), or for older ethnographic and anthropological inquiries, see Philip Drucker’s “The Tolowa and Their Southwest Oregon Kin,” and J. Owen Dorsey’s “Indians of the Siletz Reservation, Oregon.”

Rogue River Indians at about 9,500 in 1851.<sup>16</sup> His estimates, based on early twentieth century anthropological studies,<sup>17</sup> place the populations of Athapascan-speaking groups among the Rogue River Indians at 8,800, while they put numbers of the Takelma and Shasta or Chasta groups at about 500 and 250, respectively in 1851.<sup>18</sup> For thousands of years, they mainly subsisted on fishing salmon and trout; hunting deer and other animals; and gathering acorns, roots, and bulbs, which they harvested seasonally in the rivers, forests, and meadows of Southwest Oregon. The Rogue River Indians were not strangers to agriculture as Indian Office officials and policies assumed them to be; while they relied on hunting and gathering for food, they did grow a single crop, tobacco, which they used for smoking and trade.<sup>19</sup>

The main white groups that challenged the claims of the Rogue River Indians, first to the territories of Southwest Oregon in the 1850s, and later to the reservation lands of Western Oregon in the 1860s-70s, included transient white prospectors and Indian Office officials. By 1850, encroaching white settlements were competing with the Indian groups of Southwest Oregon for the limited sources of subsistence on which the Indians depended for survival.<sup>20</sup> White Indian Office officials were not only given the responsibility of acting as the chief negotiators between native groups and local whites, but also of dictating the future social and geographic organization of Indian-white interaction in the West. The main officials referenced in this paper include Joseph Lane (first governor and Indian superintendent of Oregon Territory), Luke Lea (U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1850-1853), George Manypenny (U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1853-1856), Anson Dart (Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon 1851-1853), Joel

---

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Especially Alfred Kroeber's reorganization of James Mooney's earlier population statistics, published in "Cultural and Natural Areas of Native North America," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology*, Vol. XXXVIII (1939).

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Gray, "Takelma," 36-37.

<sup>20</sup> As more white squatters set up homesteads in Southwest Oregon, they generally took the best meadowlands first, due to the grass for ranching, and fertile soil for agriculture. Yet such meadows among the dense forests of Southwest Oregon contained most of the camas roots and oak savannahs in which the Rogue River Indians gathered roots and acorns. The proliferation of white farms and ranches in Southwest Oregon by the mid 1850s led to a scarcity of gathering lands (due to white homesteaders claiming grasslands), a scarcity of gathering materials (due to livestock grazing and rooting), and a scarcity of game due to competition from local whites. Native Americans' difficulty securing subsistence became an obvious problem in the interaction between Indians and Indian Office policy in Southwest Oregon.

Palmer (Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon 1853-1856, and agent on the Coast Reservation in 1870s), and Robert Metcalfe (agent on Coast Reservation 1856-1861), among others. All responsibility to carry out negotiations with the Indians of the West, Oregon, and of Rogue River Country, rested on the shoulders of this handful of men. In Southwest Oregon, this meant maintaining relations between 9,500 Indians and several thousand white residents and travelers pouring into the region. White transient miners and Rogue River Indians had fundamentally different uses and conceptions of the land and resources of Southwest Oregon that put them naturally at odds with each other. Whereas the Rogue River peoples used specific locations within their territories at different times of the year for gathering acorns, bulbs, and roots; and for hunting deer, salmon, and other game; most of the whites who found themselves in Southwest Oregon in 1850 were there not to settle permanently, but to extract wealth from the area in the form of gold, furs, land, or wages for fighting Indians, before returning to wherever they wanted to live with their newly acquired fortune.<sup>21</sup> Thus, miners and other transient whites saw lands occupied by Indians as wasted territories since the potential wealth held within lands under Indian ownership could not be tapped by whites.<sup>22</sup>

Officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, however, thought Indian removal and relocation onto reservations was imperative in order to limit violent contact between Indian and white populations. Ironically, it was the inflexibility and violent enforcement of reservation policy itself that eventually started the Rogue River Indian War in 1855.<sup>23</sup> Several

---

<sup>21</sup> E.A. Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 13-16; Gray "Takelma"; Gray Whaley, "Oregon, *Illahaee*, and the Empire Republic: A Case Study of American Colonialism, 1843-1858," *The Western Historical Quarterly*. vol. 36, no. 2 (2005): pars. 2-11, 37-40; E.A. Schwartz, "Blood Money," 87-88, 143, 176.

<sup>22</sup> As Whaley notes in "Oregon, *Illahaee*, and the Empire Republic," the whites streaming into the Willamette Valley and the rest of Oregon in the 1840s and 1850s often confused notions of republican rights to individual property with speculation and unwarranted claims. There was little the federal government (described by Whaley as "cumbersome imperial apparatuses of treaties and land laws, striving to manipulate empire from the periphery") could do to prevent white squatters and miners from setting up communities on Indian lands not yet bought with treaties, especially when the Land Donation Act guaranteed free land to any white Easterners who made move out to Oregon (Whaley, pars. 4-11).

<sup>23</sup> The 'Rogue River Indian War' involved a confederation of various groups of Rogue River, Chetco River, Illinois River, Applegate River, and Umpqua River Indians united against white volunteer parties and federal troops. The war erupted in late 1855, and ended with the surrender of the confederated Indian groups of Southwest Oregon in mid 1856. The indigenous peoples who fought in the war, known collectively as the 'Rogue River Indians,' were relocated to the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations in 1856 and 1857 following their surrender. The war was originally sparked into action, however, by Indian Office and local vigilante efforts to force Southwest Oregon Indians to remain on a reservation plagued by disease and lack of supplies and staff.

Commissioners of Indian Affairs in the 1840s and 1850s<sup>24</sup> stressed their belief that the best way to save at least some of the American Indians from white westward expansion was to assign superintendents and agents to secure treaties with indigenous groups by negotiating the sale of their lands and the creation of reservations.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, Indian Office officials and local white miners and squatters both came to support the removal and relocation of the Rogue River Indians for different reasons. While the squatters and miners generally wanted to ‘open up’ new territories to white exploit, ‘settlement’ and ‘industry,’ the Indian Office officials generally supported removal because they wanted to ‘save’ the Indians from being crushed by ‘advancing’ white culture, to solidify political ties within the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other agencies, and to please their local white constituency for future political support. They also saw the reservation system as a temporary tool for acculturating Indians to the ways of white culture. The theory was that once relocated indigenous peoples had learned and perfected the basic practices of Western Civilization (agriculture, Christianity, and formal education, among others), their tribes would be dissolved, and their reservations would be allotted to former tribal members for private ownership.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the reservation system was originally conceptualized by its shapers as a temporary arrangement meant to turn Indians into sedentary, Christian, agricultural ‘Americans,’ in order to be eventually assimilated into prevalent white American culture.

Joel Palmer, Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs 1853-1856, secured the first ratified treaties with the Rogue River Indians in September 1853. These treaties were precipitated by years of tensions between Native American groups in Southwest Oregon and the rapidly growing white population there. When white settlers were streaming into the Willamette Valley during the mid-1840s, the Indians of Southwest Oregon were still relatively unaffected by the encroachment of white culture. While waves of smallpox, measles, and cholera had claimed the

---

<sup>24</sup> Especially Orlando Brown (in office 1849-1850), Luke Lea (1850-1853), and George Manypenny (1853-1857).

<sup>25</sup> Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1850, serial 551, 937-38, 957-58; Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1854, serial 746, 222, 230-231.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Treppert, *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), viii, 1-2, 6-10; 193-197.

lives of a significant portion of Northwest Oregon Indians (some estimates range up to 80 percent)<sup>27</sup> following initial exposure to white sailors and trappers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Indian groups of Southwest Oregon remained intact in small villages relatively isolated from one another and white intruders.<sup>28</sup> Following the discovery of gold in the Sacramento Valley of California in 1848, two thirds of the total number of white men in Oregon took to the Oregon-California Trail *en route* to the gold fields of Northern California.<sup>29</sup> While the only whites to previously settle in Southwestern Oregon prior to 1848 included a handful of farmers and trappers (with whom the Indians of the Rogue Valley generally coexisted peacefully), the discovery of gold in California brought thousands of new travelers through Rogue Country. Initial Indian-white conflicts in Southwestern Oregon, then, were not so much over wealth extraction in Southern Oregon itself, but over control of the California-Oregon Trail running between San Francisco and Portland. That said, the subsequent discovery of gold on the coast, the Illinois River, and near Jacksonville in Southwestern Oregon in 1851-1852, led to extensive semi-permanent and permanent white settlement of the region. The boom in Northern California and Southern Oregon attracted so many miners that in 1852, Jackson County, which had previously been based around the small mining camp of Jacksonville, became the most populous county in Oregon.<sup>30</sup>

### **Historiography**

In attempting to answer why reservation policy developed the way it did with the Rogue River Indians, this paper is entering into a multi-layered scholarly conversation that is relatively large with regard to the development of the national reservation system, yet relatively limited with regard to the effects of its officials and policies in Southwest and Western Oregon 1850-

---

<sup>27</sup> Leslie Scott, "Indian Diseases as Aids to Pacific Northwest Settlement," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 26. (June 1925): 154-155.

<sup>28</sup> Rogue River Indians were not free from white disease, but exposed to them more gradually than were the Indians of the Willamette Valley and the Pacific Coast. Gradual exposure over several decades allowed for the development of more resistant immunities and less overall sickness and death among the various groups of Southwest Oregon Indians, although white diseases still probably claimed thousands of indigenous lives in the region. E.A. Schwartz, "Blood Money," 66-68.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-72.

<sup>30</sup> Schwartz, "Blood Money," 113, 143.

1875. The Rogue River Indians, however, have not been completely neglected by modern historians; they have been the peripheral or main focus in several multi-disciplinary secondary studies since the 1880s. Famed San Francisco historian, Hubert Howe Bancroft, devotes great attention to the Rogue River Indians and their relations with whites in the 1850s in his extremely detailed and voluminous work *The History of Oregon*, published in 1888.<sup>31</sup> Ethnographer J. Owen Dorsey, who visited the Siletz Reservation in 1884, was the first white man to view the Rogue River peoples as his primary academic subjects. He published his report of what he saw (perhaps incorrectly) as the remnants of pre-contact cultural practices, in two articles, “Indians of Siletz Reservation, Oregon” in 1889, and “The Gentile System of the Siletz Tribes” in 1890. According to contemporary Rogue River Indian historian E.A. Schwartz, early ethnographers like Dorsey asked their Native American subjects questions “about the ethnographic present that the ethnologists assumed was identical to their cultures before contact.”<sup>32</sup> Schwartz’s observation is important because it demonstrates how even professional ethnographers and anthropologists failed to account for Indian adaptations to reservation life that would have undoubtedly changed their cultural practices in the two decades since their relocation.

A new wave of ethnographic studies directly or indirectly concerning the Rogue River Indians emerged in the mid twentieth century, including Philip Drucker’s “The Tolowa and Their Southwest Oregon Kin” (1943) and *Cultures of the North Pacific Coast* (1965), Cora Du Bois’ “The 1870 Ghost Dance” (1946), and John Swanton’s *Indian Tribes of North America* (1952). These ethnographic historians of the early and mid twentieth century had the advantage of interviewing descendants of Rogue River Indians who either remembered life before relocation, or who had been educated in traditional cultural customs on the Coast or Grand Ronde Reservations. That said, their works were less analytical, and much more expository in nature, intended to reveal and explain different cultural aspects of the lives of Northwest coastal peoples,

---

<sup>31</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Oregon 1848-1883* (San Francisco: History Co., Publishers, 1888).

<sup>32</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 29.



including language, religion, territory, familial and social organization, physical subsistence, division of labor, and trade.

Contemporary scholarship on the Rogue River Indians and reservation policy in general has varied greatly in its different approaches and scopes. The foremost secondary sources cited in this paper concerning mid-nineteenth century Native Americans and U.S. reservation policy in general include Francis Paul Prucha's *The Great Father: the United States Government and the American Indians* (1984) and Robert Trewnert's *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51* (1975).

Prucha's *The Great Father* is a two-volume, comprehensive history of U.S. Indian policy from the colonial period into the 1980s. Prucha essentially chronicles the interaction of Native Americans and Euro-Americans in the United States, focusing especially on how white conceptions of Native Americans shaped U.S. government policies towards them at different times and places in American history. *The Great Father* has about 150 pages interspersed with discussions pertinent to this paper; Prucha's main foci in these sections are the emerging reservation system, Indian Office officials and their policies, reservation policies on the Pacific Coast, national Indian relations during the Civil War, and the Indian system and its critics.<sup>33</sup> In these sections of *The Great Father*, Prucha attempts to answer the following questions: who were the officials responsible for theorizing about the future of Indian Office policy in the West? What were their goals and motivations in the removal process? How did the U.S. government's way of negotiating with Indians change in 1849? Why did the Indian Office fail to deliver on so many promises to Native American groups? Why did Joel Palmer's treaties with indigenous groups in Southwest Oregon fail to preserve peace between whites and native peoples there? Prucha basically says that Palmer's treaties in Oregon were typical of the pattern of reservation policies that emerged in the 1850s throughout the West. The ways in which Prucha says Palmer's treaties

---

<sup>33</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: the United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 302-338, 381-409, 462-483.

were typical include their arbitrary grouping of various indigenous groups under blanket terms like ‘Rogue River Indians,’ their insistence on the removal of Indians out of the way of whites, their provisions allowing for multiple relocations, and their broken promises and delays in ratification of treaties.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, Prucha serves this paper by showing how the relocation of the Rogue River Indians fits into the context of the larger history of manifest destiny, Indian wars, and violent relocations across the West. Although the broad, national focus of *The Great Father* causes Prucha to gloss over some of the more subtle circumstances that shaped reservation policy specific to the Rogue River Indians, his contextual placement of Southwest Oregon Indians in the history of national removal policy is valuable because it shows how the specific history of the Rogue River Indians correlates to the overall history of nationwide Indian removal. While Prucha focuses on the typicality of Palmer’s treaty efforts and the development of the reservation system in Western Oregon, this paper will focus more on why the reservation system developed the way it did in Southwest Oregon, and how the struggle raging there in the 1850s played into the story of the removal of the region’s indigenous peoples.

Robert Trewnert’s book, *Alternative to Extinction*, stresses the importance of Indian Office policies from 1846 to 1851 in shaping what would emerge in 1852 and after as the federal reservation system. Trewnert argues that official reservation policy originally developed out of attempts by Indian Office bureaucrats to find an alternative to what they saw as the “inevitable extinction” of the indigenous peoples of America. He reasons that reservation policy resulted with widespread violence and brutality across the West 1852-1890 because Indian Office officials were forced to account for rapid changes in the relationship between whites and Indians in the 1850s with a bureaucratic system that had been left relatively unchanged since the 1830s. In short, Trewnert thinks that the disastrous general outcome of U.S. reservation policy was due to the inability of Indian Office officials to successfully maintain a reservation policy conceived by officials from 1846 to 1851, and based on Indian Office bureaucratic structures of the 1830s that

---

<sup>34</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 401-402.

were no longer applicable in the West by the late 1850s and subsequent decades.<sup>35</sup> This paper's argument will rely heavily on Trennert in its analysis of the changing reservation system policies that came to bear on the Indians of Southwest Oregon. Yet, changing policies and bureaucratic organization is only one explanation for the final outcomes of reservation policy in Oregon; this paper will attempt to show how changing policies, along with several other factors on the ground in Southwest Oregon, came to shape the manifestation and ultimate outcomes of the reservation system in Oregon.

The foremost secondary publications concerning the specific history of the Rogue River Indians and their interactions with white squatters and Indian Office officials include E.A. Schwartz's book *The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath, 1850-1980* (1997), as well as his doctoral dissertation "Blood Money: the Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath, 1850-1986" (1991); Stephen Dow Beckham's *Requiem for a People: the Rogue River Indians and the Frontiersmen* (1975); Terrence O'Donnell's *An Arrow in the Earth: General Joel Palmer and the Indians of Oregon* (1991); Gray Whaley's article "Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic: A Case Study of American Colonialism, 1843-1858" (2005); and Nathan Douthit's articles, "Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations across a Cultural Divide" (1994) and "Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border, 1851-1857" (1999).

Of these sources, Schwartz's book and dissertation are not only the most applicable to this paper, but also the most thorough and comprehensive secondary sources on the Rogue River Indians. Both his book, *The Rogue River Indian War and Its Aftermath, 1850-1980*, and his longer dissertation, "Blood Money: The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath, 1850-1986," examine the core dilemmas of the clash between the native peoples of Southwest Oregon and encroaching whites. Schwartz takes considerable interest in the Rogue River Indian War of 1855-1856, portraying it as a "pork barrel war" supported by rival Oregon politicians each hoping to secure the political backing of their local white constituencies. In both works, Schwartz gives

---

<sup>35</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 1-10, 193-197.

careful attention to the national and state politics that affected Indian Office policies in Oregon Territory and State, ultimately arguing that the Rogue River Indians and other indigenous groups of Western Oregon were victims of the tendency of Oregon politicians to sacrifice the ideals of federal reservation policy in favor of local white interests. According to Schwartz, the Rogue River Indian War was carried out by local whites seeking government pay, and promoted by Whigs and Democrats alike in order to win over local white constituencies.<sup>36</sup>

Through his examination of the dilemmas of implementing reservation policy in Western Oregon, Schwartz attempts to answer several questions pertinent to this study about the development of the reservation system and its effects on the Rogue River Indians from 1850 on: what were the national and state politics that affected Indian policy in Oregon Territory and State? Who were the major actors (commissioners, superintendents, agents, military officers) in Indian policy in the second half of the nineteenth century, and what did they do to affect Indian Office policies (especially with Northwest Indians and Rogue River Indians)? Who were the major Indian players in signing “treaties,” fighting against whites, and of post-war reservation politics? Why did conflicts between encroaching whites and Native Americans erupt in the 1840s and 1850s in the Northwest? In addition to investigating the difficulties of implementing Indian Office Reservation Policy in Western Oregon, Schwartz’s works are also valuable for their chronological synthesis of the actual events surrounding the relocation of the Rogue River peoples. This study relies heavily on Schwartz’s works throughout, especially in the later narrative of the main events of the interaction between Rogue River Indians and federal reservation policy; his documentation of the narrative is extremely thorough, and proved immensely fruitful in leading to applicable primary sources. However, instead of focusing on the intricacies of Whig-Democrat politics in Oregon, especially as reported by early newspapers in the region (as does Schwartz), this paper will focus much more on the correspondences and

---

<sup>36</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, xii, 71-73, 132-133; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 252-258.

policies of Indian Office officials with regard to Indian removal and reservation, rather than on the effects of aggressive state and national politics on removal policies in Oregon.

Stephen Dow Beckham's book, *Requiem for a People: the Rogue River Indians and the Frontiersmen*, published in 1975, was the first contemporary scholarly narrative of the years leading up to and during the Rogue River Indian War of 1855-1856. Beckham basically gives an ethnographic and anthropological sketch of the Rogue River peoples followed by a tragic narrative of the war and removal itself. Beckham's history differs most fundamentally from Schwartz's in its narrower scope; whereas Schwartz follows the history of the Rogue River Indians from 1850 through the late twentieth century, Beckham's narrative is focused on the traditional history of the Rogue River Indians through their surrender and removal in 1856. He portrays the Native Americans of Southwest Oregon as a "Stone Age people" who became the victims of aggressive whites rapidly streaming into the region.<sup>37</sup> While Beckham's work is certainly a thorough and a reliable account of the years leading up to the removal of the Rogue River Indians from Southwest Oregon, his book emits a certain attitude of tragedy with regard to the whole affair that this study will try to avoid; even the title connotes loss and passivity with regard to the Indians with the word "requiem." Furthermore, this study, like Schwartz's, will follow the Rogue River Indians out of Southern Oregon to the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations. Beckham's lament for the Rogue River peoples, combined with his termination of their history at 1856, seems to imply that the Rogue River Indian War ended not only their very existence, but also their relationship with the federal government when they were relocated to Northwest Oregon. This study hopes to characterize the struggle over Indian removal in Oregon that raged before and after the war of 1855-1856.

Terrence O'Donnell's *An Arrow in the Earth: General Joel Palmer and the Indians of Oregon* is basically a biography of Joel Palmer that tells of his birth and youth in the East, his travels along the Oregon Trail, his role in the Cayuse Indian War of the 1840s, his political

---

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 22, 189-91.

aspirations in Oregon, and ultimately his central role in implementing reservation policy in Western Oregon. O'Donnell's study proves most valuable to this study in his thorough biographical characterization of Joel Palmer, the most influential official in the history of Southwest Oregon Indian removals. Despite Palmer's centrality to this study, O'Donnell's biography is rarely cited because of its more expository focus on his life rather than an interrogation of his policies and treaties. Gray Whaley's article "Oregon, *Illahée*, and the Empire Republic: A Case Study of American Colonialism, 1843-1858;" analyzes the use of imperialist and colonialist language to describe the lawless environment of Western Oregon 1843-1858. He compares trends of imperial organization in the American West to international colonization in such a manner that communicates the sense of decentralization, uncurbed speculation, and rapid change that characterized the mad scramble for land and resources raging in Southwest Oregon and other fringes of the American Empire in the 1850s.<sup>38</sup> Whaley's article plays into this study in its characterization of Western Oregon as a transient, masculine, free-for-all in the 1850s.

Nathan Douthit, in his article, "Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border, 1851-1857," interrogates the view of Indian officials and agents as inhabiting a "middle ground" between Indian and white cultures.<sup>39</sup> Douthit cites Benjamin Wright's infamous career as an Indian agent in Southwest Oregon and Northern California as an example of an Indian Office official who exemplifies the ambiguities and complexities of the intermediary view of agents. Wright interacted with Native Americans in widely varying manners over his career as a miner and agent; he participated in episodes of outright slaughter of non-hostile Indians, frequently used of violent force to reestablish control over agitated Indian groups, yet also sometimes used his influence to promote peace between Indians and whites in the region. In sum, Douthit argues that the work of Indian agents and officials in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s

---

<sup>38</sup> Whaley, "Oregon, *Illahée*, and the Empire Republic," pars. 4-18, 37-40.

<sup>39</sup> Nathan Douthit, "Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border, 1851-1857: Benjamin Wright and Enos." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* vol. 100, no. 4 (1999): 403-404; 428; For more on the notion of the "middle ground," with relation to interaction between Native Americans and whites, see Richard White's *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815*.

varied according to circumstance, the outcome of which depended less on the dispositions of individual Indian agents than on the specific situations such agents were forced to respond to in the process of implementing reservation policy in a rapidly changing region.<sup>40</sup> In “Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations across a Cultural Divide,” Douthit focuses on the role of Joseph Lane in securing a peace treaty with the Takelma chief Apserkahar by first establishing a positive personal relation with him in 1850. Douthit especially emphasizes the strength of their bond in helping Joel Palmer negotiate the treaties of September 1853 following a summer of Indian-white skirmishes in Southwest Oregon. Finally, Douthit discusses Lane’s unfulfilled promises to the Indians of Southwest Oregon that later resulted in outspoken dissatisfaction among Rogue River Indian leaders over the treaty stipulations of 1853.<sup>41</sup> While Douthit’s article overemphasizes Lane’s capacity to establish a peaceful friendship with a chief he threatened and probably could not even understand very well, it benefits this study in its detailed account of Palmer and Lane’s treaty attempts in Southwest Oregon 1850-1853.

One of the main goals of this study as part of the secondary scholarship on the Rogue River peoples is to describe the interaction between local whites, Indian Office policies, and Native Americans in Southwest Oregon in the years leading up to the Rogue River Indian War. Such a characterization of the conflict will be a significant contribution to the collective memory of Indian-white interactions in Southwest and Western Oregon because the situation is riddled with multi-layered, overlapping, and intertwining circumstances and interests that Indian Office officials were forced to confront in the process of implementing reservation policy in the West. Another major goal of this study is to provide an inclusive answer that really explains why the reservation system produced such disastrous results in its implementation in Southwest Oregon. Schwartz stresses part of the answer to this question in his works, arguing most basically that the

---

<sup>40</sup> Nathan Douthit, “Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border, 1851-1857: Benjamin Wright and Enos.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* vol. 100, no. 4 (1999): 404-409, 428. 402-433.

<sup>41</sup> Nathan Douthit, “Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations Across a Cultural Divide,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* vol. 95, no. 4 (1994): 475-482, 497-502; Browne to Denver, 17 November 1857, in U.S., House, *Indian Affairs in the Territories of Oregon and Washington*, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1858, H. Ex. Doc. 39, Serial 955, 27-28.

indigenous peoples of Southwest and Western Oregon were victims of the political motivations and rivalries of Oregon politicians and national parties.<sup>42</sup> The answer to the question in this paper will seek to be more inclusive in assigning cause to a host of factors that played into the narrative at various stages in the removal of the Rogue River Indians. Many of the causes this paper gives for the lamentable results of reservation policy lean heavily on Schwartz's narrative in the specific context of the Rogue River Indians; yet, other causes for the terrors of removal seem to be not cases of local specificity on the part of Indian Office officials, but rather manifestations of larger national trends. In connecting the implementation of the reservation system in Southwest Oregon to patterns of removal across the West, this paper also relies heavily Trennert's narrative regarding the changing nature of reservation policy in the late 1840s and early 1850s. This paper aims to use Trennert's argument, that 1830 and 40s theoretical ideals of reservation policy were no longer applicable to the national situation by the time such policies were developed through practice in the 1850s,<sup>43</sup> in order to both portray the relocation of the Rogue River Indians in the frame of national reservation policy, and to demonstrate how common national trends played out specifically in Southwest Oregon. Providing still further context for the place of the relocation of the Rogue River peoples in the whole history of official U.S. policy towards native groups, Prucha portrays the reservation system's emergence in Western Oregon in the 1850s as part of a still larger history.<sup>44</sup>

Ultimately, the overlapping foci of Schwartz, Trennert, and Prucha cover different levels of the same history; in using parts of their arguments to paint a multi-layered picture of the development of the reservation system in Southwest and Western Oregon, this paper hopes to depict the intersection of the struggle between the Rogue River Indians, migrant whites, and white Indian agents from 1850 to 1875. As noted by Douthit, the historical scene in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s needs clarification beyond the simplistic model of whites and Indians

---

<sup>42</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, xii.

<sup>43</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 3-5, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 400-402.



mediated by agents.<sup>45</sup> In attempting to recreate the scene in Southwest Oregon prior to the war there, this paper will provide a complex and multi-faceted answer to why the reservation system ended so disappointingly, drawing on the local, regional, national, historical, theoretical, ideological, and physical factors that were at work at the core of this story of struggle 1850-1875.

### **Methodology of Paper**

A large portion of this paper will be devoted to the rhetoric of primary sources concerning the Rogue River Indians, including a sample analysis of a report from Joel Palmer, in order to accurately show how the implementation of reservation policies tended to depart from the idealistic rhetoric behind them. The analysis of Palmer's report also provides a great look into the complex and contradictory beliefs typical of the mindsets of 1850s Indian Office officials. The difficulties and problems of implementing official reservation policy in Southwest Oregon were eventually what led to an all-out war between local whites and the Rogue River Indians in the mid 1850s.<sup>46</sup> An interrogation of the circumstances of Indian-white relations in Southwest Oregon, and of the role of national, territorial, and local Indian Office policies in shaping those relations will prove valuable in its characterization of the array of challenges that Native Americans and Indian Office officials faced in Southwest and Western Oregon from 1850 through the 1880s.

After analyzing the rhetoric of the primary sources of this study and national trends of the reservation system of the 1850s, this paper will attempt to characterize the struggle that raged between Indians and whites in Southwest and Western Oregon from 1850 to 1875 by delving into

---

<sup>45</sup> Douthit, "Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians," 502; Douthit, "Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border," 403-404, 428.

<sup>46</sup> The federal government funded the Rogue River Indian War of 1855-1856 for the purpose of forcing the Indians of Southwest Oregon to comply with reservation policy. Thus, reservations (originally intended to limit Indian-white contact and mutual violence) eventually became justifications for government sponsored Indian wars promoted by local whites. Palmer to Manypenny, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 59; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 84-85; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 202-203.

several key events<sup>47</sup> of the interaction between the Rogue River Indians, local white prospectors and squatters, and Indian Office bureaucrats. While the subjective selection of certain illustrative events will not paint an unabridged account of the causes, aspects, and aftermath of the Rogue River Indian War and removal, it will show in greater detail specific examples of the challenges faced by Indians and Indian Office officials as they tried to arrive at a diplomatic solution to the age-old problem of groups of people at odds over land and scarce resources. Analyzing key events in the story through the lens of official Indian Office policy will help characterize the interests of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its individual bureaucrats in terms of what they hoped to accomplish in each instance, what they actually accomplished, and how their ‘successes’ or ‘failures’ in upholding goals and ideals of Indian Office policy played into the dramatic showdown between white policy-makers, white prospectors, and the native peoples of Southwest Oregon.

The development of this showdown was very complex in motivations and politics, yet holds within its complexity the answers that explain why implementation of Reservation Policy so radically differed from its ideals, and why the challenges faced by the Rogue River Indians and Indian Office officials were not overcome diplomatically, but instead culminated in war, forced removal, and forced acculturation.

### **Analysis of Primary Source Documentation**

By the 1850s, Southwest Oregon had become an arena for the ideological and physical battles between white squatters, miners, and soldiers in one camp; paternalistic, distant, and politically motivated Indian Office bureaucrats in another; and confederations of Indian groups in

---

<sup>47</sup> The “key events” this paper will look into each serve to exemplify a different stage of the process of negotiation, treaty making, war, removal, and relocation onto reservations. The key events to be discussed are as follows: Joseph Lane’s confrontation and meeting with a few hundred Rogue River Indians near Table Rock in 1850, his campaign for war and Anson Dart’s treaties, Joel Palmer’s treaty negotiations of September 1853, the brief history of the Table Rock Reservation (1854-1855), the Rogue River Indian War of 1855-1856 (particularly the Battle of Big Bend and the subsequent Indian surrender), arrival and acculturation at the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations (1856-1857), the Yaquina Bay Removal from the Coast Reservation in 1865, the Alsea Removal from the Coast Reservation in 1875, and the allotment of the Coast Reservation to individual male Indians and their families following the Dawes Act of 1887.

still another. While several miners, squatters, and soldiers left behind memoirs and journals describing their experiences with the Rogue River Indians, the Native American groups of Southwest Oregon are grossly underrepresented in terms of primary documentation in their history: the only memoirs of the removal period by Rogue River Indians themselves were written much later by members who were very young at the time of the war in Southwest Oregon and relocation to Western Oregon.<sup>48</sup> In terms of surviving written primary documentation from the time of the actual events, the correspondences and reports of Indian Office officials provide the most enlightening views of the goals of reservation policy, and the process of their implementation in Southwest and Western Oregon.

The most important officials from the federal level of Indian Office bureaucracy that played substantial roles in the emergence of the reservation system of the 1850s and its continuation in the 1860s include Commissioners of Indian Affairs, Orlando Brown (1849-1850), Luke Lea (1850-1853), George Manypenny (1853-1857), James Denver (1857-1858), Charles Mix (1858), and William Dole (1861-1865), among others. Of those commissioners, this paper will deal most directly with the reports and policies of Lea, Manypenny, and Mix, since they had the most integral roles in the actual formation of Indian Office Reservation policy during the years leading up to the war and removal of the Rogue River Indians in Southwest Oregon. Commissioners basically dictated the goals of policy to all superintendents and agents; all other Indian Office employees were supposed to write reports about their efforts to the Commissioner.

Several Oregon territorial and state officials also played large roles in the execution of federal reservation policy in Southwest and Western Oregon from 1850 to 1875. The most important of these include Oregon Superintendents of Indian Affairs, Joseph Lane (1848-1850),<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> One such source is Sam Van Pelt's article "Before the White Man: An Indian's Story," published in the *Oregonian* in 1939, which provides an account of pre-war Chetco Indian life and customs along the coast of Southwest Oregon.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Lane was the first governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon, serving from 1848 to 1850. He was a Mexican War general from the East, and ran for vice president of the pro-slavery Democrats in 1860, losing to Lincoln and the Republicans.

Anson Dart (1850-1853), Joel Palmer (1853-1856),<sup>50</sup> Absalom Hedges (1856-1857), James Nesmith (1857-1858), and William Rector (1861-1863), among others. Lane and Palmer, however, stand apart from other superintendents as the most significant to the formation and development of reservation policy in Southwest and Western Oregon, mainly because their terms in office coincided most with the main actions of forming reservation policy, fighting wars, and enacting removals in Oregon.

In addition to federal commissioners and territorial and state superintendents, white Indian Office agents and subagents in Southwest and Western Oregon also had profound impacts on the implementation of official reservation policy, especially on the Table Rock Reservation<sup>51</sup> and other agencies in Southwest Oregon, as well as on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations in Western Oregon. The most influential of these agents in carrying out reservation policy in Southwest Oregon from 1850 to 1856 include A.J. Smith (commander at Fort Lane in the Rogue Valley in 1855, who eventually led troops against the indigenous peoples of Southwest Oregon during the Rogue River Indian War of 1855-1856), Alonzo Skinner (Dart's main Indian agent in the Rogue Valley in 1851), Samuel Culver (Palmer's main Indian agent in the Rogue Valley, who was responsible for relocating the Rogue River Indians to Table Rock in the spring of 1854), Ben Wright (who led extermination parties from Yreka against the Modocs in 1852, and who later became Palmer's agent for the Southwest Oregon Coast in 1855),<sup>52</sup> and George Ambrose (who replaced Culver as Palmer's main agent in the Southwest Oregon interior in 1855). The most influential agents in implementing reservation policies on the Coast and Grand Ronde

---

<sup>50</sup> Joel Palmer came to Oregon in 1845, and became employed leading troops against the Cayuse Indians in Eastern Oregon and Washington in 1848, following the Whitman Massacre in 1847. Palmer played the largest role of all Indian Office officials in the relocation of the Rogue River Indians, and was largely responsible for overseeing the development of the reservation system in Oregon, especially the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations.

<sup>51</sup> The Table Rock Reservation was created following Palmer's September 10, 1853 treaty with the Rogue River Indians. It consisted of about 100 square miles surrounding the Table Rocks and bordering the Rogue River. It operated until 1855, when most of its Indian residents fled the reservation for the Rogue River Canyon. It was terminated as a reservation for the Indians of Southwest Oregon with Palmer's establishment of the Coast Reservation in 1855.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Wright was a miner and Indian agent from Yreka, California, who gained fame in the summer of 1852 for leading vigilante mobs of miners to hunt of Modoc Indians along the Oregon-California Trail. Palmer appointed Wright agent for the Indians of the Southwest Oregon Coast in the summer of 1855. The Indians he was supposed to represent killed him in the spring of 1856.

Reservations from 1856 to 1875 include Robert Metcalfe (Coast Reservation agent 1856-1859),<sup>53</sup> Ben Simpson (Coast Reservation agent 1863-1871),<sup>54</sup> Joel Palmer (agent on the Coast Reservation 1871-1872), J.H Fairchild (1873-1875), William Bagley (1876-1878), and Edmund Swan (1879-1882), among others.

All of these Indian Office officials were steeped in a common white view of inevitable manifest destiny, including an ideological stance towards Indians that was built out of a language of ethnocentric paternalism and white cultural arrogance. The single most influential Indian Office official in the planning and implementation of reservation policy in Oregon was Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon 1853-1856. Palmer was ultimately responsible for failing to implement reservation policy in Southwest Oregon in a peaceful manner, despite his acquisition of promising treaties with the Rogue River peoples in 1853.<sup>55</sup> Palmer's reports are especially rich in interpretive content because they usually consist of Palmer explaining to his boss, Commissioner Manypenny, what he is planning for the future of Indian-white relations in Oregon Territory, and how exactly his actions contribute to the fulfillment of the theoretical goals of federal reservation policy in the West.

Analysis of a particularly rich single page of Palmer's June 23, 1853 report to Manypenny<sup>56</sup> will shed light on several of the central issues in the struggle between Indian Office bureaucrats, local whites, and the Native Americans of Southwest Oregon. The major problems that threatened the fulfillment of earlier idealistic goals of Indian Office policy were rooted in mutual distrust between whites and Indians, evidenced and exacerbated by the non-ratification or delays in ratification of important treaties, and severe disconnect between federal policies in Washington D.C. and the ability of the Indian Office to enforce such policies in the Far West.

---

<sup>53</sup> Robert Metcalfe was the Indian agent on the Coast Reservation from 1856 to 1859. He had a reputation for treating Indians harshly. He allegedly stole \$60,000 from the Indian Office before he fled Oregon in 1861 to join the Confederate Army in the Civil War.

<sup>54</sup> Ben Simpson was Indian agent on the Coast Reservation from 1863 to 1871. He also had a reputation for treating Indians harshly. Simpson played a chief bureaucratic role in pushing for the Yaquina Bay removal from the Coast Reservation in the mid 1860s. Although he was not still an agent by 1875, he also played a large part in the Alsea removal from the Coast Reservation in the mid 1870s.

<sup>55</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 59; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 84-85.

<sup>56</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1853, serial 690, 449.

Lack of staff and resources on frontier Indian agencies and reservations was another problem; this led to frustration, starvation, and ultimately escalating violence between indigenous peoples and transient whites. The depletion of game and occupation of traditional Indian gathering grounds by white squatters also contributed to Indian frustrations and difficulties with subsistence. The related problem of whites squatting on reservation lands, even after reservations were created with ratified treaties, was yet another contributor to souring Indian-white relations in Southwest Oregon. Finally, the inability of Indian Office officials like Palmer to realize their own prejudices in analyzing episodes of Indian-white interaction is a final reason why Indian-white relations worsened in Southwest Oregon in the early 1850s.<sup>57</sup> Palmer's report also highlights some of the main difficulties of interpreting historical documents about Native Americans written by white Indian Office bureaucrats in the 1850s, including, but not limited to, analyzing the complexities of the racist ideologies common among white Americans with regard to Native Americans in the mid nineteenth century, weighing the implications of various political pressures influencing individual Indian Office officials, attempting to construct a clear view of Indian-white interaction based on such racially and ideologically biased reports, and trying to make sense of the complex and convoluted motives of federal reservation officials and their policies.

The following series of quotes from a single page of Joel Palmer's contribution to the 1853 Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, not only highlights the tensions that existed in Southwest Oregon between the three aforementioned groups in the 1850s, but also displays the paternalistic and ethnocentric attitudes that permeated the plans proposed by the Indian Office to alleviate such tensions:

They [the Rogue River Indians] have become distrustful of all promises made them by the United States, and believe the design of the government is to defer doing anything for them till they have wasted away.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1853, serial 690, 449-551.

<sup>58</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1853, serial 690, 449.

This quote touches on several of the issues previously listed as integral to this paper's interrogation of reservation policy and its role in the removal of the Rogue River Indians. Indian distrust "of all promises made them by the United States" became a big obstacle for Indian Office officials in the 1850s, both for the swift implementation of federal Indian policy in the West, and for worsening Indian-white relations in general.<sup>59</sup> Treaties signed between white Indian agents and Indian chiefs on the obscure fringes of American empire were often left un-ratified in Congress, or were outdated or impossible to implement by the time they were actually ratified.<sup>60</sup> The most notable example of the non-ratification of treaties secured with Indians in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s is Congress' non-ratification of a treaty signed between Palmer and the Indians of the Southwest Oregon Coast, especially groups along the Coquille River, in September 1855.<sup>61</sup>

Palmer then addresses the unsatisfactory results of implementing distant federal policies that run contrary to the economic desires of local whites with the following:

The settlement of the whites on the tracts which they [the Indians] regarded as secured to them by solemn treaty stipulations, results among the Indians of the [Rogue] valley in frequent misunderstandings between them and the settlers, and occasions and augments bitter animosities and resentments. I am in the almost daily receipt of complaints and petitions for a redress of wrongs from both parties.<sup>62</sup>

Another common problem with the implementation of the new reservation system of the 1850s in Oregon was the dual problem of whites squatting on traditional Native American lands before they were purchased from Indian groups with the signing of treaties, as well as squatting on Indian Reservation lands, even after they were set aside for Indians and closed to white settlement. Both situations further diminished Indian trust of local white squatters, miners, and

---

<sup>59</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 339, 381; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 193-197.

<sup>60</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 407.

<sup>61</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 82; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 197-199. For more on the non-ratification of this 1855 treaty and its effects on the Coquille, Umpqua, and other Southwest Oregon coastal Indians, see David Beck, *Seeking Recognition: the Termination and Restoration of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, 1855-1984* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449.

officials, while also increasing the frequency of violent interactions between the groups.<sup>63</sup> One of the honest and most valuable aspects of Palmer's report is his admission of witnessing "wrongs from both parties" in Southwest Oregon, a fact that becomes readily apparent in thorough research of Indian-white relations in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s. One important distinction to consider, however, when analyzing such wrongs, is the general difference in motivations that characterized white-on-Indian violence and Indian-on-white violence; local whites often terrorized Indians in Southwest Oregon to either preemptively 'defend' white communities by killing Indians, or in order to push them off of exploitable land. The Indians of Southwest Oregon, on the other hand, were generally provoked to violence either in the form of real defense measures against white violence, or in the form of raids to steal food, goods, weapons, and ammunition from white travelers. Revenge for previous violence was also a major motivation for attacks by both sides. Thus, a feud gradually ensued, and both Indian-on-white and white-on-Indian raids became more frequent as miners and squatters continued to pour into the hunting and gathering territories of the Rogue River Indians.<sup>64</sup>

The following quote from the same Palmer report demonstrates the desperate state of existence that the Indians of Southwest Oregon endured in 1853, mainly due to the rapid encroachment of white squatters onto the game and soil of the best Indian hunting and gathering grounds (meadows with abundant supplies of grasses, roots, and bulbs) in Southwest Oregon:

The increasing settlements are rapidly diminishing the roots and game on which the Indians of the valley mainly subsist, and their increasing difficulties in obtaining subsistence, in the absence of moral restraint, impel them to the frequent commission of petty thefts—a source of annoyance, loss, and irritation to the settlers.<sup>65</sup>

Palmer also displays his inability to escape his racist predispositions towards the Rogue River Indians by acknowledging their "increasing difficulties in obtaining subsistence" as causation for their economic desperation, yet still blaming their supposedly inherent "absence of

---

<sup>63</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1853, serial 690, 449; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, viii, 1-7, 193-195.

<sup>64</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449-450.

<sup>65</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449.



moral restraint” for their “frequent commission of petty thefts.”<sup>66</sup> Most of the Indian-on-white crimes reported by Palmer in Southwest Oregon in 1853 were non-violent thefts, especially of weaponry and foodstuffs, lending to the idea that most Indian raids in Southwest Oregon were executed out of desperation and starvation, rather than anger, ambition, or moral inferiority.<sup>67</sup> While Palmer links the increasing scarcity of Indian food sources to their increasing propensity to steal from whites in Southwest Oregon, he still blames the instances of theft on a natural flaw in the Native American character instead of on desperation caused by starvation.

Palmer’s inability to escape his ideological prejudices in his view of the Native American peoples of Southwest Oregon serves as an example of one of the main ironies of prevalent ideologies amongst Indian Office officials of the 1850s: their adherence to irrational racial caricatures of Indian actions in the face of real, rational causes for Indian behaviors. This issue is present in almost every primary source written by white Indian Office officials from the 1850s; one interpreting such sources must consider not only the time and place of the events, but the mindsets and philosophies of the officials involved. Understanding officials’ prevalent frames of mind helps show in a clearer light their interests and goals and how they play into the larger goals of the Indian Office. In the next section of the quote, Palmer continues his interrogation of the Indian character by stressing not just his belief in the idle nature of Indians in general, but also in their inevitable and predetermined lot to be overrun by white society:

A few of the Indians are inclined to industry, and are useful as laborers; but the mass are exceedingly indolent and improvident, and the propensity to gamble, so strong and universal in the red man, exists in all.<sup>68</sup>

This quote displays the prevalent attitudes and social ideologies that permeated federal Indian Office policy, and that most educated white Americans held towards Native Americans in the 1850s. This is furthered by the common mid nineteenth century white notion that Indians are not only immoral in general, but that they are especially susceptible to the dangers of white vices

---

<sup>66</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 154-155.

<sup>67</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 201-204.

<sup>68</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449.

like drinking and gambling.<sup>69</sup> Palmer, by calling the Rogue River Indians “indolent,” demonstrates his typical belief in the natural deficiency of Indian mental and moral faculties. His view of single traits as essential parts of the Indian racial character in general is typical of mid-nineteenth century white conceptions of race.

In the remainder of the quote, Palmer’s comparisons between Indian and white cultures are riddled with an air of white cultural and racial superiority that serves to characterize the paternalistic mental paradigm of white Indian Office officials in Southwest Oregon:

That these Indians cannot long remain on the reserves in the heart of the settlements granted them by treaty, even should Congress confirm those treaties, is too clear to admit of argument. Vice and disease, the baleful gifts of civilization, are hurrying them away, and ere long the bones of the last of many a band may whiten on the graves of his ancestors. If the benevolent designs of the government to preserve and elevate these remnants of the aborigines are to be carried forward to a successful issue, there appears but one path open. A home, remote from the settlements must be selected for them. There they must be guarded from the pestiferous influence of degraded white men, and restrained by proper laws from violence and wrong among themselves. Let comfortable houses be erected for them, seeds and proper implements furnished, and instruction and encouragement given them in the cultivation of the soil. Let school-houses be erected, and teachers employed to instruct their children; and let the missionaries of the gospel of peace be encouraged to dwell among them. Let completeness of plan, energy, patience, and perseverance characterize the effort; and, if still it fail, the government will have at least the satisfaction of knowing that an honest and determined endeavor was made to save and elevate a fallen race.<sup>70</sup>

Palmer’s use of language like “benevolent designs of the government,” “preserve and elevate,” “but one path open,” “selected for them,” “guarded from the pestiferous influence,” “teachers employed to instruct their children,” and “to save and elevate a fallen race,” demonstrate the inseparability of Palmer’s paternalistic desire to help Indians by removing them, from his social attitudes of Indians as untamed savages bent on lawlessness. Furthermore, in saying that the necessity of removing the Indians of Southwest Oregon “is too clear to admit of

---

<sup>69</sup> CIA Report, 1850, serial 587, 35-36; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 324-325; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449.

argument,” Palmer is basically communicating how the inevitability of ‘manifest destiny’ was regarded as a social truth amongst whites in the 1850s.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to the complex motives behind Palmer’s plan to remove the Rogue River Indians from what he sees as assured destruction, Palmer also looks to the “improvident” nature of Indians, who he thought were not blessed by God with the faculties of ‘civilization’ and learning. While certain phrases like “ere long the bones of the last of many a band may whiten on the graves of his ancestors,” were meant to use romantic stereotypes in order to patronize and antagonize the grave struggle of real Indians, words and phrases like “restrained by,” “guarded from,” “proper laws,” “proper implements,” and “comfortable houses,” all connote notions of passivity and cultural stagnation amongst the Indian cultures of Southwest Oregon. They imply the ethnocentric notion that Indians had previously possessed no “proper” laws nor implements, nor “comfortable” dwellings before white attempts to “civilize” them. Palmer’s discussion of white Indian agents providing “instruction and encouragement” to Indians in the arts of “civilization” is at the core of the dilemma of the reservation system: the theoretical goals of the reservation system looked to help preserve Indian lives, while its other goals forced them to assimilate to the values of white American culture.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, the last quote contains Palmer’s ideal vision of the future of the reservation system in Oregon. “One path open” demonstrates Palmer’s belief that the reservation system is the last option for the preservation of the Oregon Indians. He makes many assertions about the nature of the reservation system that can only really be viewed as idealistic promises that the Indian Office could not keep. Ultimately, phrases like “completeness of plan” and “save and elevate a fallen race” are ironic, not only in their unfulfillment through implementation, but also because the Indian Office “plan” to “save and elevate” the Indians of Oregon was itself incomplete in 1853. While Palmer echoed Manypenny’s idealistic rhetoric when he professed

---

<sup>71</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 3-5; Palmer to Manypenny, 23 June 1853, CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 449-551.

<sup>72</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 1-3.

these principles in June of 1853, he had no plan for implementing such policies or forcing Indians to comply with them that would preserve peace; he basically hoped they would comply with (what he saw as) the superior logic of the whites, an assumption that proved to be naïve. Ultimately, Palmer chose to forgo his peace efforts and use violence to enforce reservation policy when the Indians of Southwest Oregon resisted his attempts to corral them onto disease-ridden, undersupplied, and understaffed reservations. Despite this “incompleteness of plan” that plagued the Indian Office in the 1850s, Palmer’s quote also communicates some of the assimilationist rhetoric and goals of Indian Office theories, including removal and isolation from white society, instruction in domestic life and agriculture, and formal spiritual and scholarly education. Despite Palmer’s professed good intentions, reservation policy in Southwest Oregon would ultimately fall out of the chaotic scramble between Indian and white groups there, meeting many of its physical goals at the harsh price of neglecting its ideological spirit. More specifically, the reservation system eventually assimilated the Indians of Southwest Oregon into agricultural, wage-earning property-owners by the 1880s, yet also resulted in a war that killed 80% of their pre-contact population in the process, confined them onto reservations, and produced a violent history of mistrust and broken promises.<sup>73</sup>

The difficulties encountered in the Palmer quote discussed above are illustrative of the obstacles historians face when analyzing almost any source written by a white person about Indians. Each report and letter by a white official must be explicated thoroughly to determine how it fits into the ideological and rhetorical goals of Indian Office policy. Most primary sources in this paper come from either letters or reports of Indian Office bureaucrats to other Indian Office bureaucrats, or from treaties and accounts of treaty-making processes. The majority of the primary sources referenced in this paper are from Indian Office officials’ reports and letters from the Congressional Serial Set, archive microfilm rolls, some newspaper articles, some memoirs and journals, and digital archive collections.

---

<sup>73</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 148-49.

**Plans with Unintended Consequences: the Emerging Reservation System and its Implications for Indian Removal Policy in the Northwest and Oregon 1850-1856**

There should be assigned to each tribe, for a permanent home, a country adapted to agriculture, of limited extent and well-defined boundaries; within which all, with occasional exceptions, should be compelled constantly to remain until such time as their general improvement and good conduct may supercede the necessity of such restrictions. In the mean time, the government should cause them to be supplied with stock, agricultural implements, and useful materials for clothing; encourage and assist them in the erection of comfortable dwellings, and secure to them the means and facilities of education, intellectual, moral, and religious.<sup>74</sup>

Luke Lea, U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1850 to 1853, wrote this in his annual report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1850; the report addresses the conflicts and successes of white-Indian relations in each region of the U.S., vaguely outlining the Indian Office's planned alternative to the extermination of the indigenous peoples of America: the federal reservation system. Lea, along with other Commissioners of Indian Affairs, Orlando Brown (1849-1850), George Manypenny (1853-1857), and Charles Mix (1858), was one of the first of a handful of Indian Office bureaucrats to begin discussing the possibility of reserving parts of Indian lands for their relocation before the lands were claimed by white squatters.<sup>75</sup> The goal of the reservation system was to 'civilize' and Christianize the Indians by teaching them to become sedentary agriculturalists instead of migratory hunters and gatherers.<sup>76</sup> While there was no consensus among Indian Office officials as to the permanency of reservations, the premise was that reserves would first be left to tribal members communally, and later allotted to individual Indian families after the group had mastered agriculture and "civilization." In this way, reservations were supposed to act as bridges from Native American ways of life to white American ways of life, intended to be tools of assimilation, not preservation.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> CIA Report, 1850, serial 587, 36.

<sup>75</sup> CIA Report, 1854, serial 746, 222, 230-231; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 47-49.

<sup>76</sup> CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 264.

<sup>77</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 1-2.

## Traditional Indian Policy of the United States

When civilization and barbarism are brought in such relation that they cannot coexist together, it is right that the superiority of the former should be asserted and the latter compelled to give way. It is, therefore, no matter of regret or reproach that so large a portion of our territory has been wrested from its aboriginal people...The embarrassments to which they are subjected, in consequence of the onward pressure of the whites, are gradually teaching them the important lesson that they must ere long change their mode of life, or cease to live at all. It is by industry or extinction that the problem of their destiny must be solved.<sup>78</sup>

An official federal reservation system did not exist in the early republic. White policy regarding Indians had been simply to remove them further and further westward, out of the way of ‘advancing’ white American ‘settlement.’<sup>79</sup> As the Euro-American population spread gradually westward, especially after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the federal government was forced to try to address the dual problem of white-Indian cultural confrontation with a peaceful solution: on one hand, the government was obligated to protect its white citizenry from the ‘depredations’ of Indians; on the other, Jefferson and others felt obligated to protect Indians from the destructive vices and the ‘inevitable’ manifest destiny of white American culture. That said, the solution chosen by white policy-makers like Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe in the early nineteenth century included the physical separation of American citizens and American Indians. The rationale behind the westward relocation of the Eastern Indians (besides opening their traditional lands to white settlement) was that they would be relocated to lands well-suited to agriculture, learn the “civilized” ways of Euro-American culture during their removal, and eventually be incorporated into white American society when it reached their western territories several years later. They also thought that separating Indians from whites would minimize violence and the corruption of Indians by white vices.<sup>80</sup>

Although relocations and reservations had been used to control Indians and open up lands to white settlement since the establishment of European colonies in the Americas, there was no

---

<sup>78</sup> CIA Report, 1852, serial 658, 293-294.

<sup>79</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 315.

<sup>80</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 1-2.

official system of Indian removal in the U.S. until May 28, 1830, with the passing of the “Removal Bill.” The bill called for the relocation of all Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River to the designated “Indian Territory” to the West. The fertile soils west of Missouri and Arkansas were considered to be prime locations for the temporary isolation and acculturation of the Eastern Indians; while white politicians discussed the establishment of a permanent “Indian Country” in the West, the prevalent theory among white policy-makers was that isolation and acculturation would render Indians ready to participate in American society by the time white “civilization” reached the Midwest in subsequent decades.<sup>81</sup> The actual enactment of these removals, however, did not start in earnest until the Indian Office reorganized its political structure in the 1830s, a process that kept it under the jurisdiction of the U.S. War Department (as it had been since its creation in 1789), yet expanded the Office’s bureaucracy in order to assign superintendents, agents, and subagents to carry out removals within certain geographic or tribal regions. The office of Commissioner of Indian Affairs was created in 1832, and a series of laws passed in 1834, including the Intercourse Law (which regulated commerce between whites and Indians), established the standard of practice for the roles of Indian agents. It also decided on the Mississippi River as the western barrier beyond which Indians were to be contained.<sup>82</sup> The infamous Cherokee removal along the “Trail of Tears” from the Southeast U.S. to “Indian Territory” in modern-day Oklahoma 1836-1839 is the most documented example of the implementation of this system of official U.S. Indian policy in the 1830s,<sup>83</sup> attesting to the brutal reality of the implementation of a supposedly-peaceful plan of removal.

According to Trennert in *Alternative to Extinction*, the main problem with the legislated changes concerning removals and Indian Office bureaucracy in the 1830s was that it fixed policies supposed to be applicable to 1830 that could only be changed through new legislation. Because of the disconnect between the rhetoric and reality of Indian removals on the frontier, and

---

<sup>81</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 2-4.

<sup>82</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 5-7; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 315-317.

<sup>83</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 235-240.

the unaccounted-for expansions of U.S. territory in the 1840s, the Indian policies established 1830-1834 were left unchanged until white pioneers were already streaming into western territories in the mid-1840s. By that time, Indian policies of the 1830s were already outdated; Indians of the West were not yet acculturated to white society, nor were permanent lands promised to them.<sup>84</sup> Even Indians that had been acculturated (such as the ‘Five Civilized Tribes’) were still relocated if they were occupying lands that seemed desirable to whites. The federal government was forced to address a new reality of white-Indian relations in the U.S., one in which thousands of white Americans were settling into lands set aside for Indians. While previous policy would have simply involved another westward relocation, such relocations were no longer possible by 1850, as American empire had already reached its western terminus.

### **Emergence of the Federal Reservation System**

The acquisition of Texas, New Mexico, and our Pacific possessions, and the vast annual emigration which passes through the Indian country and over the reservations, on its journey thither, and which was not anticipated at the time the Indians were located there, render it absolutely necessary that they be placed out of the paths of the emigrants as far as practicable. The interests of both require it.<sup>85</sup>

With the acquisition of several vast tracts of territory following the Mexican-American War, namely Texas in 1845, Oregon Territory in 1846, and California and the remainder of the Mexican Cession in 1848, continuous westward relocations of Indians were no longer feasible.<sup>86</sup> What had been seen as “Indian Territory” was now seen by whites as free land, the resources of which could be harvested by white Americans for great economic gains. The rapid acquisition of so much territory, resources, and people into the United States affected white-Indian relations in two main ways: first, it changed the western Indian territories from a frontier seldom frequented by white trappers and missionaries into a land and resource free-for-all as white pioneers

---

<sup>84</sup> CIA Report, 1850, serial 551, 293-294; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 6-9.

<sup>85</sup> CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 251.

<sup>86</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 315-317.



streamed into Utah, California, and Oregon by the thousands.<sup>87</sup> This brought more white Americans and Native Americans into contact with each other than ever before. Second, the acquisition of the western territories led to drastic changes in federal Indian policy: since there was no longer a western frontier unoccupied by whites to which Indians could be continuously relocated, those who were living in areas whites wished to occupy and extract wealth from were in obvious jeopardy of losing their lands and ways of life.<sup>88</sup>

The reservation system arose as an attempted remedy to the problem of Indians displaced and rendered incapable of self-support by the encroachment of white settlement and unrestricted cost-free wealth extraction (in the form of land, gold, timber, or game). Although new reservation policy succeeded in separating Indians and whites and preventing the total extermination of Native Americans in the territories of the West, it also hastened the willingness of white frontiersmen to war with Indians in order to round them up and open their lands for white settlement sooner (and maybe even receive pay for their service).<sup>89</sup> Not only did whites settle on Indian lands before the federal government bought them, but they also often set up homesteads on reservation lands after they were already set aside for Indians. Furthermore, the reservation system's adherence to its lofty goal of making Indians sedentary, self-sufficient agrarians was not implemented well on the western fringes of the American empire in the 1850s and 60s; people living on remote reservations often endured rough conditions and bureaucratic corruption that strayed far from Lea's paternalistic hope of "civilizing" and developing the "intellectual, moral, and religious" character of the American Indians.<sup>90</sup>

As the reservation system emerged through practice in the 1850s, it drew support from factions of whites with opposing opinions regarding Indians. Nearly all white policy-makers, both those who genuinely hoped to save the Indians from white encroachment and those who hoped to

---

<sup>87</sup> Schwartz, "Blood Money," 70-71.

<sup>88</sup> CIA Report, 1852, serial 658, 293-294, 300; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 317-318; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 193-195.

<sup>89</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 316-317; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 87-88.

<sup>90</sup> CIA Report, 1850, serial 587, 35-36; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 164-168; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 153-154, 170-171, 351-352.

“open up” their lands for white settlement, supported the new reservation system.<sup>91</sup> Both the people concerned with the Indians themselves and those interested in their land and its resources were steeped in the same ethnocentric socio-political paradigm of ‘social progress’ and ‘manifest destiny’ that produced their mutual support of reservations and Indian acculturation.<sup>92</sup> Even the most philanthropic supporters of the reservation system saw it as a tool for the “elevation” and “civilization” of an inferior race, not the preservation of a unique and valuable culture.<sup>93</sup> The benefits of the acculturation of Indians to white American culture were assumed to be obvious in the prevailing modes of nineteenth-century thinking: agriculture, Christianity, formal education, and private land ownership were at the core of Western Civilization.<sup>94</sup> Most proponents of the Reservation System were so enamored with its theoretical efforts to “civilize” the Native Americans, that they were convinced that Indian groups would relocate to reservations passively, and maybe even eagerly, realizing the merits of learning the superior ways of the Euro-American lifestyle.<sup>95</sup> Because of this, both the white ‘allies’ and enemies of the Native Americans supported their relocation onto reservations.

The paternalistic desire of white Indian Office officials for Indians to abandon their unique cultures and replace them with white American culture was also naive; most Native American nations actively resisted relocation onto reservations, resulting in half a century of wars in which white U.S. soldiers and volunteers fought numerous Native American groups across the Great Plains and the West in attempts to corral them onto reservations and exert social, cultural, religious, educational, economic, and spatial control over them.<sup>96</sup> While most policy-makers thought that Indians would be relocated to reservations with relative ease, the implementation of the reservation system ended up facing much more native opposition than anticipated by white officials; what was supposed to have been a peaceful solution to the clash of Euro-American

---

<sup>91</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 193-194.

<sup>92</sup> CIA Report, 1852, serial 658, 293-295, 300-301.

<sup>93</sup> CIA Report, 1853, serial 690, 249-251, 264.

<sup>94</sup> CIA Report, 1853, serial 710, 272-275.

<sup>95</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 195-196.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-197.

culture and American Indian cultures turned out to cause the systematic subjugation of indigenous group after indigenous group for the purpose of arriving at treaties that ceded Indian lands to whites in exchange for annuities.<sup>97</sup>

The implementation of the reservation system began in earnest when George Manypenny was appointed to replace Lea as Commissioner of Indian Affairs on March 24, 1853.<sup>98</sup> In his first annual report to the Secretary of the Interior, he stressed the need for the reservation system in order to improve Indian-white relations in the western fringes of the empire:

Commissioners—able, impartial, upright, and practical men—be appointed, as soon as possible, to proceed to Texas, California, and the territories of New Mexico, Utah, Oregon, and Washington, for the purpose of investigating the whole subject of our Indian relations there, and of negotiating and recommending such conventional and other arrangements as may be required to place them upon a safe, stable, and satisfactory footing.<sup>99</sup>

The superintendents appointed to oversee Indian affairs in those regions were expected to negotiate treaties with individual tribes, extinguishing their title to their lands through the payment of certain annuities.<sup>100</sup> As white exploration and settlement of the Far West became more complete, Indians were forced onto ever-smaller plots as the interests of advancing white culture superceded promises made to Indians in treaties. Increasing white opportunism as the exploitable frontier shrank, coupled with the non-ratification of several treaties made with Indians produced increasing Indian distrust of white officials and citizens in the 1850s.<sup>101</sup> When Indian desires for spatial, political, and economic autonomy came into tension with local white wills, white American frontier communities often took it upon themselves to force local Indian groups to comply with Indian Office policies. While such attempts enforced official policy that was originally meant to help Indians (although paternalistically and on the terms of the U.S. government), the motivation of local white offenses against Indians was usually to speed the

---

<sup>97</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 52-53, 191-193.

<sup>98</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 326.

<sup>99</sup> CIA Report, 1853, serial 710, 260.

<sup>100</sup> CIA Report, 1854, serial 746, 222, 230-231; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 318, 325.

<sup>101</sup> C.F. Coan, "The Adoption of Reservation Policy in the Pacific Northwest, 1853-1855," *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 23 (March 1922): 7-8; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 407.

opening of Indian regions for settlement and exploitation by whites, not to protect and isolate Indian groups until their eventual acculturation and assimilation into white society.<sup>102</sup>

### **Emergence of the Reservation System in Oregon Territory**

Oregon Country became official U.S. territory with the signing of “The Oregon Treaty” with Great Britain on June 14, 1846. The treaty established the northern and southern borders of Oregon Territory at 49 and 42 degrees North, respectively. The territory stretched from the Pacific Ocean in the West to the ridge of the Rocky Mountains in the East.<sup>103</sup>

President James K. Polk appointed pro-slavery Democratic congressman from Indiana, Joseph Lane, to the dual position of governor and Indian superintendent of Oregon Territory in 1848.<sup>104</sup> Stipulations in the Indian Acts of 1834 stated that governors of regions without appointed Indian superintendents were to fulfill both roles until legislation could be passed changing Indian Office bureaucratic organization.<sup>105</sup> After Whig Zachary Taylor took office as president in March 1849, he appointed fellow Whig, Orlando Brown, as Commissioner of Indian Affairs on June 30, 1849.<sup>106</sup> Brown, in his annual report for 1849, criticized the stagnant state of Indian Office policy since 1834, calling for the expansion of Indian Office bureaucracy to seven new superintendencies: four between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River, one in Oregon, one in California, and one in New Mexico.<sup>107</sup> Since the doctrine of removing Indians westward was no longer a viable option, Brown realized that a bureaucratic network of superintendents and agents had to be created in the West if any Indian Office theories were to be carried out in reality.<sup>108</sup> Jo Lane resigned from his governor position in June 1850, and was replaced by Anson Dart as chief negotiator with Oregon Indians that summer; Dart was the first

---

<sup>102</sup> Manypenny to McClelland, 25 November 1854, in U.S., House, H.Ex. Doc. 1, Serial 710, 220, 224; Manypenny to McClelland, 26 November 1855, in U.S., Senate, H.Ex. Doc. 1, Serial 810, 338.

<sup>103</sup> C.F. Coan, “The Adoption of Reservation Policy in the Pacific Northwest,” 1.

<sup>104</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 396-397; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 28-29; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 74-75.

<sup>105</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 74-77.

<sup>106</sup> Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 40, 45.

<sup>107</sup> CIA Report, 1850, serial 551, 950-953; Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction*, 43-49; Prucha, *The Great Father*, 328-329.

<sup>108</sup> CIA Report, 1850, serial 551, 937-938, 957-958; CIA Report, 1854, serial 746, 222, 230-231.

Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs appointed by the Indian Office,<sup>109</sup> and held a more sympathetic view of the Indians in Oregon Territory than did Lane. He tried to minimize violent conflicts between whites and Indians by struggling to secure treaties with various groups of Indians in Oregon Territory from 1850-1853. The terms of the treaties Dart was able to secure, however, were unpopular in Congress, and were never ratified, mainly because his treaties allowed Indians maintain their spatial autonomy for ten years instead of immediately confining them to a definite tract of land.<sup>110</sup>

The Indian Office underwent significant changes in the spring of 1853 when Democrat Franklin Pierce took office as President after four years of Whig leadership. Oregon Territory was divided into Washington Territory and Oregon Territory on March 2, 1853, separated by the Columbia River and the 46<sup>th</sup> parallel from the Pacific Ocean to the Rocky Mountains.<sup>111</sup> George Manypenny replaced Luke Lea as Commissioner of Indian Affairs on March 24, 1853, and Joel Palmer replaced the ineffective Anson Dart as Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Oregon Territory on March 17, 1853.<sup>112</sup> Palmer was the Indian Office official most responsible for the implementation of official reservation policy in Oregon Territory 1853-1856. Upon taking office, he immediately confronted the problem of whites in Oregon Territory settling on Indian lands before they had been bought with ratified treaties. For three years Palmer tried to act as chief negotiator in the struggle between a frontier culture of mostly white men looking for sources of extractable income, and numerous Indian cultures that struggled to adapt to changing conditions in their environment without being overtaken by white dictates.<sup>113</sup> The following quote, from one of Palmer's 1855 reports to Manypenny, expresses his belief that the Indians of Oregon faced threats not only from openly hostile whites, but also from the supposedly degrading influence of white vices on the spirits of Indians:

---

<sup>109</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 27-29, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Coan, "The Adoption of Reservation Policy in the Pacific Northwest," 1, 4.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 74-75.

<sup>112</sup> Prucha, *The Great Father*, 326; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 121.

<sup>113</sup> Coan, "The Adoption of Reservation Policy," 4-5.

There are in these mining districts murderers, robbers, horse-thieves, and vagabonds congregated from all parts of the world. Driven frequently from among the settlers and miners, they are compelled to take shelter among the Indians, where the most unwarrantable excesses are indulged in.<sup>114</sup>

This quote, while it certainly demonizes local white miners and squatters in Southwest Oregon, also plays into the popular notion that Indians had underdeveloped senses of morality, and were thus extremely vulnerable to the destructive nature of white vices like drinking, gambling, and petty crime. The quote also laments the degrading influence of certain renegade whites on Oregon's indigenous populations. This, in addition to opening up lands to white settlement, was a reason commonly used by Indian Office officials for the separation of indigenous groups onto isolated reservations.

Joel Palmer negotiated the first recognized treaty with the Indians living along the Upper Rogue River of Southwest Oregon on September 10, 1853. The treaty involved the first 'sale' of Indian lands to the U.S. government in Oregon, as well as the creation of the Table Rock Reservation near the mining town of Jacksonville.<sup>115</sup> This marked the start of the removal and relocation of the Rogue River Indians, a process of adaptation and struggle that resulted in a war and the eventual removal of some 2,000 Native Americans from Southwest Oregon.<sup>116</sup> This clash of Euro-Americans and Native Americans, although only a single example from a larger clash engulfing the entire American continent, is a rich example of the implementation of federal Reservation Policy of the 1850s. The ways that the Indians involved in the removal, wars, and relocation adapted to the changing conditions they faced at the hands of U.S. policy are representative of similar struggles faced by thousands of other native peoples in the mid nineteenth century. The ways in which white policy-makers attempted to control relations between Indian groups and unorganized camps of white miners also lend to a rich study of the

---

<sup>114</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 60.

<sup>115</sup> "Stipulations of a Treaty," 10 Sept. 1853, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 608, 4-8, Native American Documents Project Document D18; Coan, "The Adoption of Reservation Policy," 8-9; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 140.

<sup>116</sup> Metcalfe to Nesmith, 15 July 1857, in U.S., House, *Message from the President of the United States*, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1857, H. Ex. Doc. 2, Serial 942, 645; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 149.

complex situation of removal and the complicated tasks and motivations of Indian Office officials through the struggle.

Ultimately, however, it was a combination of local white aggression, increasing Indian discontent, and ironically, Palmer's own official efforts to enforce the Reservation System that resulted in widespread war throughout Oregon and Washington 1855-1856.<sup>117</sup> Despite his intentions, Palmer's policies failed to preserve peace between whites and Indians in Oregon for several main reasons: first, congress left key treaties un-ratified in Washington D.C., fueling Indian distrust of whites and conflicts over the permanency and exact promises of treaties. Second, the settlement of whites on Native American lands before the lands were purchased from the Indians with treaties also fueled Indian distrust of white policies. Likewise, the settlement of local whites onto Indian reservations, even after the signing of official treaties, was commonplace in Oregon Country in the 1850s. Third, the increasing frequency of Indian raids on white settlements in Oregon, though the result of white encroachment into traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering locations, was another factor that caused Indian wars to erupt in Oregon Territory in the mid-1850s. On the other hand, local white aggression, both prompting and in response to the increase of Indian desperation, was another major cause for war. Whites were motivated to war with Oregon Indians for a number of reasons; first, to simply "open up" Native American homelands to white settlement; second, to possibly receive wages from the federal government for fighting against Indians as volunteers, especially when mine outputs or other means of wealth extraction declined; and lastly, to implement official Indian Office policy by using military force to make indigenous peoples submit and consent to reservation life. Finally, horrible conditions for Indians living on and off of reservations in Oregon in the 1850s played a large role in Indian discontent with federal policy, which in turn, provided the motivation to engage in seemingly endless war with whites for as long as they were able. On reservations, most indigenous groups faced disease, starvation, exposure, and corrupt agents. Off of reservations, they also faced

---

<sup>117</sup> Coan, "The Adoption of Reservation Policy," 6-12.

disease, starvation, cold, as well as the added hazard of local and U.S.-sponsored Indian hunting parties.

Hunting parties of local white vigilantes became a big problem for Indians and Indian Office officials in Southwest Oregon and Northern California 1852-1854. Future Port Orford Indian agent, Benjamin Wright, had gained notoriety in the region by fall of 1852 for leading vigilante parties of miners out of Yreka, California for the purpose of killing local Modoc Indians who had been reportedly harassing white travelers along the Oregon-California Trail. Wright and his parties were rumored to have killed hundreds of Modocs, triggering both increased unrest among the Rogue River peoples and increased vigilantism among local whites in Southwest Oregon.<sup>118</sup> Due to such rumors and the surge of white population in Southern Oregon 1851-1852,<sup>119</sup> skirmishes between white and Indian parties became more common in Southwest Oregon 1852-1854. The volatile climate in Southwest Oregon following the bloody summer of 1853 makes Palmer and Lane's ability to secure treaties with the Rogue River peoples that September even more remarkable.

In the spring of 1854, Samuel Culver, Indian agent in the Rogue Valley, went about relocating the Indian groups to the Table Rock Reservation who had signed the treaties with Palmer the previous September. Because fever and sickness immediately set in among the indigenous peoples once they were assembled on the reservation, Culver was forced to oppose one of the main stipulations of the reservation system and grant them leaves of absence, since Indian groups on the reservation were already fleeing to the surrounding hills in order to escape the illness that seemed to result from the close proximity of whites and Native Americans on the Table Rock reserve.<sup>120</sup> Yet, despite their temporary freedom from epidemics, the sick and impoverished bands of Rogue River peoples who took to the hills in 1854 faced an impossible situation. While returning to the reservation supposedly promised subsistence in the form of

---

<sup>118</sup> Douthit, "Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border," 406-409.

<sup>119</sup> Mainly due to the gold rush there. Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon* (San Francisco: The History Company, Publishers, 1888), 185-186; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 113.

<sup>120</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 11 September 1854, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, Serial 3144, 25; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 155-156.



annuities from the Indian Office, it also meant surrendering self-governance to a bureaucratic agency and risking the increased threat of epidemics. While the hills offered spatial freedom and liberty from control by whites, they contained little subsistence for the Rogue River peoples. Territorial laws preventing Indians from buying guns and ammunition, the absence of collected food stores from the previous summer (due to continuous flights and skirmishes), and white depletion of game and roots, left the Rogue River Indians who fled the reservation in 1854 with little to nothing to eat. Thus, many indigenous groups resorted to theft for subsistence, a fact that further exacerbated hostilities between local whites and the Rogue River Indians.<sup>121</sup>

In the spring of 1855, George Ambrose replaced Culver as the main Indian agent in Southwest Oregon. As the spring ushered in better weather, Ambrose became annoyed at the increasing frequency of confrontations along the Applegate River and Galice Creek between local whites and Indians still absent from the Table Rock Reservation due to Culver's leaves of absence the previous spring.<sup>122</sup> These confrontations grew in number and intensity throughout the summer and fall of 1855, ultimately culminating with a series of events in early October 1855 that ushered in the official beginning of all-out war between Indians and whites in Southwest Oregon. Palmer demanded in early October, as an attempted remedy to the recent violence between whites and Rogue River Indians in Southwest Oregon, that all non-hostile Rogue River Indian groups immediately return to the Table Rock Reservation; all Native Americans found off of the reservation were to be regarded as hostile and killed.<sup>123</sup> Tecumtum (called "Chief John" by the whites) and his people had already decided to never return to the reserve, moving west towards their original villages in the Illinois Valley.<sup>124</sup> Faced with the choice between succumbing to white dictates and diseases on the reservation and fighting, most of the other

---

<sup>121</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 30 September 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 62-64; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 73, 82; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 154, 155.

<sup>122</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 30 September 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 62-64; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 73, 82-83; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 173-73.

<sup>123</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 59; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 84-85.

<sup>124</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 30 September 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 62-64; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 66, 82-83.

Rogue River peoples (with the exception of Toquahear (“Sam”) and his people)<sup>125</sup> took decisive action on the night of October 8, 1855. That night, a group of Rogue River Indians, led by Apserkahar (“Joe”), Cholcultah (“George”), and Lympe enacted a sort of uprising against the reservation staff, seizing provisions, tools, and weapons; and fleeing downriver from the Rogue Valley towards the more remote and mountainous canyon lands of the Siskiyou and Coast Ranges to the west. They planned on subsisting in the rugged canyons and hills along the river through the winter, and reuniting with Tecumtum’s people in the spring to fend off advancing white war parties that would come with improving weather.<sup>126</sup> Battles between this band of a couple hundred Native Americans and white volunteers raged on for about another month before wet winter season brought a break in hostilities. During the winter of 1855 and 1856, the governor of Oregon Territory requested volunteers and federal troops to fight the Rogue River Indians along the Lower Rogue River the following spring and summer in order to make them comply with the reservation system. The campaign began in March, and ended in June 1856, with the final surrender of Tecumtum, the last Rogue River leader to agree to accept Palmer’s terms of removal to the Coast Reservation.<sup>127</sup>

By 1856, nearly 2,000 survivors from the various groups of Rogue River Indians had been relocated to the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations in Western Oregon. In all, the wars caused by the implementation of the reservation system in Southwest Oregon reduced the population of the Rogue River peoples from nearly 9,500 in 1851 to about 2,000 in 1856.<sup>128</sup> The war efforts in Southwest Oregon from 1853 to 1856 ultimately cost the federal government an estimated total of nearly \$2.5 million in supplies and wages, and resulted in the deaths of thousands of Native Americans and hundreds of Euro-Americans in Southwest Oregon.<sup>129</sup> While

---

<sup>125</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 67; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 87.

<sup>126</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 66-67; Ambrose to Palmer, 20 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, 1856, Serial 858, 89; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 86-87.

<sup>127</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 93-101, 146-47.

<sup>128</sup> Metcalfe to Nesmith, 15 July 1857, in U.S., Senate, *Message*, H. Ex. Doc. 2, Serial 942, 645; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 149; Beckham, *Requiem for a People*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 75, 157-159.

Palmer certainly achieved the reservation policy goal of confining the Indians of Southwest Oregon to defined tracts of land, he did so at a great cost: the sacrifice of all benevolent Indian Office ideals that originally permeated removal policy and reservation system rhetoric.

### **Main Events in the Interaction of Reservation Policy and the Rogue River Indians 1850-1875**

The narrative of the interaction between Indian Office policy and the Rogue River Indians from 1850 to 1875 is a story of immense complexity and depth. The narrative in this section of the paper will draw heavily from primary as well as secondary sources, especially correspondences between Indian Office officials and Schwartz's works. To chronicle the interaction exhaustively would take more time and space than is available for this study. Selecting and analyzing particularly important events that occurred during pivotal periods in the history, however, can produce a satisfactory and cohesive narrative of the interaction. The following events and periods are important to this study because they shed light on the difficulties faced by Indians and Indian Office officials alike in Western Oregon from 1850 to 1875: Joseph Lane's confrontation with the Rogue River Indians (1850), Lane's campaign for war and Anson Dart's treaty attempts (1851), Joel Palmer's treaties with the Rogue River Indians (1853), Palmer's plans for Oregon's Indians and the history of the Table Rock Reservation (1854-1855), the Rogue River Indian War and removal (1855-1856), change and acculturation on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations (1857-1865), the Yaquina Bay Removal (1865), the Alsea Removal (1875) and the subsequent road to allotment of reservation lands. Such events also show why the actuality of reservation policy turned out so disappointing for the Rogue River Indians, and why certain Indian Office goals were upheld while others were neglected. Ultimately, the selection and discussion of these events is important because they each show different parts of the answer to why reservation policy ended so disastrously for the Rogue River Indians from 1850 into the 1880s.

### **Joseph Lane's Confrontation with the Rogue River Indians (1850)**

The first official treaty negotiations between a white bureaucrat and the Rogue River Indians occurred in the spring of 1850, after Oregon Governor (and Superintendent of Indian Affairs) Joseph Lane received word that a party of miners on their way back to the Willamette Valley from the California gold fields had been robbed by Indians while camping in the Rogue River Valley.<sup>130</sup> He abandoned his post as governor in Oregon City on May 27, 1850, leaving for the California gold fields with fifteen whites and eleven Klickitat Indians<sup>131</sup> from Washington. In his May 27 letter to the Secretary of War, Lane said, "I shall set out this day for Rogue River, for the purpose of placing our relations with these Indians on proper and friendly footing."<sup>132</sup> Lane's goal with the trip was to evaluate the situation of Indian-white relations along the Oregon-California Trail, and to negotiate with the Indians of the Rogue River Valley in order to ensure safe passage of white emigrants through the region.<sup>133</sup> Lane and his party arrived in Southwest Oregon in early June 1850. Two days after sending a Klickitat messenger to summon them, one hundred unarmed Rogue River men led by Apserkahar ("Horse Rider") arrived at Lane's camp near Table Rock. The translation process was tedious: the Klickitats translated Lane's English into Chinook Jargon,<sup>134</sup> after which Rogue River Indians who knew some Chinook Jargon<sup>135</sup> translated it into Apserkahar's language, most likely Athapascan.<sup>136</sup> When seventy-five armed Indians arrived, supposedly because of an error in the double-translation process, Lane ordered the Klickitats to capture Apserkahar and threaten to kill him unless all property stolen from the miners earlier that spring was returned within two days. The Indians complied, and returned what

---

<sup>130</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 27; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 74.

<sup>131</sup> Lane had hired several Klickitat Indians from Southern Washington as soldiers and interpreters.

<sup>132</sup> Joseph Lane to Sec. of War, 27 May 1850, in "Western's" *Biography of Joseph Lane* (Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1852), 29.

<sup>133</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 29-30.

<sup>134</sup> "Chinook Jargon" was the most common trade language amongst Indians of the Pacific Northwest, especially along the Lower Columbia River.

<sup>135</sup> Isolation from the Coast Range, Siskiyou Mountains, and Cascade Mountains had led to an inconsistent knowledge of the Chinook language among the indigenous peoples of Southwestern Oregon.

<sup>136</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 29-31.

they had taken from raids on the miners' camps, with the exception of gold dust, which they claimed they had poured out, not recognizing its value.<sup>137</sup> Yet the account given by "Western" (presumably Lane himself) in his 1852 *Biography of Joseph Lane* promoting his 1852 run for Oregon Delegate, makes no mention of Lane's use of Klickitats, a confusing double-translation, nor kidnapping Apserkahar, instead focusing on Lane's apparent control of the situation. "Western" wrote the following concerning Lane's exaggerated role in the incident:

He entered their country with twelve or fifteen men. These Indians had fiercely spurned all advances from whites, and rejected all attempts at conciliation. With some difficulty he succeeded in assembling them, to the number of four or five hundred warriors, for a talk...The Governor demanded restitution of the property...The head chief ordered restitution, but the possessors demurred. The Governor stepped forward, took one of the stolen pistols from the Indian's belt and returned it to the owner, and was about to take the other pistol, when the Indian having it in possession presented his gun and raised the war whoop. Instantly four or five hundred guns and arrows were presented at the small party of whites. A single false step would have led to bloodshed then and after. But Lane's coolness and promptness was equal to the emergency...Promptly stepping to the side of the principal chief, pistol in hand, he told him if a drop of the blood of any of the whites was shed, it should be avenged by the destruction of his entire tribe. This had the desired effect. The chief told his warriors to cease their hostile demonstrations, and retire across the river. The Governor then stepped among the foremost, took their arrows from the bows and returned them to the quivers, or uncocked their guns, and knocked the priming from the pans...The Governor kept the great chief with him all night...The Governor left them strips of paper, stating that they were at peace with the whites...These strips were signed with his name; and the Indians for a long while after, when they approached a white man, would hold out the paper and say, *Joe Lane! Joe Lane!* the only words of English they had learned.<sup>138</sup>

Above all else, this narrative by "Western" demonstrates the general unreliability of accounts of such events from the perspectives of white men, especially when promoting a political candidate or ideology. The account certainly glorifies Lane and his role in preserving peace, using euphemistic terms like "kept the great chief with him all night" instead of describing how they actually threatened to kill him and held him against his will in order to force his men to bring supposedly stolen items back. In addition, this account fails to mention that neither the

---

<sup>137</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 30.

<sup>138</sup> "Western," *Biography of Joseph Lane*, 29-30.

whites nor Indians probably had much idea as to what the other group really wanted, due largely to general misunderstandings magnified by the language barrier.

This confrontation between Lane's group of white and Klickitat forces, and Apserkahar's group of Rogue River peoples was a relatively minor conflict in the grand scheme of Indian-white relations in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s, the event is important since it marks the first instance of the imposition of white power over a large, united group of Indians in the region. In addition, it set the precedent for forceful white negotiations with Native American groups when deciding on treaty conditions; Southwestern Oregon Indians were repeatedly made to choose between war and acquiescing to white desires that would gradually put their own survival in jeopardy. In a trend seen in Indian removals across the continent, the gathering and confederation of hundreds of warriors from different villages near Table Rock in the spring of 1850 is evidence of the phenomenon of local indigenous groups uniting with their neighbors in response to increasing tensions between white invaders and Native American groups in general.<sup>139</sup>

### **Jo Lane's Campaign for War and Anson Dart's Treaty Attempts (1851)**

Despite Lane's attempts to intimidate the Rogue River Indians into passivity, interaction between Indians and whites in the spring and summer of 1851 again escalated to violence. Jo Lane returned to the Rogue River Valley on June 22, 1851 to try to enforce peace along the heavily traveled Oregon-California Trail running through Southwest Oregon. Believing the Rogue River Indian Wars to have begun in full, he advocated an aggressive white response to the local problems between whites and Indians in the Table Rock region. According to Schwartz, Lane used the possibility of an Indian war in Southwest Oregon to his advantage by exciting white volunteer war parties and lobbying for government pensions for volunteers who fought Indians in Oregon.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 30-31; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 88-89.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 45-46.

In response to local white talk of massacring Indians, Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Anson Dart, attempted to establish treaties with some of the Indians of Southwestern Oregon by late September 1851. On September 20, Dart was successful in making two treaties with chiefs of the Rogue River peoples. In the first treaty, four specific Indian groups ceded 600 square miles between the Rogue and Coquille Rivers, from the Pacific Ocean to the ridge of the Coast Range. In the other treaty of September 20, 1851, Dart “bought” 400 square miles of land south of the Rogue River from the Pacific to the Coast Range. Both treaties included the payment of money annuities every year for a decade, as well as the continued spatial freedom of the Indian peoples of these regions for at least ten more years.<sup>141</sup> Ultimately, Dart’s treaties would be left unratified in Congress two years later because they failed to force the Rogue River peoples onto reservations immediately.

### **Joel Palmer’s Treaties with the Rogue River Indians (1853)**

The treaties Palmer secured with the Rogue River Indians in September 1853 briefly eased some tensions between Indians and whites in Southwest Oregon following the bloodiest summer in the region to date. Several small-scale skirmishes between white vigilantes and Rogue River Indians had raged throughout the summer, including one particularly infamous episode in which a small vigilante mob from Jacksonville hanged four Indians and shot several others for the alleged killing of seven miners who actually drowned mining on a river island during high spring waters.<sup>142</sup> The economic and gender demographics of whites in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s is another explanation for the explosive environment that existed there. For one, most whites who had come to Southwest Oregon in the 1850s were not squatters, but miners; they were transient treasure seekers, and did not plan on staying in Southwest Oregon, but rather following the gold

---

<sup>141</sup> “Treaties between Anson Dart...,” 20 September 1851, S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144, 4-7; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 41-43.

<sup>142</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 53.

rushes of the West hoping to score a fortune.<sup>143</sup> In addition, few were family men; according to Whaley, there were 5,268 white men and 1,428 white women living in Southwest Oregon in 1860, a ratio of 3.7 to 1. Needless to say, this figure was even more lopsided in 1853, painting a picture of Southwest Oregon as a masculine frontier culture of exploit and extraction.<sup>144</sup> The high proportion of white men living in the area for the sole purpose of seeking new territories to mine for gold was one of the main reasons that Indian-white interaction in Southwest Oregon often resulted in skirmishes, and eventually all-out war. Extermination of local Indians was extremely popular among miners and farmers in such masculine frontier communities in the West in the 1850s. The popularity of extermination with the whites of Southwest Oregon and Northern California in the summer of 1853 is best shown with the following excerpt from the *Yreka Herald* in August 1853, which was reprinted in the *Oregon Statesman* later that month:

The present outbreak has justly led all to the conclusion that extermination is the only way to secure peace...The tomahawk will no longer be buried, but in the skulls of the red foe...Let it be our last difficulty with Indians in this section of the country...Let our motto be EXTERMINATION! And death to all opposition, white men or indians!<sup>145</sup>

Ultimately, the treaties Palmer and Lane negotiated in September 1853 were meant to alleviate such violent tensions between an increasingly desperate Native American population and a masculine, white, frontier population favoring the ethic extermination over reservation. In theory, the September 8 and 10, 1853 treaties fulfilled many of Palmer's goals: it was supposed to confine (by September 1854 at the latest) the indigenous peoples of the Upper Rogue Valley onto the Table Rock Reservation, a 100 square mile plot around the Table Rocks and along the Rogue River, just north of Jacksonville. It also entailed the U.S. government buying about 2,000 square miles of Indian lands for the price of \$60,000, \$15,000 of which the treaty required the Rogue River peoples to pay war claims filed by whites in Southwest Oregon. In addition, the treaty promised that the remaining \$45,000 would be disbursed in twenty annual installments, including

---

<sup>143</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 44-45.

<sup>144</sup> Whaley, "Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic," par. 10.

<sup>145</sup> *Yreka Herald*, August 1853; reprinted in *Oregon Statesman*, 30 August 1853; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 54.



annuities in the form of livestock, clothing, blankets, housing, and agricultural implements, among other physical items.<sup>146</sup> One big question concerning Palmer's 1853 treaties with the Rogue River Indians is why he renegotiated the September 8 treaty two days later on September 10. Both Schwartz and Atwood cite an 1857 report from agent J. Ross Browne, who visited the Coast Reservation after the war and relocation, and interviewed several important Rogue River chiefs who claimed that they had been purposefully misled by Palmer and Lane in the second treaty. Tecumtum allegedly told Browne the following concerning the 1853 treaties:

A long time ago we made a treaty with Palmer. There was a piece of land at Table Rock that was ours. He said it should remain ours, but that for the sake of peace, as the white settlers were bad, we should leave it for a while. When we signed the paper that was our understanding; we now want to go back to that country.<sup>147</sup>

Toquahear (whose people would remain on the Table Rock Reservation when the rest of the Rogue River groups fled in 1855) mirrored Tecumtum's story in his interview with Browne on the Coast Reservation in 1857, reportedly telling Browne that "[Lane] knows what was told to us; that we would have to leave [Table Rock] for awhile; but we never sold it."<sup>148</sup> In any case, the formation of the Table Rock Reservation in Southwest Oregon in the fall of 1853 seems to have momentarily eased tensions in the area. Most of the Rogue River leaders preferred written promises for a reservation and sustenance to trying to coexist with masses of eager whites crowding their territories. Local whites liked that the treaties would confine and segregate the Indian populations of Southwest Oregon from white populations there. Palmer and the Indian Office liked that the treaties appeased white desires to be rid of the Indians while still preserving their lives and some of their land on the reservation. The idea of establishing a reservation in Southwest Oregon was one of few policies that local whites, Indian Office officials, and Rogue River Indians generally came to accept (but not necessarily agree on) as a logical solution to

---

<sup>146</sup> "Stipulations of a Treaty," 10 Sept. 1853, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 608, 4-8, Native American Documents Project Document D18; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 139-140.

<sup>147</sup> Kay Atwood, "As Long as the World Goes on: the Table Rocks and the Takelma," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* vol. 95, no. 4 (1994): 528.

<sup>148</sup> Browne to Denver, 17 November 1857, in U.S., House, *Indian Affairs in the Territories of Oregon and Washington*, 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1858, H.Ex. Doc. 39, Serial 955, 27-28; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 137.

violent clashes of interests in the region. The reality of fulfilling the ideal of the Table Rock Reservation, however, turned out to be much more difficult and volatile than Indian Office officials previously anticipated.

### **Palmer's Plans for Oregon's Indians and the History of the Table Rock Reservation (1854-1855)**

The situation in Southwest Oregon became even more volatile in the summer of 1854. Agent Culver and Superintendent Palmer were unable to keep the Rogue River peoples on the Table Rock Reservation in the spring of 1854 because of the proliferation of illness among them there; according to Palmer, "disease, and death had swept away nearly one-fifth of those residing on the reservation."<sup>149</sup> Culver gave temporary leaves of absence to the people on the reservation, allowing them to subsist in the hills as long as they stayed away from local whites. Through the summer of 1854, reports of clashes between white miners and Rogue River Indian groups were on the rise, especially along the Applegate River and Galice Creek. Palmer feared that all-out war would result if the present situation of escalating Indian-miner violence in Southwest Oregon were allowed to continue unabated.

In the summer of 1854, Palmer was simultaneously working out a plan for the creation of a reservation on the western slope of the Coast Range; his original plan, hatched in 1853, was to relocate the Umpqua River peoples, the Kalapuya of the Willamette Valley, the Chinook peoples of the Lower Columbia, as well as the Indian groups of the Central and Northwest Oregon coast to this reservation.<sup>150</sup> He was apparently planning at this time to create a separate reservation in the Southwest portion of the state (like the Table Rock Reservation) for the Rogue River Indians and other nearby groups. He reported to Manypenny in September 1854 that the tract on the coast was mostly a dense forest, much of it recently burned, and that it would be conducive to the

---

<sup>149</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 11 September 1854, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, Serial 3144, 25; in Schwartz, "Blood Money," 155.

<sup>150</sup> Schwartz, "Blood Money," 141-142.

lifestyles of Indian groups from west of the Cascades, although it had little land suitable to agriculture.<sup>151</sup>

In November 1854, Palmer shifted his attention back to Southwest Oregon. On November 15, he negotiated an amendment to the September 1853 treaty with Apserkahar, Cholcultah, Tecumtum, and Toquahear, (among others) which stipulated that other Indian groups may be sent to the Table Rock Reservation, with whom the Rogue River peoples were expected to share their annuities. As payment for signing the amendment, the Indians then residing on the Table Rock Reservation were given several head of livestock, implements, and clothes. Palmer promised that if other Native American groups were moved to the Table Rock Reservation, the Rogue River peoples would be given smiths, farmers, a hospital, and a school on the reservation.<sup>152</sup> Three days later, on November 18, 1854, Palmer secured a treaty with headmen from the Scoton, Chasta, and Grave Creek Indian groups, in which the confederated indigenous peoples of the Lower Rogue River ceded lands along the Lower Rogue and Illinois Rivers in exchange for \$30,000. This sum was to be shared with the other groups of Rogue River Indians when they were relocated to the Table Rock Reservation.<sup>153</sup>

The following winter, on February 2, 1855, President Franklin Pierce signed Palmer's September 10, 1853 treaty with the Rogue River Indians. The November 15, 1854 amendments to that treaty were ratified on April 7, 1855, while the November 18, 1854 treaty with the various Native American groups of the Lower Rogue and Illinois Rivers was ratified on April 10, 1855.<sup>154</sup> Just after the ratification of his 1853 and 1854 treaties, on April 17, 1855, Palmer reported to Manypenny that he had made a final decision about the creation of the Coast Reservation. In the letter, Palmer put forth his plan for the creation of a Coast Reservation

---

<sup>151</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 11 September 1854, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, Serial 3144, 26-28; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 169-170.

<sup>152</sup> Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Rogue River, 1854," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/rog0654.htm> (accessed 17 May 2010); Schwartz, "Blood Money," 169-170.

<sup>153</sup> Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Chasta, Etc., 1854," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/cha0655.htm> (accessed 17 May 2010); Schwartz, "Blood Money," 170.

<sup>154</sup> Charles Kappler, ed., "Treaty with the Rogue River, 1853," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/rog0603.htm> (accessed 17 May 2010).

extending from the Tillamook River to the Coos River, a stretch of coastline of which Palmer said, “no other section, offering so few attractions to the whites, combines more facilities for the comfort and subsistence of the Indians.”<sup>155</sup> While he still included the relocation of the Umpqua, Kalapuya, Alsea, Siuslaw, and Columbia Indian groups in his plan for this reservation, he made no mention of relocating the Indian groups of Southwest Oregon to the Coast Reservation in this letter, lending to the idea that Palmer had considered a long-term reservation specifically for the indigenous peoples of Southwest Oregon as late as the spring of 1855. Palmer’s reservation plans for Oregon and the Rogue River Indians would radically change, however, when violent interaction between local whites and Indians in Southwest Oregon reached a climax late in the summer of 1855.

In a letter to Palmer on April 14, 1855, new Southwest Oregon Indian Agent, George Ambrose, illustrates the central failure of the Table Rock Reservation in limiting Indian-white hostilities in Southwest Oregon that spring: “They cannot be induced to stay on the Reserve without being furnished food & in fact I believe at this season of the year if they were compelled to stay on the Reserve, they would most certainly starve to death.”<sup>156</sup> Going into the summer of 1855, the Rogue River Indians faced a harsher version of the same major problem they had faced for the past four summers: they had to find a way to subsist, yet were cut off from hunting, gathering, collecting food stores, and edible Indian Office annuities. The added fact that the Rogue River Indians now had a reservation and had ‘sold’ their lands to the government increased local white hostility towards Indians living off of the reservation. In addition, restrictions on the Rogue River people’s ability to hunt (due to laws against Indians owning and buying ammunition and firearms) increased the frequency of Indian theft of livestock, provisions, and weapons from white mining camps. Drought also played a role in causing violence between Indians and whites in Southwest Oregon, as low water levels severely curtailed the ability of local

---

<sup>155</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 17 April 1855, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, Serial 3144, 35-36; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 174.

<sup>156</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 173.

whites to undertake hydraulic mining, leaving hundreds of local white men with no way to secure income in June and July. Such men would have surely been aware of Joseph Lane's political struggle to secure military pay for volunteers who had helped him police along the Oregon-California border in the summer of 1853; thus, many whites in Southwest Oregon pushed for an extermination campaign in the summer of 1855 because they thought they could use such a war to gain pay from the federal government while mine production was down.<sup>157</sup> Vigilante groups in Southwest Oregon reached new levels of popularity, and Indian hunting mobs (especially near Jacksonville) became more common than ever. Through the summer of 1855, Tecumtum's group had been migrating between their original villages along Deer Creek and the Illinois River, the camps of Indians in the Coast Range and along the Lower Rogue, the Scoton villages of Galice Creek and the Applegate River, and the Table Rock Reservation; because of this, they were accused of attacking white mining camps all over Southwest Oregon.<sup>158</sup> A contributor to the *Oregonian* claimed that from May to late September, 1855, 22 whites had been killed by Indians in Southwest Oregon.<sup>159</sup>

On October 9, 1855, in response to Ambrose's concerns about Indian-white violence in Southwest Oregon, Palmer initiated an emergency order from his headquarters in Dayton, Oregon, "requiring every Indian belonging thereto to remain constantly upon the [Table Rock] reservation, and declaring every Indian found outside an outlaw."<sup>160</sup> He was unaware that an uprising had already occurred the night before, October 8, in which most of the Rogue River peoples still on the Table Rock Reservation (except Toquahear and his people) had taken provisions and weapons, and fled down the Rogue River towards the rough canyon lands where the river cuts through the Siskiyou and Coast mountain ranges.<sup>161</sup> Despite his ignorance of this fact, Palmer seemed to already think all-out war was on the horizon in his October 9, 1855 report

---

<sup>157</sup> Schwartz, "Blood Money," 176-177.

<sup>158</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 30 September 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 62-64; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 200.

<sup>159</sup> *Oregonian*, 13 October 1855; in Schwartz, "Blood Money," 201.

<sup>160</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 58-59; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 84-85; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 202-203.

<sup>161</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 66-67; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 210-212.

to Manypenny, in which he claimed “the crisis of the destiny of the Indian race in Oregon and Washington Territories is now upon us.” He also admitted that most of the problems between Indians and whites in Southwest Oregon are “traceable to the mistaken policy of permitting the settlement of this country prior to the extinguishment of Indian title and the designation of proper reservations.”<sup>162</sup> On October 9, 1855, all of the Rogue River peoples off of the Table Rock Reservation in the Rogue Valley scrambled for the canyon and its surrounding wilderness, reportedly killing 10 to 12 white people and burning 13 houses on their way down the valley.<sup>163</sup> White vigilante groups immediately pursued the fleeing Indians on October 9 and after, killing well over 100 Indians over the next couple weeks, both stragglers on their way down the river as well as members of the Rogue River Indian groups who stayed behind on the Table Rock Reservation.<sup>164</sup>

### **The Rogue River Indian War and Removal (1855-1856)**

On October 20, 1855, Governor George Curry, in response to Palmer’s reports of Indian wars brewing simultaneously on two fronts in Oregon (against the Yakima Indians in Eastern Oregon and Washington, and against the Rogue River Indians), called for Oregon volunteer troops to fight against Indians and enforce Indian Office policy in the territory. In all, he called for 9 companies of 60 soldiers and 11 officers each to address the Rogue River Indian War in Southwest Oregon.<sup>165</sup>

Small skirmishes between Indian groups and their pursuers raged down the Rogue River through mid October. The largest battle of the Rogue River Indian War in 1855, however, occurred on October 31 near Grave Creek House, between the Rogue River and Cow Creek in the Umpqua drainage basin.<sup>166</sup> The battle, which came to be known to whites as the “Battle of

---

<sup>162</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 9 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 59; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 204, 210-212.

<sup>163</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 208.

<sup>164</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 20 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 75-76; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 206.

<sup>165</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, 20 October 1855; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 212.

<sup>166</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 228.

Hungry Hill,” due to the length of time the volunteers were pinned down without rations or reinforcements, lasted 2 days and involved about 400 white volunteers, and an estimated 100-500 Native American men. In all, white losses amounted to about 40 killed or wounded, while Indian losses were unknown, although various estimates claim 8-20 Indians were killed in the battle.<sup>167</sup> The Rogue River Indian forces ultimately caused the volunteer forces to retreat to find rations, and subsequently retreated victoriously into the hills and forests of Rogue Canyon Country. While small skirmishes between isolated groups of whites and Indians broke out occasionally in Southwest Oregon over the winter of 1855-1856, the Battle of Hungry Hill was the last large-scale conflict of the year. The Rogue River peoples must have had an incredibly hard time subsisting in the hills through the winter, especially since they had no food stores collected from the summer and fall with them on the Lower Rogue. While white volunteers tried to follow the Rogue River peoples deep into the canyon, they were not able to engage the indigenous groups in another large battle until the spring of 1856, mostly because the Native American groups had disbanded and spread out through the region to find subsistence more easily.

Meanwhile, on October 25, 1855, three weeks after the uprising on the Table Rock Reservation, Palmer announced his final plan to Manypenny to create the 1.4 million acre Coast Reservation in Oregon, stretching from Cape Lookout in the North to the mouth of the Umpqua River in the South. He now planned to confine all of the Indians of Oregon west of the Cascades onto the Coast Reservation; this included the Rogue River Indians, the Umpqua Indians, the Kalapuya, the Alsea, the Tillamook, and the Lower Columbia Indians, among others.<sup>168</sup> On November 1, 1855, Palmer sent a letter to the Commander of the U.S. Army in the Pacific, General John Wool, asking for U.S. troops to escort some 300 Umpqua Indians from Fort Lane on the Umpqua River to the Coast Reservation.<sup>169</sup> Such immediate action indicates Palmer’s desire to enact reservation policy in Southwest Oregon as quickly as possible. Several days later,

---

<sup>167</sup> Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 228-231.

<sup>168</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 25 October 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 84-87; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 232-233.

<sup>169</sup> Palmer to Wool, 1 November 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 112-113; Schwartz, “Blood Money,” 233-234.

on November 9, 1855, President Franklin Pierce signed the bill that made the Coast Reservation official reservation policy in Oregon.<sup>170</sup> Now Palmer just had to force the Indians of Western Oregon to comply with his plan in order to reach what he saw as the fulfillment of reservation policy in Oregon.

Ultimately, the series of events that transpired in Southwest Oregon from 1853 to 1855 demonstrate several major failures of Indian Office policy: the use of aggressive intimidation tactics in negotiating with Indians, disconnect between treaty-making in Southwest Oregon and the ratification of those treaties in Washington D.C., inflexibility in upholding the statutes of removal policy, and the inability of Indian Office officials to uphold promises made to Indians in their treaties and maintain peace in the region. The Table Rock Reservation eventually failed because the Rogue River Indians could not survive on it; various illnesses decimated their population while on Table Rock, leaving them with no choice but to leave and try to secure subsistence off of the reservation. In addition to the problem of illness, Palmer and Culver could not deliver the annuities they had promised the Rogue River Indians in their treaties; even if the Rogue River peoples had not faced disease, they would have faced starvation and exposure at Table Rock. In the end, however, violence from local whites and Palmer's order to return to the reservation in 1855 were what precipitated the October uprising and subsequent flight down the Rogue Canyon. This is the ultimate display of Indian dissatisfaction with white policy, peace efforts, and the Table Rock Reservation in Southwest Oregon: conditions on the reservation must have been truly horrible if the majority of the Rogue River peoples would rather go to war against a formidable foe than live there under the dictates of impotent agents. In addition to the changing mindset of the Rogue River Indians as they decided on war over starvation and disease on the reservation, Palmer's conception of himself and his responsibilities as superintendent were also changing in 1855. His view of himself seems to be shifting from a paternalistic intermediary acting in the best interests of Indians and whites, to that of a war general pursuing an enemy. This

---

<sup>170</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 161.



seeming contradiction of Indian Office theory would remain a prevalent theme in this history through the end of the Rogue River Indian War in June 1856; Palmer's goal was no longer to preserve peace in the region, but to use war as a way to force the Rogue River Indians to comply with the desires of Indian Office reservation policy.

Going into the spring of 1856, both the indigenous peoples of Southwest Oregon and Palmer knew that the future of the Rogue River peoples would be decided that summer on the Lower Rogue. Over the winter, Palmer and other officials continued carrying out reservation policy and readying volunteer and U.S. troops for the upcoming campaign to force the Rogue River peoples to surrender and accept relocation to the Coast Reservation. While Ambrose and Palmer discussed relocating Toquahear's people from the Table Rock Reservation to the Grand Ronde Reservation as early as December 1855, the group was in such disarray (due to illness, undernourishment, and inadequate clothing) that such a relocation was not deemed possible by Ambrose until late February 1856.<sup>171</sup> On February 23, 1856, Ambrose left for the Grand Ronde Reservation, located along the Yamhill River between the Coast Reservation and the Willamette Valley, with about 400 of Toquahear's people.<sup>172</sup> Palmer granted Toquahear's group with the more fertile Grand Ronde Reservation, since they surrendered early in the struggle, and never left the Table Rock Reservation; the groups of Rogue River Indians who resisted, on the other hand, were eventually put on the less fertile Coast Reservation.

In March, Palmer set about implementing reservation policy in Southwest Oregon in earnest; knowing that spring would force the Rogue River peoples to remain disbanded as they attempted to hunt, gather, and fish the spring salmon run, Palmer and white military officials planned on intercepting and engaging the Rogue River Indians at the river when they came down to fish out of necessity.<sup>173</sup> Hundreds of volunteers and regulars, led by Captains Christopher

---

<sup>171</sup> Ambrose to Palmer, 2 December 1855, in U.S., House, *Indian Hostilities*, Serial 858, 120; Palmer to Manypenny, 8 March 1856, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144, 45-46; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 246, 259.

<sup>172</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 8 March 1856, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144, 45-46; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 259, 270.

<sup>173</sup> Schwartz, "Blood Money," 261-262.

Augur and E.O.C. Ord, arrived in Southwest Oregon in mid March, and began marching into areas occupied by Rogue River Indians in hopes of provoking a large battle that would force them to surrender.<sup>174</sup> Tecumtum's people, living along Deer Creek on the Illinois River, apparently repulsed several white attempts to penetrate their territory in March and April 1856. Palmer, meanwhile, was receiving widespread criticism, especially from white residents in the Willamette Valley, for bringing Toquahear's people and hundreds more Indian prisoners of war into such close vicinity with their relatively dense settlements there.<sup>175</sup>

Tecumtum and other Rogue River Indian leaders knew that their window of opportunity to beat the whites in Southwest Oregon was closing rapidly. Their only hope of remaining autonomous in Southwest Oregon through another winter was to continue moving west down the river and regain possession of the coast. That possibility, however, seemed impossible as of mid April. On April 14, 1856, a battalion of about 300 white volunteers began marching west from the Rogue Valley into the Lower Rogue Canyon and towards the final holdouts of the Rogue River Indians near Big Meadows, located several miles downstream from Grave Creek.<sup>176</sup> The battalion stationed on the coast began marching east up the Rogue River on April 17, 1856, intent on meeting the other battalion at the Meadows before launching a final onslaught against the remaining Rogue River peoples (now thought to number 500-600 with the addition of several Klamath Indians from east of the Cascades).<sup>177</sup> Thus, by April, the stage was set for the final scene of the Rogue River Indian War. With hundreds of volunteers and regulars converging the last territories occupied by the Rogue River Indian warriors, the remainder of Rogue River fighting force was trapped from April on; they had few supplies, rapidly diminishing food stores, and no reinforcements. All parties involved knew that the decisive final battle would have to be fought in the next few months.

---

<sup>174</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 117-121.

<sup>175</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 121-123; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 283-284.

<sup>176</sup> Schwartz, "Blood Money," 291.

<sup>177</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 125-126; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 291-292.

Palmer arrived in Port Orford by ship on May 16, 1856, hoping to play a role in the treaty process that would certainly follow unconditional Indian surrender. In Port Orford, agent Nathan Olney (who replaced Ben Wright as Southwest Oregon Coast agent following Wright's death) told Palmer that 365 Indians were on the temporary reservation there waiting to be shipped to their new home on the Coast Reservation.<sup>178</sup> Colonel Robert Buchanan, commander of the regulars stationed at the Meadows, sent out messengers on May 7 to invite the headmen of the Rogue River Indians to Meadows in order to negotiate treaty arrangements. On May 16, several lesser chiefs among the Rogue River peoples arrived at Buchanan's headquarters and agreed to surrender unconditionally and relocate to the Coast Reservation. At midday on May 19, chiefs Cholcultah and Lympe came to Oak Flat, a few miles up the Illinois River from its confluence with the Rogue, in order to negotiate the terms of surrender with Buchanan. On the morning of May 20, Tecumtum and several other influential Rogue leaders joined Cholcultah and Lympe to discuss their options with Buchanan.<sup>179</sup> Collectively, they wanted to stop fighting, yet wanted to remain on their own lands rather than be relocated to the Coast Reservation. According to Bancroft, Tecumtum allegedly told Buchanan the following in the exchange:

You are a great chief; so am I. This is my country; I was in it when these large trees were very small, not [taller] than my head. My heart is sick with fighting, but I want to live in my country. If the white people are willing, I will go back to Deer Creek and live among them as I used to do; they can visit my camp, and I will visit theirs; but I will not lay down my arms and go with you on the reserve. I will fight.<sup>180</sup>

Despite Tecumtum's refusal to surrender to the terms of the Indian Office, Cholcultah and Lympe promised to meet Captain A.J. Smith on May 26 at Big Bend (about three miles upriver from the confluence with the Illinois), where they would surrender unconditionally and begin the process of relocation to the Coast Reservation.<sup>181</sup> On the morning of May 27, 1856, however, hundreds of Rogue River warriors, still armed, landed at Smith's camp at Big Bend, and allegedly

---

<sup>178</sup> Joel Palmer, "Joel Palmer Diary for 1856," 7; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 134-135; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 310.

<sup>179</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 135; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 311.

<sup>180</sup> Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, 406.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 407; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 136; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 313.

commenced an attack on his surrounded force of 80 troops who were dug in at the top of a hill there.<sup>182</sup> Meanwhile, Palmer met Buchanan at his camp near the mouth of the Illinois River, where they made camp for the night, apparently unaware that Smith's company had been under attack for the better part of a day, only three miles away. The confederated Indian groups attacked well into the night on May 27, renewing attacks against Smith's at 4 AM on May 28. Upon learning of the battle on May 28, Palmer, Olney, and Augur set out for Big Bend with reinforcements, arriving at 4 PM. Once there, Augur's troops (along with Palmer himself) charged and opened fire on the flank of an Indian force surrounding Smith's dwindling troops. The Rogue River men apparently retreated down a steep ravine and disappeared.<sup>183</sup>

On May 29, Joel Palmer again sent messengers to bring the leaders of the Rogue River peoples in to talk. When they still refused, Palmer threatened on May 30, 1856, that if the Rogue River peoples did not come in that day, he would cease negotiations with them, and instead carry on the war. Palmer's intimidation tactic worked, and Rogue River men led by Cholcultah and Lympe came to Big Bend that night and gave up their arms. The two chiefs insisted to Palmer that they did not participate in the Battle of Big Bend, and that they would have come in sooner if Tecumtum had not threatened their lives.<sup>184</sup> On June 10, Buchanan left Big Bend for Port Orford with 277 Rogue River Indians who had either surrendered or been captured, and were destined for the Coast Reservation. On June 12, 1856, 421 Rogue River people in Augur's camp were united with Buchanan's group of prisoners, totaling more than 700 Indians in all, who arrived at Port Orford on June 14. The steamship *Columbia* arrived at Port Orford on the morning of June 21, 1856. Here Palmer oversaw the loading of most of the captured Indians deemed too sick to make

---

<sup>182</sup> Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, 406-408; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 317.

<sup>183</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 137-140; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 317-320.

<sup>184</sup> Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, 409-410; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 141; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 329-330.

the overland trek to the Coast Reservation. 199 men, 226 women, 127 boys, and 118 girls were loaded onto the ship's deck and shipped off for the Coast Reservation.<sup>185</sup>

The remaining bands of the war-ravished Rogue River Indians were systematically killed, captured, or sent to Port Orford in the weeks following the surrender of most of the Rogue River Indians in mid June. Tecumtum and his people finally agreed to meet Buchanan at Oak Flat on June 23, where they also surrendered unconditionally on June 29, and began the walk to Port Orford, arriving on July 2, 1856.<sup>186</sup> A *Statesman* article from July 15, 1856 reported that the steamship *Columbia* had brought another 700 Indians from Port Orford to the Coast Reservation, and that Tecumtum and his group had begun the 200 mile overland trek from Port Orford to the Coast Reservation.<sup>187</sup> Small bands of Rogue River Indians that had been holding out in Southwest Oregon were mostly all removed to the Coast Reservation by May of 1858.<sup>188</sup>

By the end of the war, deportation, and relocation of the Rogue River Indians in 1856, Palmer had completed the first step of Indian Office reservation policy (confining Indians on a reservation separate from white settlements), but at the heavy price of thousands of Native American lives, hundreds of Euro-American lives, hundreds of thousands of dollars of public funds, as well as breaking numerous promises made to Native American groups. The next chapter in the story of Indian Office policy and its effects on the Rogue River Indians includes their interaction with one another on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations 1856-1875. Instead of rectifying the errors of previous Indian Office officials like Palmer and Lane, the implementation of official reservation policy in Western Oregon simply involved more hardship for the indigenous peoples of Southwest and Western Oregon, including several more broken promises and treaties that ultimately resulted in multiple reductions and removals within the Coast Reservation itself.

---

<sup>185</sup> Palmer to Manypenny, 3 July 1856, in U.S., Senate, *Letter*, S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144, 53-55; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 146; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 333, 335-336.

<sup>186</sup> Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of Oregon*, 410; Palmer "Diary" 14; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 146; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 341-342, 345.

<sup>187</sup> *Oregon Statesman*, 15 July 1856; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 346.

<sup>188</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 149-150; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 348-349.

### **Change and Acculturation on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations (1857-1865)**

The Coast Reservation was officially reduced to the Siletz sub-agency following the allotment of former Coast Reservation lands to individual Indian families in 1894. Despite this end, the Indian Office's fulfillment of the goals of reservation policy from the 1850s through the 1870s is checkered. While Palmer was able to confine the Indians of Western Oregon onto a definite tract of land, he was unable to secure the sale of their lands before such lands were squatted on by local whites, a problem that in hindsight was a major cause of the war. Furthermore, Palmer was unable to preserve peace between Rogue River Indians and local whites, despite his attempts to implement reservation policy in order to avoid bloodshed between the two groups. On the reservation, Palmer and his successors proved equally incompetent in delivering on the promises they made to the Indians when they agreed to relocate. The Coast Reservation was perennially understaffed from the 1850s to the 1870s, and annuities promised in the form of food, tools, clothing, and shelter were simply not delivered. Palmer and other Indian agents tried to teach the Indians on the Coast Reservation how to become self-sufficient agrarians, but the poor climate and soils of the densely forested region proved insufficient to actually support Native American subsistence. That said, many Indians were forced to go off of the reservation in order to hunt game or earn wages as laborers in neighboring white towns. Thus, the Coast Reservation failed to fulfill the foremost goal professed by the Indian Office: to assimilate Indian groups into white culture by teaching them the art of agriculture. Many Native Americans, however, found ways to contribute to and benefit from white society in Western Oregon themselves, simultaneously fulfilling and refuting the future theoretical goals of Indian Office ideologues in the 1850s.

One of the first Indian Office reports from the Coast Reservation, written by Agent Metcalfe in July 1857, recorded the reservation's Native American population at 1,943.<sup>189</sup> Indian Office investigator, J. Ross Browne, who visited the Coast Reservation in 1857, asserted that Metcalfe's harsh rule over the Indians there was the only force that compelled them to remain on the reservation through the first winter.<sup>190</sup> The first winter on the Coast Reservation was devastating to Indian populations of the Coast Reservation: measles, malnourishment and undernourishment, coupled with the fact that they had to build their own houses from scratch, resulted with the deaths of hundreds of Rogue River people. 205 Takelmas alone died in the first year, reducing their numbers on the Coast Reservation from 590 in mid 1856 to 385 by the spring of 1857. In 1865, there were only 121 Indians left on the reservation who identified themselves as Takelmas.<sup>191</sup>

Several aspects of Coast Reservation organization remained constant through its existence: the failure to deliver enough supplies with annuity money to allow all the Indians on the Coast Reservation to subsist, white disregard for previous Indian Office treaties with the Indians of Western Oregon, severe understaffing, financial and logistical problems, and attempts to force Indians to learn the ways of white agrarian culture.

One of the greatest failures of Indian Office officials to uphold their promises regarding the Coast Reservation in the first year of its existence involved the problem of getting flour to the remote Indian settlements of the Coast Reservation. Superintendent Absalom Hedges, who replaced Palmer on July 16, 1856, thought that Siletz Bay and Yaquina Bay would be great locations to deliver annuities by sea to the Indians of the Coast Reservation.<sup>192</sup> Neither port, however, was especially friendly to large supply schooners, especially in the winter. When one

---

<sup>189</sup> Metcalfe to Nesmith, 15 July 1857. In House, *Message H. Ex. Doc. 2, Serial 942, 645*; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 149.

<sup>190</sup> Browne to Denver, November 17, 1857, in House, *Indian Affairs, 1858, Serial 955, 32-48*; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 164.

<sup>191</sup> "Census Report for Siletz, 1865," J.W. Huntington, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Annual Reports, 1865, 470; William Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation 1855-1900," (Master's diss., Portland State University, 1973), 7; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 168; Metcalfe to Nesmith, July 27, 1858, in Senate, *Message*, 1858, 605.

<sup>192</sup> Hedges to Manypenny, 7 November 1856, NAM 234, Roll 609; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 165.

such supply ship wrecked at the mouth of the Siletz River in December 1856, the resulting struggle to get food for the Indian populations of the reservation turned ugly.<sup>193</sup> While some Indians quickly migrated south to Yaquina Bay where another schooner had successfully delivered flour, the stores there were depleted rapidly, and the majority of Indians on the reservation had no food. Metcalfe's solution was to buy flour in Kings Valley, just East of the Coast Range, and have it hauled over the mountains to the people of the reservation. When he discovered, however, that snow 2 to 4 feet deep in the Coast Range would prevent the use of mule pack trains, he ordered the strongest of the Indians on the reservation to walk over 50 miles through mountain snow in order to haul 20,000 pounds of flour back to the reservation.<sup>194</sup> Before Metcalfe ordered this, however, about 1,500 Native Americans had been apparently surviving the winter on the reservation for one month without flour and with for several days with no meat.<sup>195</sup> While flour quickly became the main source of sustenance for the Western Oregon Indians on the Coast Reservation, the flour they were given by mills was usually of extremely low quality. In many cases, Indians carried flour great distances only to find that it was cut with the worst mill sweepings, including "shorts and sweeps," a raw grain mixture that was commonly used in the 1850s for livestock feed.<sup>196</sup> In addition to the difficulties of finding adequate shelter and food on the reservation 1856-1857, the Rogue River Indians also suffered from diseases like measles, as well as food poisoning from being forced to eat bad flour and rotten vegetables in order to stay alive.<sup>197</sup>

On September 21, 1857, Tecumtum, Lympe, and Cholcultah demanded to meet with an agent. They explained to special agent J. Ross Browne that their people were dying fast on the reservation due to disease and starvation. They demanded to be allowed to return to Southwest Oregon (as Palmer and Lane had apparently promised them in 1853) and settle on lands near

---

<sup>193</sup> Hedges to Manypenny, 19 November 1856, NAM 234, Roll 610; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 165.

<sup>194</sup> Browne to Denver, 17 November 1857, in U.S., House, *Indian Affairs*, 1858, Serial 955, 40-41; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 165.

<sup>195</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 165; Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 11.

<sup>196</sup> Frances Fuller Victor, *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon* (Salem: Frank C. Baker, State Printer, 1894), 415; Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 11.

<sup>197</sup> Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 11-12.



Table Rock and Evans Creek that they never sold to the federal government. Browne instead tried to appease them with typical Indian Office gifts like flour, blankets, clothes, tools, and building supplies; despite this gesture, Browne also assured the chiefs that if they returned to Southwest Oregon, they would surely be shot as hostiles.<sup>198</sup>

Thus, the initial years on the Coast Reservation were part of a failed experiment. The vast majority of the Indians there were constantly either sick, starving, or physically impoverished. Charles Mix, who took over for Manypenny as U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1858, said that the two reservations in Texas, the five in California, and the two in Oregon are all still in the process of developing and should “properly be regarded as only experimental.”<sup>199</sup> Agriculture, one of the chief goals of original reservation theory, was practiced on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations with mixed levels of success. In general, agricultural efforts of Western Oregon Indians fared much better on the Grand Ronde Reservation than the Coast Reservation for several main reasons: first, the climate and soil of the Yamhill Valley (just to the East of the Coast Range) was more conducive to farming than the moist seaward slope of the Coast Range; second, since the Indian people who ended up on the Grand Ronde Reservation received preferential treatment for their early surrender (at least with the Rogue River Indians), their agents generally supplied them better than those on the Coast Reservation; the Grand Ronde Reservation was much more accessible to and from the Willamette Valley, so it was much easier for Grand Ronde Indians to buy, trade, and sell agricultural products with local white farmers in the Willamette Valley. Successful large-scale agricultural production began on the Grand Ronde Reservation in the late 1860s and 1870s. In addition to farming, Indians on both the Coast Reservation and the Grand Ronde Reservation added to their food stores by practicing original modes of hunting and gathering: women collected berries, acorns, camas and wapato roots, and other edible plants for

---

<sup>198</sup> Browne to Denver, 17 November 1857, in U.S., House, *Indian Affairs*, 1858, Serial 955, 44-47; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 151.

<sup>199</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 169.

subsistence; while men hunted deer, elk, and other game in addition to fishing.<sup>200</sup> On top of hunting, gathering, and farming, many Native Americans on both reservations were forced at different times to leave the reservation to seek employment with local whites during various agricultural seasons. Labor was apparently in high demand in the 1850s and 1860s, a situation that helped (and possibly even saved the lives of) hundreds of indigenous people on the Coast and Grand Ronde Reservations.<sup>201</sup>

By August 1862, more than half of the Indians of the Coast Reservation were off of the reservation looking for work in the Willamette Valley to secure some wages before they returned to harvest their own crops. Passes had become a formality of the past, as Indians with and without passes were forced to spend more time off the reservation, mixing economically with the local white population.<sup>202</sup> Agriculture took much longer to develop fully on the Coast Reservation than on the Grand Ronde; the Indians of the Coast Reservation would never really reach a comfortable level of agricultural self-sufficiency. The combination of poor climate, poor soil, few implements, and the high costs of delivering supplies to its rural sections proved to be damaging to the agricultural production and overall health of the people on the Coast Reservation. While corrupt agents such as Metcalfe certainly capitalized off of selling provisions, meant for Indians, geographic isolation is another reason why their annuities never got them very far: the reservation's location "out of the way of the white settlements" added \$10 per ton to the cost of deliver flour there. Especially in the winter, when roads on the Coast Reservation were even more difficult to traverse, Coast Reservation agents reportedly paid up to \$17 per barrel of flour for barrels that sold for \$4 at the mill in Kings Valley.<sup>203</sup>

Ultimately, life in general was better for the Indians on the Grand Ronde Reservation than for those on the Coast Reservation. In the 1870s, most Grand Ronde Indians were

---

<sup>200</sup> Tracy Leavelle, "We Will Make it Our Own Place: Agriculture and Adaptation at the Grand Ronde Reservation, 1856-1887," *American Indian Quarterly* vol. 22, no. 4 (1998): 4-5.

<sup>201</sup> Leavelle, "We Will Make it Our Own Place," 12-13.

<sup>202</sup> Biddle to Rector, 13 August 1862, in CIA Report, 1862, 276; Rector to Dole, 2 September 1862, in CIA Report, 1862, 256; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 171.

<sup>203</sup> Browne to Denver, 17 November 1857, in U.S., House, *Indian Affairs*, 1858, Serial 955, 34; Leavelle, "We Will Make it Our Own Place," 12; Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 12.

beneficiaries of white employment off the reservation in addition to their own farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering endeavors. Agent P.B. Sinnott, reported from Grand Ronde in 1877 that the Indians there produced 90% of their own food by means of farming, while the remainder was produced through fishing, hunting, and gathering. In 1878, the agent claimed that the Indians of Grand Ronde produced 95% of their subsistence needs through farming, essentially fulfilling one of the main goals behind Indian Office theory: agricultural self-sufficiency.<sup>204</sup>

Despite the fulfillment of a few goals of assimilation on the reservations of Western Oregon, the story as a whole, especially on the Coast Reservation, is largely one of continued frustrations and difficulties with physical sustenance. As the reservation system worked itself out through practice in Western Oregon, several promises made to the Indians of the Coast Reservation were broken in favor of white popular opinion. The federal government opened up the Yaquina and Alsea sections of the Coast Reservation to white squatters in 1865 and 1875, respectively. In addition, financial troubles and a high turnover rate with agents led to an environment of disconnected policies and bureaucratic self interest. While Metcalfe resigned as agent of the Coast Reservation in 1859, eventually stealing Indian Office funds on his way to join the Confederate Army in 1861, he was by no means the lone incompetent agent to serve on the reservation.<sup>205</sup> Under-funding and understaffing, especially during the Civil War, left many Coast Reservation agents feeling as if they were underpaid for the amount of work they were expected to do; this led to a string of agents in the 1860s who had very brief tenures and reservation agents. Daniel Newcomb, who replaced Metcalfe as Coast Reservation Agent in 1860, only stayed for two years before he was replaced by B.R. Biddle, who in turn served for only one year.<sup>206</sup> The man who replaced Biddle in August 1863, Benjamin Simpson, although he served as agent on the

---

<sup>204</sup> Leavelle, "We Will Make it Our Own Place," 7.

<sup>205</sup> Victor, *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon*, 416; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 164.

<sup>206</sup> Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 15.

Coast Reservation until 1871, was responsible for inflicting the main bureaucratic blows to Indian Office promises previously made to the Indians of the Coast Reservation.<sup>207</sup>

Simpson quickly earned a reputation among both whites and Indians as a particularly brutal agent. He favored heavy discipline for Indians, and often held public whippings when he punished them for petty crimes. He was apparently hostile to the precedent set by previous agents in allowing Indians to leave the reservation with or without passes; upon his inauguration, he reportedly told the Indians that all who left without passes would receive 40 lashings. Simpson also allegedly made personal profit on the reservation by selling provisions meant for Indians at a rate of up to three times what the Indian Office paid for them. In addition, Simpson was the driving bureaucratic force behind the 1865 and 1875 reductions to the Coast Reservation that ultimately reduced the reservation to one fifth of its original size by 1875.<sup>208</sup>

### **The Yaquina Bay Removal (1865)**

Simpson first discussed opening up Yaquina Bay in his Indian Office report for 1863. In the report, he suggested that Yaquina Bay may one day prove useful to whites as a port of navigation and trade, due to what he saw as a safe harbor despite its relatively shallow entry and bad winter weather. He basically says that Yaquina Bay should be opened to white settlement if other officials agree that the bay could be lucrative for future city planning, transport, or trade.<sup>209</sup> Simpson, however, was not the only white man interested in the prospect of opening up Yaquina Bay for white settlement; Richard Hillyer, captain of an oyster fishing vessel from San Francisco, had begun harvesting oysters and operating a store on the bay as early as December 1862.<sup>210</sup> Oregon Superintendent, J.W. Huntington, ordered Simpson to tell Hillyer to vacate the reservation, an order that Hillyer ignored, arguing that reservations could not lawfully extend the

---

<sup>207</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 174.

<sup>208</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 174-177.

<sup>209</sup> Simpson to Huntington, 20 August 1863, in U.S., House, *Message from the President of the United States*, 38<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1863, H.Ex. Doc 1, Serial 1182, 185-86.

<sup>210</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 176.

oyster beds located in the tidal flats of the bay. Huntington, despite his desire to assert his regional control to oust Hillyer, was another influential Indian Office bureaucrat who supported removing Yaquina Bay from the Coast Reservation in the early 1860s.<sup>211</sup> Simpson again commented on the stability of Yaquina Bay for future white occupation in his annual report for 1864. In addition to Huntington, Simpson, and Hillyer, the farmers of the Willamette Valley (especially in Corvallis and Kings Valley) were generally supportive of opening Yaquina Bay to white settlement, because they saw it as a direct outlet to regional and international agricultural markets. Yet such a view was grossly misinformed; even after Yaquina Bay was opened to white settlement and the town of Newport was erected there, the harbor's 15-foot depth at high tide would not be enough to make Newport eligible to replace Portland as the Willamette Valley farmers' most efficient outlet to the sea.<sup>212</sup> Despite this misinformation among Willamette Valley farmers, they had prompted the Yaquina Bay Wagon Road Company to begin building a road in 1863 (two years before the official opening of lands to whites) that would eventually connect Yaquina Bay with the Willamette Valley.<sup>213</sup> On December 21, 1865, Yaquina Bay was officially opened up to white squatters. In all, the order extinguished Indian titles for their reservation lands for a down payment of \$16,500 to the Coast Reservation Indians. The territory ceded by the Indians of Western Oregon included all the land between the Pacific Ocean in the west, that ridge of the Coast Range in the east, a line two miles south of the Siletz agency in the north, and the Alsea River in the south, totaling about 212,000 acres in all. As for the Indians living in the ceded zones, some agreed to relocate to Siletz, while others tried to stay in their homes and farms.<sup>214</sup>

Ultimately, the Yaquina Bay Removal of 1865 demonstrates one of the main contradictions of Indian Office policy all along: none of the treaties made in Oregon actually

---

<sup>211</sup> Huntington to Dole, 28 March 1864, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 614, 1-6, Native American Documents Project Document D77; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 176-177.

<sup>212</sup> Simpson to Huntington, 12 September 1864, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, CIA Report, 1864, 104; Leslie M. Scott, "The Yaquina Railroad, the Tale of a Great Fiasco," *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 16 (September 1915): 229; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 179-180.

<sup>213</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 177.

<sup>214</sup> Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 18-19.

meant anything. From the very beginning, the Land Donation Act of 1850 was at odds with the main goal of reservation policy in the West: to secure treaties ‘buying’ lands before white settlement.<sup>215</sup> Whites had been squatting on lands in Southwest Oregon from 1843 to 1853, before Palmer ever secured the first treaty for the sale of Rogue River Indian lands (which would not be ratified until 1855). Thus, all white settlement in Oregon between the passing of the Land Donation Act in 1850 and the ratification of Palmer’s first treaties in 1855 was technically illegal according to the theoretical goals of the Indian Office. According to the Land Donation Act, however, Palmer’s treaties were superfluous; why should he make treaties to buy the lands from Indians when whites were already streaming into them anyway? Similarly, when white squatters, farmers, and fishermen desired to open up and settle Yaquina Bay, no one stopped them (or could), and they eventually got their way, despite the fact that Yaquina Bay was part of a reservation promised to the Indians of Western Oregon in a bill signed by the President.<sup>216</sup> The implications of such disconnect between local white economic desires and Indian Office enforcement of its treaties were dire. Indian distrust of white officials soared because of such blatant breaches of confidence in the treaty process. In addition, such breaches of contract with the Indians of Western Oregon set a precedent for future white relations with those Indians: the treaty efforts of agents were neglected by eager whites who knew the Indian Office was too detached and physically insignificant to enforce the laws of its treaties on local whites.

### **The Alsea Removal (1875) and the Road to Allotment**

Following the precedent set by the Yaquina Bay Removal in 1865, local whites began applying pressure for the dissolution of the Alsea portion of the reservation, especially after an episode of Indian-white violence on Alsea territory in October 1867. A reservation employee shot and killed an Indian man earlier that month, causing much stress among the Indian groups living

---

<sup>215</sup> Mott to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 11 February 1859, in United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 611, 12-15, Native American Documents Project Document D64.

<sup>216</sup> The 21 December 1865 bill signed by Andrew Johnson.

there.<sup>217</sup> Ironically, Simpson, who had led the bureaucratic push to open Yaquina Bay to white settlement, originally opposed opening up the Alsea tract, probably because he feared for his job security if the Alsea sub-agency were also dissolved. In January 1871, however, Simpson's eight-year stint as agent of the Coast Reservation came to an end, as Palmer was appointed reservation agent in his place.<sup>218</sup>

In 1873, Oregon Superintendent of Indian Affairs, T.B. Odeneal, proposed yet another reduction of the Coast Reservation, this time in both the northern and southern sections of the reservation. He wanted to relocate the Indians living north of the Salmon River (also called the Nestucca) from Tillamook County, as well as the Indians living south of the Alsea River in the Alsea sub-agency from their homeland to the Siletz sub-agency. As Schwartz notes, Odeneal's priorities in this situation seem like a glaring contradiction of to the ideals of Indian Office policy. Agents were supposed to act as representatives and protectors of Native American groups in the West, not as promoters of local whites who wished to (or already had) settled on Indian reservation territory. In January 1874, John Mitchell, a senator from Oregon, put forth a plan similar to Odeneal's for the reduction of the Alsea sub-agency, a plan that Ben Simpson (now a federal surveyor) helped him make.<sup>219</sup> In early 1875, Mitchell started introducing bills to Congress to close the Alsea sub-agency, all in hopes of opening its lands to white lumbermen, who could capitalize greatly off of the wealth of fir, pine, and cedar timber in the Siuslaw and Alsea forests. In February, Mitchell's bill was amended in Congress, and he was told that it would pass if he secured the consent of some 500 Indians living on the Alsea sub-agency to be removed.<sup>220</sup> Of all the stipulations, Mitchell and Simpson knew that getting Indian permission to move the people of the Alsea sub-agency would be nearly impossible; of the 500 or so Indians living in the Alsea sub-agency, most were Siuslaw or Alsea Indians who had never yet been

---

<sup>217</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 182.

<sup>218</sup> *Oregonian*, 17 July 1871, 1, Native American Documents Project Document D82; Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 186-187.

<sup>219</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 191-193.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

relocated. Although they had lived in frame houses and had farms like whites, the Indians and the Alsea sub-agency had been previously allowed to remain on their original homelands, and would obviously not be willing to relocate in 1875.

Coast Reservation agent, J.H. Fairchild, attempted to negotiate with Indians in the Salmon River and Alsea sub-agencies to this end, but was not able to convince them of the plan's supposed merits. The Indian Office, however, preferred a more forceful agent, and appointed Ben Simpson in July 1875 as a special agent meant to gain the approval of the Alsea, Siuslaw, and Tillamook Indians for the closing of their lands and removal to the Siletz section of the reservation. On October 28, 1875, Simpson told Fairchild that he had gained permission of the said groups to terminate their reservation and remove them to Siletz, almost certainly a blatant lie.<sup>221</sup> Fairchild, ultimately ashamed with his role in the Alsea reduction of the Coast Reservation, resigned as agent in September 1875. His successor, William Bagley, was now responsible for removing the unwilling Alseas, Siuslaws, and Tillamooks to Siletz. While Alsea territory was eventually opened to white settlement on September 16, 1876, Bagley and the reservation did not have enough monetary resources to complete the removal. By late November 1877, Bagley had lost nearly all control on the Coast Reservation. The Tillamook and Alsea sections of the reservation had been dissolved, but due to lack of funds, he had been unable to complete their removal or provide food, shelter, or clothing for them. Because of this, Bagley was forced in December of 1877 to return to their homeland and resettle like whites there.<sup>222</sup>

In all, hundreds of Alsea, Siuslaw, and Tillamook Indians died in the course of their incomplete removal and maldistribution of annuities. Indian Office officials had basically removed the Alsea, Siuslaw, Umpqua, and Tillamook Indians from their lands, and then allowed them to return to them as homesteaders. In the process, however, the Indian peoples of the former Alsea and Salmon River sub-agencies lost their claims to reservation lands, as well as any

---

<sup>221</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 195-198.

<sup>222</sup> Bagley to Hayt, 26 November 1877, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 624, 1-4, Native American Documents Project Document D85; Schwartz, "Blood Money," 200-201.



annuities that had been promised to them by previous Indian Office treaties. In many ways, the circumstances of the Alsea Removal were similar to those of the Yaquina Bay Removal a decade earlier. It basically involved pressure by local whites to open up Indian lands that were thought to be of some use to future white society in Oregon. It differed, however, in that the Indians relocated during the Alsea Removal were already virtually assimilated into white American modes of living. The removal was reminiscent of the Cherokee removal forty years before, in which Native American groups were relocated despite their extensive efforts to assimilate into white culture. The fact that the Alseas and Siuslaws had houses and farms, however, was of no concern to local whites that wanted to settle on their lands and harvest the rich timber deposits there. Above all, the Alsea Removal again shows the ineffectiveness of the Indian Office in curbing local white interests for the benefit of Indian groups. In short, this removal occurred not because the Indian Office wanted to further acculturate the Alsea and Siuslaw Indians, but because local whites wanted Indian lands, and white politicians like Mitchell wanted to please their local white constituencies.

Five years later, in 1882, 67 Alsea people were relocated to a village along the river where Siletz Reservation agent, Edmund Swan, had prepared 15 houses for them.<sup>223</sup> Swan also instituted the first successful allotments of reservation lands 1881-1882, insisting that each Indian household could claim 160 acres on which to squat. In so doing, Swan was anticipating the fulfillment of the Indian Office ideal of turning the Indians into land-owning, self-sufficient agriculturalists.<sup>224</sup> In many ways, Swan's allotment plan was years ahead of its time; 160 acre parcels made private allotment a more attractive offer to the Indians of Western Oregon than had previous offers of allotment. In addition, Swan's plan played directly into the manifestation of the General Allotment Act of 1887 (also called the Dawes Act), which gave Indians living on certain reservations in the West 160 acre plots for personal ownership.

---

<sup>223</sup> Schwartz, *The Rogue River Indian War*, 208.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

Allotments were surveyed by the federal government on the Coast Reservation in 1892, and officially ratified in 1894. The territories of the Coast Reservation were divided into 536 allotments, covering a total of 43,258 acres. In the summer of 1894, 15 more allotments, amounting to a total of 1,201 acres, were added to the previous total, the lands of which were sold to the federal government for \$142,600. This sum was to be disbursed to the Siletz people annually at the rate of \$75 per adult per year, until it was depleted. In 1895, the former reservation lands ceded by the Coast Reservation Indians in the allotment process were opened to white settlement at the rate of about \$1.50 per acre.<sup>225</sup>

The relationship between the Rogue River Indians and Indian Office policy between 1850 and 1887 was shaky at best. While certain agents and officials at times tried to protect the interests of the Rogue River Indians, the majority of their efforts were either purposely misleading, halfhearted, or simply ineffective. Nonetheless, the efforts of Indian Office officials in Southwest and Western Oregon accomplished certain goals of Indian Office: the lives of some of Oregon's Indians were preserved, many of their lands were sold, their tribal affiliations were sometimes dissolved or generalized (hence the term 'Rogue River Indians'), they were instructed in agriculture and Christianity, their reservations were eventually allotted for private ownership, and many eventually integrated into white society with relative ease. Yet, despite making the Rogue River Indians private property owners, wage earners, fishermen, lumbermen, and agriculturalists, the Indian Office failed to realize most of its more positive goals concerning the Native Americans of Southwest Oregon. They did not, for example, follow through on delivering annuities that were supposed to keep Indian peoples alive on reservations. Nor did they ratify and uphold many treaties they made with the Indians of Oregon. Furthermore, they did not preserve peace between Indians and whites (the foremost theoretical responsibility of Indian officials and

---

<sup>225</sup> "Full Report of proceedings," 17 October 1892, in Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75, Special Case 147, Siletz, 1900 Land 1276 (enclosure 14), National Archives, 1-21, Native American Documents Project Document D80; Charles Kappler, ed., "Agreement with the Alsea and other Indians on Siletz Reservation in Oregon," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904) <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/Images/v1p0533.jpg> (accessed 17 May 2010); Kent, "The Siletz Indian Reservation," 33-34.

agents) in Oregon, but rather forced the Rogue River Indians into a war for the sake of forcefully implementing Indian Office policy. In all, the Indian Office eventually fulfilled its physical goals of removal and acculturation with regard to the Rogue River peoples, yet failed to fulfill its theoretical ideals of preserving peace, and protecting and providing for the Indians in the process.

### **Conclusion**

The reservation system that fell out of Indian-white clashes in Southwest Oregon in the 1850s turned out much worse for Native Americans than promised in Indian Office theoretical rhetoric of the 1840s and 50s. The main reason that reservation policy manifested so disappointingly in Oregon was that the fundamental premise of the Indian Office and reservation system (buying Indian lands before allowing white settlement) was naturally at odds with the Land Donation Act, which promoted squatting on lands in Oregon Territory before they were bought from Indians with treaties. Thus, the Indian Office and its officials were fighting an uphill battle from the start to preserve peace in Southwest and Western Oregon in the 1850s, as two opposing national policies forced them to try to appease both whites and Indians. How could they have preserved peace by securing treaties with Indians, when the lands 'sold' were already populated with whites? Furthermore, how could they gain the trust of indigenous peoples when various treaties were neglected, delayed, or never ratified? Lands set aside for Indian reservations were also squatted on by whites, demonstrating the inability of such a disconnected Indian Office bureaucracy to actually control people on the ground in the far reaches of the American empire.

The rapid inundation of whites in Southwest Oregon in the early 1850s made local Indian quests for subsistence much more difficult; Indian people now had to compete with miners, homesteaders, ranchers, and livestock for the limited sources of subsistence available in the natural environment of Southwest Oregon. Scarcity of food and other economic opportunities produced desperation, raids, retaliation, and feuds, and by 1855, a full-on war was underway between whites and Indians there. Ironically, the war came to be headed by Indian Office

officials, the same men who were supposed to secure treaties with Indian groups in order to preserve peace. In the process of restoring 'order' and 'peace' in Oregon, the Indian Office itself promoted a war that killed the vast majority of the Rogue River Indians' pre-war population, before it confined them to under-funded and under-staffed reservations in Northwest Oregon. A general lack of basic needs, especially food, shelter, clothes, and disease prevention, characterized the first two decades of life on the Coast Reservation. By the mid 1870s, Rogue River Indian survivors and their children (among other groups) had been forced to try learn how to grow their own food, speak English, work for whites as agricultural and wage laborers, and adopt white American dress, religion, and education. By the late 1880s, their community lands were allotted for individual ownership, and the Indian Office accomplished its ultimate goal for the reservation system in Oregon: assimilating Indian peoples into the lifestyles of white society. Yet, despite its eventual fulfillment of its ultimate goal of basic assimilation and acculturation, the Indian Office left many of its theoretical goals for the reservation system unfinished. The most glaring of these unfinished goals were treaties that were never ratified; the Coquille Indians, for example, never received annuities, a reservation, money for their lands, nor federal tribal status until the late twentieth century, due to the non-ratification of their 1855 treaty with Palmer in Congress. In addition, the Indian Office, while it cared little for the preservation of Indian culture, was supposed to protect the lives of the indigenous peoples within its jurisdiction, a goal that was hardly met in Southwest Oregon, considering the loss 80% of the Indian population there from 1851 to 1857. Ultimately, the actual manifestation of the reservation system that emerged in Southwest and Western Oregon in the 1850s, 60s, and 70s eventually fulfilled some of its theoretical ends via a much more violent means than originally planned and anticipated by Indian Office officials. Broken promises, white racism and unrestrained economic ambition, as well as Indian Office bureaucratic impotence also contributed to the formation of a system that was thrown together to in a half-hearted attempt to regulate Indian-white relations during rapid demographic changes in Oregon Territory and State.

## **Bibliography**

Atwood, Kay. "As Long as the World Goes on: the Table Rocks and the Takelma." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. 1-1-1994. Vol. 95, no. 4, 516-533.

----- and Grey, Dennis. *People and the River: A History of the Human Occupation of the Middle Course of the Rogue River of Southwestern Oregon*. Medford: Bureau of Land Management, 1996.

-----, *Illaha: The Story of Settlement in the Rogue River Canyon*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2008.

Bagley to Hayt, 26 November 1877, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 624, 1-4, Native American Documents Project Document D85. [database online] <http://www2.csusm.edu/nadp/d80.htm#1> (accessed 17 May 2010).

Bancroft, Hubert Howe (Frances Fuller Victor, ed.). *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*. Vol. 29, *History of Oregon, 1834-1848*. Vol. 30, *History of Oregon 1848-1883*. San Francisco: History Co., Publishers, 1888.

Barr, Daniel. *The Boundaries between Us: Natives and Newcomers along the Frontiers of the Old Northwest Territory, 1750-1850*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2006.

Beck, David. *Seeking Recognition: the Termination and Restoration of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians, 1855-1984*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Beckham, Stephen Dow. *Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975.

-----, ed. *Tall Tales from the Rogue River: The Yarns of Hathaway Jones*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004.

Beeson, John. *A Plea for the Indians*. Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1982.

Booth, Percy. "The Legend of Indian Mary and Umpqua Joe: Pioneer Days in the Canyon Country of the Rogue River." Grants Pass: Josephine County Historical Society, 1975.

Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report. 1849, serial 551.

-----, 1850, serial 551.

-----, 1850, serial 587.

-----, 1852, serial 658.

----- . 1853, serial 690.

----- . 1853, serial 710.

----- . 1854, serial 746.

Coan, C.F. "The Adoption of the Reservation Policy in Pacific Northwest, 1853-1855."  
*The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*. Vol. 23, no. 1. March 1922. 1-38.

Dippie, Brian. *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*. Middletown:  
Wesleyan University Press, 1982.

Douthit, Nathan. "Between Indian and White Worlds on the Oregon-California Border,  
1851-1857: Benjamin Wright and Enos." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. 1-1-  
1999. Vol. 100, no. 4, pg. 402-433.

----- . "Joseph Lane and the Rogue River Indians: Personal Relations Across a  
Cultural Divide." *Oregon Historical Quarterly*. 1-1-1994. Vol. 95, no. 4, 472-515.

----- . "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Indians of Southern Oregon." *The Oregon  
Historical Quarterly* 93 (Summer 1992): 25-64.

Drucker, Philip. "The Tolowa and Their Southwest Oregon Kin." *University of  
California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 36 (1943): 221-  
300.

Fisher, Andrew. "Ghost Dances and Identity: Prophetic Religion and American Indian  
Ethnogenesis in the Nineteenth Century." *Journal of the West*. 1-1-2007. Vol. 46,  
no.1, pg. 108.

----- . "Oregon Indians: Voices from Two Centuries." *Journal of the West*. 1-1-2007.  
Vol. 46, no. 1, pg. 91.

----- . "The Si'lailo Way: Indians , Salmon and Law on the Columbia River." *Journal of  
the West*. 10-1-2007. Vol. 46, no. 4, pg. 87.

----- . "Tangled Nets: Treaty Rights and Tribal Identities at Celilo Falls." *Oregon  
Historical Quarterly*. 2004. Vol. 105, no. 2, 178-210.

----- . "They Mean to be Indian Always: The Origins of Columbia River Indian  
Identity, 1860-1885." *The Western Historical Quarterly*. 12-1-2001. Vol. 32, no.  
4, pg. 468.

"Full Report of proceedings," 17 October 1892, in Records of the Bureau of Indian  
Affairs, RG 75, Special Case 147, Siletz, 1900 Land 1276 (enclosure 14),  
National Archives, 1-21, Native American Documents Project Document D80.  
[database online] <http://www2.csusm.edu/nadp/d80.htm#1> (accessed 17 May  
2010).

Glassley, Ray. *Pacific Northwest Indian Wars*. Portland: Binfords and Mort Publishers,  
1953.

- Glisan, Rodney. *Journal of Army Life*. San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft Co., 1874.
- Gray, Dennis. *The Takelma and Their Athapascan Neighbors: A New Ethnographic Synthesis for the Upper Rogue River Area of Southwestern Oregon*. University of Oregon Anthropological Papers, no. 37 (1987).
- Heckert, Elizabeth. *The People and the River: A History of the Takelma Indians of the Upper Rogue River Country*. Ashland: Aquarius Press, 1977.
- Hietala, Thomas. *Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- History of Southern Oregon Comprising Jackson, Josephine, Douglas, Curry, and Coos Counties*. Portland: A.G. Walling, 1884.
- Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: the Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- House. *Indian Affairs in the Territories of Oregon and Washington*. 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1858. H. Ex. Doc. 39, Serial 955.
- *Indian Hostilities in Oregon and Washington*. 34<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1856. H. Ex. Doc. 93, Serial 858.
- *Message from the President of the United States*. 33<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1853. H. Doc. 1, Serial 710.
- *Message from the President of the United States*. 35<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1857. H. Ex. Doc. 2, Serial 942.
- *Message from the President of the United States*. 38<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1863. H. Ex. Doc. 1, Serial 1182.
- Huntington to Dole, 28 March 1864, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 614, 1-6, Native American Documents Project Document D77. [database online] <http://www2.csusm.edu/nadp/d77.htm#2> (accessed 17 May 2010).
- Kappler, Charles, ed. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol2/treaties/>. Also available in print form.
- *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904. <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/Vol1/Images/>. Also available in print form.
- Kent, William Eugene. "The Siletz Indian Reservation 1855-1900." Portland: Portland State University Master's Thesis, 1973.
- LaLande, Jeff. "The Indians of Southwestern Oregon: An Ethnohistorical Review." In

- Living with the Land: the Indians of Southwest Oregon*. Southern Oregon Historical Society, 1990.
- Leavelle, Tracy Neal. "We Will Make it Our Own Place: Agriculture and Adaptation at the Grand Ronde Reservation, 1856-1887." *American Indian Quarterly*. Fall 1998. Vol. 22, no. 4.
- Leidecker, Matt. "The Rogue River – A Comprehensive Guide from Prospect to Gold Beach." Hailey: Idaho River Publications, 2008.
- Merrell, James. *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Mott to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 11 February 1859, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 611, 12-15, Native American Documents Project Document D64. [database online] <http://www2.csusm.edu/nadp/d64.htm#12> (accessed 17 May 2010).
- Nesmith, James. "A Reminiscence of the Indian War, 1853." *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 7 (1906): 213-231.
- O'Donnell, Terence. *An Arrow in the Earth: General Joel Palmer and the Indians of Oregon*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1991.
- Office of Indian Affairs. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Report, 1862. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1863.
- Oregonian* (Portland), 1871.
- Palmer Papers. Ms. AX57, University of Oregon Library, Eugene.
- Phillips, George. *Indians and Indian Agents: the Origins of the Reservation System in California, 1849-1852*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.
- Prucha, Francis Paul. *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians*. Vols. 1 and 2. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.
- *Indian Policy in the United States: Historical Essays*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981.
- Richter, Daniel. *The Ordeal of the Longhouse: The Peoples of the Iroquois League in the Era of European Colonization*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Schwartz, Earl Albert. "Blood Money: The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath, 1850-1886." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991.
- *The Rogue River Indian War and its Aftermath, 1850-1980*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.



- Scott, Leslie. "Indian Diseases as Aids to Pacific Northwest Settlement." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 26 (June 1925): 144-61.
- "The Yaquina Railroad, the Tale of a Great Fiasco," *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 16 (September 1915).
- Seaburg, William Ronald. *Collecting Culture: The Practice and Ideology of Salvage Ethnography in Western Oregon, 1877-1942*. Seattle: University of Washington, 1994.
- Senate. *Letter from the Secretary of the Interior*. 53rd Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1893. S. Ex. Doc. 25, Serial 3144.
- *Message from the President of the United States*. 34<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1855. S. Ex. Doc. 1, Serial 810.
- "Stipulations of a Treaty," 10 Sept. 1853, in U.S., Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 608, 4-8, Native American Documents Project Document D18 [database online] <http://www2.csusm.edu/nadp/d18.htm> (accessed 17 May 2010).
- Taylor, Alan. *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
- Trennert, Robert A. *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975.
- Van Pelt, Sam. "Before the White Man: An Indian's Story." *Oregonian* Sunday magazine, 2-5-1939. 8.
- Victor, Frances Fuller. *The Early Indian Wars of Oregon*. Salem: Frank Baker, 1894.
- Walsh, Frank. "Indian Battles of the Lower Rogue." Grants Pass: Te-Cum-Tom Publications, 1970.
- Walsh, Frank. "Indian Battles Along the Rogue River, 1855-56." Grants Pass: Te-Cum-Tom Publications, 1972.
- "Western." *Biography of Joseph Lane*. Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1852.
- Whaley, Gray. *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee: U.S. Empire and the Transformation of an Indigenous World, 1792-1859*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- "Oregon, Illahee, and the Empire Republic: A Case Study of American Colonialism, 1843-1858." *The Western Historical Quarterly*. 1-1-2005. Vol. 36, no. 2, pg. 157-178.
- White, Richard. *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes*

*region, 1650-1815*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Yunker, Jason. "The Southwest Oregon Research Project: Strengthening Coquille Sovereignty with Archival Research and Gift Giving." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*. 1-1-2005. Vol. 29, no. 2, pg. 1.

Zenk, Henry Benjamin. *Chinook Jargon and Native Cultural Persistence in the Grand Ronde Indian Community, 1856-1907: A Special Case of Creolization*. Eugene: University of Oregon, 1984.