

## THE INDIAN RAID ON THE CASCADES IN MARCH, 1856

Before proceeding with this narrative, the writer of which was a resident of the Lower Cascades at the time of that murderous foray, it will be well, perhaps, for the benefit of all who are not conversant with the locality, to sketch briefly the topography of that portion of it with which we are immediately concerned, together with the prevailing conditions of that remote time.

The Columbia River at this place flows approximately from east to west; and all the places herein mentioned were situated on the north, or Washington side. At the Lower Cascades, which was the head of navigation from below, was a little hamlet consisting of perhaps a half dozen dwellings near the river, in an open glade bounded on the north and east by a dense growth of small fir saplings; which, starting near the river ran out in a northerly direction for two or three hundred yards, where it made a square turn to the west.

Here is where the Indians displayed bad generalship as, if they had attacked that place first instead of places above, they could have sallied out of that thicket with but little risk and have appropriated most of our scalps as, although we had repeatedly been warned by a friendly Indian named Jack that we were in imminent danger of an attack at any time, we were utterly unprepared to offer any effective resistance. There is a long, narrow island in the river extending from nearly opposite the steamer landing at the Lower Cascades for a considerable distance up the river, which was occupied by a remnant of some tribe of Indians with whom Jack lived, although he evidently belonged to some other tribe. That he had associated much with the whites was attested by the fact that he had as good command of English as any of us.

About two and a half miles above the Lower Cascades, at the head of navigation for boats of any kind, a blockhouse was situated, and also another little hamlet about like the one below. From this place freight had to be transported by land to the Upper Cascades by one of the operating companies, connecting on the north side with the steamer *Mary* plying between that place and The Dalles; while the other company crossed over to the other side at this point, connecting with the steamer *Wasco* also by land.

Each of these companies owned a little schooner of about ten tons capacity each, that were utilized when the wind was favorable, which was the exception rather than the rule, otherwise, freight was hauled up to the Middle Cascades in bateaus by man power. The reason for calling the reader's attention to these boats will appear in due time.

### *The Raid*

The morning of March 26, 1856, broke with a clear sky and with a steady wind amounting almost to a gale, blowing straight down the river; notwithstanding which, the south side crew of which the writer was one, attempted to take a bateau load of freight up to the upper landing; but soon realizing the futility of trying to buck against that head wind, we tied up; after which I sauntered away, bound for no place in particular, but on arriving at the top of the bank my attention was arrested by a group of perhaps a half dozen men of which Indian Jack was one and seemed to be the center of interest.

My curiosity being somewhat aroused, I sauntered over in that direction to learn what it was all about; and when I got within ear shot I heard Jack say, "That's the cannon at the blockhouse and the Indians will be down on you before you know it."

During the whole time that we were engaged wrestling with the bateau the cannon at the blockhouse had been booming; but, for my part it never entered by consciousness. There had recently been a crew of men working on the road between the Lower and Middle Cascades which required considerable blasting, during which time I had become so accustomed to it that when a blast was fired it failed to arrest my attention; but when I heard Jack say, "That's the cannon at the blockhouse," believe me I never had heard anything plainer in all my experience. But Jack wasn't convincing his audience by any means; and they were contending to a man that the reports we were hearing were blasts, in spite of the fact that presumably he had every opportunity to know what he was talking about, and no imaginable incentive to lie about it. To this day I have never been able to account for that exhibition of asinine stupidity.

As for myself it required no argument to convince me that the Cascades was a good place to get away from just at that time and consequently I lost no time in finding Capt. Kilborn my employer, and also one of the owners of one of the above men-

tioned schooners; and as soon as informed of what I had heard Jack say and hearing the report of the cannon, he remarked, "I have been hearing those reports all morning and didn't wake up. Go and rustle up the women and children and tell them that our schooner will be off for Portland as soon as we can get off and if they value their scalps to be on hand as soon as possible," and believe me they lost no time in getting there.

Here I learned something about women that surprised me. More times than one I had heard women let out a squeal on beholding a harmless worm, and of course anticipated that much hysterics would be in evidence when they were apprised of what was up, and the reader can guess my surprise when not one of them whimpered; and in an incredibly short time after they were warned of the proximity of the hostiles the little schooner was on her way down the river with a stiff breeze astern with all sail set and to say that she flew would be no great exaggeration.

As is well known by all Columbia River men Cape Horn, between Vancouver and the Cascades, is a pretty rough locality when there is a strong wind blowing, and we anticipated a rough reception at that point, but when we were within two or three miles of the place we ran into a dead calm as if a door had been clapped to behind us, and the river was as smooth as glass; as if our good genius were saying, "I have brought you safely thus far out of a perilous situation, henceforth you can paddle your own canoe."

Not having anything with which to paddle the only alternative was to drift with an exasperatingly slow current for four or five miles, when we were met by the steamers *Bell* and *Fashion* running as squarely abreast as a well trained span of horses. On being apprised of the situation both boats went about instantly, The *Fashion* taking us in tow for Portland and the *Belle* stopping at Vancouver where she was boarded by Lieut. Sheridan and forty soldiers and headed again for the Cascades.

While the *Belle*, however, was on her way from Vancouver to the Cascades, the *Fashion* had a ten-mile run to Portland, necessitating a run of about twenty miles to get back to Vancouver; which, in addition to the time required to raise and equip forty men, consumed so much time that the volunteers, of which the writer was one, were left entirely out of the game. We passed the *Belle* about daylight on the morning of the twenty eighth, moored some little distance below the landing, where,

as we soon learned, Sheridan had already encountered the Indians. On steaming up to the landing we saw a large body of Indians quite a distance up the river, well out of gunshot, however. After they had milled around for perhaps ten minutes, one of their number who was on horseback pointed off to the north, whereupon they started on the run straight toward us. At the angle of the above mentioned fir thicket a few panels of a high zizzag rail fence was visible, over which they valuted like so many monkeys; which was as near as we volunteers came to getting into an engagement with them. However, during a period of about forty-four hours they succeeded in murdering sixteen persons besides wounding several more; and at the Lower Cascades there was nothing left but some piles of ashes to indicate that the place had ever been inhabited.

As was stated at the beginning of this article there were two schooners that played an important part in this momentous event, and only one as yet having been accounted for, it will now be in order to trace the movements of the other. When the first schooner with the women and children departed for Portland, most of the men remained, reasoning that, while the cannon at the blockhouse continued to fire, the Indians would all be engaged at that place, with but little likelihood of their appearing at the lower place; but if it should so happen that the Indians appeared in overwhelming numbers, they could take to the schooner and make their "get away" in short order.

Theoretically, this plan was flawless; but, like many another plausible looking theory, it had its drawbacks. The schooner with the women and children had barely disappeared down the river, than the Indians came swarming out of the above mentioned fir thicket in such overwhelming number that they hiked them to the schooner in double quick time. In the meantime, however, a contingency had arisen which knocked their flawless theory into a cocked hat; so that when they were ready and quite anxious to go away from there, the wind had gone on down the river, as if it had forgotten them altogether; and having no oars the only chance to escape the hail of bullets that were singing past their ears was to hoist sail, which, with the aid of the current to make steerage way enabled them finally to work themselves out of gunshot. There were only a few guns in the bunch, and why the man who had charge of the schooner didn't pull out before the Indians were upon them, none of them were ever

able to explain. Strange to say, only one man was wounded, while a bullet grazed the wrist of another, but not enough to draw blood.

Thomas Pierce, the man who was wounded was an old frontiersman who lived across the river at the present site of Bonnyville perhaps, and, discovering that something was amiss on the north side, he lost no time in getting over there with a good rifle, which, despite his wound,—a shot through the fleshy part of the thigh,—he never ceased firing till they were clear of the Indians. What Fortune dealt them subsequently until they were back at the Cascades I never had the curiosity to inquire. The next thing I knew they were all back and everything was running along about as usual.

The western terminus of steam navigation above the falls was known as

*The Upper Cascades.*

Here was situated the Bradford house, a two story hewed log structure, the lower story of which was utilized as a store, and the upper, as a residence and boarding house. This place was connected with the Middle Cascades by a tramway over which freight was transported between the two places. These two places were attacked simultaneously; before, as indicated above, the raid on the lower place.

The Bradford house to which all the settlers fled who had escaped the first onslaught, was capable of withstanding anything the Indians could have brought to bear against it had it not stood in front of, and in close proximity to, a perpendicular bank that was within a few feet of being as high as the eaves of the house; and to further complicate matters, a short distance back from the house was a depression in the ground, forming a sort of basin where an Indian was entirely hidden from the inmates of the house. Here was an excellent chance unmolested to build a fire; with which it would be quite an easy matter to set fire to the house.

Unfortunately for this well laid plan however, Mr. Bush, who lived in the upper story was an excellent shot with a rifle, and punching a chink from between two logs, for a porthole, whenever an Indian showed his head which he was obliged to do to reach the house with a fire brand, he immediately started on a trip to "the happy hunting grounds" with a bullet hole through

it; and although they succeeded in throwing several brands on the house, they did no serious damage.

I have before me an article concerning that affair in which it is stated that the Indians "succeeded in setting on fire the shakes of the roof again and again. Just as shrewdly, and repeatedly daring exposure, the little band of whites put out the fires."—And yet, although "They were on the brink of a mighty river they lacked a drop of water to cool their parched tongues!" Something wrong here, which requires elucidating. How did those people in the absence of a drop of water to "cool their parched tongues" succeed in extinguishing so many fires? Although it wasn't raining at the time it is only reasonable to suppose that, at that time of year it must have rained a short time previously in which case the roof would have been too damp to ignite readily. Be that as it may, I have a vivid recollection of lying shortly afterward,—not only one night either—rolled up in a pair of uncomfortably damp blankets with the whole of Washington Territory for a bed room, while the roof above me consisted of an exceeding leaky firmament.

Not having been present at the time of the attack on the Bradford house, my knowledge of what occurred there is only from hearsay; but as I had the same version of it from several of the inmates of the house only a few days after the event, it is only reasonable to suppose that, so far as related, it is correct; but how much they omitted, of course I do not know. They told of the attempts to fire the house, but they did not mention that the roof ever became ignited. Neither did they mention that attempting to run the rapids with a scow had ever been contemplated, as they no doubt were aware that the whole party would be exterminated in short order if they ever left the shelter of the house.

However, two men,—Bailey and James Lindsay, having been surprised away from the house, despairing of ever reaching it, determined as a last resort to take their chances with the river; but while looking for the most suitable place to take to the water they were mistaken from the house for Indians; whereupon Mr. Bush shot Lindsay high up in the shoulder, the ball coming out below, and missing the collar bone by a hair's breadth; which of course, disabled him for swimming, leaving him the alternative of reaching the house or being scalped by the Indians; and Bailey refusing to leave him, they reached the house in safety, all on

account of a lucky mistake that saved both their lives; as they could never have come through those falls alive.

At the beginning of the onslaught the steamer *Mary* was lying at the landing in front of the Bradford house with a fire going, but with not sufficient steam to stem the current at the head of the falls. Notwithstanding what would have been a murderous fire if the Indians could have hit a hay-stack, the crew succeeded in getting under weigh bound for The Dalles. It has been said that some of the crew were killed; but if so it was never mentioned in my presence.

*Sheridan's Battle with the Indians*

When the *Belle* with Sheridan's detachment of forty men, arrived within sight of the landing at the Lower Cascades there was a large body of Indians in possession of the place. Consequently it was deemed the better policy to land some distance below. The place chosen for landing was against a gravel bar of considerable size, devoid of vegetation with the exception of quite a number of balm-of-gilead saplings interspersed over the bar, none of them over four inches in diameter,—not large enough to be any protection against the Minnie rifles of the soldiers.

Here is where the battle took place, as there was plenty of evidence of the fact. Not more than thirty feet from the boat was a large pool of blood where one of the two soldiers who were killed in the engagement died, and as other evidence a considerable number of the cottonwood saplings were mowed down as cleanly almost as if they had been felled with an axe. How many Indians were killed in the encounter it was impossible to say, as they carried their dead off the field.

They probably wouldn't have given battle in such an exposed situation had it not been that Sheridan kept his men concealed so that they were right where he wanted them before they were aware that the soldiers were aboard the boat; and instead of making an easy capture of a steamboat, as was evidently their intention, they ran into a hornet's nest with disastrous results. Despite much that has been broadcast to the contrary, this was Sheridan's only encounter with the Indians, for the very sufficient reason, owing to the nature of the locality, that an attempt to reach the blockhouse either by land or water would have laid him open to ambush along nearly the whole route; and Sheridan was too good a soldier to be caught in a trap like that. It was

the proximity of Col. Wright's force that caused the Indians to withdraw, although he never actually came in contact with them, as they made good their get away before he arrived on the ground; and the last that was seen of any of them was as is stated above.

How many of the Cascade Indians were engaged in the raid, it is impossible to say. Their guns, consisting mostly of Hudson's Bay flintlock muskets, although there were some good rifles, were all loaded, but only nine Indians were apprehended, and were hanged accordingly. Afterwards, seeing a file of soldiers drawn up and my curiosity being aroused, when I went out to investigate I found an Indian with his hands tied behind him to a stake, about the worst scared Indian in seven states; which well he might have been, for had it not been that Indian Jack happened along in the nick of time, he would not have looked on the world to exceed two more minutes. When Jack saw what was going on he asked "What are you doing that for"? and when Sheridan told him that some of the other Indians accused him of being in the raid, Jack said "Why, he wasn't in it at all," Sheridan then ordered him turned loose.

I presume this is about as suitable a time as any to discuss the matter of the fragment of a cannon discovered rather recently. Concerning the conjecture that it might have exploded during Sheridan's fight with the Indians. Although he had a cannon aboard the boat it was not fired at all, lest it damage the boat so the deck hands, with whom I was well acquainted, informed me. Neither did the cannon at the blockhouse explode, and I offer it merely as a suggestion that some squaw brought it from somewhere to utilize as an anchor for her "canim" (canoe) while fishing for sturgeon.

All the plunder from the dwellings at the Lower Cascades that could possibly be of use to an Indian was found under a shelving rock on the bank of the river some distance east of the place, with a guard consisting of a lone old Indian who when discovered had a gun pointed at the party who discovered him. His friends had left him to the tender mercies of the whites, with disastrous results to himself.

Shortly after the Indians disappeared from the Lower Cascades as stated above, the volunteers were scouring the fir thicket, during which a young man by the name of Lyman Chittenden was shot in the arm by the accidental discharge of the Captain's gun.

Some time previous to the raid another youngster and myself attempted to scale Castle Rock; (I believe it is now called Beacon Rock) but soon gave up the attempt as impracticable. What then was our surprise to see several weeks after the raid a fire blazing right on the tiptop of it! Whatever the object of it was, it never came to anything.

I cannot close this rather lengthy article without further mention of Indian Jack. Of all who were concerned in that affair, none is entitled to greater credit; and yet, nowhere have I ever found so much as a mention of his name, notwithstanding the fact that, if his repeated warnings had been heeded much bloodshed undoubtedly would have been averted; while, owing to the incredible stupidity of nearly all the men in the place, his warnings fell on deaf ears for no other conceivable reason than that they didn't want to believe him.

This article is written at the solicitation of Mr. D. A. Brown Historian of the Skamania County Historical Society of Skamania County, Washington.

F. M. SEBRING.