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Press Release

CTUIR, Oregon City Honor 5 Cayuse Men with Tribute

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) and Oregon City have worked together for three years on a project to honor five Cayuse men who were unjustly taken into custody, charged and hanged in Oregon City Territory in 1850.

The names of the five men who volunteered to talk about the killings that occurred at Whitman Mission in the Walla Walla Valley were: Tiʔílakaʔaykt, ʔIceyéeye Siléqis, Kóyomá Šamqín, Tamáhas and łókomooc. (These Cayuse and Nez Perce names are represented with standard Americanist symbols.) According to CTUIR historians, Whitman was suspected of coveting Cayuse lands and poisoning Cayuse people by spreading disease. Following Whitman's death, a militia formed and launched what came to be known as the Cayuse War.

Starting in 1991, CTUIR Board Trustee Armand Minthorn worked with former Oregon City Mayors Dan Fowler and Alice Norris on ways to commemorate. Subsequently, CTUIR Trustee átway (late) Les Minthorn, who carried the family name Kóyomá Šamqín, told at least two Oregon City groups that approached the CTUIR with ideas of reconciliation and dramatic re-enactment that what the CTUIR most wanted was “to find our ancestors and bring them home for proper burial.” Both Minthorns descend from the families of the hanged men.

“It's important that we remember all aspects of our history, not just the pleasant parts. I'm pleased that we have been able to partner with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to create a memorial that pays respects to these five men in a manner they find appropriate, and ensures the men are never forgotten,” noted Oregon City Mayor Denyse McGriff.

The tribute will include a historical interpretive panel and boulder. A plaque on the boulder will present a hopeful message that the burial location of the five men may be found. Efforts to identify the graves are ongoing but are challenged by conflicting historical accounts of the location and changes in the infrastructure and landscape over time.

“Honoring these five men in this way reflects our love and respect -- for ancestors who made sacrifices so we could be here, for the leaders who made this tribute possible, and for those who

carry on the work our elders directed us to continue,” remarked Toby Patrick, CTUIR Board of Trustees and Chairman of the Cultural Resources Committee.

The project site is on the McLoughlin Promenade, a 7.8-acre linear park overlooking the historic location of their public hanging near Willamette Falls. The site’s proximity to the places where the men were detained, tried and hanged is of great importance to the CTUIR and was carefully considered by Oregon City officials in the selection process.

In 2021, the Oregon City Commission approved funding to construct the tribute project. Construction will begin on May 6 and a dedication is planned for June.