



Siuslaw Pioneer Museum

The Early Siuslaw Valley

Whenever my husband and I travel to a new town we wonder how that town began... what caused settlers to pick that particular spot to start a settlement?

In this issue we will continue to investigate the beginnings of the town of Florence. We will also look at the surrounding area which is referred to as the 'Siuslaw Valley' as it relates to the Siuslaw River and its tributaries that drew indigenous peoples to its shores and later other settlers from around the world.

Often, people focus on just the ethnic group they belong to when looking at history. We want to broaden our focus in this exposé to include other ethnic groups that impacted the valley; Native tribes, Chinese, European, Asian, etc. We'll see how this unfolds.

I hope you will join us as we begin the story of Florence Oregon! Let's get started...

Merilee Mulvey, Volunteer Editor
Kyle Research Library at SPM

There is a marvelous website of the Confederated Tribes of the Siuslaw Valley and we will share some of their historical information in this issue. Please use this link to visit their website:

<https://ctclusi.org/history/>

The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians are made up of 3 tribes (4 Bands): 2 bands of Coos Tribes: Hanis Coos (Coos Proper), Miluk Coos; Lower Umpqua Tribe; and Siuslaw Tribe.

The diversity of languages and cultures you can find along the West Coast attests to the longevity these bands sustained for hundreds of generations in the lands they call home.

The tribes trace their ancestry back to the aboriginal inhabitants of the South-Central coast of Oregon. Their historic homelands extended from the richly forested slopes of the Coastal Range in the East to the rocky shoreline of the Pacific Ocean in the West. They lived peacefully in an area characterized by moderate temperatures and abundant natural resources including fish, shellfish, wildlife, and a rich variety of edible plants.





Map from the *Atlas of Orean* (2nd Ed.) University of Orean Press 2001



Descendants of the Siuslaw and Kuitsh peoples live today throughout Western Oregon, and are represented by several federally recognized tribes: the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon has a website that explains some of the history of coastal indigenous peoples of the Siuslaw Region.

Link- <https://libraryguides.lanec.edu/siuslaw>

A Bit about the history...

The Siuslaw peoples lived mainly around the estuary of the Siuslaw River, leaving during summer to travel upriver and into the hills of the Coast Range. Another tribe, the Quiich, inhabited the area around the Umpqua River and wintered around Winchester Bay. In the summer, both peoples travelled annually as far as the Willamette Valley.

The indigenous landscape was very diverse as it included the Siuslaw and Umpqua River estuaries which provided fish and shellfish. Nearby fresh water lakes also provided good fishing. Hunting and gathering in the nearby Coast Range mountains and heavily timbered forests provided materials for shelter and food to eat. The weather was mild and rainy and there were seals and sea lions to hunt along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Occasionally there would be a stranded whale beached that would provide blubber and oil for the peoples.

Siuslawan was the primary language of which both the Siuslaw and Quiich spoke dialects. The language is related to Alsea and Yaquina and Coosan Languages. There may be Salish influences in the language, as well.

Both groups of peoples built large, high-prowed canoes up to 30 feet long, carved out of cedar logs. They were mainly for river, bay, and open ocean travel as they would trade with neighbors, visit fishing grounds, shell fishing sites, and sea mammal hunting sites.

Good nutrition from the reliable and abundant foods they consumed helped the indigenous peoples to sustain a healthier lifestyle than 18th century Europeans and Asians. Before settlement by other ethnic groups started to have an impact on indigenous peoples, they were much more disease free and mortality often was caused by injuries from hunting and fishing and warfare.

Cannery Workers from China

The American Gold Rush, as well as fishing, canning, and railroad construction brought many workers from the Asian continent. During the 1840s-1860s there was a political and economic upheaval in the province of Guangdong which was the beginning of an influx of Chinese immigrants to the West Coast of the USA.

Many Chinese and Mongolian workers, hired temporarily by local area cannery operators like the Kyle family, arrived from Astoria, Coos Bay, and as far north as Portland each fishing and canning season. They would have come on schooners for the canning season. Many Chinese were rehired each year and most would return each fishing/canning season to various canneries along the Siuslaw River to their former employers. In 1901, there was a strike in San Francisco, and the supply of tin to make cans did not arrive before the fish run in Florence so many of the Chinese workers had to be laid off for a while. Some workers, when finished with their jobs canning or fishing, would be hired by the owners of Hop farms in the Eugene area and would be transported there by horse drawn wagons. For a general overview of Chinese in Oregon, the Oregon Historical Society has information on their website you might enjoy reading. Link: <https://www.ohs.org/events/oregons-early-chinese-american-history.cfm>

The Siuslaw Pioneer 1954 booklet talks about the Canneries on The Siuslaw. "Chinamen were employed in all these canneries. They were brought in from Astoria by boat in time to get everything ready for the receiving of the fish."

"Sheet time was bought in 90-pound cases. Pig lead and pig zinc and muriatic acid was bought in quantity and the Chinamen made the cans by hand."

"As soon as the packing season was over the Chinamen were shipped back to Astoria. Some went out on boats, but there were also some who left for Portland via Eugene. The Whisman boys, who ran the stage to Eugene, met them at Head of Tide with two wagons and four-horse teams, and got them to Eugene."



Chinese Cannery Workers
Soldering cans at Kyle Cannery

The Canning Process

Can making: Workers cut and shaped metal into cylindrical bodies. Seams were soldered together. Bottoms were cut and pressed into shape before being attached to the body.

Fish preparation: Salmon were thoroughly washed but not scaled. The fish were inspected, cleaned, and cut to fit the cans.

Cooking and Finishing: The sealed cans were placed on trays and shoved into boilers. They were cooked in steam for several hours to kill bacteria. After cooking, the cans were cooled, washed, and painted before being packed for shipment.

The **Duncan Cannery** opened in 1877 and was soon followed by numerous canneries which flourished as the fishing industry grew. In 1894 the William **Kyle Cannery** was established. Cans were made by hand in preparation for the fish brought to the canneries which were cleaned, cut, and processed. It was not uncommon for 500 cases to be canned by a cannery in a single day. Cases of canned fish were then shipped out on schooners, which often carried 3500 cases of salmon and 100 barrels of salt salmon for shipment to San Francisco.

Siuslaw Pioneer Museum Kyle Research Library has source material for the canneries in the Siuslaw Valley.

History of Cushman, Oregon and the Family it was named after...

Excerpts from the booklet "The Cushman Connection" by Barbara (Cushman) Bauer...

The lineage of the Cushman family dates back to the early 1600's tracing to the Mayflower pilgrims. Descendant Cyrus Curtis Cushman was born in November 1853 in Wisconsin. Following in his father's footsteps as a lumberman, Cyrus Curtis Cushman came west in the 1870's with his future father-in-law, Sidney Waite, looking for timber. They scouted the West Coast from Seattle to Coos County before deciding on the Siuslaw River Valley.

They both purchased large tracts of timber east of Mapleton before returning to Wisconsin. Cyrus married Mary Emma Waite in Wisconsin on September 2, 1880. Cyrus was 27 and Mary was 25 yrs old. After the birth of their two children, the family made the trek back to the Siuslaw River Valley in 1887 and settled in Acme, Oregon.

On November 1, 1914, Mary indicated in a letter that train service had commenced that day between Eugene and Mapleton, OR. The right of way was settled at David's Mill and the quarry. It took at least a month to do the grading at those places, then the laying of rails continued to Acme.

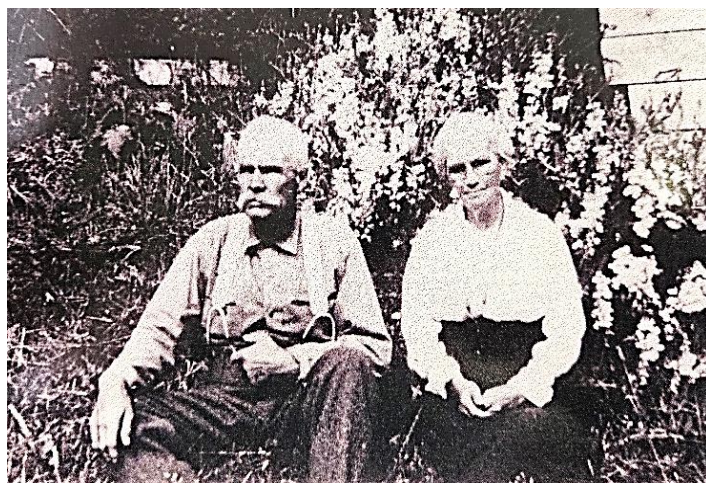
The Southern Pacific Company complete its Coos Bay line of the railroad to Acme in 1916. The company already had an 'Acme' along its line so they named the station 'Cushman' after Cyrus C. and Irvin B. Cushman. After the station was named, the post office in Acme, about a mile west of the station, followed suit.



Cyrus Curtis Cushman



Mary Emma Waite



Cyrus and Mary Cushman

Cyrus' brother, Irvin B. Cushman, with his wife Nora and their daughter Ula, followed his brother west to Cushman. Irvin built and ran a general store while Cyrus ran his own sawmill. The general store also housed the post office. Irvin was the postmaster. Irvin and his family built a home up Skunk Hollow. During the 1890s and early 1900s Cyrus and Irvin families bought numerous properties in western Lane and Douglas counties.

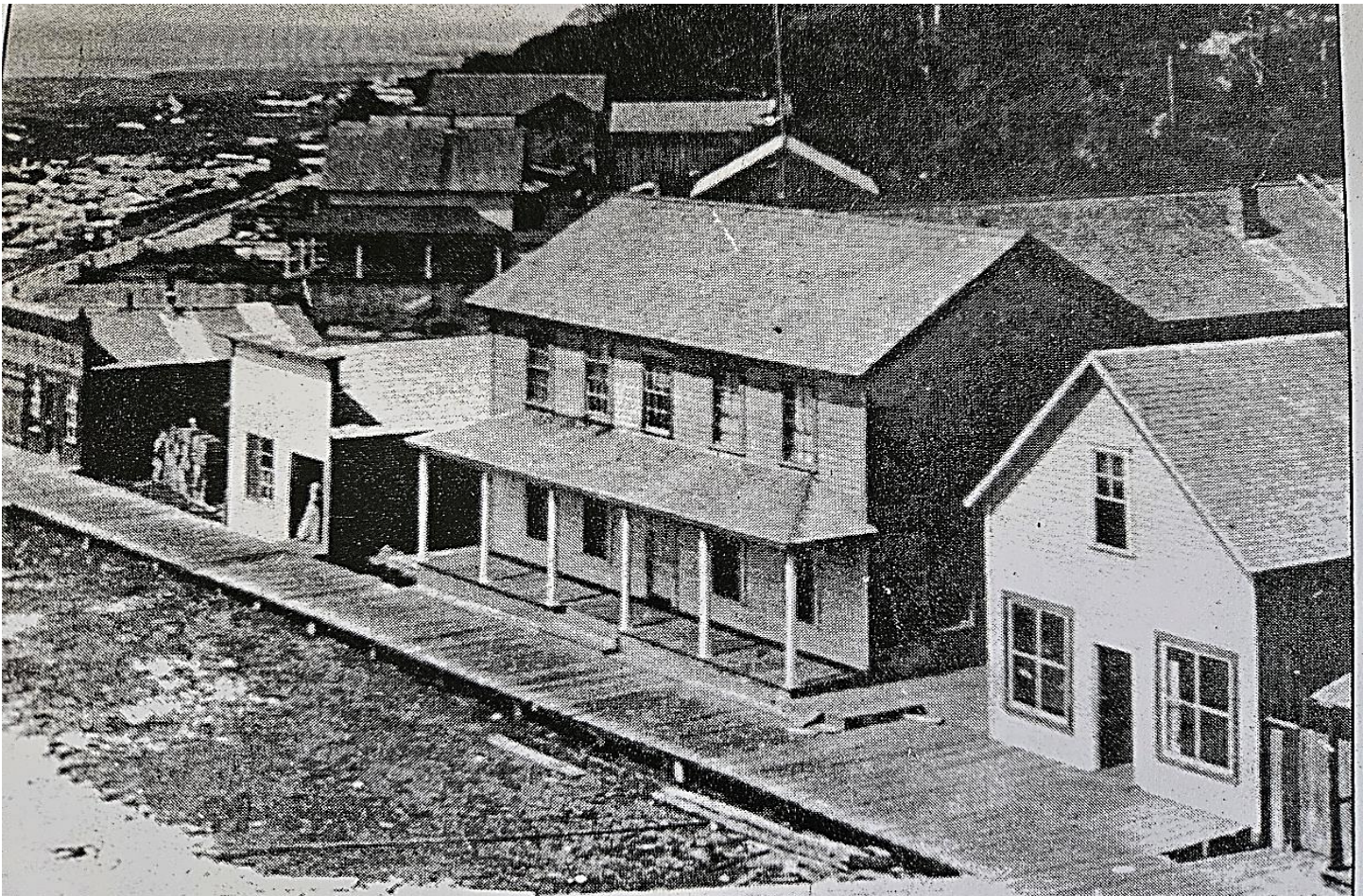
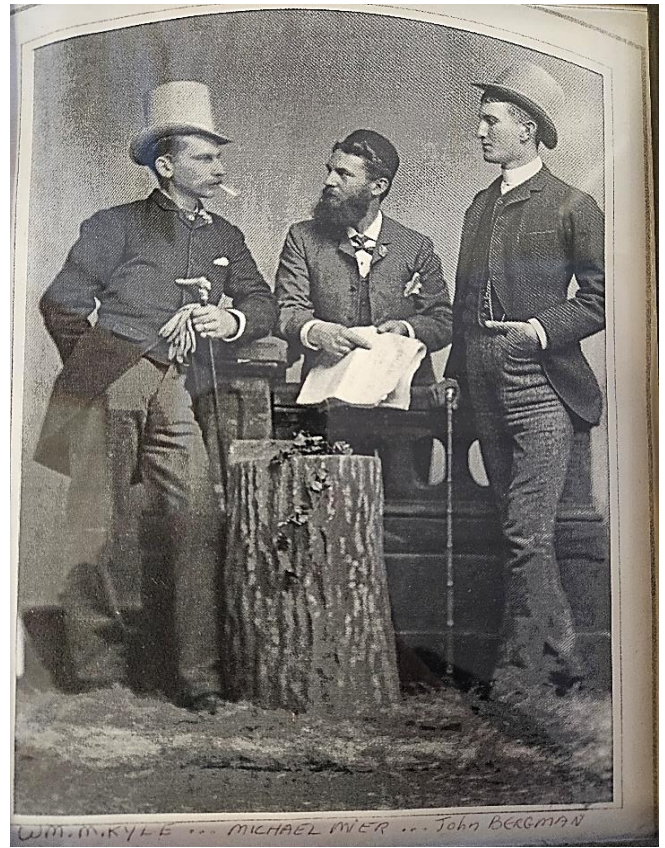
Because of the proximity of the river to the town, most children were taught to swim before they even started school. Many children also learned to row and handle a boat proficiently. Occasionally, heavy winter rain or snow season caused a 'freshet' where streams were overflowed the Siuslaw River with water and logs/debris that would wash down to the ocean. During a freshet after the railroad had been built, most all the debris piled up against the new trestle in one big log jam, creating such an effective dam that the river backed up. During freshets, farmers along the river caught unmarked logs for firewood, a dangerous but needed job to supplement heating homes.

L to R Local businessmen, Wm M. Kyle-Mike Meyers-John Bergman

Main street (now Bay Street) Florence in the late 1800s.



Early Florence main street.



Book Review: *Blazing A Wagon Trail to Oregon*, by Lloyd W. Coffman
(available at the Siuslaw Public Library)

Excerpt from the Epilogue –At the time the Great Migration train of 1843 left Missouri for Oregon in the spring of 1843, many members of the wagon train had joined the adventure because of the free land bill then pending in Congress. It would take more than a year for those people to learn that the bill never got out of the House of Representatives.

It was not until 1850 that Congress finally passed a special bill for the Oregon Territory called the Donation Land Law. Even then, the bill authorized only 320 acres for each claimant instead of the 640 the provisional government had allowed. Married men, though, could claim an additional 320 acres for their wife. The Donation Land Law was the first free land bill in the history of the United States, preceding the Homestead Act by a dozen years. It was scheduled originally to expire at the end of 1853, but as that date neared, Congress passed an extension to last through 1855. A peculiar sidelight to Oregon History was the extraordinary number of marriages that occurred in 1855 just before the land act became history!



June 20th at 11:00 a.m. Walking Tour of Old Town. Starts at the Pioneer Museum.

Self-guided walking tour maps are also available at the museum and Florence Chamber of Commerce for free.

Newsletter Changes Coming

The newsletter is going to be evolving this summer. We will be shortening the quarterly issues from eight to four pages. In addition, we will be publishing periodic “Special Edition” issues focusing on a single topic in one or more parts. We feel that this will allow the Kyle Research Library staff to present much more in-depth historic information about the Siuslaw Valley, Florence history, and museum artifacts. We know many supporters are not able to visit in person. We want you all to experience the history! Our website is also keeping pace with updated information.

Visit us at:

<https://www.siuslawpioneermuseum.com>

Upcoming “Special Edition”

One of the most fascinating historical aspects of the westward movement to the Siuslaw Valley is modes of transportation before the automobile was invented. A “special edition” we’re working on currently is the history of stage coach travel to Florence and surrounding hamlets. We know you will find the information truly amazing as we learn about travel by horse, coach, wagon, foot, and other modes of travel in bygone years. Stay Tuned for this 2-part series!



Upcoming Events

April – June 2026

April 13 Board Meeting at museum
May 11 Board Meeting at museum
June 8 Board Meeting at museum

Keep abreast of happenings at the museum...

Visit us at:

Library e-mail library@siuslawpioneermuseum.com

Newsletter e-mail: siuslawpioneermuseum@gmail.com

★ website www.SiuslawPioneerMuseum.com

<https://www.facebook.com/Siuslaw-Pioneer-Museum>

Endowment Fund

An endowment fund in the Museum's name has been established with many financial gifts from our members. Donors who wish to contribute to this fund should make their contribution payable to:

"Western Lane Community Foundation"
and specify
"Siuslaw Pioneer Museum Endowment"
on the check

Mail check to:
Siuslaw Pioneer Museum
P. O. Box 2637
Florence, OR 97439

Please keep in mind that checks specified to the endowment fund are to be used as specified by the endowment maker for special projects or the general endowment held by the foundation.

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Name of your business _____
Sponsor, Patron, & Lifetime levels will have your business listed on the museum website

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Make Check Payable to: Siuslaw Pioneer Museum Member year runs Jan 1 – Dec 31

MAIL TO: Siuslaw Pioneer Museum, PO Box 2637, Florence OR 97439

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

Individual	\$25.00	Business/Friend	\$50.00	Patron	\$175.00
Family	\$40.00	Sponsor	\$95.00	Lifetime	\$1,100.00

If you wish to pay by credit card, you are welcome to go to our website membership section

Additional Gift amount for the SPM General Fund: \$ _____



P.O. Box 2637

Florence OR 97439

Return Service Requested

MAILING LABEL

Newsletter Printing contributed by the Florence Branch, Banner Bank

SIUSLAW PIONEER MUSEUM



The Siuslaw Pioneer Museum is located on the corner of 2nd and Maple streets in Old Town Florence.

Our location address is:
278 Maple Street

Our mailing address is:
P.O. Box 2637
Florence OR 97439

Meet our Board of Directors and Trustees

President	Pam Mann	Trustees:	
Vice-President	Craig Sanders	Nicole Lewis	Pat Rongey
Secretary	John Barnes	Annie Schmidt	Kyle Lewis
Treasurer	Dorothy Hosking	Brian Alexander	

Board meetings are held the 2nd Monday of each month at the museum. These meetings are open to all members. Call ahead for space availability.