



Oregon

U.S. DISTRICT COURT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Collecting, preserving, and promoting Oregon's legal history*

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UNCATEGORIZED

# Wild Wild History: Key Players in the Rajneeshpuram Episode Come Together for Famous Cases

# Discussion

*July 19, 2019*

By Douglas Pahl

In 1981, the Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, his personal assistant Ma Anand Sheela, and their community of followers purchased the Big Muddy Ranch near the tiny Oregon town of



Philip Toelkes was known as Swami Prem Niren when he served as the attorney for Rajneeshpuram. All photos by Owen Schmidt.

Antelope. The ambitious experiment soon ignited great concern among the citizens of Antelope as well as among state and federal officials. The resulting legal and cultural controversies – many of them caused or exacerbated by supporters of the Bhagwan – played out in state and national media and in state and federal courtrooms. Events spiraled from challenging to bizarre to quite dark, and the initially challenging issues of constitutional, voting rights, and land use law issues gave way to fairly obvious issues in the realm of criminal law.

On June 27, before a crowd of approximately 300, leading advocates from both sides of the



Judge John Jelderks shares memories and newspaper articles of the time.

Rajneeshpuram episode revisited the events that captivated Oregonians and the nation in the 1980s and continue to reverberate today. Three speakers made prominent appearances in the highly acclaimed

Netflix Original documentary series *Wild Wild Country*. The lively event was the latest installment of the Famous Cases series. The U.S. District Court of Oregon Historical Society was joined by cosponsors the Oregon Historical Society and the Perkins Coie firm. **Oregon Supreme Court Justice Tom Balmer** moderated the discussion by:

**Philip Toelkes** (a.k.a. **Swami Prem Niren**), attorney for the Rajneesh

**Robert Weaver,**



Robert Weaver and William Gary listen to the Wild Wild History presentation.

assistant U.S. attorney at the time and lead

federal prosecutor

**William Gary**, lead counsel for Oregon Attorney General Dave Frohnmayer on the matter

**U.S. Magistrate Judge John Jelderks**, who presided over a number of the state court legal proceedings

Thirty-five years later, Oregonians continue to grapple with the Rajneeshpuram episode. It is an extraordinary story of a religious utopian experiment gone wrong. The strong feelings engendered by these events remain, highlighted poignantly by proceedings in Oregon courtrooms. The Famous Cases program brought together the leading legal advocates to reflect on the most significant issues they faced in and outside courtrooms during that tumultuous time.

1980s Oregon	Famous Oregon legal cases
Rajneeshpuram	

*By adairl2014*

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———— PAGES ————

2003 Annual Picnic at the Leavy Hop Farm

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2004 Annual Dinner/LSA Recipient Randall Kester

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2004 Picnic Honoring Sen.

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The Investiture of U.S. District Judge Karin J. Immergut  
February 4, 2020

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Judge Anna J. Brown:  
“Fundamentally inclined toward solving problems”

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USDCHS is operated by a volunteer group of lawyers, judges, scholars, and lay persons interested in preserving the court’s history. This historical society is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Your

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Judge Otto Skopil

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-Lifetime Service Award  
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January 8, 2020

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2005 Annual Dinner / LSA  
Recipient Katherine O'Neil

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History, Hospitality, and  
Hops  
January 3, 2020

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2005 Annual Picnic  
Honoring Oregon History  
Makers

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The Investiture of U.S.  
Magistrate Judge Mustafa  
Taher Kasubhai  
December 17, 2019

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2006 Annual Dinner /  
Lifetime Service Award  
Recipients Tom Stoel and  
Carolyn Stoel

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The Hon. Danielle  
Hunsaker: A Gifted,  
Humble, and Kind Jurist  
December 17, 2019

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2006 Annual Picnic  
Honoring Longevity in the  
Law

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2007 Annual Dinner /  
Lifetime Service Award  
Recipient Norm Wiener

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2008 Annual Dinner //  
Lifetime Service Award  
Recipient Owen Panner

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2008 Picnic Honoring  
Legislative and  
Administrative Lawyers

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2009 Annul Dinner/Lifetime  
Service Award Honoree  
Nancy Moriarty

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2009 Picnic Honoring  
Officials and Lawyers for  
the Confederated Tribes

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2010 Annual

Dinner/Lifetime Service  
Award Honoree George  
Fraser

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2010 Picnic Honoring Trial  
Lawyers

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2011 Annual Dinner //  
Lifetime Service Award  
Recipient Senior United  
States Circuit Judge of the  
United States Court of  
Appeals for the Ninth  
Circuit Edward Leavy

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2013 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipients Norm Sepenuk  
and Sidney Lezak.

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2014 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipient Steve Wax

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2014 Annual Picnic

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2015 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipient Judge Robert E.  
Jones

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2015 Annual Picnic

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2016 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipients Ron and Jewel  
Lansing

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2016 Annual Picnic

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2017 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipient Jeff Batchelor

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2017 Annual Picnic

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2018 Annual Picnic

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2019 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipient Judge Anna Brown

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2019 Annual Picnic

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Articles

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Robert E. Jones, An Oral  
History

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Events

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2018 Annual Dinner/LSA  
Recipient Barnes Ellis

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December 1, 2017 CLE &  
Reception

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Historical Society's Annual  
Meeting and Lifetime  
Service Award  
Presentation

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Judicial Portrait Unveiling  
June 28, 2018 CLE &  
Reception

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Wild Wild History: The Rise  
and Fall of Rajneeshpuram

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Famous Cases Lecture  
Series

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Historical Society's Annual  
Picnic Through the Years

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Newsletters

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Oral Histories

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Ancer L. Haggerty

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Charles H. Turner

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Donald Ashmanskas

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Betty Roberts

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James A. Redden

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John Cooney

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John Jelderks

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Malcolm Marsh

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Michael Marcus

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Owen Panner

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Randall Kester

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Robert E. Jones

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Stephen Bloom

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Susan P. Graber

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Peter McCabe

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Peter McCabe

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Sidney I. Lezak

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Steven T. Wax

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## Photos

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[Annual Picnic August 2014](#)

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[Annual Picnic August 2017](#)

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