

## **Round Valley Convinces State to 'Revise' History**

November 5, 2001 - Covelo

Ernie Merrifield, a member of Round Valley UMC on the Native American reservation near Covelo, last week successfully completed a two-year campaign to convince the State of California to reflect for the public a more accurate and inclusive history.

A historic marker that overlooks Inspiration Point - a mountaintop view of the whole of the nearly circular Round Valley in the northern reaches of Mendocino County - has for 42 years celebrated the European settlement of the 1850s. The plaque ignores reference to the Yuki, who populated the valley for thousands of years. Adding injury to insult, the old plaque honors the names of soldiers and entrepreneurs who led the slaughter to conquer the valley.

The old plaque itself will be history in a matter of weeks as a new one - with wording Merrifield largely wrote - is cast in iron and mounted.

The California State Office of Historic Preservation had placed the item on its Nov. 2 agenda, but all parties quietly agreed last month to make the change administratively as opposition faded away. That is so, even though the plaque reports an aspect of history that the county would prefer to forget. It will say that the reservation was created "to protect the local tribes from the genocide of the Mendocino County Wars." Merrifield, in a gesture of inclusiveness, allowed a sentence telling of the European settlement - but with no hint of celebration of it. His first draft did not mention the European conqueror by name, but the final version does in a compromise.

Merrifield was assisted in his quest by former U.S. congressman and former county supervisor Dan Hamburg, who said: "California has a history full of violence and subjugation of one culture over another. To make it seem less than it was, as is evident in the [old] marker, is a disservice not only to Native Americans but to the entire community."

The 1959 plaque was approved by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors at the behest of the Covelo Women's Improvement Club. Hamburg told e-Span: "In 1959 there was not even a thought that Native Americans should be consulted." And, at first, even the idea of revision took some massaging. "The project hasn't been easy for a number of non-Native families who are invested in their version of history [which is that] white people settled the county and the West." At first, not even all Native Americans were united in making it an issue, for whites and Native Americans had reached a virtual truce in tensions that neither side wanted disturbed.

But, noted Hamburg, "The plaque was a symbol of injustice that occupied Ernie's thoughts when he was a teenager, and it bubbled up inside him his whole adult life. Today, Ernie [a Native American] crosses lines in Round Valley more effectively than anyone else I know of. He is widely trusted in both communities."

After starting with the Yuki history, the new plaque will mention the additional tribes that were forced onto the reservation: the Nomlacki, Wylaki, Lassik, Sinkyone, Cahto, Kabeyo, Shadakai, Yokayo, Shokawa, Kashaya, Habenapo, Wappo, Concow, Maidu, Colusa, and the Achamawi.

Almost all of Round Valley UMC's members today are descendants of those tribes. The church, built on the reservation in 1857, became de facto Methodist as President Grant in 1869 appointed Methodist pastors as reservation agents. Two months ago, as in every September, Round Valley UMC members were part of a 100-mile trek west from Chico, commemorating the forced march of 1863 in which many of their ancestors perished.