

SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE

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Today



A MAN OF DIGNITY: CHIEF TIPSU TYEE
GINKGOS GROW HERE ONCE AGAIN
DID YOU SEE WHAT HE DID WITH THAT BASEBALL?





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SOUTHERN OREGON HERITAGE TODAY

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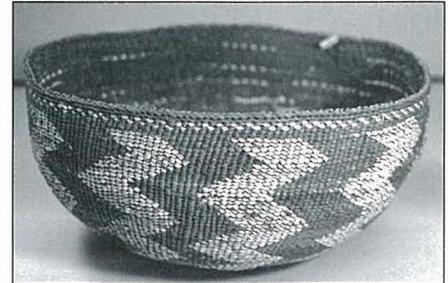
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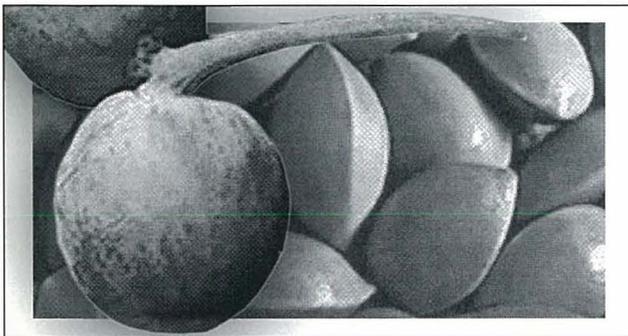
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PAINTING BY JANET IVIE

ON THE COVER

This Janet Ivie watercolor accurately reflects what Native Americans from the Rogue Valley might have worn on an upland expedition to gather bulbs with their digging sticks and baskets.



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by Nan Hannon

Last Chief of the Ashland Creek People

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THE RAPID INVASION OF SOUTHERN OREGON

by Euroamerican settlers in the early 1850s left us with little information about the Shasta Indians who lived in the Rogue Valley for thousands of years before the pioneers arrived. The first settler in the Upper Bear Creek Valley pitched his tent near a Shasta village in the Ashland area in November of 1851. By August of 1853—less than two years later—the surviving Ashland Shasta had abandoned their ancient homes for mountain refuges from which most would be hunted out like animals over the next three years.

In their eagerness to establish farms and businesses, the settlers took no interest in learning about the rich Shasta culture. Over the fresh ruins of the Shasta village on Ashland Creek, the settlers threw up the frame buildings of the Ashland Plaza. They fenced off the Indians' oak groves and root grounds, making them into wheat fields and cow pastures. They turned the well-worn paths of Indian trade routes into wagon roads. In her memoirs, pioneer Mary Hill Dunn was typical of her contemporaries in recording almost no information about the lives of her former Shasta neighbors, but rather her relief at being "free from further trouble from them."¹

Despite the brief period of contact between the settlers and the Shasta Indians living in the Ashland area, and the paucity of information the settlers left about them, it is still possible to reconstruct the life and death of the last chief of the Ashland Creek Shasta, a man who made one loyal friend among the newcomers.

The Shasta name that his father gave him



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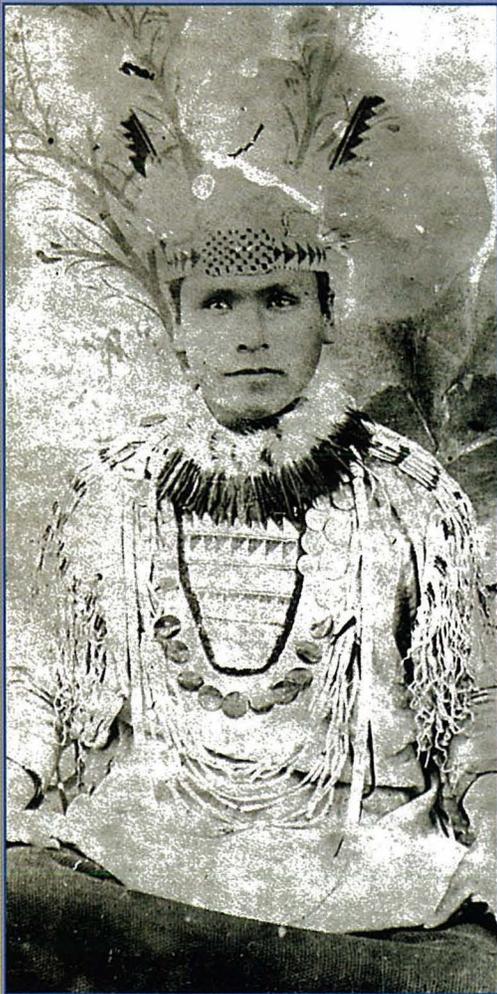
In 1852, Tipsu Tyee's band spent the summer on the Dead Indian Plateau. Undoubtedly, women from the band dug camas bulbs from the large upland prairies with digging sticks of fire-hardened wood and carried them back to camp in their burden baskets. After being roasted in large pits, the sweet, starchy camas bulbs could be carried down to the valley-floor village and stored for months.

as a baby is unknown. History knows him only by his Chinook jargon name, *Tipsu Tyee*, which means "bearded chief." We have no particular details of Tipsu's story before he reached middle age. However, it seems likely that Tipsu's life followed the course typical for an Oregon Shasta man, as described many years later by Sargent Sambo, the son of a Bear Creek Valley Shasta leader.²

Tipsu probably spent most of his life in an ancient Shasta village located along Ashland Creek, where the present entrance to Lithia Park and the Ashland Plaza now stand. The village may have been called *K'wakhakha*, which means "where the crow lights."³ Though the Shasta are long gone from *K'wakhakha*, great flocks of crows still hold their ancestral home in the conifers overlooking Ashland Canyon. Each morning they fly toward the eastern light, spreading out to feed over a range that mirrors the core territory of the Ashland Creek Shasta, in the Upper Bear Creek Valley between the Siskiyou and the Cascades. At twilight,

they return to roost above Ashland Canyon, sometimes flying silently, sometimes crying out in their harsh voices. Generations of Ashland Creek Shasta no doubt marked their dark flights. Through much of his life, their coming and going bracketed each of Tipsu's days.

The village consisted of a small group of conical dwellings dug into the granitic alluvium where the narrow canyon of Ashland Creek opens out into its floodplain. It was a fine site for a village,



Sargent Sambo, the son of an Oregon Shasta leader called Sambo, gave anthropologists detailed descriptions of traditional Oregon Shasta life. In this photograph from the early 1880s, young Sargent wears traditional chiefly regalia inherited from his father. Epaulets of dentalia shell money, abalone shell discs and a feathered collar adorn his deerskin garment, and he wears necklaces of dentalia and trade beads.

close to most resources that the people needed. Regular fires set by the people kept back the firs and cedars that crowded the slopes above them, maintaining the valley floor as oak woodland in which they could gather acorns and hunt deer. Below the village, men fished at the confluence of Ashland Creek and Bear Creek, where the cold, snow-fed waters of Ashland Creek entered warmer, slower Bear Creek. Here, drawn to cool water, salmon and steelhead pooled. Many nosed into Ashland Creek, and ascended the mountain stream to spawn. Above the village, men also fished at the falls where Ashland Creek's north and south forks converge, spearing and probably netting fish before the runs diverged upstream. For material for stone tools, the people had to go no further than Bear Creek. Its Cascade tributaries deposited basalt cobbles that could be shaped into mortars, pestles and other ground stone tools. It also held jasper nodules, which could be flaked into arrow points and knives.

Across the valley, the Cascades offered more bounty. In spring the slopes blossomed with the flowers of small, edible bulbs. The foothills offered many points of gentle ascent to the upland prairies full of edible camas lilies. Here, in the high country where elk and deer summered, the Shasta spent summer months digging camas and hunting. Peoples from surrounding areas shared the uplands. They came from the Klamath Basin to the east; they came up Jenny Creek from the south, and Little Butte Creek from the north. Shasta, Takelma, Klamath, and perhaps Modoc peoples took this opportunity to trade, gamble, exchange news, and arrange marriages. The Ashland Creek Shasta got many items in trade from these neighbors, including obsidian from the Klamath Basin and Medicine Lake Highlands, and a butter-yellow chert from Chert Creek along the Upper Klamath River. They also obtained items in their travels, following their trade routes over the mountain passes that connected neighboring valleys: the Klamath, Rogue, Applegate, and Illinois. Tipsu knew this rich country intimately.

It's likely that the rushing sound of Ashland Creek soothed Tipsu's infant sleep, that he spent his early years mostly

in the company of women and other children, and that he saw his father and other adult men mostly at mealtimes. The band of 100 or so people among whom he spent his life consisted mostly of related men and their wives. Other closely related Shasta bands lived in the Neil Creek and Emigrant Creek drainages near the foothills of the Siskiyou. The Shasta in the Upper Bear Creek Valley numbered perhaps 250 souls.⁴

From early childhood, Tipsu's kin taught him to rise early each morning and bathe in the cold creek waters. They taught him to work hard, practice sexual restraint, honor his elders, and respect the powers that inhered in all things. His grandparents required him to memorize a body of stories told in the winter months. These stories contained important practical and social information for the Shasta. They cautioned against wasting food. They warned of the dangerous consequences of incest.⁵

At one or more times during his youth, his elders sent him out to seek spirit helpers who would help him align himself with the powers of the world. Fasting in a place considered powerful—a spring, a waterfall, a cave, a rock outcrop—he asked for help in a world in which nothing happened by accident. If he remained in harmony with his spirit helpers and the many powers at work in the world, he could expect luck, wealth, and long life.

As he approached adolescence, he spent more time in the men's lodge, listening to lore and stories, sharing tobacco, using the sweat lodge. The older men encouraged him to gather firewood for the men's lodge and to share game with others, especially the needy. They taught him the practical and spiritual aspects of hunting, and to practice the fasting, cleanliness, and abstinence that induced a state of purity and hunger that encouraged deer and other game animals to give themselves to his need.

Since the chieftainship tended to be hereditary among the Shasta, it's likely that Tipsu was born into a family of some wealth and political power, and that his father was chief before him. His family would have taken special care to pass on ritual knowledge about ways to behave that brought luck and power and to respect himself and his position as a person of good family.⁶

In his late adolescence, when he had proved himself a good hunter, his family helped arrange a marriage with a suitable young woman: modest, intelligent, capable, and hardworking. His wife was most likely from a distant band—perhaps not even Shasta—and their marriage helped strengthen bonds between the groups. Tipsu and his family would have paid his in-laws a handsome bride price, consisting of shell money, furs, food, and prized objects; the higher the bride price, the greater the prestige of the families, and the greater the value of children born to the marriage. As the headman of a band, Tipsu may have later married a second wife to help support the responsibilities of a chief, which often included providing feasts for visitors, maintaining the men's house, redistributing food to the needy, mediating disputes with outsiders and within the band, coordinating trade, and leading raids and war parties. With his wife or wives, Tipsu had at least three sons and a daughter.

During adulthood, he took on a leadership role among his people. Though he may have been born to this role, he kept it because he embodied qualities desirable in a headman. Sargent Sambo said of a headman: "... he must be good natured; not a trouble-maker; one who speaks well of everybody; honest ... when he says anything people know he means what he says."⁷ To some degree, he shared leadership responsibility with another Indian with a badly scarred face, whom the settlers dubbed *Sullix*, from the Chinook jargon word meaning "angry."⁸ Shared leadership of bands seems to have been common in the region, and because the Shasta usually lived in bands of related men, Tipsu and Sullix may have been brothers or close kin.

Throughout Tipsu's life, the shadow of a strange and dangerous people lay over him and his people, and as headman he no doubt worried as they drew ever closer, for great changes for the Shasta preceded and accompanied them. From childhood he heard rumors of powerful white men from the east, known in the Chinook trade language as *Bostons*. The Indians of the West Coast had suffered the impact of the *Bostons* for more than 200 years before Tipsu's birth, as Old World diseases such as smallpox, measles, and malaria preceded the *Bostons*, spreading from tribe to tribe, sweeping through Indian populations without genetic immunity to the pathogens.⁹ In Southern Oregon and Northern California, prosperous villages in prime locations, such as Gold Hill along the Rogue River and Irongate along the Klamath River, were deserted shortly before the arrival of the *Bostons* in the region, perhaps because their inhabitants perished in epidemics.

The *Bostons'* goods also preceded them

into Southern Oregon. Trade items turned up in villages, with beads and metal especially prized. Horses and guns altered ancient patterns of mobility and hunting and the balance of relations between groups.

Tipsu was probably a very young man when Peter Skene Ogden led a party of Hudson's Bay Company explorers through the Upper Bear Creek Valley in 1827. Perhaps he saw those explorers. Certainly, he must have seen Euroamericans that came after them: Ewing Young driving longhorn cattle from California to the Willamette Valley, packers and miners.

Early on, the white people labeled the Shasta as aggressive. In November of 1851, Alonzo Skinner, who had been appointed Indian agent, wrote to his superiors: "I

*"We were to be good
people, and not to disturb
one another, not to steal,
and in particular not to
interfere with their
women and horses."*

THOMAS SMITH



believe that the only portions of the Indians in [the Rogue Valley] from whom any difficulty is to be apprehended, unless some provocation shall be given them, are those living in the vicinity of the foot of the Siskin [Siskiyou] mountains, and those in the valley ... above Table Rock."¹⁰

But the Shasta appear timid in the single surviving account relating their own perspective on first contact with Euroamericans. "An old man living near Yreka"—perhaps Sargent Sambo—described "the appearance of the first [Euroamerican] party seen by his band near the site of Ashland, Oregon. ... They were armed with flintlocks. The Indians fled, but the white men motioned them back with their hats, and when the natives returned, the white men made signs to sit down, placing their hands on their breasts and saying 'Makoi, makoi!' which the Indians took to mean that they had friendly intentions."¹¹ It may be

that the Euroamericans better understood the Takelma Indians living in prosperous fishing villages along the Rogue River than the more mobile and elusive Shasta.

The first glimpse that history gives us of Tipsu Tyee is in mid-November of 1851, when Tipsu was perhaps in his late forties. We see him then through the eyes of a forty-two-year-old settler named Thomas Smith, who had acquired the honorific title of captain for his prudent and resourceful leadership of a company of men from Kentucky to the gold fields of California.

Smith described Tipsu as a muscular, heavy-set man who stood five foot six or seven, with dark hazel eyes. He noted the bearded chief's long hair and sandy chin whiskers. "He was brave but cautious [cautious]," Smith wrote, and then giving way to the prejudices of his time, added "...and had more good traits than was common among Indians."¹²

Smith had selected a land claim in the Upper Bear Creek Valley. Yreka was already a busy mining town, with frame houses and two-story business buildings. Smith decided to raise potatoes and other vegetables to sell to Yreka miners. He persuaded David Earl, Patrick Dunn, and Fred Alberding to become partners in the enterprise. While these three men prepared to leave California, Smith returned to Oregon on November 9. He expected his partners to join him shortly, but they had lost their horses, and it was eleven days and nights before they arrived. Smith and his dog slept in a tent, and tilled the soil during the day. "We held our ground solitary and alone during those long 11 days of solitude," Smith wrote. Curious, and probably nervous, about the stranger, Shasta Indians came daily to ask him what his intentions were. Smith was evasive.

When Smith's partners arrived and the men set about erecting a cabin, Tipsu Tyee himself came with a large group of Indians to find out what the strangers were up to. Tipsu first inquired which of them was chief. Smith's companions pointed to him, and Tipsu proceeded to ignore the others and question Smith, indicating that it was his custom as a chief to deal with other chiefs. Tipsu's actions in historical narratives indicate that he was always highly conscious of his rank.

Speaking through an interpreter in Chinook jargon, the trade language of the Pacific Northwest, Smith told Tipsu part of the truth: he and his partners wanted to raise a crop of potatoes and other vegetables to sell to the Yreka miners. But he also told Tipsu that after their harvest, the men planned to leave.

Tipsu's next questions indicate the concerns that the Indians had about the bad behaviors of the Euroamericans. The Oregon Shasta were well aware that the

miners molested and murdered their Shasta kin in the Klamath River country on the other side of the Siskiyou. Because of their rapacity, Shasta John, also known as *Tyee* John, chief of the Scott Valley division of Shasta Indians along the Klamath River, had already abandoned his ancient homeland and led his surviving people into exile in the Applegate country.¹³ Tipsu asked Smith: Did the white men want to steal their horses or women? Smith replied, "We did not want either." Tipsu then asked how much land they wanted to use. Smith indicated five or six acres.

After long discussion, Tipsu and Smith came to an agreement. "We were to be good people, and not to disturb one another, not to steal, and in particular not to interfere with their women and horses," Smith recalled. After one warm season, the strangers were to leave. The Shasta were to see that no "bad Indians" disturbed or stole from the whites. In turn, the whites were to see that "no bad Boston men" came to steal from or molest Tipsu's people.

Alberding left for the Willamette Valley to obtain seed for the farming enterprise. While the others put up the cabin, some Indians entered their tent, and stole their weapons, including knives, guns, powder, and lead. Angered by the thefts and alarmed at the loss of weapons, Smith determined to confront Tipsu. A large group of Indians assembled at the claim. Debate continued through the day. Tipsu insisted that his people were not responsible for the thefts and that Indians on the Klamath River, feuding with his people, had stolen the

weapons. Smith remonstrated that Tipsu had promised to keep "bad Indians" away from his party.

Smith, gambling on his past experience with Native American respect for courage, finally issued an ultimatum. If Tipsu did not produce the stolen property, Smith would go to Yreka, raise a party of men, return and burn the Ashland Creek village to the ground. Smith's companions, surrounded by more than 100 Shasta, paled, and urged Smith to back down. Smith held his ground. Most of the Indian men flew into a rage. Tipsu "spoke two or three soft words and quieted the tumult." Tipsu asked Smith to repeat his threat. Smith did, adding that the angry Indians would be "great cowards" to murder the four white men unless they would give them guns to defend themselves "and then talk about killing us; and we will fight all of you. Your *tyee* [chief] has told us that ... you are all brave; but I see you are cowards." At this point, Tipsu's wife spoke up. Smith described her speech and gestures as eloquent. The Shasta withdrew to talk among themselves and returned to promise that they would send men south to the Klamath River to retrieve the stolen items from the thieves.¹⁴

Tipsu did send men, but only two rifles were recovered. Tipsu explained to Smith that the Klamath River Indians would kill the Ashland Creek people if they pursued them. Smith was adamant. The exasperated chief finally offered Smith ownership of a large tract of land if only he would be satisfied. Smith agreed. He recalled that Tipsu "said 'close' or all right, and with great

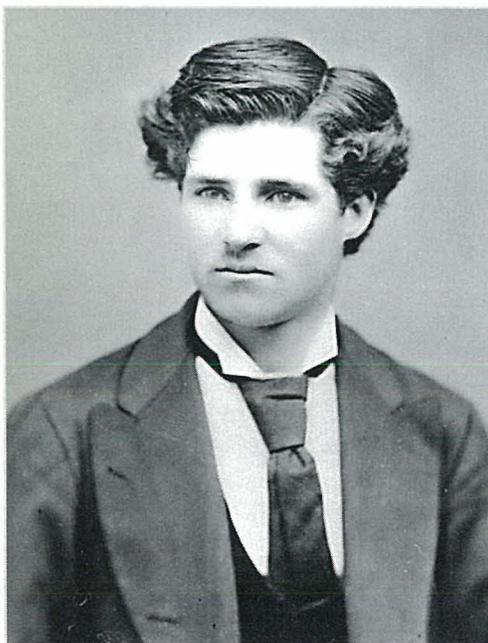
kindness and dignity came up and took me by the hand, saying, 'This land is yours. My people will not claim it any more; and we will be friends.'" In this first historical encounter, Tipsu proved himself interested in peaceful solutions to conflicts with the settlers.¹⁵

"But the poor old fellow was doomed to see trouble again," Smith wrote. "The [Klamath River] Shastas who were always his deadly Enemies came over unexpectedly to him when only he and 2 of his sons were in camp. They had a desperate fight." Tipsu was badly wounded by a bullet in his jaw, a knife wound in his back, and an arrow wound in his right shoulder blade. Both sides agreed Tipsu would likely die, and, in accordance with custom, the Klamath River Shasta paid several horses as compensation to Tipsu's band for their loss.

At Tipsu's behest, his sons went to Smith to persuade him to use whatever healing skills he had to help their father. Smith agreed. In the morning, he walked to the Ashland Creek village. He found anxious Shasta crowded into a lodge, and Tipsu, bundled in blankets, being steamed in a pit.

Smith believed that the chief was close to death, but he applied antiseptic poultices of wild wormwood and whiskey to the wounds and directed Tipsu's people how to make and change the poultices. Tipsu asked weakly if Smith believed that he would recover. Smith replied that if he survived the next two days that he probably would. Tipsu asked how long Smith thought it would be until he could walk. Smith estimated ten or twelve days.

SOHS #909



This photograph of James A. Cardwell was taken only a few years after he and his companions built a sawmill next to Tipsu Tyee's village on Ashland Creek.

SOHS #11518



Captain Thomas Smith settled in the Bear Creek Valley in 1851. He survived his friend Tipsu Tyee by 38 years. His 1885 memoir paints a vivid and sympathetic picture of the Shasta chief.

A. G. WALLING, 1884



After negotiating treaties with Rogue River Valley Indians in the 1850s, Joseph Lane became Oregon's first territorial governor.

At the end of that time, Tipsu walked the four miles to Smith's claim to fulfill Smith's prediction and show Smith that he had saved his life. "He told me that he would always be my friend, and that he would never fight me nor my friends."¹⁶

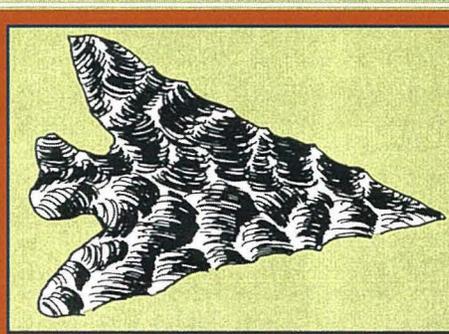
Tipsu attributed his recovery to Smith's doctoring, and came to consider him a friend and confidante. He liked to talk about how well the two had settled the difficulty of the stolen guns, and confided to Smith that "he liked a good, brave man" and that during the tense confrontation over the weapons, he had admired Smith for "talking skookum"—speaking bravely—and told his men that Smith "had a big heart and must not be killed." He often came to Smith to talk about the problem of the white invaders. "They kept coming and taking his land; and when he asked them for pay they cursed him and made him go away," Smith remembered. No doubt he shared with Smith his concern about the four former miners who set up camp right next to his village in January of 1852: James Cardwell, Abel Helman, Dowd Farley, and Eber Emery. These men began to cut pines for construction of a cabin and a sawmill on Ashland Creek, giving the Shasta a few gifts and promises about government compensation for their land.¹⁷ The payments never materialized and the Shasta did not find their new neighbors congenial.

Tipsu also had other problems on his mind. The Klamath River Shasta wanted Tipsu to return the horses they had paid the band as compensation for Tipsu's anticipated death. Tipsu refused to give them up. About 150 Klamath River Shasta came to fight for the horses. Tipsu's people sent for aid from the Butte Creek people, who may have been Shasta themselves,¹⁸ and who were certainly intermarried with the Ashland Creek people. The reinforcements gave the Ashland Creek people about 150 men on their side. The two groups engaged in three days of highly ritualized warfare involving sound and fury but little injury before coming to terms.

After the Klamath River Shasta left, Tipsu's band asked Cardwell for help feeding their Butte Creek allies. The winter of 1851-52 had been unusually hard and cold, and Tipsu's people had run out of food. When the settlers refused to share their supplies, some of the hot-headed members of the band threatened Cardwell and Emery.

Cardwell recalled "... there was a large stout young buck the son of old Sullix one that I was well acquainted with sprang at me ... I put my arm around his waist and gathered him up on my hip, and threw him his length flat of his back over my head. He sprang up and siesed me by the hand, and said I was the sku com est [*skookumest* - bravest] man he had ever seen before, and that his heart would not permit of his doing me any injury and he told the Indians to disperse ..."¹⁹

The discovery of gold near Jacksonville in February of 1852 brought miners swarming into the Rogue Valley. According to Cardwell, "... people began to take up land for ranches all over the country, and have them surveyed. While the surveying was in progress, the Indians seemed to be at a loss to know how it was that the white men would take compass and chain and go around and cry stick stuck and set up a few stakes and call the land their own."²⁰ Almost



"Sound and Fury":

RITUALIZED COMBAT AMONG THE SHASTA

"The [Klamath River Shasta] would all collect at the edge of the prairie on one side and [Tipsu's people] would all collect on the opposite side and each army would bild large log fires at the spot wharre they were assembled and some 10 or perhaps 15 and perhaps 50 from the one side would go screaming and jumping skiping across to withein some thing like sixty to 80 yards of the opposing party and about the same number from the opposing party would start after them and shoot at them all the way back and a new or fresh party would start in and chase the pursueing party back again. This kind of war fare was kep up for three such sessive [successive] days. They then come on to peaceable terms."

James Cardwell left this eyewitness account of the ritualized combat between Tipsu Tyee's people and the Klamath River Shasta. The conflict took place in the late winter of 1852, near the present-day Ashland Railroad District. Stylized fighting such as this permitted men to work off their aggressions without much harm coming to anyone, and served as a prelude to peaceful negotiation.

overnight, the town of Jacksonville sprang up and the sawmill next to the Ashland Creek village sold all the lumber it could mill.

In addition to concern over the loss of land, Tipsu found the bad manners of the settlers inexplicable. One day, he and some of his men rounded up a band of stray cattle and returned them to their owners in Jacksonville. The owners gave each of the Indians a shirt as a reward. As the noon meal was in preparation, Tipsu and his son expected to be invited to dinner, food-sharing being the basic ethic of hunting-gathering peoples. The cook, annoyed that the chief lingered, swung at him with a pole. Nursing his anger, Tipsu recounted the incident to Smith, showing him the skinned arm which he'd raised to deflect the blow. Smith asked him why he hadn't retaliated against the *Boston*, since he was so *skookum* [powerful and brave]. Tipsu replied that, like Smith, both he and his son were "great men." He held his hand a foot and a half from the ground to show that his assailant was a small, worthless man. It was beneath their dignity as honorable men of rank to deal with such an inconsequential person.²¹

What Tipsu did not discuss with Smith, perhaps assuming it to be a common human custom, was that among the Shasta hospitality was taken seriously. When one visited another village, the proper behavior was to quietly seat oneself outside the headman's lodge so that a polite invitation to eat and drink might be extended.²² Whenever a visitor arrived, a meal was made for him.²³

Indeed, according to pioneer informants, "all of the [Rogue River Indians] were in the habit of coming into Jacksonville, where they begged food, fraternized with the lowest whites, and were friendly to all." But they excepted Chiefs Sam, Joe, and Tipsu Tyee, and an Indian woman called Queen Mary, who "...were immeasurably above their subjects, as they never condescended to beg, but took with ready grace what was offered."²⁴

Either a variant of the same story, or a different incident was recounted by pioneer Henry Klippel, who claimed to be an eyewitness. "John Sands, a rough miner, intoxicated himself, and meeting Tipsu Tyee in Jacksonville, struck him over the head with a stick. The insulted savage, bow in hand, drew an arrow to the head, and appeared about to pierce his assailant's heart; but shouting '*Hi yu lum; nika wake memloose mika!*' lowered his bow. Experts in the Chinook jargon translate the above as 'You are very drunk or I would kill you!'"²⁵

Far from being a "savage," as Klippel called him, in these accounts Tipsu showed his consciousness of his rank and even a sense of *noblesse oblige*. This unexpected dignity unnerved white men, who labeled Tipsu as "enigmatical," "wily," and "intractable."

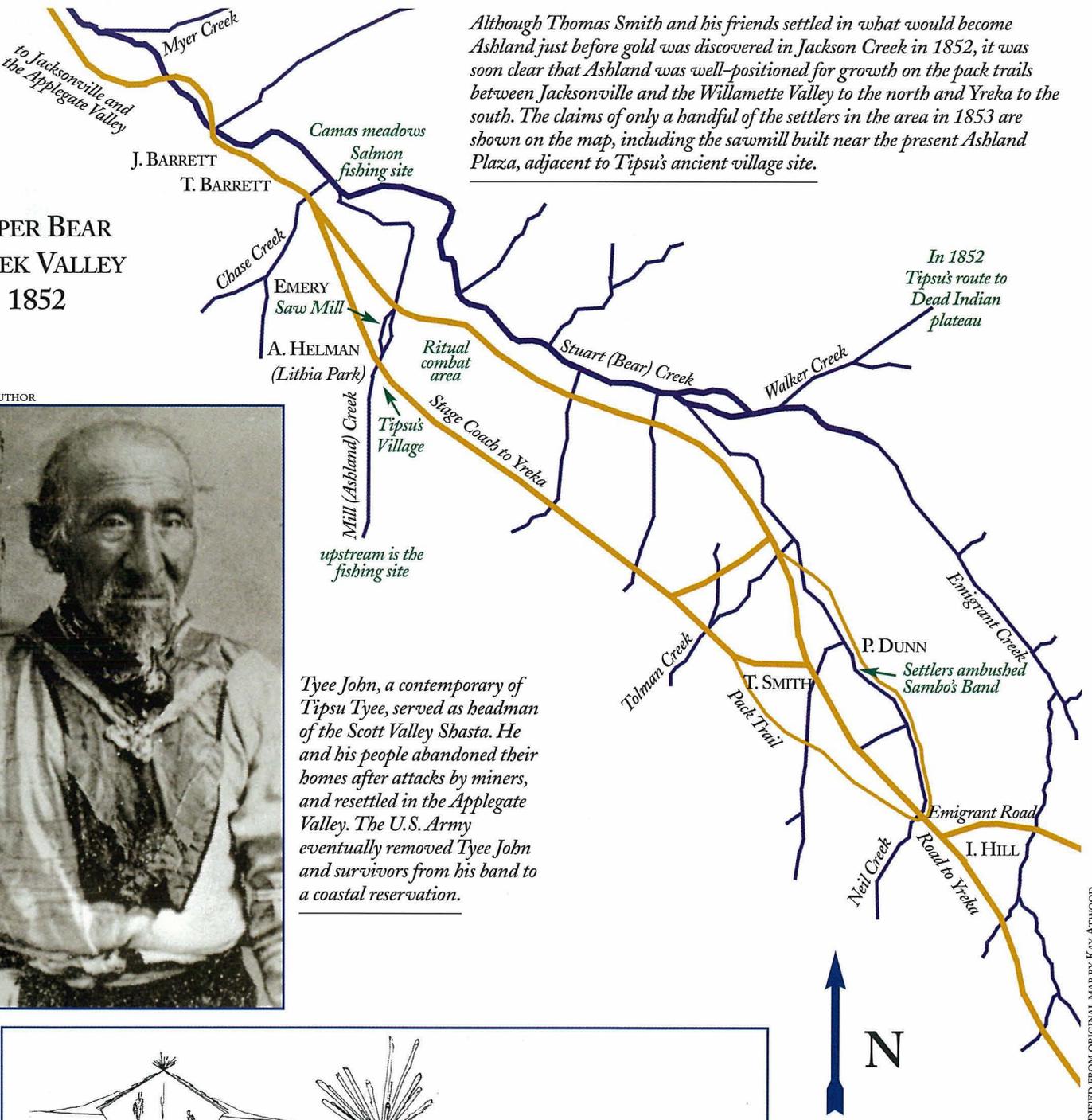
**UPPER BEAR CREEK VALLEY
1852**

Although Thomas Smith and his friends settled in what would become Ashland just before gold was discovered in Jackson Creek in 1852, it was soon clear that Ashland was well-positioned for growth on the pack trails between Jacksonville and the Willamette Valley to the north and Yreka to the south. The claims of only a handful of the settlers in the area in 1853 are shown on the map, including the sawmill built near the present Ashland Plaza, adjacent to Tipesu's ancient village site.

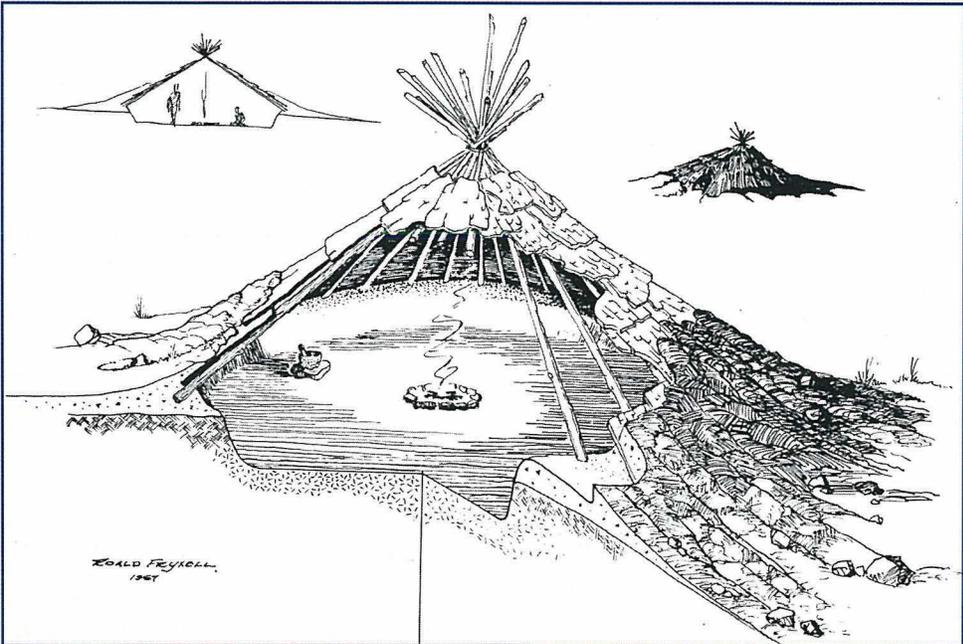
COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



Tye John, a contemporary of Tipesu Tye, served as headman of the Scott Valley Shasta. He and his people abandoned their homes after attacks by miners, and resettled in the Applegate Valley. The U.S. Army eventually removed Tye John and survivors from his band to a coastal reservation.



MODIFIED FROM ORIGINAL MAP BY KAY ATWOOD



DRAWING BY ROALD FRYXELL

While some Shasta bands lived in rectangular plank houses, those on Ashland Creek and in California's Shasta Valley built conical dwellings of cedar bark slabs.



In April of 1853, Martha, Mary, and Ann Hill and their mother became the first white women to settle in the Upper Bear Creek Valley. Mary noted Indian encampments "every mile or so along Bear Creek." The arrival of white women in the Ashland area indicated to the Shasta that Euroamericans meant to stay and populate the land they had taken from the Indians. Between them, the Hill sisters had twenty-five children.

With so many newcomers in the region, friction between the whites and the Indians increased. In July of 1852, an Indian killed a miner on the Klamath River and a posse of ten formed to hunt down the killer in the Bear Creek Valley.

Tipsu's band was summering in the Cascade uplands, at the head of Walker Creek. At the same time that the posse arrived at the sawmill site on Ashland Creek, the son of Sullix, the strong young man who had pronounced Cardwell *skookum* and dissuaded other Indians from harming him, came down from the mountains to get his gun repaired. Although he had no connection with the killing on the Klamath River, the vigilantes from Yreka took him hostage. Emery and Cardwell, who perhaps owed his life to Sullix's son, made no move to help him. Instead, they rode with the posse and their prisoner to Big Bar on the Rogue River, near Gold Hill, where Takelma Indians were demanding either payments or the return of prime land from a settler named George Ambrose.

At Big Bar, Sullix's frightened son "... made a step back as if he intended to run," Cardwell wrote. "One of the men shot him in the back of the head with [a] large-size colts revolver blowing his head to atoms. ... The Indians that had crossed over all jumped into the water to swim over and the Indians on the opposite shore opened on the Whites across the river and immediately began to retreat up the hill, the whites returning fire." Cardwell believed that all the Indians in the water were killed.

"The cry was extermination of all the Indians," Cardwell recalled. The gathered

men broke up into companies "to go to different indian rancherias [villages] to clean them out."

Seizing the opportunity to get rid of their Indian neighbors on Ashland Creek, Cardwell and Emery rode back to Ashland that night and mustered a company of ten men to attack Tipsu's band. On July 18, as they prepared to start out in the morning light, Sullix rode

up to their cabin, seeking his son. "As he approached the house ...," Cardwell wrote, "Mr. Dodson stepped out with a large pistol in hand and demanded his surrender. The indian immediately began to retreat and cry out don't shoot. Dodson fired the ball taking effect in the hip, and not dismounting him. I fired the next shot, ball entering his back under shoulder and coming out under left breast. Mr. Emery fired breaking right shoulder. He still retained his seat, and made his escape and got back to the tribe, and warned them before we could reach them. They made their escape into the big mountains where we could not pursue on horseback."²⁶

Whether Sullix survived his wounds or learned of his son's death, history does not tell us. There is no further mention of him in any memoir or record. Given his distinctive facial scars, it seems likely that later settlers would have mentioned Sullix had he survived.

Despite the murder of one of their headmen and his son, Tipsu's people probably returned to their ancient home to spend one last, uneasy winter along Ashland Creek. Settlers continued to arrive and take up claims, although much of the best farmland in the Upper Bear Creek Valley had been claimed the previous summer. In mid-March of 1853, the Barrett family took up two claims northwest of the sawmill, close to a camas meadow along present-day Valley View Road that probably constituted an important resource area for Tipsu's people. The settlers competed with the Indians for fish, game, and firewood. Their livestock ate wild plants that were an essential part of the Indians' diet. Their wheat fields replaced the expanses of wild grass and tarweed that had provided the Shasta with edible seeds.

The country was becoming so settled that on April 4, 1853, election districts were drawn up for Jackson County, and the sawmill right next to Tipsu's village became the polling place for residents of the Upper Bear Creek Valley. On April 14, settler Isaac Hill, who had staked out a claim in the present location of Emigrant Lake and left

his son to hold it, returned with his wife and three daughters of marriageable age. By the end of 1853, a census would show that 120 settlers had taken up permanent residence between the present site of Jackson Hot Springs and the foot of the Siskiyou Mountains.²⁷ It was clear that the white invaders meant to stay and multiply, and that in their minds there was no room for the Shasta, whom they murdered without compunction.

In the spring of 1853, Tipsu paid a final visit to Smith, to tell him he was leaving Ashland Creek. He said that the powers of the world were angry with him for allowing the Bostons to take and till the land. He assured Smith of his friendship and affirmed his gift of land to Smith. Tipsu told him farewell. A part of Tipsu's band remained in the Upper Bear Creek Valley for a few more months under the leadership of a younger chief whom the settlers derisively called Sambo. Tipsu and the rest of his people left their home for the Applegate drainage, a remote and rugged country, where he hoped his people could stay clear of the pioneers. He and Smith did not meet again.

Tipsu would be dead before a year had passed. Smith continued to live on the land Tipsu had given him, farming and raising livestock. He brought his bride, Margaret, to the homestead. In 1859, they buried a two-year-old daughter in the ground once claimed by the Shasta. He served three terms in the Territorial Legislature.²⁸ After twenty years on the land in the Upper Bear Creek Valley, Smith moved, with his surviving daughter Ella, to a fine house close to the site of Tipsu's old Ashland Creek village. There he lived until his death at the age of eighty-three. In his mid-seventies, troubled by the romanticization of the Rogue Indian Wars and the dark portrait of Tipsu painted in Walling's 1884 *History of Southern Oregon*, he penned a memoir and sent it to historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, complaining of the descriptions of Tipsu Tye. "I only claim that justice should be done."²⁹

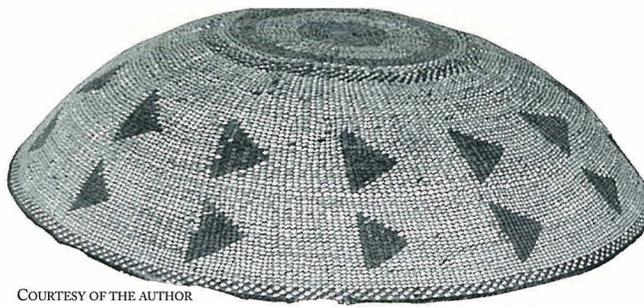
But justice served neither Tipsu nor the Shasta. Tipsu had rightly anticipated continued conflict between the Indians and the invaders. In August of 1853, only three or four months after he told Smith farewell, conflicts broke out again throughout the region. Anxious settlers in the Upper Bear Creek Valley made a pre-emptive strike against the remaining Shasta. A party of twelve men, including Smith, attacked Sambo and his folk as they rested from the afternoon heat in the shade of trees along Neil Creek. The startled Indians fired back. Two settlers were wounded; at least one Shasta man was killed.

Some Shasta escaped. The settlers took the others hostage, penning them in a corral

at the Patrick Dunn claim. Soon after, Sambo and other Shasta men surrendered to the settlers, asking not to be separated from their wives and children. At the first opportunity, the Indians seized their captors' guns and fled with their families. In the escape, on August 17, Sambo shot and mortally wounded John Gibbs, whom he had befriended when the packer settled in the Siskiyou. Another settler was also killed. Fearing reprisals, Sambo and his kin disappeared into the mountains of the Oregon-California borderland, and did not return to their homeland. Thus the Shasta were forced out of the Upper Bear Creek Valley. Their place was immediately taken. "After the Indians quieted down, father took us home," wrote Mary Hill Dunn, "and the next morning a [wagon] train of emigrants came in."³⁰

Atrocities multiplied in that scorching month of August, as miners, settlers, and Indians struck out rather randomly against each other over accumulated grievances. The Indians retaliated for the molestation of Indian women by rowdy miners, killing several men. In early August, a Phoenix-area settler named Edwards was found dead after stealing a Shasta woman from Tyee John's band on the Applegate. On August 6, citizens of Jacksonville hanged two Shasta men and a young boy who happened to be in town. War broke out between the settlers and the Takelma.

On August 21, General Joseph Lane, who later became Oregon's first territorial governor, arrived in the Rogue Valley and took charge of military operations. Lane's efforts to make peace were undermined by brutal attacks on Indian camps by self-styled



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

This Shasta seed parching basket measures 15 inches across. Soft brown pine root fibers make up the basket's foundation. The basketmaker overlaid a lighter design in beargrass leaves, which develop a golden patina over time.

"militia volunteers" who realized that killing Indians could be more lucrative than gold mining. They put in outrageous monetary claims for their services. Fierce battles pitting U.S. Army soldiers and volunteers against the Indians came to a conclusion on August 24, when several Indian chiefs sued for peace. Lane, who had been wounded in the shoulder earlier in the day, agreed to set up treaty negotiations. On September 10, several Southern Oregon chiefs signed a treaty later ratified by the U.S. Senate, agreeing to relocate to a reservation near Table Rock.

But while the 1853 war raged, Tipsu kept his people out of the conflict, remaining in the rugged Applegate country. In mid-September, Lane, determined to get all the Indians under control, undertook a secret and foolhardy mission. Arm still in a sling, he set off with one interpreter, Robert Metcalf, to find Tipsu and get him to sign the treaty. After nightfall, lost in the chaparral in the Applegate area, the two men blundered into the middle of Tipsu's encampment. The startled Shasta held their fire with considerable restraint, for they were mourning relatives who had died in the fighting along the Rogue River. Surely

Tipsu considered how easy it might be to kill Lane and Metcalf and make sure their bodies were never found. But he did not harm the reckless general.

Lane and Metcalf spent an uneasy night bedded down among the Shasta. Unnerved by the weeping of a young woman whose brother in a Butte Creek band had been killed, Lane offered her blankets to keep quiet. In the morning, he began negotiations with Tipsu, offering clothes in return for signing a treaty. Tipsu finally acquiesced.³¹

Lane left with his treaty and a tale of adventure. But the Senate never ratified this treaty, and Tipsu and his people never went to the new Table Rock Reservation. They remained in the mountains.

Finding Tipsu less tractable than the Takelma chiefs, the settlers and the military held him and his band accountable for subsequent problems, but with so many Indian bands engaged in guerrilla warfare, it is difficult to determine responsibility for particular acts. Certainly, life had become desperate for Tipsu's people, hunted and harassed by volunteer militia and the army. Homeless through the winter, and with their hunting, gathering, and fishing places usurped, they were surely hungry, and no



Overshadowed by the looming mass of Mount Shasta to the southwest, the mining town of Yreka—shown here circa 1890—quickly sprang up around the discovery of gold deposits in the Klamath River and its tributaries.

doubt responsible for some raids as their options for survival narrowed.

On May 18, 1854, perhaps seeking an alliance, perhaps seeking sanctuary, Tipsu, accompanied by one of his sons and a son-in-law, approached his old enemies on the Klamath River. Perhaps to settle old scores, perhaps to gain favor with the Army, Tyee Bill killed Tipsu and his companions. They presented soldiers with the gift of Tipsu Tyee's scalp.

The death of the courageous chief came as good news to the Army, but the indignity of his scalping was not enough. The military wanted to be certain that Tipsu was dead and sent a party to dig up the corpse and make a positive identification of the bearded chief.

Tyee Bill told the soldiers that Tipsu had tried to recruit his people for a campaign to oust the Euroamerican invaders. We can't know the truth of that statement. It would certainly have been in Tyee Bill's interests to do anything to portray his people as friends of the whites, although it was to no avail. Just six days after Tipsu's murder, Tyee Bill and most of the men, women, and children in his band were brutally gunned down by "militia volunteers" supposedly escorting them to Fort Jones.³²

It is possible that Tipsu simply sought food and refuge among kin, hoping that old feuds might be forgotten in the face of a common threat. However, it seems likely that Tipsu knew that Tyee Bill's position was as precarious as his own. Tipsu's belief that he had fallen out of favor with the world's mysterious powers by allowing the white people to take and till the land, and his respect for outrageous courage, suggest that he may have gambled his life and his luck on a hopeless attempt to drive out the colonizers. Yet, Tipsu's consistent success in avoiding direct conflict with the whites keeps open the possibility that he maintained a peaceful agenda to the end.

His intentions during his last days are only one of the things we will never know about the bearded chief.

One day in late November or early December of 1851, shortly after Tipsu Tyee and Tom Smith had settled their differences over the stolen guns, Tipsu paid a visit to his neighbor and found him reading a medical book. He was intrigued. The anatomical drawings must have seemed flat, but familiar to the hunter who had gutted and dissected hundreds of animals, cutting bone into clever tools, stripping sinew from muscle and bone to use for backing on his bow, for grafting his arrow points to their shafts. Tipsu asked whether the marks on the page represented the language of the Bostons. Smith began to explain the text to him.³³ It is easy to picture them on that late fall day, sitting in the middle of the world Tipsu knew so well, studying the book together, two men considered wise by their own peoples, two men who had come to respect each other. Had the currents of history been less swift, had the Euroamerican colonization of the West been less ruthless, what worlds they could have opened to each other. ■

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: The author thanks the Oregon Council for the Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, for a grant that assisted with research travel; and the staff of the Bancroft Library in Berkeley; Addie Dyal of the Oregon State Library; and Dr. Shirley Silver, Department of Anthropology at Sonoma State University, for gracious assistance.

Anthropologist Nan Hannon organized the first Symposium on the Indians of Southwest Oregon, jointly sponsored by the Southern Oregon Historical Society and Southern Oregon State College in 1989.

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These Shasta baskets show the skill and painstaking attention to design details the Shasta women used when making these utensils. The large basket was used for gathering food; the two smaller baskets are acorn mush bowls; and the smallest is a tightly woven water dipper. Acorns were a staple of the Shasta diet, and were used in preparing porridge or bread.



The Day Ashland Threw Yreka a Curve

by Joe Peterson

The decidedly partisan Yreka crowd didn't believe it could be done. Nobody was that good. How could that new pitcher from Ashland named McConnell make a baseball curve horizontally?

Much earlier that June day in 1884, George McConnell and his Ashland teammates had climbed aboard a six-horse stagecoach headed for Yreka, California. While McConnell and his catcher were new to town, the rest of Ashland's team was well-stocked with pioneer family names including Butler, Wagner, Wimer, Alford, and Sears. Even the traveling umpire was a Tolman.

What a day it would prove to be—a brass band to meet the stage before the game; a dance that evening after the lopsided Ashland victory; and for Yreka fans, the thrill of seeing the first “curved ball” ever thrown as far as they knew. Although the *Ashland Tidings* credited McConnell with being the first to successfully throw a curve ball in the country, an East Coast major-leaguer of the 1870s is generally recognized as the first curve ball pitcher.¹ Candy Cummings claimed he invented the pitch after seeing a spinning clamshell curve across the water as it was being skipped.

In 1884 Yreka though, nobody was talking about Cummings and his clamshells. It was this McConnell fellow who fascinated them. After the game, some of Yreka's business boosters urged the Ashland ace to demonstrate how he did it. McConnell obliged by ordering that three poles be set in a line and then proceeded to

entertain the crowd with a throwing exhibition, described the *Daily Tidings*:

Standing at the left of the first one, [McConnell] threw the ball repeatedly so that it would pass at the left of the first pole, to the right of the middle one, and to the left of the last one. Then he threw the ball so as to make it curve the other way, proving to the satisfaction of all that there was no delusion about the matter.²

Armed with McConnell, the cocky Ashland nine enjoyed numerous victories and even challenged all comers to a “\$1000 or \$2000” match for each of the next several seasons.³ During this period, George married into the pioneer Gillette family and soon had a small family of his own to support. Commenting on the birth of his daughter, he said he was “sorry only because he will not be able to make a baseball pitcher out of the new arrival.”⁴

Fifty years later “the team that made Ashland famous”⁵ remained legendary. George McConnell and two of his teammates would even make a nostalgic anniversary return visit to the Yreka diamond, but this time in the relative comfort of an automobile. And while not greeted with a brass band as before, the now aged boys of summer had not been forgotten. There were still Yrekans to be found who could recall seeing their first “curved ball.” 🏠

Joe Peterson is an adjunct history instructor at Southern Oregon University.

ENDNOTES:

1. Joseph Reichler, ed., *The Baseball Encyclopedia* (New York, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1979), p. 37; <http://www.baseball-almanac.com>, “Candy Cummings.”
2. *Ashland Daily Tidings*, 13 June 1884.
3. *Ashland Daily Tidings*, 1 May 1886.
4. *Ashland Daily Tidings*, 20 July 1888.
5. *Ashland Daily Tidings*, 14 June 1934.



Above, the 1884 Ashland Tour Team featuring curve ball pitcher George McConnell gripping the baseball. At right, the 1884 Yreka Town Team posed for a picture before a one-sided loss to the Ashland Nine.



SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Things To Do in October

PROGRAMS : *(see listings below for complete descriptions)*

	<u>DATE & TIME</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
Craft of the Month	Museum hours	CHILDREN'S MUSEUM	Paper Pumpkins; free
"Results of 25 Years of Archaeological Historic Survey on the Rogue River National Forest..."	Thurs., Oct. 4, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	HISTORY CENTER	2001 Oregon Archaeology Celebration: lecture and slide show; free
"The Oregon-California Trail"	Fri., Oct. 12, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.	HISTORY CENTER	2001 Oregon Archaeology Celebration: lecture and exhibit; free
The <i>Atlas of Oregon</i> "	Wed., Oct. 10, 7:00 p.m.	HISTORY CENTER	University of Oregon lecture; free

PROGRAM DETAILS

FOR TIMES AND LOCATIONS, SEE SCHEDULE ABOVE.

OCTOBER CRAFT OF THE MONTH

Paper Pumpkins

Families are invited to decorate one of the many paper pumpkins on display in the Children's Museum pumpkin patch.

2001 OREGON ARCHAEOLOGY CELEBRATION

SOHS is co-sponsoring two free programs for this annual event.

• **October 4: Jeff LaLande**
 "Results of 25 Years of Archaeological and Historic Survey on the Rogue River National Forest: What a Miniscule Portion of Your Tax Dollars has Paid for."
 Rogue River National Forest Archaeologist Jeff LaLande will present an illustrated lecture discussing the past 25 years of "cultural resource management" work on the National Forest, focusing on prehistoric sites and other cultural evidence found at higher elevations surrounding the Rogue River Valley, as well as some of the interesting historic sites and structures still present.

• **October 12: Mark Tveskov**
 "The Oregon-California Trail."
 Mark Tveskov, assistant professor of anthropology at Southern Oregon University, will discuss the history of the Trail and describe the results of recent archaeological research that uncovered a segment of the original wagon trail on the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Supplemental exhibit of photographs and artifacts.

THE *ATLAS OF OREGON*

Join Medford Cartographer Stuart Allan and University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer for a program celebrating publication of the second edition of the *Atlas of Oregon* and the university's 125th anniversary. Allan, globally recognized as a genius of cartography, produced the maps for the *Atlas*. Over 1000 maps and diagrams as well as information on Oregon's history, economy, geography, geology, demographics, industry, and natural resources help us understand the past and chart the future.

2002 NATIONAL HISTORY DAY

Attention educators and students grades 6 through 12! It's time to start thinking about the 2002 contest. This year's theme is *Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History*. Registration deadline is early January, but now is the time to research and develop an exhibit, media program, live performance, or historical paper for the competition held in the Stevenson Union at Southern Oregon University February 23, 2002. Winners will compete at state and national levels. For more information, call Dawna Curler at 773-6536, or e-mail history@sohs.org.

BOARD MEMBERS/OFFICERS ANNOUNCED FOR 2001/2002

Bob Bills and Edward Jorgenson of Medford and Judy Lozano of Butte Falls were elected to three-year terms. Officers for FY 2001/2002 are Nancy Hamlin, president; Hank Hart, first vice-president; Robert Stevens, second vice-president; Yvonne Earnest, secretary; and Judi Drais, treasurer.

THE KLAMATH COUNTY MUSEUM ANNOUNCES OCTOBER EVENTS

The Klamath County Museum will offer various children's programs and present *Frederick Remington Art of the West*, a discovery of the artist's works and instruction in the art of illustration and clay sculpture. The *Tule Lake Japanese Internment* exhibit is open through October. For more information, call 541-883-4208.

SOHS ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERSHIP

Society members are invited to attend the Annual meeting Thursday, October 11, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., at the History Center in Medford. Speaker Jeff Uecker will present *Changing Views of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in Oregon*. Call 773-6536 to R.S.V.P. by October 5. Fee for decadent desserts, \$5.00.

Award Winning!

A Century of the Photographic Arts in Southern Oregon:

A Directory of Jackson County Photographers, 1856 - 1956

\$7.50 • SOHS Members

\$8.95 • Non-members

Available at the SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY RESEARCH LIBRARY
 History Center, 106 N. Central Ave., Medford
 (541)773-6536 • sohs.org

EXHIBITS : (see listings below for complete descriptions)

	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>MUSEUM HOURS</u>
Century of Photography: 1856-1956	HISTORY CENTER	Mon. - Fri., 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
The History of Southern Oregon from A to Z		
History in the Making: Jackson County Milestones	JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM	Wed. - Sat., 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Sunday, noon - 5 p.m.
Miner, Baker, Furniture Maker		
Politics of Culture: Collecting the Native American Experience		
Hannah: Pioneer Potters on the Rogue		
Hall of Justice		
Ongoing 'hands on history' exhibits	CHILDREN'S MUSEUM	Wed. - Sat., 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Sunday, noon - 5 p.m.
Weaving Demonstrations/Sales	3RD STREET ARTISANS' STUDIO	Sat., 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

EXHIBIT DETAILS

FOR TIMES AND LOCATIONS, SEE SCHEDULE ABOVE.

CENTURY OF PHOTOGRAPHY: 1856-1956

Highlights the work of two area photographers, Peter Britt and James Verne Shangle, with cameras from the Society's collection.

THE HISTORY OF SOUTHERN OREGON FROM A TO Z

Do you know your ABC's of Southern Oregon history? Even local oldtimers might learn a thing or two from the History Center windows along Sixth and Central as each letter of the alphabet tells a different story about the people, places, and events that have shaped the region we live in.

"HISTORY IN THE MAKING: JACKSON COUNTY MILESTONES"

The spirit of America is captured in the history of Jackson County. Follow in the footsteps of early residents who experienced the five historic milestones explored in this new exhibit. You'll be inspired by the pioneers who arrived by sea or land; see the gold rush from the perspective of Chinese sojourners; discover the local impact of the railroad and automobile, and more. Artifacts include rare Chinese archaeological material and



an early Coleman stove. A 1940s jukebox plays music and oral histories describing automobile travel experiences.

MINER, BAKER, FURNITURE MAKER

Explores the development of the Rogue Valley and the impact the industrial revolution had on the settlement of Oregon.

POLITICS OF CULTURE: *Collecting the Native American Experience*

Cultural history of local tribes and discussion of contemporary collecting issues.

HANNAH: PIONEER POTTERS ON THE ROGUE

Examples of pottery made over four decades by the Hannah family.

HALL OF JUSTICE

History of this former Jackson County Courthouse.

THIRD STREET ARTISANS' STUDIO

Rogue Valley Handweavers, Far Out Fibers, and the Saturday Handweavers Guild will present an exhibit of woven wall art at the Third Street Artisans' Studio, Third and California streets, in Jacksonville. Members will also demonstrate the traditional art forms of spinning and weaving. The exhibit will run through October 27.

CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Everyone enjoys exploring the home and work settings from the 1850s to the 1930s through "hands-on-history."

HISTORIC OPEN HOUSE LISTINGS:

- **State Historic Preservation Office** - PHONE: 503-378-4168
prd.state.or.us - click on "publication"
- **Southern Oregon Historical Society** - PHONE: 541-773-6536

SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY SITES

PHONE: (541) 773-6536
unless listed otherwise

FAX: (541) 776-7994
E-MAIL: info@sohs.org
WEBSITE: sohs.org

HISTORY CENTER
106 N. Central, Medford
Mon. - Fri., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

RESEARCH LIBRARY
106 N. Central, Medford
Tues. - Fri., 1 to 5 p.m.

**JACKSONVILLE MUSEUM &
CHILDREN'S MUSEUM**
5th and C, Jacksonville
Wed. - Sat., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sun., noon to 5 p.m.

HANLEY FARM
1053 Hanley Road
(open by special appointment)
(541) 773-2675

C.C. BEEKMAN HOUSE
California & Laurelwood, Jacksonville
(open first three weekends in Dec.)

C.C. BEEKMAN BANK
3rd and California, Jacksonville

JACKSONVILLE HISTORY STORE
3rd and California, Jacksonville
Wed. - Sat., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sun., noon to 5 p.m.

THIRD STREET ARTISANS' STUDIO
3rd and California, Jacksonville
Sat., 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

U.S. HOTEL
3rd and California, Jacksonville
Upstairs room available for rent.

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The Ginkgo Tree: An Ancient Treasure

by Nan Hannon and Donn L. Todt

“LOOK, MOMMY, A TREE FROM OUTER SPACE!” CRIED four-year-old Anne, running to us with a ginkgo leaf in her hand. While the ginkgo is not extraterrestrial, Anne recognized that its two-lobed, fan-shaped leaf with its unique parallel veins came from an extraordinary tree, unlike any other on Earth.



PHOTO BY DONN L. TODT

The ginkgo is the oldest surviving tree species on the planet. Dating to over 200 million years ago, it watched the dinosaurs come and go. Once common in North America and Europe, climate changes gradually restricted it to East Asia. Western scientists, familiar with fossil ginkgo leaves, assumed it extinct until plant explorer Engelbert Kaempfer discovered ancient specimens growing at temples in Japan in 1691, preserved by Buddhist monks after the tree had disappeared from the wild. Ginkgos more than a thousand years old grace monasteries, palaces, and temples in China, Japan, and Korea, where the tree is honored.¹ Ginkgos were reintroduced to North America from China in 1784.

Despite its broad leaf, *Ginkgo biloba* is a conifer, a member of the pine family. This is evident in the radial symmetry of its branch structure, and in its seeds. Its closest living relative is the yew tree, which also produces a fleshy seed capsule. While some people dislike the odor of the ginkgo seed capsule, the seed itself is a valued food and medicine in Asia. The roasted seed, which tastes like a sweet chestnut, was traditionally presented to the Chinese emperor in a golden bowl.

Although very slow-growing, ginkgos make excellent urban trees because of their pollution tolerance and resistance to insects and

disease. This resistance derives from chemicals called ginkgolides, increasingly important in Western medicine, and a vital ingredient of traditional Asian medicine.

An ancient Chinese treatise notes that ginkgo extracts were used 4,800 years ago to treat senility in members of the royal court. In the last thirty years, Western medicine has increasingly adopted ginkgo extracts to treat a variety of ailments. Several studies indicate the value of ginkgo in treating symptoms of age-related memory loss.²

The ginkgo tree cut down in Ashland’s library park in June 2001 to make way for library expansion was one of the older ginkgos in the United States. But you can still visit large ginkgos elsewhere, where modern citizens, like the ancient Buddhist monks, took pains to preserve these “living fossils.” The “Mark Hatfield Heritage Ginkgo” is located near the Oregon State Capitol in Salem. When Hatfield served as governor, he insisted a pioneer-planted ginkgo be spared during construction of the state Labor and Industry Building.

A ginkgo tree planted in the early 1900s by the mayor of Issaquah, Washington, is now the focal point of the Issaquah Plaza. The tree was almost cut to allow development in the 1970s, but a petition from schoolchildren alerted the developer to the tree’s uniqueness. He redesigned his project to highlight the tree.

Perhaps the most poignant ginkgo grows among the ruins of a temple in Hiroshima, only two miles from the blast center of the atomic bomb. This ginkgo was the first tree in Hiroshima to put forth undeformed buds after the blast. Rather than cut down this survivor tree to rebuild the temple, the people of Hiroshima redesigned the temple to embrace the tree protectively.

To travel back in time with ginkgos, visit Ginkgo Petrified Forest State Park in Vantage, Washington. Today the area is sagebrush desert. But twenty million years ago, the area was swampland. Against the spectacular backdrop of the Columbia River, an interpretive center and hiking trails show fossil specimens of ginkgos and other ancient trees.

In Southern Oregon, ginkgo trees turn a luminous yellow in the fall, and drop their leaves around Halloween, golden gifts not from outer space, but from deep time. 🌳

Anthropologist Nan Hannon and ethnobotanist Donn L. Todt garden in Ashland.

ENDNOTES:

1. Peter Valder, *Garden Plants of China*, (Portland: Timber Press, 1999), p. 72.
2. P. Le Bars et al., “Randomized Trial of an Extract of *Ginkgo biloba* for Dementia,” *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 278:1327-1332.



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