

MANY TRIBES ONE NATION

From our earliest history, the Natítayt (The People) were diverse. Our identity was reflected in our life-ways and traditions, our languages, and the geographic areas we occupied. Our common bond was our unified world view, the land, the rivers, and the abundant natural resources we shared. Our interactions were governed by food gathering, kinship, intermarriage, ceremony, trade, and sometimes warfare.

The Natítayt later became known as the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla Tribes. Our close relatives and neighbors were many, and many of them were present at the Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855.

In describing the peoples represented in the Treaty of 1855, the introduction to the Treaty articles of Agreement states the following: "... the undersigned chiefs, head-men, and delegates of the Walla-Wallas, Cayuses, and Umatilla tribes, and bands of Indians, occupying lands partly in Washington and partly in Oregon Territories, and who, for the purposes of this treaty, are to be regarded as one nation acting for and in behalf of their respective bands and tribes."



"We-ah-te-na-tee-ma-ny," also called "The Young Chief"

This is also reflected in the minutes taken at the treaty council: "Besides the Indian chiefs already mentioned and some others, about 1800 Indians, Nes Perses, Cayuses, Walla Wallas, Yakamas, Dalles Indians and others on the Columbia above were assembled."

"Here are Nes Perses, Cayuses, Walla Wallas, Yakamas and Umatilla and bands on both sides the Great river to below the Dalles. Tribes Northwards: Colvilles, O-kin-a-kune, Palouse. For the principal tribes here present, we have thought of two Reservations. One Reservation is the Nes Perses country and one in the Yakama country."

But the ancestors of today's CTUIR members rejected that offer and a third reservation, the Umatilla Indian Reservation, was fought for and agreed to.

As one elder puts it, "This was all ours. We didn't get a gift of anything."

These few direct words are a reminder to all that the reservation was not a gift given to the native people, but is the land secured and reserved in the Treaty of 1855, a protected subset of the original homeland as a place to live after the larger native lands were ceded.



Arrival of the Nez Perce Indians at Walla Walla Treaty, May 1855

These words still remain with many people today as we so often must explain what the Treaty of 1855 means to us, the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla people, and to all those present at the Treaty signing. Quotes from tribal leaders at the Treaty Council proceedings in Walla Walla emphasize the negotiation and struggles to obtain and secure treaty rights that are still upheld today, not only on the reservation but throughout the ceded lands. These are just a few words recorded over the course of two weeks of negotiations from tribal leaders who spoke so eloquently on behalf of the people:

"From what you have said I think you intend to win our country, or how is it to be? In one day the Americans become as numerous as the grass, this I learned in California; I know that is not right. You have spoken in a round about way; speak straight. I have ears to hear you and here is my heart..."

"My friends, God made our bodies from the earth as if they were different from the whites. What shall I do? Shall I give the lands that are a part of my body and leave myself poor and destitute? Shall I say I will give you my lands? I cannot say. I am afraid of the Almighty. I love my life is the reason why I do not give my lands away. I am afraid I would be sent to hell. I love my friends. I love my life, this is the reason why I do not give away my lands..."

"This is our mother this country, as if we drew our living from her. My friends, all of this you have taken. Had I two rivers I would be content to leave



Governor Stevens with Indians at the Walla Walla Council in May of 1855.

the one and live on the other. I name three places for myself, the Grande Ronde, the Touchet towards the mountains and the Tucannon."

"The line of the Cayuse Reservation will be where the trail crosses the Walla Walla, thence in a straight line to the Umatilla below Wm. McKay's house, from thence north of the butte, straight to John Day's River. The reason why that shall be the line is that they want more room for their horses and cattle."

"I said to Gen. Palmer that I desired permission to get fish there while I lived. When I learn that the house is made, (meaning the reservation), then I shall go there."

Negotiating for the United States, Governor Isaac Stevens made a promise that these rights would be inherently protected:

"My children, I said to you yesterday we want you to agree to live on tracts of land, which shall be your own and your children; we want you to sell the land you do not need to your Great Father..."

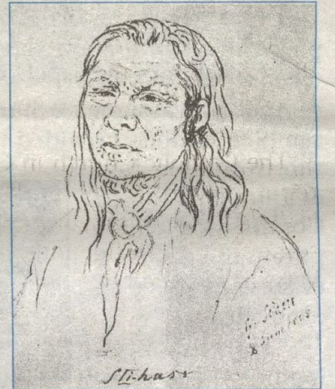
"We do not want you to agree not to get roots and berries, and not to go off to the Buffalo; we want you to have your roots and to get your berries and to kill your game; we want you if you wish to mount your horses and go to the Buffalo plains..."

Of the Indian person, Stevens once again promised:

"...that he can graze his cattle outside of the reservation on lands not claimed by settlers, that he can catch fish at any of the fishing stations, that he can kill game and can go to Buffalo when he pleases, that he can get roots and berries on any of the lands not occupied by settlers."

These words still hold power today – the power of the treaty document upheld in the courts of the United States, the power of a government-to-government relationship that withstands the test of time, and the power of promise.

- from Tamastlikt Cultural Institute



Five Crows or "She-ca-yah," Chief of the Cayuses.