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## Oregon History: Indian Wars

**Overview** Hugo, Oregon like most places has its Native American history, some known, most not. Hugo's first citizens or peoples were the Takelma Indians of the Rogue River Valley.

**Oregon History: Indian Wars**<sup>1</sup> Camas lilies bloomed in such profusion that meadows looked like lakes amid the forests. The tarweed seeds ripened and the women set the fires. Armed with beaters and funnel-shaped baskets, they began the annual cycle of gathering. Acorns ripened, matured, and fell from the oaks. Their flour, when leached of tannic acid, provided a nutritious gruel or bread when baked on flat stones near the fires. Salmon surged up the rivers. Eels clung to the rocks as they ascended the rapids. Deer and elk browsed on the nutritious plants in the foothills. Flecks of gold glistened in the crystal-clear water of the streambeds.



This was the setting when, during the winter of 1851-52, packers on the trail to California discovered the placer mines of southwestern Oregon. Within weeks a reckless population, most of them hardened miners from California, surged over the Siskiyou or stepped off the gangplanks of ships putting in at Crescent City, Port Orford, Umpqua City, or Scottsburg. The rush was on. It meant quick riches for those who found the right pothole in bedrock filled with nuggets or the fortunate miners whose riffle boxes captured the fine particles of gold that glistened in the black sand. For the Indians of the Rogue River country it meant that all they had known and their very lives were at stake.

The causes of conflict erupted everywhere. The Donation Land Act became law in 1850. Years passed before treaties, negotiated in 1853 and 1854, were ratified. Some, such as those of Anson Dart or the Willamette Valley Treaty Commission of 1851, never gained Senate approval. In spite of the promises of superintendents of Indian affairs Dart and Palmer, the white people poured in. Dispossession ruled.

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## Takelma Indians

The miners drove the Takelma, Shasta, Chetco, Shasta Costa, Mikonotunne, Tututni, Galice Creeks and Cow Creeks from their villages. Located on old stream terraces, the Indian homes were prime locations for placer deposits.

The hungry newcomers hunted the game, decimating the deer and elk populations. The Territorial Legislature in 1854 prohibited sale of ammunition or guns to Indians, deepening their disadvantage. The miners and residents of Jacksonville, Canyonville, Kerbyville, and Gold Beach liked bacon and ham. They let hogs run wild, catching them in baited traps. The hogs ate the acorns, a primary subsistence food for the Indians.

Mining debris poured down the Illinois, Rogue, South Coquille and South Umpqua Rivers. The salmon runs diminished; the eels died. Crayfish, fresh water mussels and trout choked on the flood of mud. Starvation threatened. The claimants of Donation Lands fenced their fields with split-rail fences and built log cabins. They worked with a will to stop Indian field burning. The Indian women found it impossible to harvest tarweed seeds and the blackberries that formerly regenerated with the annual fires did not grow back. The settlers turned under the fields of camas lilies, and their cattle and horses grazed off the blue-flowering plants.



*Salmon*

The mining districts--whether in the Rogue River country or the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon--caused major ecological disruption. The rush for quick wealth through mineral exploitation unraveled nature's ways and long-established human subsistence activities. Then came the "exterminators"--unprincipled men who believed only dead Indians were good Indians. They formed volunteer companies and perpetrated massacres against the Chetco Indians in 1853, the Lower Coquille Indians in 1854, and in wanton aggression against Takelma Indians camped near the Table Rock Reservation in 1855.

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## Oregon Blue Book

Frederick M. Smith, sub-Indian agent at Port Orford, in 1854 addressed the attacks on the Indians in his district. They were ravaged by hunger, dispossession of their villages, onset of new and fatal diseases, and overt murders. Reporting the massacre of the Lower Coquille Indians, he



*Camas*

wrote: "Bold, brave, courageous men! to attack a friendly and defenseless tribe of Indians; to burn, roast, and shoot sixteen of their number, and all on suspicion that they were about to rise and drive from their country three hundred white men!" Smith's lament, the mourning cries of the Indian women, the death rituals of rubbing the hair with pitch, and the inexorable course of hunger, attack, and death precipitated the conflicts known as the Rogue River Wars. The troubles seethed between 1852 and 1856. Finally the U.S. Army had sufficient forces to mount a campaign in 1855-56 to destroy the Indians' ability to resist.

Vanquished by the combined operations of the Oregon Volunteers and Army regulars, the Indians of the Rogue and Umpqua Valleys and the southwestern Oregon coast were then removed to the Siletz and Grand Ronde reservations. Forced marches through winter snows or over the rocky headlands and through the sand dunes of coastal Oregon became trails of tears for hundreds driven to the distant reservations. Other survivors were herded aboard the Columbia, a sidewheel steamer, which removed them from Port Orford to the Columbia and lower Willamette River area. Then they had to walk the muddy trail to the reservations.

**Want more information?** Contact a member of the HNAT.

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1. Oregon Blue Book. *Oregon History: Indian Wars*. Downloaded January 2, 2010. <http://bluebook.state.or.us/cultural/history/history14.htm>.

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## Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society's Mission

This information brochure is one of a series of documents published by the Hugo Neighborhood Association & Historical Society (*Hugo Neighborhood*). It is designed to be shared with neighbors for the purpose of helping protect our rural quality of life by promoting an informed citizenry in decision-making. The *Hugo Neighborhood* is an informal nonprofit charitable and educational organization with a land use and history mission of promoting the social welfare of its neighbors.

### Land Use & History

The *Hugo Neighborhood's* land use mission is to promote Oregon Statewide Goal 1 — Citizen Involvement, and to preserve, protect, and enhance the livability and economic viability of its farms, forests, and rural neighbors. It will act, if requested, as a technical resource assisting neighbors to represent themselves.

Its history mission is to educate, collect, preserve, interpret, and research its local history and to encourage public interest in the history of the Hugo area.

Volunteer membership dues are \$10.00 annually per family and normally used for paper, ink, envelopes, publications and mailings. Send us your e-mail address if you want to know what we are doing.

Email: [hugo@jeffnet.org](mailto:hugo@jeffnet.org)

Web Page: <http://www.hugoneighborhood.org/>

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## Oregon History: Indian Wars



Brochure NA-7 Of Hugo's  
Native American Brochure  
Series



### Rogue River near Rainie Falls

Courtesy of Oregon State Archives Photo No. josD0059

*The 1850s were a wrenching time of transition.  
Steadily the Indian numbers diminished, their food  
sources destroyed and their lands appropriated. These  
were terrible times for the region's native peoples.*

**June 15, 2005  
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**Hugo Neighborhood Association &  
Historical Society  
Josephine County Historical Society**