
Augusta “Toots” Simmons

Who was Augusta “Toots” Simmons?

Augusta Simmons, nicknamed “Toots” by her family, was a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. She served on the Siletz Tribal Council, the people elected to lead the Tribe’s government.

Early Life

Augusta was born on August 28, 1900, in Siletz, Oregon. Her parents were Louis Smith, from the Quu-iich (Lower Umpqua) people, and Agnes Newberry Smith, who was from a mixed Umpqua and settler family. Toots had a challenging life. Her parents separated and her older brother died when she was very small. Because her mother Agnes was sent to a school in Los Angeles, California, she did not get any land to live on when the Reservation was divided up in 1894. Toots and her mother had to work hard to survive. Her mother worked as a school cook, a nurse, and a midwife. Toots helped by running errands. She rode her horse from the family’s home on the Siletz River to the town of Siletz and back again.

Toots’ stepfather’s name was Coquelle Thompson. Coquelle was an important leader born in his Tribal homeland who remembered many important customs and traditions. Toots helped to carry these traditions forward. As a girl, she learned to participate in Nee-dash, an important traditional dance of the Siletz people. She also learned to prepare and eat traditional foods.

Adult Life

In 1922, Toots married Fredrick Simmons, another Siletz Tribal member. They raised a large family at Siletz. They were also active members of the community.

During World War II, Augusta volunteered to help her community. People were afraid that some places in Oregon might be attacked during the war. Augusta went to the town of Siletz to listen for enemy



Augusta “Toots” Simmons *(Continued)*

airplanes that might be coming to bomb the Oregon coast. She learned what sounds different kinds of planes make. At night, she checked to make sure everyone’s windows were covered. If the town was dark, any enemy airplanes coming to attack would get lost. Even though those attacks never came, Augusta showed bravery and leadership to help protect people from potential danger.

Augusta served as a leader in other ways too. She continued to be involved in Nee-dash and worked to keep the tradition of dance alive at Siletz. Toots also served on the Siletz Tribal Council. The Tribal Council is a group of people chosen to lead the Tribe, make important decisions about the future, and talk to the United States government. Augusta was one of the first women to serve on the Siletz Tribal Council.

Later Life

Augusta worked to can food to keep it from spoiling. During the 1940s and 1950s, she often came to a big community kitchen at Tribal headquarters on Government Hill. Many Tribal people in the area shared the kitchen. Toots volunteered to teach people how to cook and how to can fruits and vegetables. She also taught people about traditional foods. She showed them how to store salmon, eel, deer, and elk meat and how to eat other traditional foods, like seaweed.

Augusta lived in Siletz her whole life. She dedicated her life to helping others in her community and inspired many people. She died on March 3, 1976, at the age of 75. Two of her children, Dolly Fisher and Frank Simmons, would follow in her footsteps and serve on the Siletz Tribal Council.

Sources

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