

DOCUMENTS

INDIAN WAR IN WASHINGTON TERRITORY

In this *Quarterly* for October, 1925, page 314, it was announced that T. C. Van Epps had sent from Los Angeles, California, two historic documents. According to promise then made, one of the documents is here reproduced. It relates to the condition of the Indian tribes at the head of Puget Sound as reported by Wesley B. Gosnell, Special Indian Agent, at the end of 1856, and gives his carefully drawn conclusion as to the causes of the Indian war then fresh in mind.

The preservation of the document is in itself an interesting story. Mr. Van Epps is one of Olympia's highly respected pioneers. In writing from California September 1, 1925, he says: "I started this life on February 15, 1847, but still consider myself a young man, mentally at least." In sending the document, he says: "This original copy came into my hands in this manner. You will probably remember that I had a book, stationery and notion store in Olympia for about fifteen years. Major E. T. Gunn was the publisher of the *Olympia Transcript* for many years and a close friend of mine. Upon his demise, the office fixtures were sold and I purchased from the administrator a sixteen-drawer cabinet for holding large sizes of cardboard. In the cabinet I found this original report. I presumed it had been taken there to be printed before sending a copy to Washington, D. C. I have preserved it all these forty-two years intending to send it to you to be placed in the Historical Archives of the State."

In 1857, the Territory of Washington published at Olympia, (Edward Furste, Public Printer,) what is now a rare book entitled *Message of the Governor of Washington Territory. Also, The Correspondence with the Secretary of War, Major Gen. Wool, the Officers of the Regular Army, and of the Volunteer Service of Washington Territory*. There are 406 pages of letters and documents pertaining to the Indian war. It is one of the prime sources of that period of Northwestern history. The document here reproduced does not appear in that volume. It was probably finished after the many other documents had been compiled for printing. The latest document included in the book bears the date of November 23, 1856, and this one by Special Agent Gosnell is dated December 31, 1856.

There is a reference in the volume (pages 73-74) to earlier work by Lieutenant Gosnell. Governor Stevens, in a letter to Hon. Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War, under date of March 21, 1856, says: "Lieut. Gosnell has made one scout in the Nesqually bottom of ten days, with 14 Indians. Yesterday morning he started out on a scout of three days with thirty Indians. The effect of the first scout was salutary. Such I doubt not will be the effect of the second, yet in the first scout Lieut. Gosnell went with his life in his hands. Some of his Indians were more than suspected, and he went with them alone."

The Governor's son, General Hazard Stevens, in *The Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens*, Volume II., has several references to Wesley Gosnell. On page 169, in giving a brief muster of Indian auxiliaries he shows the Squaxon tribe with fifteen under Lieutenant Wesley Gosnell. On page 187, he says: "Captain Sidney Ford with his Chehalis Indians, and agent Wesley Gosnell with a party of friendly, or pretended friendly, Indians from the Squaxon reservation—own brothers to the hostiles these—scoured the swamps and bottoms of the Puyallup and Nisqually." Again on page 255, he says: "When Sidney Ford led a party of Chehalis Indians on a scout against the enemy, he lay one night pretending slumber, while he listened to a long discussion between his *friendly* Indian followers as to the expediency of killing him and joining the hostiles. Agent Wesley Gosnell had a somewhat similar experience, What iron nerves, what devoted patriotism, thus to venture into the trackless forests at the head of these uncertain and treacherous savages!"

Gosnell remained Special Agent during the next year, 1857. Hubert Howe Bancroft in his *History of Washington, Idaho and Montana*, pages 176-177, states that two Indian Superintendencies were united in the spring of that year under J. W. Nesmith who found "W. B. Gosnell in charge of the Nisqually and Puyallup Indians on the Puyallup reservation".

It is well known that there were some genuine friends among the Indians of that time. It may be that a few have survived all these years who could recall those days of trouble. Still more certain is it, that children and grandchildren of those friendly Indians would appreciate it if records could be discovered setting forth the good deeds of their ancestors. However that may be, the children of the pioneers will undoubtedly share with writers

of history a feeling of gratitude toward Mr. Van Epps for his making possible the publication of this document.

THE EDITOR.

The Gosnell Report

Olympia, Washington Territory.
December 31, 1856.

Hon. Isaac I. Stevens

Governor & Superintendent Indian Affairs,
Olympia, Wash. Tery.

Sir:

Having received an appointment from you on the 1st inst of Special Indian Agent to take charge of the Indians parties to the Treaty of Medicine Creek, negotiated Dec. 26, 1854, I deem it proper at this time to submit the following report of the Action I have taken in pursuance of my instructions to carry into effect the stipulations of said Treaty, the condition of the Indians, and the state of affairs generally in my special agency.

The Indians under my charge are those belonging to the head of Puget Sound, and are collected upon the Squoxain, Puyallup and Nisqually Reservations. The number of Indians belonging to each may be set down as follows: Squoxain 375, Puyallup 550, and Nisqually 240.

The Indians belonging to Squoxain Reservation have come in pretty generally for the winter. They are comfortably clothed, enjoy very good health and appear to be well satisfied and contented. Eight Indian houses have been completed, and are occupied by the Indians who much prefer them to their former miserable huts. A blacksmith shop has also been completed, and will be in operation in a few days, or as soon as iron can be obtained. As these Indians have provided for themselves considerable food for the winter, I shall issue provisions to them very sparingly, until the Spring months, which are the most severe on them for subsistence. I have visited the Indians on the Puyallup and Nisqually Reservations twice during the last month.

Warren Gove, the Carpenter appointed under the Treaty, is in charge of the Puyallup Reservation, and is engaged in constructing quarters for the winter and in making preparations for raising a crop next year. A contract has been let to Messrs. Harned & Morgan to build twelve Indian houses on this Reservation.

Owing to the great difficulty of obtaining sawed lumber in that vicinity, I do not expect that those houses will be completed

before the first of May next. There are only about 200 Indians on this Reservation at present. They are in a very destitute condition both as regards clothing and food. They are also very unhealthy and are dying off rapidly. They appear to be very religiously inclined and the Catholic Priests have probably more influence with them than any other tribe on the Sound. On the 8th inst. the Chief of this Tribe, *K'Qatch-ee*, died.—He was about 80 years of age, had always borne the character of a good Indian, and the instructions which he gave to his people a short time before his decease were very good, and will have a beneficial influence. The head chief of the Puyallup Tribe is now *Es-ahl-atahte*.

Wm. P. Wells, the farmer under the Treaty, will take charge of the Nisqually Reservation as soon as the weather moderates sufficiently to permit the necessary work to be done. Quite a number, perhaps 100 Indians, have congregated here. These Indians are also badly prepared for the winter, both as to food and clothing. Their health, however, is generally very good. The Indian "Charley" mentioned in my report as Local Agent, who was then missing, has been found dead on the Chehalis river. It is supposed that his death was caused by a fall of some twenty feet from a log lying across a ravine, and which he attempted to go over in a state of intoxication. His Tribe appear satisfied that his death was accidental.

I am happy to be able to state that but comparatively little whiskey has been trafficked during this month among the Indians of my charge. They all manifest a very friendly disposition towards the whites and are very anxious that all those steps towards the improvement of their condition which are referred to in their Treaty should be carried into execution without delay.

On the first breaking out of hostilities, the friendly Indians having been removed to Reservations under orders of the Indian Department, many of them were compelled to leave their horses behind to the mercy of the hostiles and volunteers. Some of these horses were afterwards retaken, but many were lost. Over 30 horses are now claimed to have been thus lost by the Indians under my charge. The Indian Department has always promised that the friendly Indians should be indemnified for all losses consequent upon their removal to Reservations. I respectfully call your attention to this matter and ask that some steps may be taken at an early day towards paying those Indians who have suffered in this way.

I desire to call your attention to the course pursued by the Military authorities in reference to Indians who were engaged in hostilities against the whites west of the Cascades. The fact that Indians known to have been engaged in the murders of white men and women, are suffered to run at large through the Territory, and no steps taken to arrest them for trial before the Civil Courts has a bad effect upon the friendly Indians as well as upon the citizens, and may yet be the cause of serious difficulty. I have refused to receive such Indians upon the Reservations for the following reasons: 1. I did not deem it the legitimate duty of the Indian Service to furnish an asylum of protection to known Indian murderers. 2. As those murderers are liable, until after a trial, to be killed by white men who are the relatives or friends of the persons murdered, to collect them on the Reservations would be to make those places the theatre of illegal revenge, by proclaiming to all those who had lost relatives in the recent hostilities where to come to find the murderers. 3. I have not the power, if I even possessed the authority, to protect these murderers from the whites. The Indians have always been taught by us that the violators of the law would be brought to justice; but when they see murderers running at large over the Territory, and no steps taken by the Military to arrest them, or shot down without trial by the incensed relatives of the deceased, their faith in the professions of government is much shaken.

After an Indian has been tried and acquitted, I will receive him and will protect him with my life against any and all attempts of white men to injure him. But until they are tried by the Courts and discharged, I will not receive or take charge of known murderers. In order that I may not be thought to arrive at unfavorable conclusions as to the guilt of Indians without proper foundation, I will state that my information is always derived from either the Indians of the tribe to which the accused belongs, or from the fact that an indictment is pending against him in Court. For the sake therefore of justice to the white man as well as the Indian, and for the purpose, if possible, of preventing any further Indian difficulties in this Territory, I do trust that the Military authorities of this Territory will, ere it is too late, take this matter in hand, arrest all supposed Indian murderers and turn them over to the Civil Courts where they will receive a fair and impartial trial.

The principal portion of the hostiles west of the Cascades in

the late Indian war were from the Puyallup and Nisqually Tribes, which are now under my charge. In my intercourse with these tribes I have derived considerable information from them in reference to the origin of the war, which, as it may be interesting to you, I will take the liberty of inserting in this report.

The Indian War has been in contemplation for over three years by the Klickatats, Yakimas and Walla Wallas. During the summer of '55 they made a proposition to the Indians on the Sound to assist in exterminating the whites, and they should receive an equal share of the spoils. The Treaty with these Indians was not the cause of the outbreak, but was only used by those who had determined on a war as a ground of argument to create disaffection among the others. During the summer Leschi, a Nisqually chief, visited the Indians east of the Cascades, both in this and Oregon Territory. The Yakimas, Klickatats and Walla Wallas were then holding Councils in reference to their plan of operations in the proposed war against the whites. These Councils were attended by Leschi, and at one of them a proposition was made to him by those Tribes, that if he and his brother Quiemuth, could succeed in inciting the Nisquallies to open acts of hostility against the settlements on Puget Sound, they would receive in payment for their Services 100 head of Cattle and 150 horses. This proposition was accepted by Leschi, on behalf of himself and his brother, and the bargain was formally concluded.

On his return to the Sound country, he told his people that the extermination of the whites in this Territory had been agreed upon by the Indians east of the Cascades, and urged them by every argument, threat and persuasion in his power, to join in the combination. He told them that besides their share of the spoils (movable property) that they would of course possess all the buildings and other improvements made on the soil by the whites. He represented to them that the Indians east of the mountains were very powerful and told them that it was their design to not only exterminate the whites, but to kill and make slaves of all Indians on the Sound whom they found had not taken up arms against the whites. This threat added to other arguments was not without its influence in exciting them to revolt. It was Leschi who first started the famous story of the *Polakly Illehee* or "Land of Darkness"—a story most admirably adapted to work upon the fears and credulity of an ignorant and uncivilized people: it spread among all the Indians with the rapidity of wild-fire, exciting horror at

the terrible future in store for them and arousing their latent savage hatred for all whites. These chiefs did not calculate that we would receive any assistance from abroad.—They expected, as the Indians of Oregon were hostile, that the people of that Territory would have enough to do to protect themselves, and that before a sufficient force of troops from California or the States could reach us, their work could be done and their object attained.

Another inducement to go to war was offered to them by certain employees and discharged employees of the Hudsons Bay Company and other foreigners in this Territory, intermarried with Indian women. These people told the Indians that a war between the United States and Great Britain was unavoidable, and that if they could succeed in wiping out the Settlement north of the Columbia river, they would not only receive the benefits of the plunder, but the Americans would never again attempt to settle the country, and they could obtain better pay for their lands from the English Government.

These assurances I am informed were accompanied by liberal presents of ammunition and promises of further assistance in case of need.

During the Summer of 1855 a Hudsons Bay Pack Train, with a very large quantity of Powder, Lead and other supplies, left Fort Nisqually for Fort Colville. I am informed by a white man who professed to be knowing to the fact, that in passing through the Klickatats Country, the gentleman in charge of the Train, made presents of large quantities of ammunition to those Indians, openly encouraging them to take up arms against the Americans, and assuring them that there was no doubt of their success, if they were united, and further that he felt certain that all the Indians both east and west of the Cascades would cooperate with them. Shortly afterwards the murders of those citizens of this Territory on their way to Fort Colville Gold mines, took place, and I cannot but regard this as a confirmation of the truth of the information I received.

The Upper Nisquallys, Upper Puyallups, a portion of the lower Puyallups, the Klickatats and other Indians living near the head of Green and White rivers, together with a portion of the Duwamish at once entered into the combination. The other Indians of the Sound, their Sympathies with the hostiles, but afraid of the whites on the one hand, and equally in terror of the execution of the threats of the Indians east of the mountains on the

other, hesitated, and stood for some time on a balance as it were, for peace or for war. Meanwhile those who were in favor of the plan used every effort to make the combination general. Messengers or runners were dispatched in every direction with exaggerated tales of the power and successful operations of the confederated Tribes east of the Cascades, and of wrongs committed against the Indians by the whites; and influential Chiefs travelled among the Sound Tribes exhorting them to take up arms and make common cause.

Without doubt some Indians had suffered real greivances in a limited degree at the hands of the whites. Bad white men had obtained the labor or services of Indians and failed to pay the stipulated wages. Their ancient burial places and fishing grounds had been interfered with, and old camping spots and potatoe patches had been wrested from them and plowed up by the Settler. These instances of wrong, however, were rare, and were deemed of less importance by the Indians themselves than by impartial whites, and are more than compensated by the many substantial comforts and advantages which they have received in their trade and intercourse with the whites. The hostiles themselves do not assign these as the cause of their outbreak. All the real causes operating upon the minds of the Indians west of the Cascades in determining them to take up arms against the whites, may be briefly summed up under the following heads: 1. The Yakimas, Klickatats, and Walla Wallas, being known to be powerful tribes, and feared as such, had determined upon war, and had threatened, if they were successful, to kill and make slaves all who failed to make common cause with them, and the Sound Tribes were afraid that this threat would be literally carried into execution. 2. The prospect of the spoils. 3. The encouragement they received from foreigners in this Territory. 4. Believing that unless effectually checked in time the Americans would overrun the country and the Indians would [be] wiped out, they regarded the present as a timely and favorable opportunity to extirminate them.

The Strength of the hostiles west of the Cascades at the outbreak may be estimated as follows: Nisquallys and a portion of the Lower Puyallups, under Leschi and Quiemuth 65 warriors: The Green and White river Indians together with the disaffected of the Upper Duwamish, under Nelson and Kitsap, 35 warriors: The Klickatats and their relatives, west of the mountains, living on and near the head of Green and White rivers, under Kenaskut

55 warriors: and the Upper Puyallups, under Quilquilton, 20 warriors. Total number in the field 175, who commenced hostilities on the White river Settlements by murdering men, women and children Oct [28] 1855.

In February following these were reinforced by 40 Klickatse from the East of the Cascades under the command of young Owhi.

It is now ascertained beyond doubt that the above were not the only Indians west of the Cascades who entered into the combination. All the Tribes on the Sound and Straits Sympathized with the movement, and the great majority of them, actually and formally pledged themselves in council to act in concert. Had these not been compelled by unlooked for events to violate their faith, the number of warriors in the field west of the Cascades would have been swelled from 215 to over 1200. What prevented the perfection of the Indian Combination [on] the Sound will appear from what follows.

The massacre on White river took place too soon. Nelson and Kitsap committed a fatal error by striking a blow until the combination was properly matured, and before the plans were agreed upon and fully understood. Although it was undoubtedly a mistake, yet the step taken at that particular time displays Shrewdness and bears evidence that it was not done without consideration. The Company of Volunteers under Captain Hayes, and the Company of Regulars under Captain Maloney, which had marched from Fort Steilacoom a few days previous left the Sound country in a comparatively defenceless condition. It was supposed by both whites and Indians that these companies would of course push on over the mountains into the Yakima country, there to join Major Rains for the purpose of punishing that Tribe for the murder of the miners. Very fortunately, and unexpectedly to the Indians, Capt. Maloney in command of the two Companies, after proceeding as far as the Nachess pass, determined to fall back to Fort Steilacoom. Had it not been for this occurrence, together with the promptness with which other Volunteer Companies took the field in response to the call of the executive, and the effective blows struck at White and Green rivers, it is more than probable that combination, notwithstanding the imprudence of Nelson and Kitsap, would have been perfected on the Sound.

As it was, however, the Sound Tribes generally, surprised at the massacre on White river, they were equally taken aback by the

sudden return of Maloney, and the prompt action and vigorous blows struck both by the Volunteers on this side the mountains and by the Oregon Volunteers on the other side. They were amazed. The energetic movement of the Oregon Troops in our behalf was an event they had as little calculation upon as they had of the sudden outbreak and immediate accompaniments. Without any thought of relinquishing their design of entering into the combination, all those who had not actually committed themselves by overt acts or hostility, considered it their best policy to come under the control of the Indian Service for the time being, quietly watch the progress of the contest, and stand ready to seize any good opportunity to strike an effective blow which a favorable turn in the war might present. Hence it was that all the friendly (so called) Indians had regular communication with the hostiles during the fall and winter of 1855, and always received accurate news of the progress of the conflict long in advance of the whites. Fortunately, the favorable turn, so anxiously looked for and confidently expected, never happened. At this stage of affairs it is proper to refer to the testimony unanimously borne by the Indians to the prompt and efficient action of M. T. Simmons, Indian Agent, in breaking up the combination of the Sound Tribes. Immediately after the White river massacre he went to work to remove the friendly Indians to a distance from the scene of hostilities, so as to prevent their conniving at, or joining in the movements of the hostiles. He told them that the war ground was on the east side of the Sound, and that all who remained on that side would be considered hostile by the whites and treated accordingly:—and that all who desired to be regarded as friendly must remove to the west side. To effect such an object at such a time was no trifling undertaking: but by indefatigable exertions and at great personal risk, he at length succeeded in removing all the Indians who were in any danger of becoming disaffected, except a few who remained in the town of Seattle to the west side of the Sound. Those thus removed were placed on Reservation under the charge of Local Agents whose business it was to watch them and give notice of any suspicious movement. The hostiles saw that it was impossible to receive assistance from the friendly Indians so long as they remained on Reservation, and Leschi made one effort in the case of his descent upon Fox Island, to break up the whole system. Having met with but little success in that attempt he never repeated it. Being thus subjected to a rigid sys-

tem of surveillance by the Indian Department, and receiving no encouragement from the several battles which took place between the hostiles and the troops, the Indians on the Reservations gradually lost sight of their former disaffection. Indeed in the course of time, seeing that there was no hope for the hostiles, some Tribes expressed a willingness to enter the field and fight for the whites. This offer was at once accepted by the Indian Department, which was desirous, in order to effectually guard against the possibility of the friendly Indians turning, to place them in an attitude of unmistakable hostility toward those who had taken up arms against the whites. Patkanim, the Chief of the Snoqualmie Tribe, who is known to have attended the Councils to effect a combination among the Tribes, having lost all hope in the success of the hostile movement, and designing to ingratiate himself and his people in the confidence of the whites, as well as on account of the pay which was offered, took the field at the head of 60 of his tribe, and remained out over a month. Besides the Snoqualmies, a portion of the Chehalis, Squoxin, Skakwamish and Snohomish tribes, actuated by similar motives, took up arms for the whites. By this means all sympathy with the hostiles was obliterated, and they lost all hopes of a combination among the Sound tribes. In order to avoid being misunderstood, I will briefly recapitulate the events which prevented the combination of the Sound Tribes against the whites. They are as follows: 1. The massacre on White river before a perfect understanding had been secured among all the Tribes. 2. The unexpected return to the Sound Country of the two companies under Capt. Maloney. 3. The prompt movement and efficient blows struck by the Oregon Volunteers east of the Cascades. 4. The policy of the Indian Service in promptly removing, immediately after the outbreak, all professedly friendly Indians to the west side of the Sound. 5. The employment of friendly Indians as auxiliaries to operate in the field against the hostiles. I have the honor to be very respectfully

Your obt. Serv^t.

W. B. Gosnell,
Special Ind. Agt.