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Petition to change the name of Lane County to Kalapuya County

This petition is brought to you by David G. Lewis and Esther Stutzman, two people of Kalapuyan ancestry and enrolled members of two Oregon tribes. David is a descendant of the Santiam and Yoncalla Kalapuyans, and other tribes of western Oregon, and Esther is a descendant of Yoncalla (Komema), and other tribes of western Oregon. We have been historians and culture bearers for many communities in the region for decades. David's histories are passed on through public education events and are published online at the ndnhistoryresearch.com blogsite, and Esther has had a career educating and retelling tribal oral histories to people throughout the region. David has a PhD in anthropology from the University of Oregon, and Esther has run a Summer Culture Camp on the Rogue River for some 40 years. We are not funded nor supported by our tribes for this petition.

It has been long known to both of us that Joseph Lane was a force for the colonization of our peoples and lands from the 1840s to the 1850s. First as a settler to the Willamette Valley and then as Indian Agent and General in the Oregon Territorial Volunteer Militia. Lane led campaigns against the tribes in southern Oregon, specifically the Takelmans, Shastans, Cow Creeks, and Chasta Costans in the Rogue River region. He wrote two treaties of peace with the "Rogue River Tribes" first in 1850, and then again in 1853. The peace he sought came at a cost to the tribes, in the loss of lands and sovereignty over their territories they had lived in for more than 10,000 years. The peace accords came at the culmination of several "outbreaks," a series of conflicts and battles that were leading to war between the white gold miners and the tribes. The gold miners of northern California and southern Oregon were seeking the ultimate genocide of whole civilizations of Native peoples, when they raped tribal women, and wiped out whole villages of tribal peoples, in their quest for wealth. There was no law or justice in the region who would hold the gold miners accountable because they were thought to be righteous white men killing the scourge of "blood-thirsty Indians" who "infested" the land. And so, even the peace treaties held no power to keep the peace as white gold miners and volunteer militia regularly violated the agreement, but only tribal people were held accountable, the majority dying at the hands of the Oregon volunteer militia, one company of which was under the direction of General Joseph "Jo" Lane. The attacks by the militia were called "pacifications" or "retribution." Regularly it happened that the theft of a horse or cattle by a few Native people, would cause genocidal attacks on Native villages by companies of the militia, with few or none left living, even if they surrendered peacefully. Lane was not directly responsible for all such attacks, but he was part of the system of military pacification and took part in efforts to destroy villages and never stood up for the rights of Native people to bring grievances to the courts for justice. Looking back at the period of the Rogue River Indian Wars, from roughly 1849 to 1856, and the treatment of Native peoples by the settlers of Oregon, many of whom joined the militia in order to get paid for killing "Indians," we now wonder who was truly civilized and who was savage?

People may ask if the original settlers really understood how their colonization was destroying the Native peoples. In 1849 Joseph Lane, then the federal Oregon Indian Agent, general in the militia, and Governor of the Territory, wraps up a report by giving an urgent appeal, an appeal suggesting that he was well aware of what was happening to the tribes, he knew that the resources were disappearing under the American plows, and that the Americans were creating a humanitarian disaster in the Oregon Territory.

Lane wrote: "Surrounded as many of the Tribes and bands now are by the whites, whose arts of civilization, by destroying the resources of the Indians, doom them to poverty, want and crime, the extinguishment of their title by purchase, and the locating them in a district removed from the settlements, as a measure of the most vital importance to them. Indeed the cause of humanity calls loudly for their removal from causes and influence so fatal to their existence." (Letter of October 1849, Joseph Lane Letterbook, Whitman Massacre 1849, OHS)

This section of Lane's official report, suggests he knew deeply how he and his fellow Americans were affecting the tribes, and yet nothing was done by himself, an influential politician, or the territorial government, to save the tribes for at least seven years following this report.

Joseph Lane, the early settler of what became Lane County, took his Donation Land Claim from the Kalapuyan tribal lands of the southern Valley, the Chelamela, Chafin, and Winefelly peoples. Lane did what hundreds of other white settlers did, took a mile square piece of land without fair payment to these tribes. This claim was turned into farmland and ranch land and this took wild food sources from the Kalapuyans in the area. The combination of hundreds and thousands of such claims caused broad starvation and poverty among the tribes, who had been weakened by malaria and other diseases introduced in the 1830s. Malaria by itself caused a 95% population decline, and so the remaining Kalapuyans were then subject to the whims of the newcomer settlers. The Willamette Valley treaty of 1855 removed the Kalapuyans to the Grand Ronde in 1856, and did eventually pay the tribes for their lands, but by 1855 there was little choice. The tribes had endured some 40 years of colonization, the effects of introduced diseases as well as the loss of their lands and so they knew that if they did not remove they would all die. The 30 or so remaining Kalapuyans of the southern Willamette Valley, once removed to the Grand Ronde Reservation they shared with 27 to 35 other tribes, were then subjected to near-prison-camp-conditions, where for 20 years they endured starvation, malnutrition, lack of land, and basic necessities, and this caused hundreds of early deaths. There was very inconsistent support from the federal government, despite promises by Indian agents that they would be better off after removal.

In the history of Oregon, there were previously two counties named after the Kalapuyans, Tualatin and Champoeg counties. These early counties, now renamed and reapportioned, were quite vast, extending up into British Columbia and into Idaho in their early arrangements. However, today there is only one county with a Kalapuyan name, Yamhill County, named after the Yamel Kalapuyans. The Kalapuyans had influence over the early Oregon settlers. We know

that the early settlers counted on the Kalapuyans to help build their farms. The Kalapuyans were taught to farm and ranch and they were fast pupils and became trusted farmworkers usually working as day laborers for little payment in trade. If it had not been for the help of the Kalapuyans many of the early settler farms would not have been built or turned profits so quickly. Yet by the 1850s, the farmsteads then fully built with fences and barns, the Kalapuyans became a nuisance to the farmers. There was no land in the valley set aside for the Kalapuyans so they had to adapt to a squatter lifestyle, living on the edges of farmsteads and tolerated by the settlers. Once the majority of the prairies were plowed under and the root foods of the Kalapuyans were gone, they could no longer dig enough camas to store through the winter when wild foods were less available. So they began begging and stealing from the settlers to survive. These thefts caused the tribes to get a reputation of being thieves, when in actuality there was no place for them to go and live under their traditional culture in the valley any longer. By 1855, as there were about 600 remaining of an original estimate of 15,000 Kalapuyans, so removal became the only answer to save the few remaining Kalapuyans. Removal also answered the complaints of the settlers about the Kalapuyans, who were constantly in trouble, when the normal way to deal with “Indians” was to shoot them for petty crimes, because again there was no court who would hold white people accountable for such acts.

To rename Lane County as Kalapuyan County would be an appropriate reversal of the colonial process of the past 200 years in Oregon. Colonization is a process of inscribing the land with the culture of the colonizers, including suppressing Native peoples, and renaming landmarks in the names of the colonizers. Decolonization, in part, involves the reversal of many colonial practices and replacing the colonial place names with those of the original inhabitants of the land, in this case the Kalapuyans who are documented as living here far longer than the United States has existed as a nation. Americans pride themselves about their nation’s diversity and plurality, yet there are few attempts until relatively recently to have the places where we emphasize not just the European American histories but also the histories of the Indigenous peoples of this land. Indigenous Peoples’ Days are one such movement toward true recognition of Native peoples, and the state project to teach Native histories in public schools is another example, while an additional way is to honor the original indigenous peoples with a place name. The renaming of Lane County to “Kalapuya County” would be an example of how our society can show that it values and honors the long-term and continuous presence of the Kalapuyans of the Willamette Valley.

Qa’pai (Thank you)

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