



## CITY OF ST. HELENS

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# PRESS RELEASE

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## **COLUMBIA COUNTY READS 2019 FOCUSES ON HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF OREGON SLAVERY**

**St. Helens, Ore.** – The six libraries of Columbia County have selected two books by authors Phillip Margolin and Gregory Nokes for this year's Columbia County Reads 2019. Both books, one a work of fiction and the other nonfiction, tell the historical account of an Oregon slave who took his former master to court and won the case in 1853.

Columbia County Reads is a yearly collaboration between Columbia County libraries to bring reading to the forefront of public discourse. If everyone reads the same book or author at the same time, it is hoped that it will inspire discussions, connections, and a shared perspective among Columbia County residents.

Participating libraries include Clatskanie Library District, Columbia City Community Library, Rainier City Library, Scappoose Public Library, St. Helens Public Library, and Vernonia Public Library. Each library has the two selected books available for checkout.

Gregory Nokes's book "Breaking Chains: Slavery on Trial in the Oregon Territory" is the true account of a former black slave in Polk County who sued his owner for the freedom of his children. Phillip Margolin's book "Worthy Brown's Daughter" is a work of fiction based on the account described in Nokes's nonfiction book. The Columbia County libraries hope that this pairing of a work of fiction and nonfiction will appeal to a broader range of readers: those who enjoy the faster paced narrative of Margolin's story and those who want to learn the history behind the story by reading Nokes's book.

Both authors will jointly give a presentation at four Columbia County libraries. Participants are encouraged to attend whatever library event is most convenient for them:

- St. Helens Public Library, April 25, 7 p.m.
- Vernonia Public Library, April 26, 6 p.m.
- Scappoose Public Library, April 27, 3 p.m.
- Clatskanie Library District at the Clatskanie Cultural Center, April 27, 7 p.m.

Nokes and Margolin will have their books available for purchase at each event.

Gregory Nokes wrote "Breaking Chains" after learning that one of his ancestors from Missouri brought a slave named Reuben Shipley to Oregon in 1853. Greg, a born and raised Oregonian, had no idea that his ancestors had any involvement with slavery nor that there were ever slaves in Oregon. This led him on a journey to discover and write about the little-known history of black slaves in Oregon. He learned that there may have been as many as 100 slaves

brought by early settlers to help establish new farms in the territory. While 100 slaves pales alongside the national statistic of four million slaves, the fact that there were any slaves in Oregon was itself a sad revelation to Greg. Greg tells many of their stories. His book helped inspire the Oregon Public Broadcasting program "Oregon's Black Pioneers" which aired on February 25, 2019. The program can be accessed on OPB's Oregon Experience website.

Phillip Margolin spent over 20 years as an attorney, specializing in criminal defense. He served as an appellate attorney, appearing before the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, the Oregon Supreme Court and the Oregon Court of Appeals, before he began writing full time in 1996. His novels, many of which are legal thrillers, have received numerous awards and nominations. "The Last Innocent Man" was made into an HBO movie and "Gone, But Not Forgotten" was turned into a mini-series starring Brooke Shields.

In 2018, Phillip Margolin and Gregory Nokes made a joint appearance at the Oregon Historical Society's Book Club to discuss their works.

Although there are no known instances of slave holding in Columbia County, the Columbia County Museum Association is partnering with the Columbia County libraries to display images and descriptions of life in Columbia County around the same time period as these accounts.

St. Helens Public Library was awarded a \$2,000 grant from the Columbia County Cultural Coalition to help fund Columbia County Reads 2019.

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For further information regarding Columbia County Reads 2019, please contact St. Helens Public Library Director Margaret Jeffries at [margaretj@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:margaretj@ci.st-helens.or.us) or 503-397-4544, ext. 601.