

## II. INDIANS OF THE SIUSLAW VALLEY

It is uncertain exactly which tribes used the Siuslaw Valley as their territory. By the time that William Martin first arrived in the valley in 1850, the tribes in the area had already been decimated by epidemics of white man's diseases which had spread like wildfire throughout the Pacific Northwest tribes. Many of the smaller groups had already intermarried with members of other tribes. It was known, also, that families occasionally changed allegiances by moving into a neighboring village. Thus, there is little way of pinpointing our local predecessors.

The nearest tribes in the area were the Chelamela, the Yoncalla Kalapuyas, the Siuslaws and the Lower Umpquas. All spoke Chinook jargon, made up of 500 words, which evolved from the various tribes. Primarily, they had the same type of life-style. Their chief food sources came from the abundant plant and animal life in the Siuslaw Valley. Their main staples were acorns, hazelnuts, camas, fish, roots, game and berries. The local tribes regularly practiced field burning to harvest dried wild wheat pods and to control the growth of vegetation. They took advantage each fall of the plentiful supply of salmon provided during the salmon runs in the Siuslaw and Smith Rivers and the connecting streams. They traveled throughout their territory on foot or by dugout canoe, usually made from a cedar log. Few horses were owned by the Indians in the coastal and inland valley areas. Those that were owned were symbols of prestige.

In a thesis he wrote for a Linfield college project, Ron Thomas, a former Loranian, wrote, "It is believed that at least two villages were once located within the radius of the Siuslaw Valley. It was considered Siuslaw tribal domain, although land ownership was not recognized among the tribes. It was a tribal belief that all land belonged to all people to share and to use equally. According to Dr. Dell Hymes, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, the tribal members were believed to be a very peaceful and quiet people. Villages were family units with a head man. There was 'no concept of belonging to a large group or tribe with a supreme leader.' The members chose as their leader someone who had the necessary abilities and skills to make decisions for the tribe. Theirs were usually democratic and community-oriented societies."

The tribes lived in winter homes constructed of planks and bark. The average house was approximately 40'x 80' and housed several families related by blood or marriage. Each family laid claim to a fireplace, sleeping

quarters and storage benches within the house. Occasionally, mats or wood partitions were put up for privacy between families. The house, utensils and tools were all considered community property. A leader was chosen for each household.

Each spring, the members of the tribes would often leave for their favorite hunting or gathering grounds, living in temporary shelters all throughout the spring and summer months. There were no strict territorial boundaries between the tribes and most seemed to agree that no man should own the land, and they respected the areas where their neighbors dwelled.

Wherever the members of the tribes roamed, a sweatbath was an essential part of their daily routine. It was considered absolutely critical to their hygiene requirements and religious laws that they take time for their sweatbath each day. An enclosed area was built and rocks were heated to a degree that when water was poured over them, they would fill the room with steam. After sitting in the forerunner to today's steamroom long enough to do more than just "glisten," the Indian would leave and immediately jump into a nearby stream where he cooled off quickly. One of these sweatbaths was believed to have been on the property once owned by the Gilbert family. Members of the family believe that there was an Indian village located in the same area.

Ron Thomas' thesis continued, "...Tribal religious leaders were called 'shamans.' It was their practice to go for days without food and water. Climbing to the highest elevation possible, they built a fire. They would then enter a dream-like state while sitting before the heat of the flames. The dreams that came to them were believed to contain prophecies and were regarded as significant guides to the life of the tribe.

"Intermarriage among the tribes of the Siuslaw Valley was widely practiced and the individual tribes soon began to meld. Intermarriage between the Lower Umpquas and the Siuslaws was so common that they could be considered the same tribe. Bride prices were placed on the women of the tribes and established the social ranking of the various families. The higher the bride price, the higher the families were ranked socially.

"Slaves were taken and traded among the tribes of the Siuslaw Valley, but not extensively. More frequently, the members of the local tribes were victims of the slave trade. Other northwest tribes such as the Klickitat and Haida would invade their domain and take members of their less aggressive neighbors as slaves. Physically, the Siuslaw Valley tribe members were rather fair