

Territorial Government and Indian Wars

In 1847, the Cayuse Indians stormed the Waiilatpu Mission, killing Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, twelve residents, and taking dozens of hostages. The Whitman Massacre, as it would later be known, was the first significant episode of violence between whites and Indians in Oregon Country. It also initiated a thirty-year period of conflict and warfare in the region. Historians have labeled these conflicts, the Indian Wars.

The outbreak of war between whites and Indians reflected the drastic and abrupt transition that was underway in the region. By 1847, Oregon Country was changing in many ways. The Treaty of Oregon (1846) had ended the era of joint occupation and the Oregon Country, below the 49th parallel from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, belonged to the United States. The American territorial acquisition reflected a changing demographic in the Oregon Country. Since the early 1800s, only a handful of whites lived in the region. However by 1847, around 5,000 Americans called Oregon Country home. Most of these people lived in the Willamette River Valley, but there were other communities as well.

The increase in American settlement began to change the population composition of Oregon Country. While American Indians remained the majority population group, white Americans were no longer a rarity, but a significant minority. Moreover, the American pioneer population was not stagnant, but increased every year as more and more people journeyed west along the Oregon Trail. As new pioneers arrived, pressures began to grow between Indian and white communities.

The fundamental tension between Americans and Indians was over land. While Indians in Oregon Country had specific territories in which they lived, they did not view land as a commodity that could be owned. The land was a sacred gift from the Earth. It provided all that the Indians needed for survival. To them, the land must be respected and treated with reverence so that future prosperity was possible. American pioneers had vastly different opinions about land. For most Americans, land was a source of wealth. Land existed to be bought, sold, divided, cultivated, or changed to fit the needs of each individual owner. How land should be used was not

bound by ancient customs, but economic necessity. If it was profitable to grow wheat on a piece of land, then wheat was grown. Similarly, if there was high demand for beef, then the land could be used for cattle. In this way, Americans adapted the land to meet the demands of the economy. To them, land was a valuable asset in making money and generating wealth.

REASONS FOR CONFLICT

While Indians and pioneers differed in their opinions over land and its value, it was not a new disagreement. American and Indian cultures had held their respective beliefs over land for centuries. In spite of this large area of disagreement, Indians and whites had lived peacefully in Oregon Country throughout the early 1800s. This is not to say that there were never any episodes of violence. But armed conflict between whites and Indians in the region was rare. So why then did violence and warfare become increasingly common between 1847 and 1877? There were several developments in Oregon Country that made war between the United States and Indians inevitable.

DECLINE OF THE FUR TRADE

If not for the fur trade, white settlers may never have come to the Oregon Country during the early 1800s. There was little else of economic value that could be exploited here at the turn of the 19th century. Yet in spite of bringing the first white residents to the region, the fur trade was an example of successful cooperation between whites and Indians.

The success of the partnership was based upon trade. The trade and bartering of goods was a significant part of the culture of both Coastal and Plateau Indians. In fact, Coastal Indians would often travel east to obtain goods from Plateau tribes. In addition to their trade with the Coastal tribes, Plateau Indians had vast trading networks that extended past the Rocky Mountains to the Great Plains.



▲ The painting above illustrates a typical scene from a rendezvous, where Indians and white fur traders would come to exchange goods. These events became less frequent in the 1840s.

When the first white fur traders and trappers arrived in Oregon Country, they simply immersed themselves within the already existing trade networks. Both the Coastal and Plateau Indians were happy to incorporate them because the fur traders brought goods, such as guns, ammunition, alcohol, pots, pans, and other metal works that were difficult, if not impossible, to obtain in Oregon Country.

As a result of a healthy trading system, Indians in Oregon Country tolerated the presence of white settlers and their forts. The exotic and valuable goods that the Indians obtained from the forts and trading posts was viewed by them as a good compensation for allowing whites to operate in Indian territory.

The fur trade, though, began to decline in the 1830s and continued into the 1840s. Changing styles and the mass production of textiles from factories in Europe and the eastern United States lowered demand for fur pelts. In addition, over-trapping had resulted in decreased beaver and otter populations, making it more difficult to find fur-bearing animals. By 1846, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was no longer operating in Oregon Country and the Hudson's Bay Company had retreated

to Canada as a result of the Treaty of Oregon in 1846.

The departure of the fur industry did not stop white pioneers from coming to Oregon Country. As previously mentioned there were approximately 5,000 pioneers living in the region in 1847 and more were coming every year along the Oregon Trail. These new pioneers initiated new industries in Oregon Country. They became involved in farming, ranching, logging, mining, and other endeavors.

These new economic activities required land ownership and most white settlers simply squatted on whatever land they desired, neither asking nor caring for Indian permission to do so. Moreover these new settlers, unlike the fur traders, offered nothing in return for the use of Indian land. In fact, the white pioneers seemed to resent the very presence of the Indians. Indians could not understand how American pioneers thought that they had the right to claim ownership of the land. Even the Indians, who had lived on the land for centuries, did not feel that they owned it. But the Indians did believe that the land existed to provide for their living and they now saw white pioneers taking away their livelihood without offering anything in exchange.

TREATY SYSTEM AND INDIAN REMOVAL

Another cause of the Indian Wars in Oregon Country was the United States' policy towards Indian tribes. When the United States first gained its independence from Great Britain in 1783, one of the first major issues that it had to address was diplomatic relations with the Indian tribes. Indians made up a significant portion of the population east of the Mississippi River and they were a powerful military force.

The United States was financially and militarily exhausted from the long conflict with Great Britain; it could not afford to then fight another war against the various Indian powers. To avoid military engagement against Indians, the United States decided to make peace with them through **treaties**.

The United States signed treaties with the largest tribes and confederations, such as the Iroquois in the Great Lakes and the Cherokee in the South, recognizing the sanctity of their land and treating them as if they were separate countries that were diplomatically equal to the United States. Furthermore in 1790 and 1793, the United States passed laws that required whites to receive a license to do business with Indian tribes and forbid white settlement on Indian territory.

However by 1828, times had changed. Indian populations in the eastern United States had dwindled and American populations had increased. The population increases coupled with the economic prosperity meant that Americans required more and more land. It was not long before many Americans began to call for settlement on Indian lands. In 1830, **President Andrew Jackson** signed into law the **Indian Removal Act**, requiring all Indians in the eastern United States to be settled on reservations west of the Mississippi River.

The Indian Removal Act directly contradicted the treaties and previous federal laws. The United States Supreme Court ruled that removing the Indians was unconstitutional, but President Jackson and the states ignored the ruling and pressed ahead. During the 1830s and 1840s, all Indians east of the Mississippi River were removed and placed on reservations in the West.

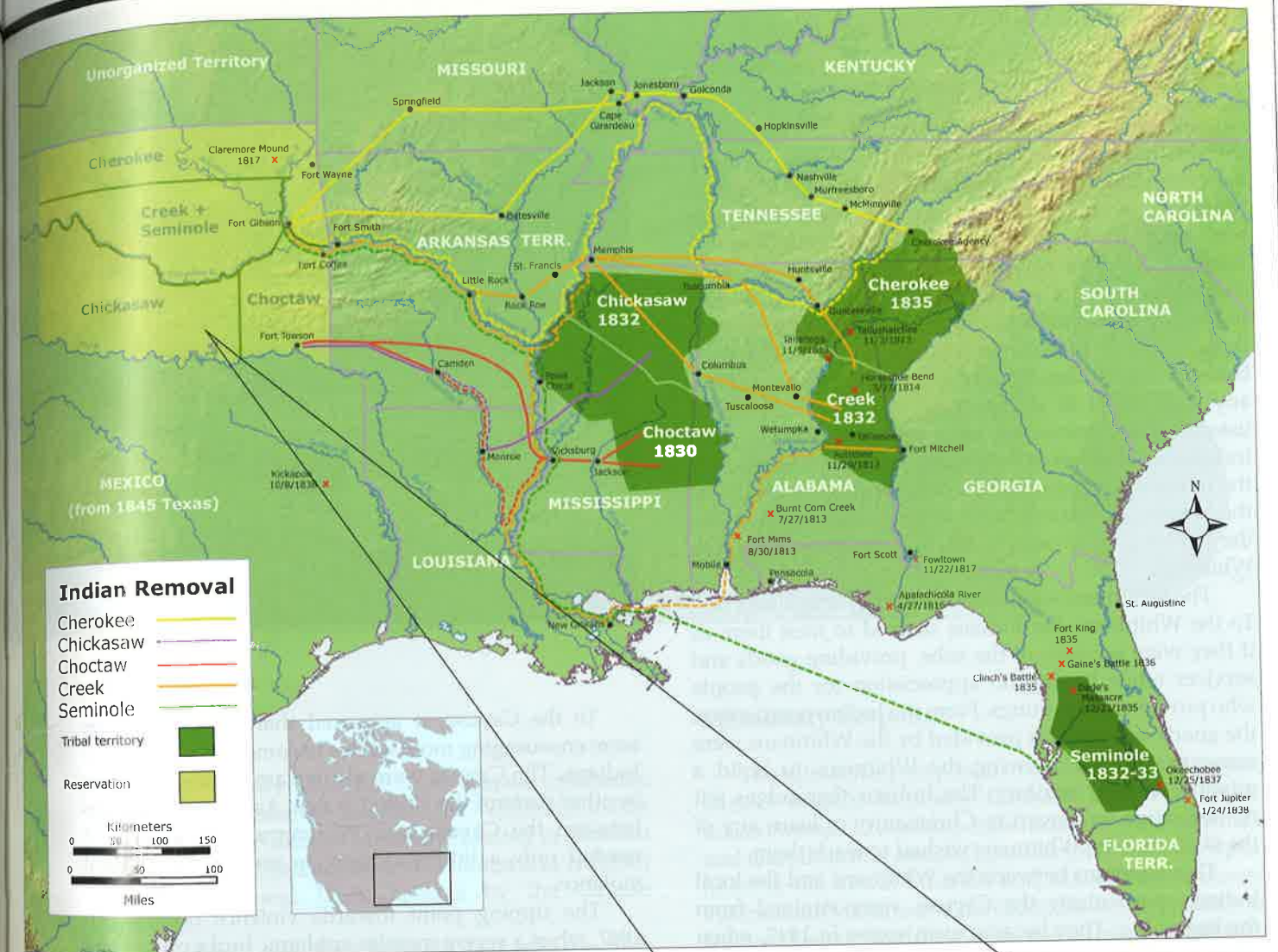
While these actions took place far from Oregon Country, their ramifications were still felt in the region. Indians in Oregon Country had extensive trading networks and routinely communicated with tribes from California, the Southwest, and the Great Plains. Through these trading relationships, Indians in Oregon Country became aware of what befell Indians in other parts of North America. The rumors fueled further distrust of the motives of white pioneers in Oregon Country.

CONNECTING TO AMERICAN HISTORY

Indian Removal and the Trail of Tears ...

In 1829, mining prospectors discovered gold in northern Georgia. Georgian politicians and business leaders were excited by the discovery but there was a problem. The gold was on the federally protected land belonging to the Cherokee Indians. Residents of Georgia found a sympathetic ear in President Andrew Jackson, who had been an Indian fighter as a young man. In 1830, Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, calling for the removal of all Indians east of the Mississippi River to Oklahoma, which he called Indian Territory. Though the Indian Act was ruled unconstitutional, the government proceeded with the removal.

Originally the Cherokee wanted to fight removal, but in 1835 a group of Cherokee signed an agreement acknowledging the removal. The group was a small minority, but the government claimed that they spoke for all the Cherokee. In 1838, the United States Army marched onto Cherokee lands and forced them to march to Oklahoma. Soon after, they did the same to the Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole Indians. The journey was called "path on which we cried," hence the name Trail of Tears, because of the thousands who died along the 1,000 mile trip. The Trail of Tears set a precedent in American history for removing Indians from their native lands to reservations.



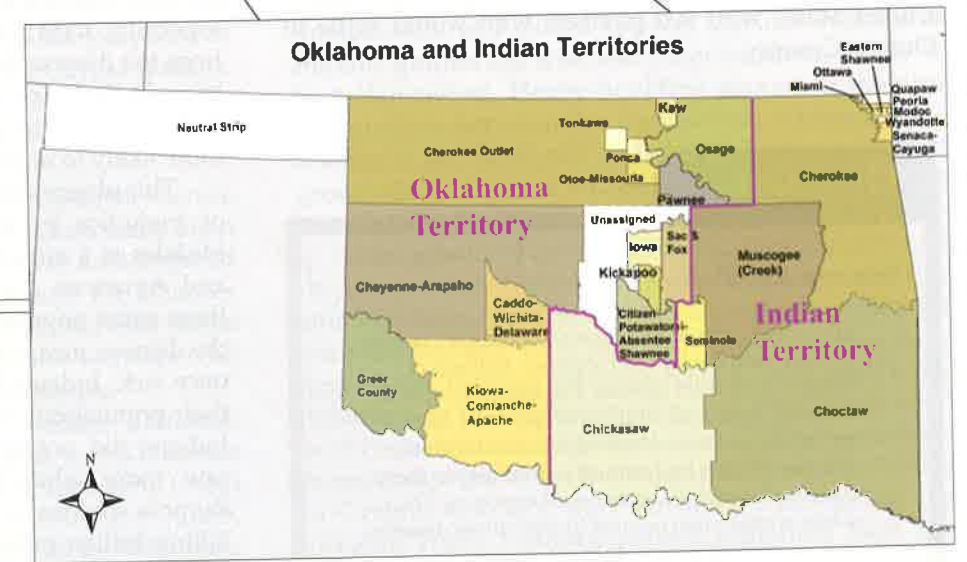
▲ Indian Removal - The Trail of Tears, 1830s - 1840s



▲ The painting above depicts the suffering endured by Indians on their forced march to Oklahoma.



▲ President Andrew Jackson



▲ Oklahoma and Indian Territories

THE WHITMAN MASSACRE

Background

The increased presence of pioneers, the decline of the fur trade, rise of other industries, and the fears of American Indian policy all played a role in the Whitman Massacre of 1847. **Marcus and Narcissa Whitman** had operated the **Waiilatpu Mission** in southeastern Washington since 1837. The Whitmans had hoped to convert the local **Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla** Indians to Christianity and to convince them to change their nomadic lifestyle to a more "civilized" society based on agriculture. However, the local Indians resisted any such effort to change their culture. They would listen to the missionaries, but would not abandon their indigenous religion or their nomadic lifestyle. However, the Indians did spend a considerable amount of time at the Waiilatpu Mission, but mostly to obtain goods that they needed or to receive medical treatment from Dr. Whitman.

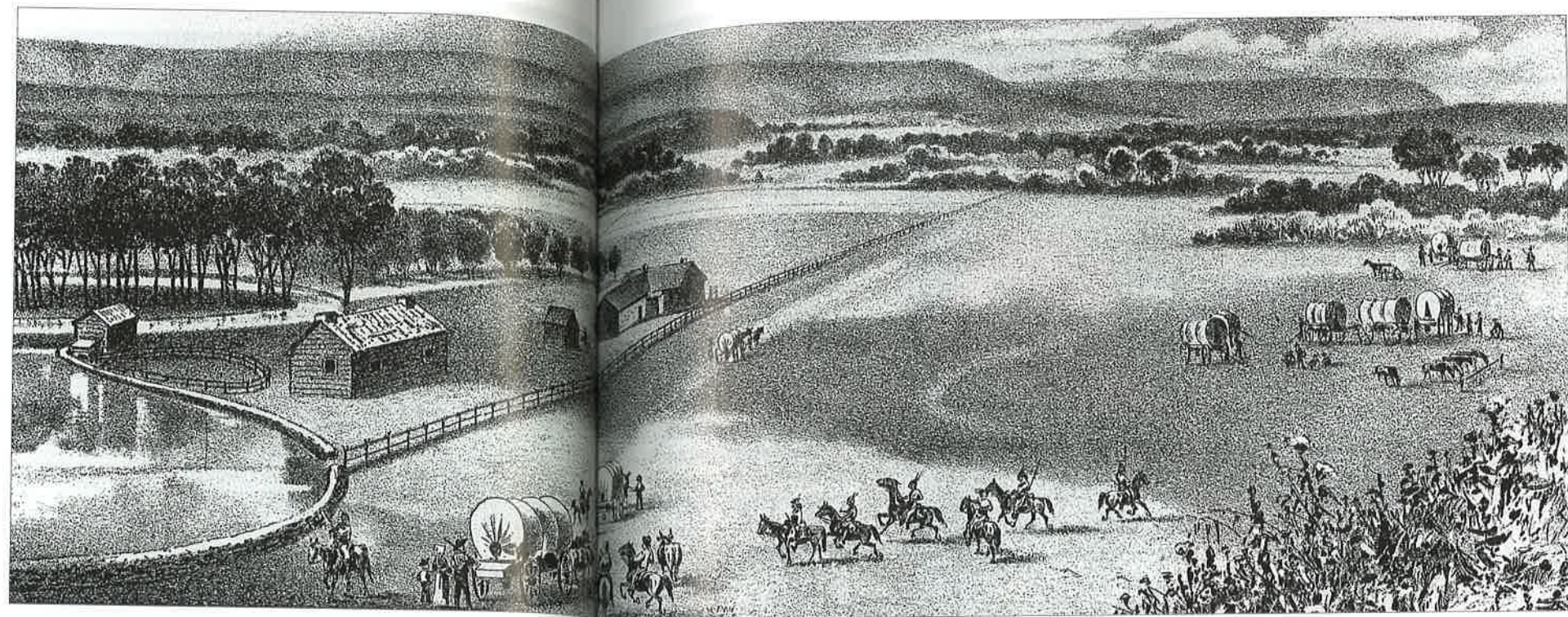
The Whitmans were alarmed by the Indian behavior. To the Whitmans, the Indians seemed to treat them as if they were servants of the tribe, providing goods and services while having no appreciation for the people who provided these things. From the Indian perspective, the goods and services provided by the Whitmans were compensation for allowing the Whitmans to build a mission on their territory. The Indians themselves felt no obligation to convert to Christianity or learn any of the skills that the Whitmans wished to teach them.

Thus relations between the Whitmans and the local Indians, particularly the Cayuse, were strained from the beginning. They became even worse in 1843, when Marcus Whitman returned from a trip to the eastern United States with 900 pioneers who would settle in Oregon Country.

QUICK FACT

INDIANS AND DISEASE

- Historians estimate that from Columbus's landing in 1492 until the late 19th century, millions of Indians died from disease. The diseases, such as measles, small pox, and influenza, were carried by whites and spread through contact with the Indians. Whites had natural immunities to these diseases because of centuries of exposure. Thus while whites often became ill from these diseases, they were fatal to most Indians.



◀ This engraving portrays Waiilatpu Mission as it looked before the Whitman Massacre. Below are portraits of Tilaukait and Tomahas, leaders of the massacre.



To the Cayuse, it appeared that the missionaries were encouraging more whites to come and displace the Indians. The Cayuse were also aware of developments in other parts of the United States. As a result, tensions between the Cayuse and Whitmans were tense and needed only a little prodding to escalate to outright violence.

The tipping point towards violence occurred in 1847, when a severe measles epidemic broke out among the local Indians and whites. The Cayuse Indians were especially hard hit by the epidemic and many died from the disease. Both white pioneers and Indians alike brought their sick for treatment from Dr. Whitman. The Cayuse began to notice that the white patients were more likely to recover than sick Indians.

This observation was probably true but not because of prejudice by Dr. Whitman, rather from biology. Measles is a virus that has existed amongst European and American populations for centuries. As a result, these same populations have acquired an immunity to the disease, meaning that they are more likely to recover once sick. Indians had no such natural immunity and their populations suffered heavier losses. However, the Indians did not understand the reasons, they simply saw more white patients recovering than Indians. Rumors soon arose that Dr. Whitman was intentionally killing Indian patients rather than treating them. This rumor combined with previous tensions encouraged the Indians to embark upon a final act of revenge.

Massacre

On November 29, 1847 two Cayuse warriors, **Tilaukait** and **Tomahas**, attacked the Whitmans inside their home. The **Whitman Massacre** resulted in fourteen whites murdered and a total of 47 women and children were captured and taken hostage by the Cayuse warriors.

The Cayuse and their hostages fled into the Blue Mountains. A few individuals escaped to warn others of the massacre. After the massacre, a militia composed of white pioneers pursued and fought the Cayuse Indians. After some initial skirmishes, negotiations between the militia and the Cayuse obtained the freedom of the 47 hostages on December 23, 1847.

However, the militia continued to pursue the Cayuse Indians for the next two years. Many historians often call this the **Cayuse War**, but it was never a widespread conflict. The Cayuse tried unsuccessfully for alliances with other tribes. Finally, the Cayuse turned over to the authorities at The Dalles, the five Cayuse warriors who were responsible for the killings at Waiilatpu.

In the end, the five Cayuse Indians, Tilaukait, Tomahas, **Kiamasumpkin**, **Iaiachalakis**, and **Klokomas** went to trial. After a long trial, the five men were found guilty and sentenced to death. They were hung on June 3, 1850 for their roles in the violent attack on the Whitmans and others.

Missionary Response

The missionary response to the Whitman Massacre varied widely between Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Protestant missionaries were alarmed and feared similar attacks by other Indian tribes. Upon hearing the news, Elkanah and Mary Walker closed Tshimakain Mission and moved to the Willamette River Valley. Henry Spalding was traveling to Waiilatpu when the massacre occurred. He returned home immediately and closed Lapwai Mission. Nez Percé Indians guided his wife and other residents safely to Fort Vancouver. Henry Spalding stayed to monitor negotiations between the Cayuse and whites for the release of the hostages, as his daughter was in that group. Once she was released, they too went to Fort Vancouver.

The Catholic Missionaries had an entirely different response. They continued to work, travel, and live amongst the Indians. Since they enjoyed better relations with the Indians, they saw little reason to fear their aggression. This fact led many whites, including Henry Spalding, in the region to suspect Catholic collusion with Indians to kill Protestant rivals and prevent them from converting souls. In fact, anti-Catholic hostilities in Oregon Country were so fierce that during the Yakama Wars, Catholic priests remained with the Indians rather than joining whites.

OREGON TERRITORY

The brutality of the Whitman Massacre shocked residents of the eastern United States when word reached them. In Washington, D.C. it helped push Congress into action and they passed the **Organic Act** of 1848, creating **Oregon Territory**. Oregon Territory was massive and included the modern states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and small parts of western Montana. The original territorial capital was at Oregon City, but in 1851 it was relocated to Salem. Both of these capitals were chosen for their proximity to the major population centers in the Willamette River Valley.

The purpose of Oregon Territory was to extend American government institutions to the region. During the 1830s, Congress had extended American laws to Oregon Country to govern and protect Americans living in the region. But the area was still under joint occupation and the extension had little practical effect. Disputes between people were usually handled by communities or taken to impartial individuals, such as Dr. John McLoughlin of the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1842, American residents living in the Willamette River Valley formed the **Oregon Provisional Government** to provide services and enforce laws in Oregon Country. But the Oregon Provisional Government was simply an agreement and had little power or authority.

In principle, the creation of Oregon Territory brought a radical change to the region. The establishment of a territorial government brought Oregon Territory under the direct jurisdiction of the federal government. In addition, it provided territorial and local government institutions in which residents of Oregon Territory could participate either through election or holding office. The change brought a sense of order and stability, especially to Oregon itself, contrasting sharply with the frontier days of the fur trade and early pioneer era.

The establishment of Oregon Territory was part of a national movement of expansion and organization. In 1846, war erupted between Mexico and the United States over the border of Texas, which had broken away from Mexico in 1836 and joined the United States in 1845. During the war, the United States Army marched deep into Mexican territory, eventually taking the capital Mexico City in 1847. In 1848, Mexico and the United States signed a treaty ending the **Mexican War**.

As part of the treaty terms, Mexico ceded its possessions in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and Colorado to the United States. Almost overnight, the United States had assumed its modern appearance south of the Canadian border. Only a small strip of land in southern Arizona and New Mexico was left and that was added in 1853.

As a result of the Mexican War and the Treaty of Oregon in 1846, the United States had officially acquired a significant quantity of land. The territorial acquisition occurred at a time when many Americans subscribed to the belief of **Manifest Destiny**. Manifest Destiny was the belief that it was the destiny of the United States of America to control and populate all lands in North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. The acquisition of so much new land seemed to confirm the beliefs of those individuals who argued for Manifest Destiny.

With the pressure from adherents to Manifest Destiny, the federal government acted swiftly to organize territories in the American West. Between 1848 and 1853, the territories of Oregon, Nebraska, Kansas, Utah, Minnesota, and Washington were created. Additionally, California became a state in 1850. In this way, the establishment of Oregon Territory in 1848 and Washington Territory in 1853 can be seen as part of larger movement occurring across the western United States.

WASHINGTON TERRITORY

Washington Territory was granted incorporated territorial status in 1853. It was generally assumed that it would become a state in the near future. An **incorporated** territory's organizational structure was based on its territorial population. Normally, any territory with a population of free white males under 5,000 became a **first phase territory**. A first phase territory had all aspects of its government controlled by Congress. A territory with more than 5,000 free white males was declared a **second phase territory** and would have its own territorial government.

Although Washington did not meet the population requirements, Congress declared it a second phase territory. The territorial government of Washington was based upon the federal government, with executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

The territorial executive branch was headed by the governor who was nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate. The territorial judicial branch consisted of a series of courts, culminating in a supreme court. The justices of the territorial supreme court were also decided by the federal government. Finally, Washington had a territorial legislature to make laws. Unlike the other branches, Washington residents elected members to the territorial legislature.

CONNECTING TO HISTORY

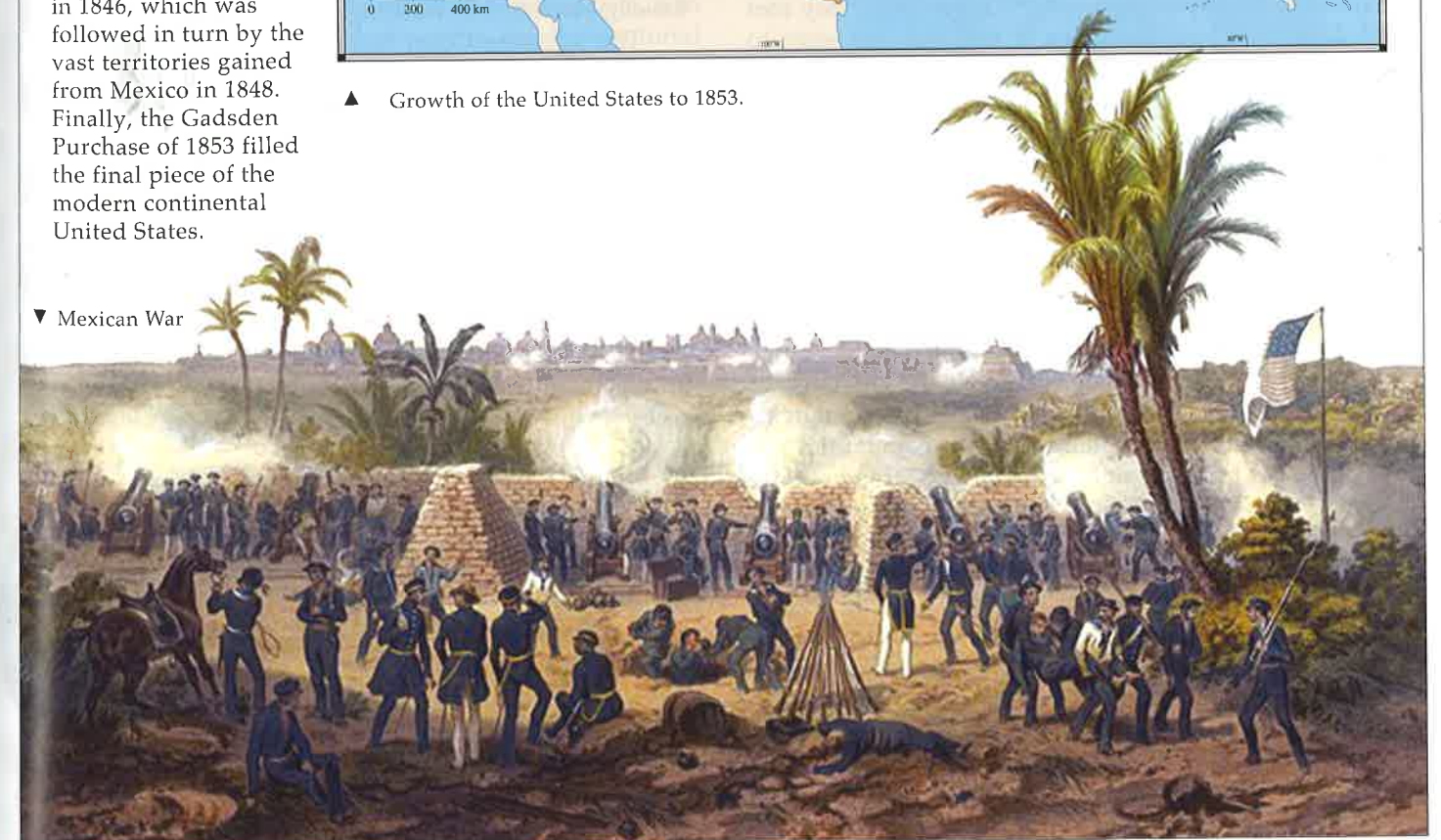
Completing the Continental United States ...

Many people look at a map of the continental United States and take its modern shape and appearance for granted. In truth, the continental United States was not always its current size. Following independence from Great Britain in 1783, the United States only stretched from the Atlantic Ocean until the Mississippi River. In 1803, America expanded greatly with the Louisiana Purchase. In 1819, the United States gained Florida as a result of the Adams-Onís Treaty. The next expansion occurred with the acquisition of Oregon Country in 1846, which was followed in turn by the vast territories gained from Mexico in 1848. Finally, the Gadsden Purchase of 1853 filled the final piece of the modern continental United States.



▲ Growth of the United States to 1853.

▼ Mexican War





Isaac I. Stevens (1853-1857) Fayette McMullen (1857-1859) William H. Wallace (1861) William Pickering (1862-1867) George E. Cole (1867) Marshall F. Moore (1867-1869)

TERRITORIAL LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Washington's **Territorial Legislative Assembly** was divided into an upper house called the **Council** and a lower house called the **House of Representatives**. All members of the Territorial Legislative Assembly were elected by the voters of Washington Territory. The Council had only nine members from 1853 to 1879. In 1879, the Council expanded to 12 elected members. The House of Representatives originally had 18 elected members, but was expanded to 30 members in 1877.

At first, Washington's Territorial Legislative Assembly met annually for sixty days in the territorial capital of **Olympia**. Between 1853 and 1865, they met 60 days each year. Believing it was not necessary to meet annually, Washington requested a change from once a year to only once every two years, or biennially for 60 days. Biennial legislative sessions began in 1869. Congress reduced the length of legislative sessions from 60 days to only 40 days from 1877 to 1883. The biennial sessions of 60 days were restored in 1883. Biennial sessions of 60 days continued for the next century.

In addition to its territorial government, each incorporated territory could elect one individual to serve as a territorial delegate to the United States House of Representatives. The delegate had the privilege of debate, but had no vote in the House of Representatives. This important position allowed better communication between the territory and the federal government. The delegate could voice his opinion as well as the opinion of the residents of the territory on major national issues and the needs of the people.

Congress had the power to review and to reject or **veto** any piece of legislation passed by the Legislative Assembly in Washington Territory. Every legislative bill could be reviewed; copies of passed laws were provided to Congress to make sure the territorial laws were consistent within the framework of the United States Constitution.

TERRITORIAL JUDICIAL BRANCH

The primary purpose of the **territorial judicial branch** was to interpret the law. Congress established the structure of the territorial court system. Washington Territory had a Supreme Court, district courts, probate courts, and a lower court called the justice of the peace. President Franklin Pierce appointed a Chief Justice and two associate justices. Their appointments were confirmed or accepted by the United States Senate. Probate judges and justices of the peace were elected by the eligible voters in Washington Territory.

The Supreme Court was located in Olympia. The court was basically an appeals court. The three Supreme Court justices also were assigned as district presiding judges. The three district courts heard both major criminal cases and civil suits. If a district court case was appealed to the Supreme Court, the presiding judge was one of these justices.

In 1883, the territorial legislature and delegate formally proposed to Congress to establish a fourth district. This fourth district was granted in 1886. The probate court and judge had exclusive power to decide on wills and testaments. Justices of the peace decided cases of petty or minor criminal offenses.

TERRITORIAL EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Since the newly created Washington Territory was an incorporated territory, all executive officials were appointed by the President of the United States. In addition, each appointed official had to be formally approved or confirmed by the United States Senate. These appointed officials included a **territorial governor**, marshal, attorney, secretary, and Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

BRANCHES OF THE TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT



- **Legislative Branch:** Legislative Assembly
 1. Upper House — Council
 2. Lower House — House of Representatives
- **Executive Branch:** Governor
- **Judicial Branch:** Supreme Court

The most important executive, and territorial position as a whole, was the territorial governor. Territorial governors were appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate. They served four-year terms, unless they resigned or were removed. The primary purpose of territorial governors was to enforce United States laws and policy in Washington Territory. These powers were quite broad and gave tremendous authority to territorial governors. Territorial governors decided important positions in the territorial government. They had the power to levy huge fines for violation of federal law or to pardon criminals convicted of a crime. Finally, territorial governors were in charge of the state militia and thus were powerful military figures.

As a result of the broad powers granted to territorial governors, residents of Washington Territory were eager to have a say in what individual received the position. However, Congress continually denied residents the right to choose their own territorial governors. Washington Territory was a land rich in resources and the federal government had a vested interest in ensuring that development in Washington occurred in ways beneficial to the rest of the country. Their most effective tool in shaping Washington Territory was the governor's office.

FOCUS ON

Washington Territorial Governors

Isaac I. Stevens	1853-1857
J. Patton Anderson	1857
Fayette McMullen	1857-1859
R.D. Gholson	1859-1861
William H. Wallace	1861
William Pickering	1862-1867
George E. Cole	1867
Marshall F. Moore	1867-1869
Alvin Flanders	1869-1870
Edward S. Solomon	1870-1872
James F. Legate	1872
Elisha P. Ferry	1872-1880
W.A. Newell	1880-1884
Watson C. Squire	1884-1887
Eugene Semple	1887-1889
Miles C. Moore	1889



▲ Washington Territorial Capitol Building



Alvin Flanders (1869-1870) Edward S. Solomon (1870-1872) Elisha P. Ferry (1872-1880) W.A. Newell (1880-1884) Watson C. Squire (1884-1887) Eugene Semple (1887-1889) Miles C. Moore (1889)

FOCUS ON

George Gibbs ...



George Gibbs came to Oregon Territory in 1849 after a failed attempt at gold mining in California. Gibbs originally came from a New York family. No ordinary pioneer, Gibbs was well-educated. He studied law at Harvard and was the librarian for the American Ethnological Society, an organization dedicated to the study of the native peoples of North America. As a librarian Gibbs discovered a passion for studying American Indians. He carried that interest to the Oregon Country.

Between 1849 and 1853, Gibbs helped negotiate treaties with the Willamette River Valley Indians. In 1853, Gibbs was hired to conduct a survey of the Indians in Washington Territory. His work gained him valuable insights into the people. During this time, Gibbs compiled a dictionary of local languages, recorded customs, and documented stories. He was considered the foremost expert of his day on the Indians of Washington Territory and was selected by Isaac Stevens to help negotiate the treaties. Gibbs observations, research, and experiences with the Indians of Washington Territory was later compiled and published in a book.

TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT AND INDIANS

The establishment of the territorial government had a profound impact upon relations between pioneers and Indians. To the Indians it was an alarming signal of the intentions of American pioneers. Prior to 1853, many Indians believed that American pioneers were simply a phase, much like explorers and fur traders, and that they would soon disappear. But the establishment of Washington Territory and its government sent a clear signal of permanence. The Indians realized that the American pioneers intended to stay and would become a permanent fixture of the land.

For American pioneers, the establishment of Washington Territory brought a new ally to the region. Pioneers no longer felt separated and isolated from the rest of the country. Additionally, pioneers now gained the support of the federal government in all disputes and a territorial government to solve local problems. There was also an understanding that Washington Territory had achieved a new status. While only a territory now, the region had begun a journey towards statehood. Pioneers began to see themselves as a chosen people, destined to pave the way for a new state to enter the union.

TREATIES AND RESERVATIONS

In order to become a state, Washington Territory would have to meet certain population requirements. In 1853, Washington only had a few thousand residents. The territory needed more people. The secret to enticing people to move to Washington Territory was land. The United States Congress understood this fact and in 1850 passed the **Donation Land Claim Act**. The Donation Land Claim Act granted 320 acres of free land to any white male citizen over the age of 18. Married couples could claim 640 acres. Recipients of the free land only had to occupy their claim for four years as well as develop it.

However, the problem with granting free land to potential settlers was the presence of large Indian tribes throughout the territory. United States officials knew that the Indians would not tolerate large migrations of American pioneers claiming substantial portions of their territory. To forestall conflict and open up lands for development, the federal authorities authorized **Isaac Stevens**, the Washington Territorial Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, to commence negotiations with the major Indian tribes.

The goal of these negotiations was to convince Indians to settle on reservations. A **reservation** is land set aside solely for the use of Indians. On a reservation, Indians were entitled to live in their traditional lifestyles and govern their own affairs without interference from the federal or territorial governments and pioneers. The establishment of reservations for Indians had been the primary goal of federal Indian policy since the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Thus, the federal government was simply directing Isaac Stevens to follow the same policy as was occurring throughout the western United States.

CONNECTING TO AMERICAN HISTORY

If there were one word to describe Isaac Ingalls Stevens, it would be ambitious. Stevens was born in 1818 to a wealthy farming family from Massachusetts. As a boy, he attended prestigious Massachusetts academies and later went on to attend West Point. At West Point he excelled in mathematics and engineering. After graduating first in his class, Stevens was placed in charge of improving coastal defenses in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maine. When war broke out between Mexico and the United States, Stevens was dispatched to Mexico and served under the commanding officer General Winfred Scott.

Growing dissatisfied with army life, Stevens sought to advance himself in politics. Rather than run for office, he campaigned to be named a territorial governor in one of the new western territories. In 1853, President Pierce named him Washington Territorial governor. His first job in Washington was to complete a survey for a potential railroad route through the territory, which he completed in 1854. Stevens next turned his attention to the Indians. He was directed to peacefully convince the Indians to settle on reservations. However, Stevens treated the Indians with such arrogance and contempt that he created tensions that erupted into the Yakama and Spokane Indian Wars. Stevens left the governorship in 1857, but continued to serve as the Territorial delegate to Washington, D.C. until 1860. In 1861, he joined the Union forces and fought in the Civil War. Isaac Stevens died at the Second Battle of Bull Run in 1862.

Isaac Stevens ...



Peace Treaties

At first Governor Isaac Stevens focused on the Coastal Indians of Western Washington. He negotiated five treaties with Washington's Coastal Indian tribes. These major coastal treaties included the **Medicine Creek Treaty** (December 26, 1854), **Muckleteoh Treaty** (January 1855), **Point No Point Treaty** (January 26, 1855), **Neah Bay Treaty** (February 1855), and **Quinault River Treaty** (July 1, 1855). These treaties were simpler to negotiate than the later treaties with the Plateau tribes because Coastal tribes required less territory than the Plateau tribes. The terms of each treaty varied, but some limitations were placed, as to fishing and hunting areas. Indians were to live within the newly established Indian reservations west of the Cascade Mountains.

It is important to note that most Coastal tribes did not understand the terms of the treaties; few of them understood that they were signing away their lands for life. In part the misunderstanding comes from cultural differences. Indians did not believe in permanent land ownership, but in land use. Most tribes thought that they were loaning use of the land to whites, not perpetual ownership.

In addition to cultural differences, there were language barriers in communicating the terms of the treaties. Stevens and his negotiators did not speak any of the local languages. Most communication was done through Chinook jargon, the regional dialect used for trade. Chinook jargon worked well for exchanging goods, but it could not convey the legal details of the treaties. Thus, many Coastal chiefs were not even aware of what they signed.

Whether they understood the treaties or not, the United States government considered the documents binding. Governor Stevens then turned his attention to the more challenging task of establishing treaties and reservations amongst the Plateau Indian tribes. This task was going to be very difficult because the Plateau Indians practiced a nomadic lifestyle that did not translate well to a sedentary existence on a reservation. Stevens divided his task by calling for the Columbia Plateau Indians to meet at Walla Walla. After completing the negotiated treaties, he would negotiate with tribes living in the Rocky Mountain areas of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming.

The Walla Walla Council

Governor Isaac Stevens, Indian agent **Joel Palmer**, and 43 soldiers arrived at **Mill Creek** on May 21, 1855. Most of the major Plateau tribes were represented. By May 28, there were nearly 5,000 Plateau Indians attending the **Walla Walla Council**. Important leaders attending included: **Spokane Garry**, **Peopeomoxmox**, **Lawyer**, **Looking Glass**, and **Kamiakin**. The council lasted for 13 days.

The Walla Walla Peace Treaties

The first treaty was with the **Nez Percé** Indians. The Nez Percé Reservation included 7,694,270 acres of land in northeastern Oregon and western Idaho. The main portion of the reservation was located in the Wallowa and Blue mountains. The Nez Percé tribe received \$200,000 plus a \$500 annual payment to each tribal chief.

A second treaty was signed by the tribal chiefs of the **Cayuse**, **Walla Walla**, and **Umatilla** tribes. They received 512,000 acres of reservation land in northeast Oregon along the Umatilla River. They received a \$150,000 cash payment plus \$500 annual stipend to each tribal chief.

The third major treaty of the Walla Walla Council was with the 14 tribes of the **Yakama Nations**. The Yakamas controlled most of the central section of Washington, but their ancestral homeland was greatly reduced from 10 million acres to only 1.25 million acres of reservation land. It was located from the Yakima River west to the Cascades. It also included a small 36 square mile area 25 miles up the Wenatchee River—a vital salmon fishing spot. The Yakamas also received \$200,000 cash and \$500 annually for each chief.

Through the negotiation of these three treaties, Governor Stevens had cleared over 22 million acres of land for settlers. However, Stevens conduct of the negotiations left much to be desired. The Yakama, Nez Percé, Walla Walla, Umatilla, and Cayuse Indians all resented his condescending and arrogant attitude towards Indians.

In spite of his success in negotiating treaties with three large tribal confederations, Stevens failed to convince many Plateau tribes to sign or even attend the conference. The Spokane Indians sent a representative, Spokane Garry, to observe, but made no arrangements with Stevens. Many of the northern Washington Plateau tribes, such as the Kalispel, San Poil, Okanogan, and Colville did not attend either. Smaller tribes, such as the Wanapum were often lost in the agreements or lumped with other Indian tribes such as the Yakama.

CONNECTING TO HISTORY

The Walla Walla Council ...

The Walla Walla Council brought together the most important chiefs of many Plateau tribes such as Lawyer and Looking Glass of the Nez Percé, Peopeomoxmox of the Walla Walla, Spokane Garry of the Spokane, and Kamiakin of the Yakama. These individuals, and numerous other important chiefs, gathered to hear the words of Governor Isaac Stevens. Although each of these men signed a treaty, with the exception of Spokane Garry, none of them were satisfied with their treatment from Stevens. Their feelings of resentment would play a large role in the subsequent Indian wars.



Lawyer



Kamiakin



Peopeomoxmox



Spokane Garry



Looking Glass



FOCUS ON

The Wenatchi Indians ...

In 1855, members of the Wenatchi Indians attended the Walla Walla Conference. The Wenatchi Indians were a Plateau tribe living along the Wenatchee River. Their territory extended from the modern cities of Wenatchee, Cashmere, and Leavenworth. Although the Wenatchi were a distinct people with their own language and culture, the territorial officials at the Walla Walla Conference combined them with the Yakama Indians. As part of the treaty signed with the Yakama Indians, a small 36 square mile reservation was granted to the Wenatchi at the confluence of the Wenatchee River and Icicle Creek.

Despite the guarantee of a reservation, federal officials never conducted an official survey to establish the reservation boundaries. The Wenatchi Indians remained on their land without the protection or safeties of a reservation. During the 1880s, the Wenatchi Indians petitioned the territorial and federal government to officially recognize the reservation promised in the 1855 treaty. However, the Wenatchi Indians never received their reservation. Their guaranteed lands fell along the proposed path of the Great Northern Railroad. To make room for the railroad, federal officials acquired the consent of Yakama leaders who signed away the reservation. The Yakama had the authority to do so because the federal government considered the Wenatchi Indians as a branch of the Yakama. As a result the Wenatchi Indians were forced to leave their lands in spite of having signed a treaty to protect them. Most settled on the Colville reservation. To this day, they still fight to have their original reservation restored to them.



Chief Sealth

Sealth, pronounced by whites as Seattle, was born around 1786. His father was a war leader of the Suquamish Indians, but his mother was a slave. Sealth gained a reputation as a fierce and brave warrior. He was famous for defending his people against other Coastal tribes who raided the Suquamish. By the 1830s, he was the most important Suquamish chief.

Sealth welcomed the arrival of white settlers. He was eager to trade with them for important goods. The city of Seattle was named in his honor. Chief Sealth did not participate in the Indian Wars in Washington Territory. He hoped by keeping peace, his tribe would not suffer. But his hopes were unrealized. Life on the reservation that he had secured was difficult and most Indians were poor. Traditional trading networks and economic activities ceased in the face of white economic development. Sealth died a poor and, perhaps, disillusioned man in 1866.



Chief Joseph

"Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers."

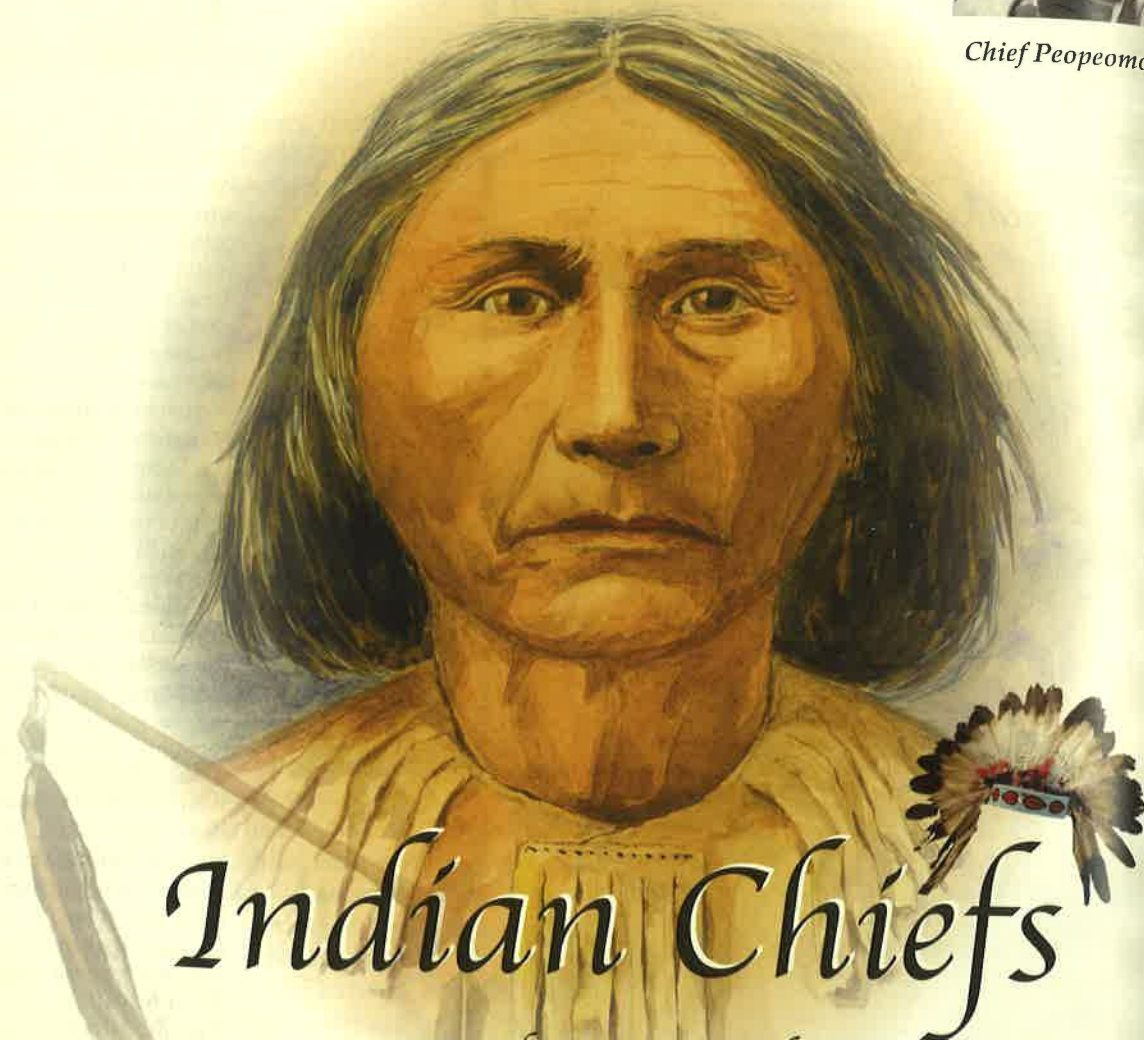
— Nez Percé Chief Joseph

"Goods and the earth are not equal. Goods are for using on the earth. I do not know where they have given lands for goods."

— Walla Walla Chief Peopeomoxmox



Chief Peopeomoxmox



Indian Chiefs

In their own words



Chief Moses

"I have kept my tribe from war... Moses not fight. When strange Indians come to my camp; I drive away. I keep peace always between the Indians and the whites. I am your friend. General Howard promised me a reservation in my own Coulee. If I not get it, I talk to you about coming here."

— Sinkiuse-Columbia Chief Moses

"I went to war because I believed that the Indian had been wronged by the white men."

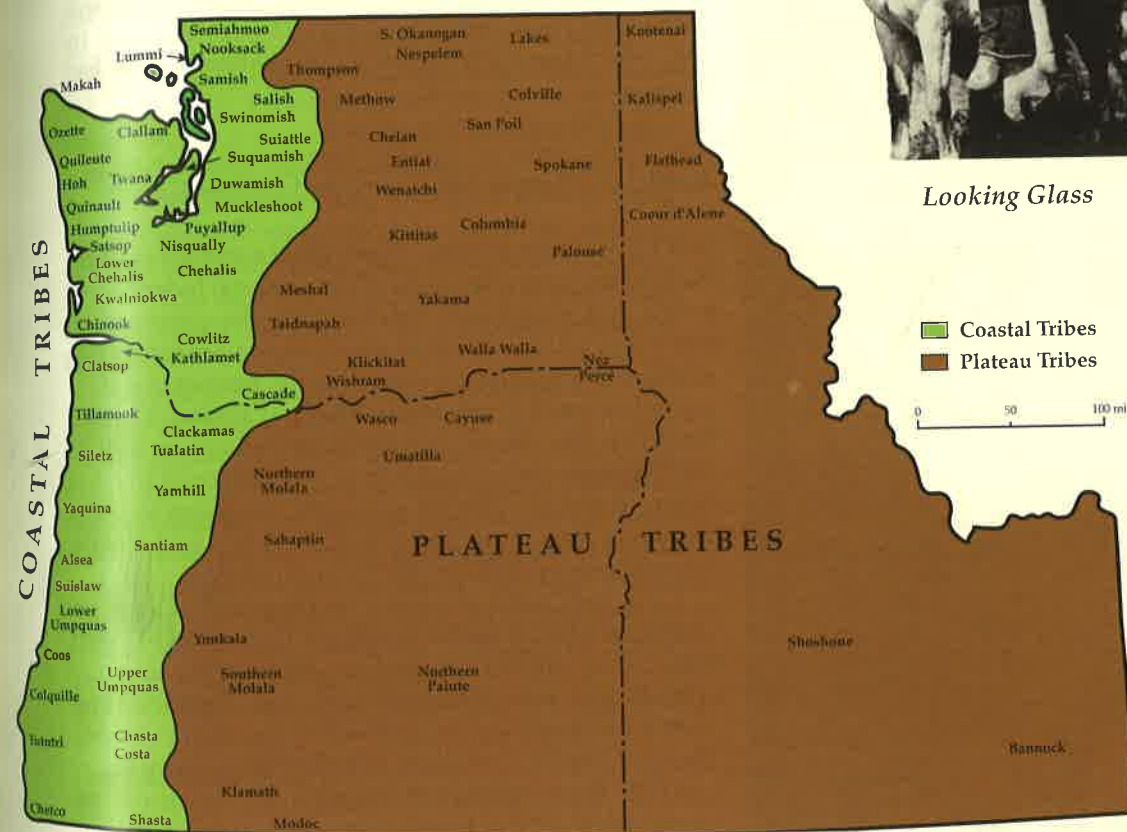
— Nisqually Chief Leschi

"I am now going to speak. From those who have been speaking they have been listening to us from above and from the ground. A long time ago the Great Spirit spoke to my children. I am from the body of my parents and I set on a good place. The Great Spirit spoke to his children the laws with track on the ground strait and after that there have been tracks on my ground. And after that the big chief, the President, his ground was stepped on in the same way. And for that reason I am not going there to trample on his grounds, and I do not expect anyone to tramp on mine."

— Nez Percé Chief Looking Glass



Looking Glass



Chief Leschi

Chief Leschi was the leader of the Nisqually Indians, a tribe on the southern end of Puget Sound. Leschi was well respected by Indians and whites alike and known for keeping the peace between the two peoples. In 1856, the Nisqually Indians launched a surprise attack on settlers and military stations in Puget Sound, resulting in many deaths. Leschi was accused of leading them and arrested. He proclaimed his innocence, but was convicted in a trial and executed. Many felt that the trial was unfair. In 2004, the Washington State Supreme Court reviewed the case and declared Leschi innocent of all charges.



Chief Napoleon

Napoleon was a chief of the Tulalip Indian tribe. He agreed to move his people onto a reservation by signing the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855.

"My friends, you have been speaking to me a poor people. This earth is known as far as it extends. This earth has red people on it and it has had as far as it extends. The people are lost. They don't think whose talk has come to us poor people. On the other side of the big water there is a large country. We also know that towards the east there are a great many different kinds of people. There are red people and yellow people, and black people. And a long time ago the people that travelled this country passed on the waters. And there is that country on that other side of the big waters they have their laws. Yes! they have their laws there. We now hear the laws they have there. And we now know they have those laws there. We also know the white people pass about in the waters as they wish to. I do not know what they find in travelling about on these waters or what they are hunting, whether it is timber, leaves, grass, or what."

— Nez Percé Chief Lawyer



Chief Lawyer

THE YAKAMA WARS

Many of the Plateau tribes were unhappy about the treaties signed at the Walla Walla Council. The Indians held that they had lived on their lands for centuries and the white man had no right to divide and sell it. Furthermore, many tribes resented Governor Stevens and the terms he dictated to the tribes. Among many chiefs there was talk of open rebellion and warfare. Fueling these warlike feelings was a deep mistrust of pioneers and the American government. The Plateau Indians knew the stories and rumors of atrocities and broken treaties from other parts of the United States.

The spark for conflict came in September of 1855 when Yakama Indians discovered two miners panning for gold on their treaty lands. The Yakama Indians knew that if gold was found on their lands the government would be quick to confiscate it. Most Indians in Washington Territory had heard of the vicious treatment



▲ Yakama Indian warrior on horseback.

received by Indians in northern California upon the discovery of gold on their lands in 1849. Some of these California Indians had treaties which should have prevented whites from taking their land for gold. But the treaties seemed to matter very little and miners forced Indians to leave their lands. Any Indians who refused were attacked.

Angry over the Walla Walla Council and fully aware of what would happen if gold was found on their treaty lands, the Yakama Indians killed the two miners. Rumors of their deaths spread and a federal Indian agent was dispatched to discover the truth. He too was killed by the Yakama Indians, and thus the **Yakama Wars** had begun.

Battles of Toppenish Creek and Union Gap

The Yakama Indians, under the leadership of Chief **Kamiakin**, knew that the death of a federal Indian agent would not go without reprisal from the government. Kamiakin and his warriors began to prepare for war. In addition to preparing his own people, Kamiakin sought out allies among the **Walla Walla, Palouse, Cayuse, Umatilla, Nez Percé, and Spokane** Indians, as well as the **Nisqually** Indians of Western Washington. Kamiakin began to see this conflict as a great campaign to expel the white man from Washington Territory and reverse the concessions of the Walla Walla Council.

The first battle occurred at **Toppenish Creek** on October 6, 1855. There, the Yakama Indians and United States Army officers engaged in a fierce gunfight. Army officials had not anticipated such stiff resistance and were outmanned and outgunned by Kamiakin's forces. The next day, they retreated to gather reinforcements.

The next significant engagement occurred on November 9, 1855 at **Union Gap** where Yakama Indians and 700 Army soldiers met for battle. The skirmish was inconclusive with neither side suffering many casualties. After the battle the Yakama Indians fled west into the mountains for the winter. The Army pursued, but was unable to follow due to snowstorms.

War Spreads to Puget Sound

Violence crossed the Cascade Mountains into the Puyallup and White river valleys in January 1856. The **Nisqually** Indians, allegedly led by Chief **Leschi**, attacked the blockhouse in Seattle on January 26, 1856, but were driven off by cannon fire from the United States' ship, **Decatur**. While there were other minor skirmishes around Puget Sound, there were no other major battles.

Death of Peopeomoxmox

As the Yakama Wars spread, fear and distrust amongst pioneers grew. Whites began to see hostile Indians everywhere. Their fears were based on a misunderstanding of Plateau society and tribal organization. Chief **Kamiakin** led a band of Yakama Indians against Army and territorial forces. But he did not speak for all the Yakama Indians, nor did he speak for all the Plateau tribes in the region. But that did not quell fears in southeastern Washington.

In Walla Walla, the legacy of the Whitman Massacre and fears of local Indians created high tensions. In October of 1856, **Peopeomoxmox**, a Walla Walla chief, led a raid on a former Hudson's Bay trading post near Walla Walla, stealing supplies and burning it to the ground. In spite of this display, Peopeomoxmox had not allied himself with Kamiakin. Yet residents of Walla Walla believed a full scale Indian attack was imminent. In response to their plight, members of the Oregon militia marched to Walla Walla to battle the Indians.

Naturally, Peopeomoxmox was alarmed at why a group of Oregon militia men were in his territory. He requested a meeting with the militia leader. At the meeting, Peopeomoxmox was ordered to surrender. He informed the militia men that since he was not at war, there was no reason to surrender. The militia took him captive anyways and then executed him. This atrocity prompted the Walla Walla to attack the militia, but they were defeated. Following the battle, the Oregon militia returned home.

The Cascades Attack

In March 1856, Chief **Kamiakin** led the **Yakama, Cascade, and Klickitat** Indians in a surprise attack on Cascades. **Cascades** was a small town where goods traveling down the Columbia River were portaged around a series of waterfalls and rapids.

Kamiakin's objective was to gain control of the Columbia Gorge. The gorge is located where the Columbia River cuts through the Cascade Mountains. Kamiakin's success would have isolated eastern Washington.

The settlers, east of the Cascade Mountains, would have been trapped by the Plateau Indians. Kamiakin's plan was also to unite all Plateau tribes against the settlers in the Puget Sound and Willamette River Valley areas. Although a brilliant plan, it did not work. Kamiakin's warriors were driven off by the Cascade settlers.



▲ Chief Kamiakin of the Yakama Indians.



▲ Colonel Edward Steptoe



▲ Colonel George Wright



▲ James E. Wool

End of the Yakama Wars

After the failed attempt at Cascades, conflict slowed to a halt. United States Army soldiers under the command of Colonel George Wright scoured the countryside looking for Kamiakin and his men but were unable to locate him. Nor were they able to find any Indians who wanted to engage them. In fact, all seemed peaceful. Thus, Wright returned to his base at Fort Walla Walla and recommended that all members of the Washington militia disband and return home. To discourage any further hostilities, the United States Army built **Fort Simcoe** on the Yakama Reservation. From here they could house troops and monitor the activities of the Yakama.

Thus, for the rest of 1856, peace returned to the region. But peace did not soothe the grievances. The Yakama still resented the terms of the Walla Walla Council treaty and the refusal of Governor Stevens to prevent pioneer intrusion on Yakama lands. Many residents of Washington Territory, including the governor himself, were outraged by the conclusion to the war. They wanted to bring Kamiakin and his followers to justice for instigating the conflict, as well as sending a "message" to all Indians about the folly of opposing the United States Army and the Washington militia.

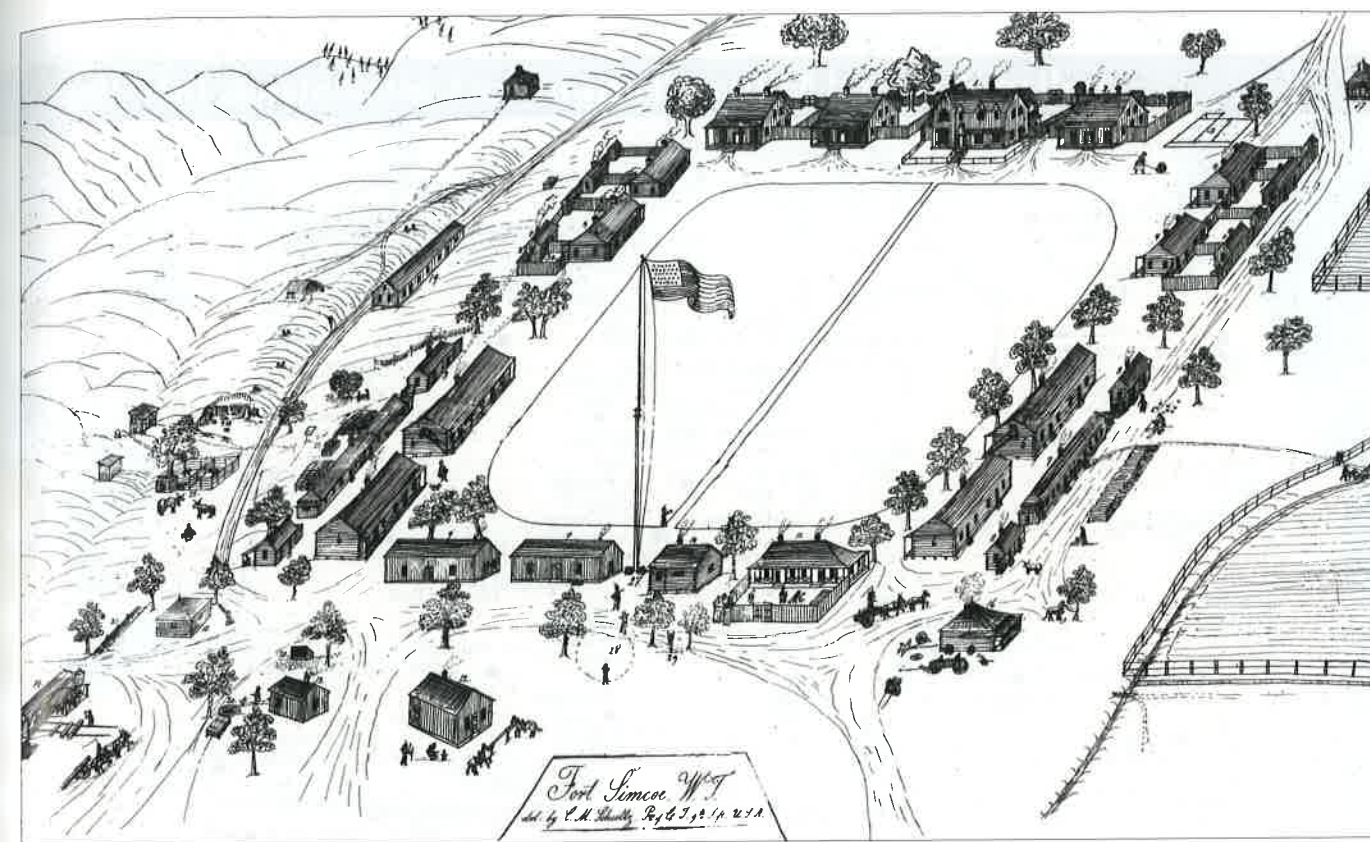
THE SPOKANE WAR

The Spokane Indians had attended the Walla Walla Council in 1855, but did not sign a treaty. In the years following the council, government officials approached the Spokane about signing a treaty and establishing a reservation, but they always refused. The Spokane Indians were able to avoid the initial spell of treaties and reservations for two main reasons. First, they were a powerful tribe. Although they maintained good relations with white settlers and did not participate in the Yakama Wars, they also made clear that they would protect their land at all costs. The determination of the Spokane Indians was helped by another important factor. The location of their homelands in northeastern Washington was far from major population centers and few settlers were eager to take their lands.

However in 1858, the situation started to change. Gold prospectors arrived near Colville. The Spokane Indians knew that gold miners would inevitably lead to larger settlements. Fear of large-scale white settlement grew when soldiers marched north from Walla Walla to protect miners from potential Indian attacks. The Spokane, along with their allies the Coeur D'Alene, Palouse, and other Indians from local tribes, confronted the soldiers in May of 1858. This led to the Battle of Rosalia.

The Battle of Rosalia

On May 16, 1858, the United States Army, under the command of **Edward Steptoe**, found itself surrounded by 1000 warriors of the **Palouse, Spokane, Coeur d'Alene**, and other tribes. Steptoe and his men were trapped in a ravine. The colonel wisely asked to speak with the chiefs. They told him not to cross the Spokane tribe's land. Outnumbered five to one, Steptoe withdrew.



▲ Fort Simcoe, built on the Yakama Reservation in 1856, was a strategic military fort designed to intimidate and pacify local Indians.

However, the Indians were ready to fight. They harassed the soldiers, trying to provoke a battle. The soldiers camped near a lake and the next morning began a retreat toward Fort Walla Walla (**Rosalia** – May 17, 1858). Colonel Steptoe was again surrounded by the Indian warriors; a running battle began.

Harassed and humiliated, and with several of his men killed or wounded, Steptoe again retreated. The detachment was again surrounded but they escaped during the night (**Pine Creek** – May 18, 1858). Steptoe and his men marched south to the Snake River, where they crossed without further harassment. They finally reached the safety of **Fort Walla Walla**.

The Battle of Spokane Plains

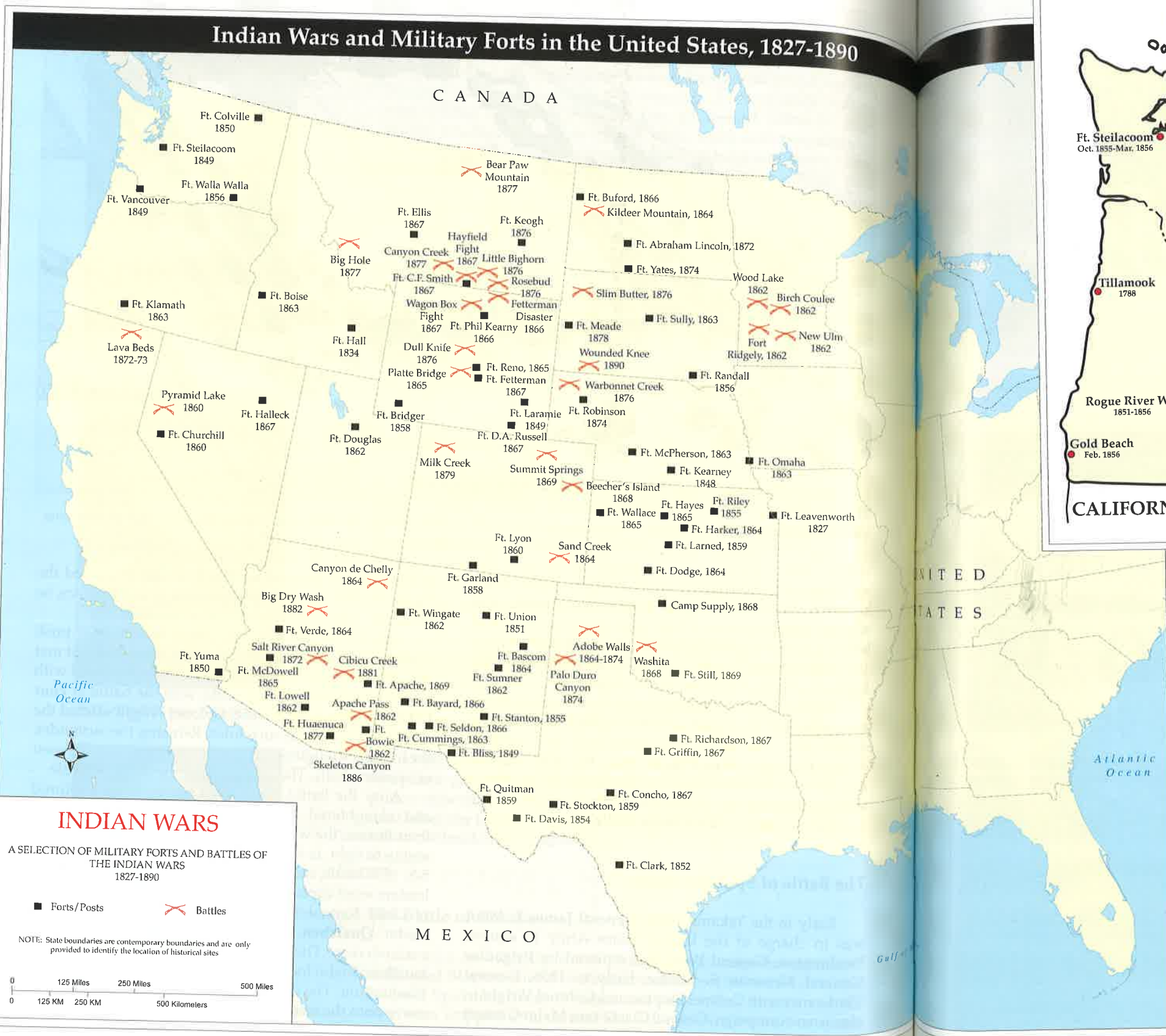
Early in the Yakama Wars, **General James E. Wool** was in charge of the United States Army in eastern Washington. General Wool was replaced by **Brigadier General Newman S. Clarke**. Early in 1858, General Clarke met with Colonel Steptoe and **Colonel Wright** to plan a new campaign. General Clarke sent **Major Garnett** with 300 soldiers north from **Fort Simcoe** to clear the river valleys of hostile Indians along the eastern slope

of the Cascade Mountains. Garnett quickly cleared the Yakima Valley. Reinforced with artillery and infantry, he drove the Yakama Indians towards Spokane.

Colonel Wright and his troops would then push north to Spokane and Fort Colville. Colonel Wright met with stiffer resistance. Wright's men, now equipped with the new long-range Sharps rifle, won the battle at **Four Lakes** on September 1, 1858. Colonel Wright offered the warriors a chance to surrender. Refusing the surrender, the Indians strengthened their position just 16 miles west of Spokane Falls. The soldiers won the decisive battle.

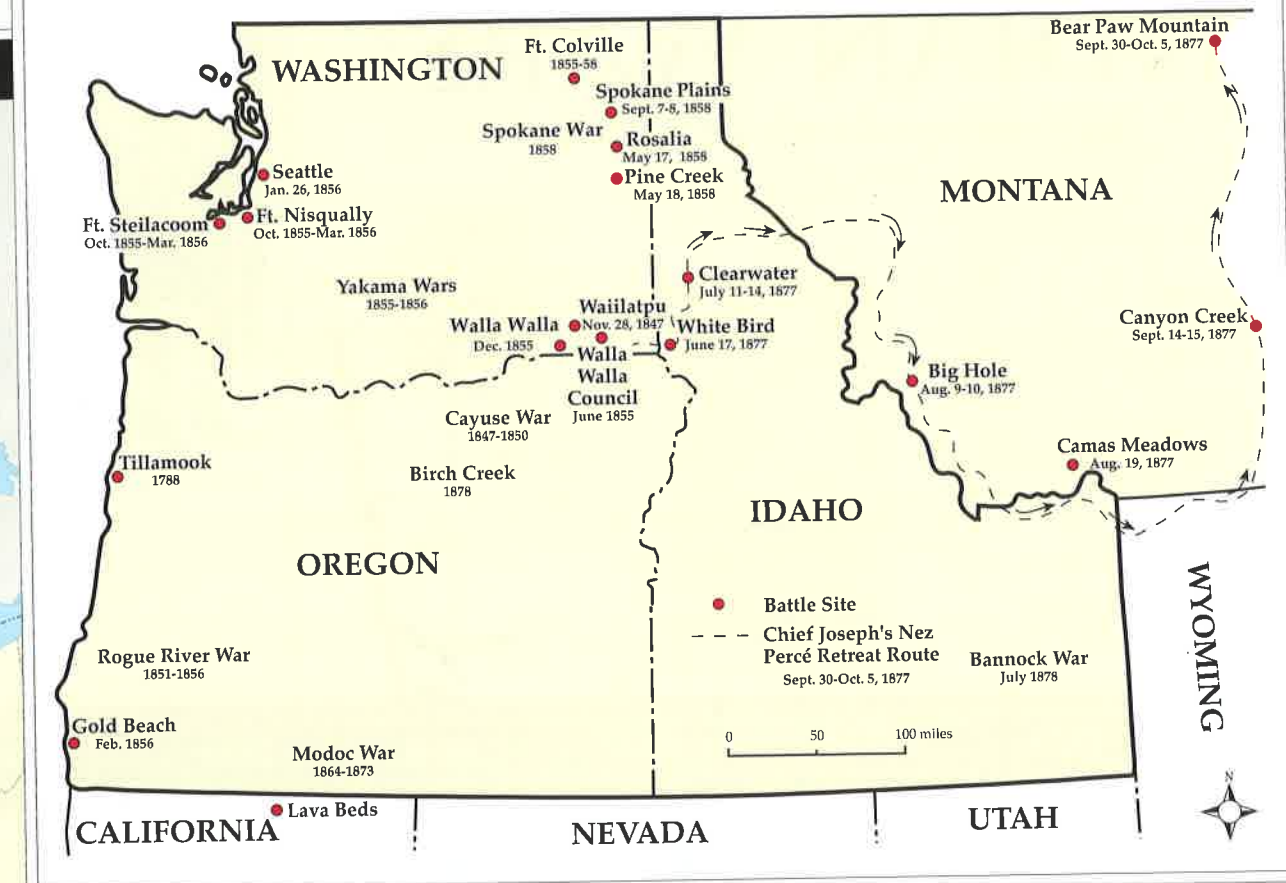
After the battle, the United States Army captured and slaughtered nearly 900 Indian horses. Without their horses, the warring Indians lost mobility and their ability to fight. In the weeks that followed the September 5-8, 1858 battle, many warring tribes surrendered. Their leaders were captured and executed with the exception of Chief Kamiakin, who escaped to Canada. Yakama leader **Qualchen** was executed fifteen minutes after surrendering. The defeat of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho Indians ended the military campaigns in Washington. The defeated Indians had no choice but to move onto the reservations. While small, local instances of violence continued to occur, there were no more large scale wars fought inside Washington Territory.

Indian Wars and Military Forts in the United States, 1827-1890



▲ Indian Wars and Military Forts in the Western United States, 1827-1890

Indian Wars in the Pacific Northwest, 1847-1877



▲ Indian Wars in the Pacific Northwest, 1847-1877

INDIAN WARS

Conflicts of the Western United States

The Indian Wars in Washington Territory were not isolated events. Aggressive American territorial acquisition combined with the subsequent pioneer migration brought about a concerted effort to remove Indians from their homelands onto reservations. The creation of the reservation system might have worked and forestalled war. But the United States and its citizens often did not honor the reservations and continually revised or eliminated them. This led to a widespread outbreak of war across the American West. The combatants of these wars echo in American history. Names like Custer, Crazy Horse, Howard, Red Cloud, Sherman, Sitting Bull, Cochise, Geronimo, and Joseph are etched into the mythology of the American West.

While warfare was spread across the western United States, a closer look reveals that conflict was concentrated mostly in the Great Plains and the Southwest. The tribes on the Great Plains, such as the Sioux, Arapaho, Crow, and Cheyenne were nomadic peoples who survived by following the buffalo herds. Reservation life did not suit their culture and they rebelled. In the Southwest, the Navajo, Hopi, Comanche, and Pueblo Indians were a combination of hunters and farmers. The reservation system took away the fertile lands in which many made their living and placed them on less favorable property. They too revolted against this situation.

INDIAN WARS

A Chronological Look at Conflicts

1830

Indian Removal Act

1832-1838

President Andrew Jackson enforced the 1830 Indian Removal Act - Indians were removed from the eastern United States and forced to move to Oklahoma (Indian Territory); journey known as the **Trail of Tears**

1832

Black Hawk War ended - United States Army, Illinois and Michigan militia, and Sioux Indians defeated Sauk and Fox warriors led by Chief Black Hawk

1838

More than 4,000 Cherokee Indians died during the Trail of Tears

1847

Whitman Massacre - Cayuse warriors killed Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and 12 others

1847-1850

The **Cayuse War** concluded when the five Cayuse Indians who killed the Whitmans and 12 others were hung

1851-1856

Rogue River Wars in southwestern Oregon involved Coquilles and Umpquas Indians, gold miners, settlers, and the United States Army

1855-1858

Yakama Wars occurred in eastern Washington and the Puget Sound region. Indian leaders were Chief Kamiakin, Chief Leschi, and Chief Peopeomoxmox



▲ Chief Kamiakin



▲ Chief Leschi



▲ Chief Peopeomoxmox

1858

United States Army defeated the Plateau Indians at the **Battle of Spokane Plains** in eastern Washington

1864

Sand Creek Massacre - Colonel Chivington attacked Chief Black Kettle's Cheyenne encampment in eastern Colorado

1867-1875

Comanche Chief Quanah Parker and his warriors fought white settlers in Kansas and Texas

1868

Washita Massacre - 100 Indians killed including Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle when Colonel George Armstrong Custer's soldiers launched an attack on his Cheyenne encampment

1876

Battle of Little Big Horn in Montana was a conflict between Sioux leaders Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse who defeated U.S. Army Colonel George Armstrong Custer and 210 of his men



▲ Sitting Bull

1876-1881

Sioux Wars - series of battles between the Plains Indians and the United States Army



▲ George A. Custer

1881

The victor at the Battle of Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull of the Hunkpapa Sioux tribe surrendered ending the **Sioux Wars**

1883

Chief Washakie, an eastern Shoshone, assisted and supported the United States government throughout his life



▲ Chief Washakie

1890

Hunkpapa Sioux leader, Sitting Bull, was killed by an Indian policeman, Red Tomahawk on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation



▲ Chief Big Foot

Massacre at Wounded Knee - the United States Army killed 150 Sioux Indians, including Chief Big Foot of the Miniconju Sioux

1830

1835

1840

1845

1850

1855

1860

1865

1870

1875

1880

1885

1890

1895



1862-1886

The **Apache Wars** was a conflict between the Chiracahua Apache led by Cochise and Geronimo and the United States Army



▲ Geronimo



▲ Cochise



▲ Victorio

1866-1868

Red Cloud's War - two-year campaign against American violation into Sioux territory led by Oglala Sioux Chief Red Cloud



▲ Chief Red



▲ General Sherman

1872-1873

Modoc War - General William T. Sherman and 1300 soldiers pursued 50 Modoc warriors led by Captain Jack in northern California's lava beds. Captain Jack surrendered after five months and was tried for previously killing General Canby at a peace conference



▲ Captain Jack

1866

Betterman Massacre - Sioux and Cheyenne warriors led by Chief Red Cloud killed more than a 100 soldiers and workers

1877



▲ Chief Joseph

Nez Percé Battle ended when Chief Joseph surrendered to the United States Army after being defeated at the **Battle of Bear Paw Mountain** in northern Montana

Sioux Chief Crazy Horse and 1,000 tribal members surrendered to the United States Army at Camp Robinson, Crazy Horse was later arrested and killed during his imprisonment

1886

Apache Wars ended as Cochise and eventually Geronimo accepted terms of surrender to the United States government



▲ Geronimo (far right) and some of his Apache warriors

1891

Sioux Indians surrendered to the United States Army, ending a long history of violent **Indian Wars** in the American West

THE NEZ PERCÉ RETREAT

The last Indian conflict to have impact upon Washington Territory was the **Nez Percé retreat**. The **Nez Percé** were an important Plateau tribe whose traditional homeland was in southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and western Idaho. The Nez Percé had a reputation as an accommodating and peaceful tribe. Violence between Nez Percé Indians and white pioneers was almost non-existent.

At the Walla Walla Council, the Nez Percé had signed a treaty guaranteeing a large reservation in northeastern Oregon, southeastern Washington, and western Idaho. However in 1863, gold was discovered along the Clearwater River on the Nez Percé Reservation. White prospectors were eager to remove the Nez Percé from the land to clear the way for mining operations. The negotiators approached the Nez Percé living in the Wallowa Mountains, to whom the gold lands belonged, offering cash and goods in exchange for them agreeing to move to the Nez Percé reservation in western Idaho. The Nez Percé in Oregon refused.

Since the Nez Percé living in the Wallowa Mountains refused to sign away their lands, government officials approached the Nez Percé living in western Idaho. The Nez Percé living in Idaho were quite different from those in the Wallawas of northeastern Oregon. They had largely adopted a white lifestyle and were attempting to live as farmers and ranchers. Government officials approached their leader, **Chief Lawyer**, and asked him to sign away the lands in northeastern Oregon. After promises of a reward, Chief Lawyer signed away the territories in northeastern Oregon, despite not having the legal right to do so since he was not a chief of the Nez Percé living in that area.

Even though the United States had a signed treaty, there was no immediate effort to remove the Nez Percé. By 1876, though, white settlers wanted access to these lands. Of particular interest to them were the pasturelands of the Wallowa Mountains where Chief Joseph's band of Nez Percé lived. Faced with growing pressure from settlers, the federal government ordered the army to remove the Nez Percé living in northeastern Oregon.

In November 1876 and May 1877, **General Oliver O. Howard** held two councils with the Nez Percé. The most important chiefs, **Joseph**, **Looking Glass**, **White Bird**, and **Toohoolhoolzote** all attended. The chiefs refused to recognize the agreement signed by Lawyer as he had no right to sell their lands. In fact, General Howard agreed that the lands were illegally confiscated from the Nez Percé. But that did not change the situation, the Nez Percé still had to leave and settle on the **Lapwai** Reservation in western Idaho.

The Nez Percé were bitter over the decision, but did not want conflict with the army. Reluctantly, they agreed to move. Still, not all the Nez Percé accepted the concession peacefully. Along the journey to Lapwai, a group of Nez Percé warriors took out their anger on a group of pioneers, killing four people. Joseph was outraged but understood their anger. However, General Howard was livid and sent out troops to apprehend the Indians. When the soldiers arrived at Clearwater on June 17, 1877 they encountered warriors ready to fight. The Nez Percé routed the soldiers, with those left surviving retreating back to General Howard at Fort Lapwai.

Chief Joseph and the other Nez Percé leaders knew now that peaceful settlement on the Lapwai Reservation was no longer an option. They decided to flee and make an attempt to reach Canada and join other exiled Indians. The Nez Percé knew the journey well, having traveled to the area every year to hunt buffalo.

The United States Army pursued Chief Joseph and the members of his tribe. Five major military battles occurred along the difficult retreat towards Canada and their potential freedom. During the course of the conflict, Joseph had earned the respect of many whites. However, after 1,700 miles and numerous battles, the army defeated the Nez Percé at **Bear Paw Mountain** in 1877.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Nez Percé retreat was the final Indian conflict to affect Washington Territory. Its conclusion marked the end of an era for the region. Until the establishment of Oregon Territory in 1848 and Washington Territory in 1853, the history of Washington was dominated by Indian culture and society. Indians constituted the vast majority of the population and controlled the most territory. The incorporation of Oregon and Washington territories brought the region more directly under the control and influence of the rest of the United States.

As a result, more white pioneers came to the region and there was a concerted effort to remove and marginalize the Indians. Unsurprisingly, many Indians rejected this treatment and fought wars to preserve their culture and homelands. In the end, pioneers, backed by the United States Army and territorial militias, prevailed. The settlement of Indians on reservations marked a new period in the history of Washington. From this point forward, pioneers determined the course of Washington's history and American society dominated the region.

FOCUS ON

Chief Joseph ...

Following the death of his father, also named Joseph, Chief Joseph assumed leadership of the Wallowa band of Nez Percé Indians. As chief, Joseph was a defender of his people's culture and lands. He considered the Wallowa Mountains sacred and given to his ancestors by the Great Spirit. More than the land, though, Joseph loved his people and to avoid war, he chose to migrate peacefully to the Lapwai Reservation.

However, the murders committed by a small group of Nez Percé forced Joseph and his band to flee towards Canada. During the flight, the Nez Percé won several battles against the army and successfully evaded them for many weeks. Often Joseph is credited with the military genius of this campaign. But Joseph was not a war leader and he left much of the military planning to his brother and Looking Glass. Joseph's real gift was in inspiring his people and leading them through tough times. When Joseph surrendered at Bear Paw Mountain, the army promised that he could settle on the Lapwai Reservation and eventually return to his home in the Wallowa Mountains. But Joseph was never allowed to return. After some time in Kansas and Oklahoma, he was moved to the Colville Reservation where he died in 1904.



▲ Portrait of Nez Percé Chief Joseph.

"Tell General Howard I know his heart. What he told me before I have in my heart. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. The old men are all killed. It is the young men who say yes or no... He who led the young men is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills, and have no blankets, no food. No one knows where they are, perhaps freezing to death. I want time to look for my children and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead... Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more forever."

— Chief Joseph