

Introduction

In 1859, three small girls, none older than six, found themselves taken from their mother and given to different families in Kings Valley, Oregon. Their names were Ellen, Winifred, and Mary. Their mother was a Rogue River Indian woman named Kitty; their father was the former Coast Reservation agent Robert Metcalfe, who was returning to Texas. He left several thousand dollars behind for their care. One can only imagine the children's heartache and longing for their mother and for each other as each became acquainted with her new life. For nearly a century and a half, the descendants of these three children wondered what had happened to their mother and father. Family lore has it that Kitty may have spent some time with Ellen, the oldest girl, after she married and moved to central Oregon. But other sources indicate she died when the girls were young. There are no known records of Kitty's death or place of rest.

The family knew that Robert had moved to Kentucky and raised racehorses there, but that's all they knew. In the early 1900s the girls, now all with families of their own, found Robert's brother James in New Mexico and learned that their father had died in 1905. Because land might have been available on the Siletz Reservation at this time, the families tried to prove their Indian heritage with the information James supplied, but to no avail. And this is where the story ended for a hundred years.

As luck goes, I happened to be writing a thesis on the Coast Reservation for a degree in historical archaeology and became intrigued with Robert Metcalfe's story. I posted a query on the Internet and, to my profound surprise, found a descendant of one of the girls. What followed was quite a journey, but to



Figure 2. Kitty Metcalfe.

make a long story short, my research helped Winifred's great-grandson become a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, his long-hoped-for dream and the culmination of over a century of the family's desire to know where they came from.

I tell this story because it's not an uncommon tale in Indian families. Metcalfe's opinion, shared by most of his era, was that removing children from Indian influence was the only way to save them. When we read this today, we can't believe anyone could be so prejudiced and heartless, but this is what happened to many children—they were removed from their parents' influence as the only way to become "civilized."

As I was delving into the history of the Coast Reservation, I contemplated what mind-set could possibly have given Europeans permission to come to the Americas and take over the continents. I learned that philosophers centuries earlier had developed rationales and rituals for doing so. A primary rationale was the belief that society developed in an orderly fashion from savage to civilized; Europeans saw themselves as civilized and the native people they encountered as savages, to be elevated to a civilized state at best, eradicated at worst.

Because agriculture was the most important component of the immigrants' world view, major problems developed around land and its use. Immigrants wanted Indian land; American Indians, for the most part, were not amenable to giving it up or did not have the same idea of land use and ownership that settlers brought with them.

A policy the English developed early on, referred to as the "right of preemption," was used to render the acquisition of Indian land ethical. The Doctrine of Discovery, which gave "discovering" nations the first right to negotiate with native people, was the foundation of the preemption policy. This policy stated that the government, as the king's representative, could acquire lands either by