

Exhibit charts Grand Ronde tribes' termination, renewal

Written by Barbara Curtin Statesman Journal
Apr. 20

statesmanjournal.com



GRAND RONDE EXHIBIT

Purchase Image

The bow of a hand-carved canoe is on display in the Grand Ronde exhibit. / TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ / Statesman Journal

At a glance

What: "We Were Here First ... And We're Here to Stay!: Assimilation, Termination and Restoration of the Grand Ronde Tribe"

Where: Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill, 1313 Mill St. SE

When: Through May 27; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays

Cost: Free with museum admission of \$6; \$5 ages 55 and older, \$4 students, \$3 ages 6 to 17 and free on Tuesdays

Information:

www.willametteheritage.org

A large ledger, filled with the elegant script of the 19th century, is among the arresting artifacts at the Willamette Heritage Center's new exhibit on the Grand Ronde tribes.

The Grand Ronde Agency passbook records each time an Indian was allowed to leave the reservation between 1856 and 1920. A proud people who had freely roamed Western Oregon for generations now had to beg permission to work or visit family elsewhere.

"We Were Here First ... And We're Here to Stay!" was curated by the Cultural Resources Department of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the Grand Ronde Museum.

It follows the U.S. government's efforts to liquidate the Grand Ronde tribes by moving Indians to reservations, breaking treaties, buying up land and encouraging assimilation with the larger culture.

When the tribes indeed had all but disappeared, the government ended their federal status in 1954. As an information panel notes, "In 100 years, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde went from owning all the land to owning nothing."

There might be no story to tell today, if not for the tribes' decades-long fight to renew their status and build a new nation. Photos, news clippings and a video document that successful campaign, which culminated in 1983 with President Ronald Reagan's signature.

A traditional shovelnose canoe, carved by the tribes in 2011, witnesses to current projects to rebuild tribal culture and language.

David G. Lewis, the tribe's historian, worked with colleagues Julie Brown and Veronica Montano to tell the story from a tribal perspective.

They drew material from Lewis' doctorate dissertation on termination and restoration, plus oral histories and historical documents.

"I think we found a much deeper context than we had before," Lewis said. "The project made me look more closely at some accounts I had taken for granted in the past."

He hopes that non-Indians will visit the exhibit and learn from it.

"If you've lived in Oregon most of your life, what do you know about the tribes?" he said. "If you don't know much about them, you need to know."

The tribes organize an exhibit each spring at the Willamette Heritage Center as part of the center's new mission to tell the Mid-Valley's wider story.

The project has helped tribal staff grow in their skills, Lewis said. "The production value is better than previous exhibits; it's sharper and more professional."

That's important because the tribes are working to raise \$5 million through grants and donations for their planned Grand Ronde Museum. The first phase, a small gallery, should open next year, Lewis said.

bcurtin@StatesmanJournal.com, (503) 399-6699 or twitter.com/BarbaraCurtin