

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

REMINISCENCES OF FRANCIS M. REDFIELD CHIEF JOSEPH'S WAR

The following selection is taken from the reminiscences of Francis M. Redfield (1842-1929). The manuscript is in the possession of his daughter, Professor Ethel E. Redfield, University of Idaho, Southern Branch. It includes an account of his childhood on a New England farm; his departure for California at the age of sixteen; his trip across the plains, working his way by driving an emigrant team; his experiences as a prospector in Nevada and Oregon, as keeper of one of the first grocery stores in Albany, Oregon, as a homesteader in Idaho Territory, and as sub-agent on the Nez Perce reservation.

In 1869 he married Miss Elizabeth Farrell. Six children were born to them: Charles, Velma, Elbert, Ethel, Frank, and Ima. Mrs. Redfield died in 1906.

Mr. Redfield homesteaded in Idaho from 1872 to 1876, first in Genesee Valley and later in the Craig's Mountain section near Lake Waha. He was appointed sub-agent on the Nez Perce reservation in 1876 and was stationed at Kamiah. The reminiscences here printed have to do with his experiences at the time of the outbreak under Chief Joseph in 1877.

Portions of the reminiscences dealing with Mr. Redfield's experiences as a prospector in Nevada and Oregon have been printed in *The Sunday Democrat*, Albany, Oregon, June 15 and 22, 1924, and in *The Bend Bulletin*, Bend, Oregon, Sept. 16, 1922. An article, "Albany During Fifty-eight Years," also taken from the reminiscences, was printed in *The Sunday Democrat*, Albany, Oregon, May 28, 1922.

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FLOY LAIRD

Pocatello, Idaho

THE NEZ PERCE WAR

A treaty was made with the Nez Perce Indians, by Governor Stevens in 1855, whereby a large extent of country was included in the Indian Reserve. This treaty was signed by the Nez Perce chiefs. But emigrants soon crowded into the country, miners especially. A new treaty must be made, and another treaty was made in 1863, by which the reservation was cut down, which excluded the Wallowa Valley in Oregon, and a region round about. By the second treaty the Nez Perce tribe was divided into distinct tribes, known as Treaty and Non-Treaty Indians. Joseph of the Wallowa Valley, the White Bird Band in the region of the Salmon River and its tributaries, and a band under the command of Too-hul-hul-sot claimed the land between the Salmon and Snake Rivers. They were the "Treaty Indians."¹ There was another band from Asotin Creek and another led by Hush-hush-cut, and another band led by Looking Glass.² These bands refused to sign the treaty, and were known as the "Non-Treaty Indians." They had never accepted Government bounty and refused to live on the reservation, although close relations were always maintained between the two tribes.

In 1877, after a series of collisions with white settlers, the order came from Washington to eject the Non-Treaties from the Wallowa and to place them on the reservation in Idaho. Councils were held at Lapwai to apportion lands to the various chiefs of the Non-Treaties; and it was thought that all arrangements for their peaceable transfer to the reservation had been made, when the country was startled by a series of murders upon the settlers, which inaugurated the Nez Perce war of 1877. The first victim was a man who had a little store on the White Bird.³ They killed him but did not harm his family. It seems this trader had had some difficulty with an Indian and had killed him some time before. I was a

¹The manuscript is in error at this point. Old Joseph had signed the treaty of 1855 after the Wallowa and Imnaha valleys had been made a part of the Indian reserve. When this treaty was replaced by the treaty of 1863, the Wallowa and Imnaha lands were taken away from the Indians. Then Old Joseph along with several other chiefs refused to accept the changes made by the new treaty. They were known as the Non-Treaty Indians. Following his father, Young Joseph of the Nez Perce War always remained a Non-Treaty chief, opposing the confinement of his people to the reservation. H. H. Bancroft, *History of Washington, Idaho and Montana, 1845-1884* (San Francisco, 1890), 448, 493-494; G. W. Fuller, *A History of the Pacific Northwest* (New York, 1931), 264.

²The chief lieutenant of Joseph in the war of 1877. He was killed at the conclusion of the war when Miles and Howard overwhelmed Joseph's band. Fuller, 271-272.

³The reference here seems to be to one Larry Ott. General Howard writes of him: "The first day of March, 1875, Larry Ott, who lived on the south side of Salmon River [White Bird Creek flows into Salmon River] had a quarrel with an Indian which terminated in the death of the latter. The grand jury had the killing of this Indian by Ott under consideration, and being unable to find sufficient evidence of guilt, brought in no bill. Ott was not killed by the Indian as reported, but is still alive." O. O. Howard, *Nez Perce Joseph* (Boston, 1881), 101.

member of the Grand Jury at Lewiston when the case was brought before us; but from the evidence, we judged the man not to blame and returned not a true indictment. This matter, however, had rankled in the minds of the Indians, and they sought revenge by killing him.

In company with Col. Watkins,⁴ U. S. Indian Inspector, and John B. Monteith, Agent at Lapwai, we spent one week in company with three of the Non-Treaty chiefs in looking up locations for them. We camped out and looked over the territory between the North and South Forks of the Clearwater and Camas Prairie.⁵

I was present at Lapwai in the spring when General Howard called the chiefs in council to discuss the matter of coming onto the Reservation. I was well acquainted with Chief Joseph. His trail to Wallowa passed my house on his way going home from Lapwai, and one cold night he and two others slept in the house by the kitchen stove. At a meeting of the Indians at Lapwai, with the Government officials who were explaining to the Indians that they must vacate their homes and obey the laws, Joseph said, "My father and his father before him lived in the Wallowa Valley. The country belonged to them; and when they passed away, it belonged to me, my brother Ollicut, and our people. I never signed a treaty, never accepted anything from the Government. If a bag of grain was ground for my people, we paid for it." He concluded by saying, "I do not want to be a pig in a pen, but rather than have my people, my family, wife and children, suffer, I will obey."

Perrin B. Whitman was the interpreter on this occasion. He was the nephew of Dr. Marcus Whitman, who, with thirteen others, were massacred by the Cayuse Indians, November 29, 1857.

In February, 1877, I received the following letter from the Agent:
Office, Indian Agent, Nez Perce Indians
Lapwai, Idaho Territory, February 22, 1877

F. M. Redfield

Dear Sir:

I wish you would keep a good look out, and if you should see any move among the Indians that looks bad, send word immediately by some one who will be sure to come.

I don't think there is any cause of any alarm, if I did I would send the spring wagon to bring the women away.

I shall keep a good look out at this end, and I am nearer Joseph than you and will know of any move he may make.

He promised today that he did not intend to make any trouble.

Truly yours,

Jno. B. Monteith

⁴Col. E. C. Watkins.

⁵From here to the paragraph beginning, "On Thursday, the 14th day of June," two parallel accounts in the reminiscences have been combined by Professor Ethel E. Redfield.

It was about the first week in June, after my return from Lapwai with supplies, that the Indians came to me and told of a band of some forty Non Treaty Indians that had come on the reservation and were camped about three miles up the river at Solweicus* place, that they were mostly young men, dressed in the customary shirt, blanket, and moccasins, their faces painted, and feathers in their hair. There were no squaws with them. I was somewhat disturbed in mind upon hearing this and sent "Nine Pipes," who was a friend of mine, yet a Non Treaty, up to their camp to learn what he could as to why they were there. Upon his return he reported that the government had ordered all Non Treaties to be upon the reservation by the 20th of June. I was, however, suspicious of the motive of their presence there. About a week after this, as I sat in front of my office just after sundown, I saw three Indians coming down the road. I walked out to the road and sat on the stile at the fence; and as they approached, I recognized Solweicus and two "long hairs" with him. (The "long hairs" did not belong to the church.) I said to them "tots secapta" (good evening). The two Non Treaties did not look at me, but looked straight ahead and rode past, going as far as the mill. Solweicus dismounted and told me that the Indians camped at his place were in need of provisions and that these Indians came to demand food. They wanted flour and bacon and coffee. He said that the government had ordered them to come onto the Reservation and should feed them. I explained to him that I had no government supplies and that all the government food supplies at Kamiah were at the dormitory and were for the school children. I told him I could furnish nothing and that the government expected the Indians coming on the reservation to bring their provisions with them. He replied they would be "sulup" (mad). The Indians soon came back, and I spoke to them again, but they would not look at me and joined Solweicus and passed along the road up the river.

On Thursday the 14th day of June, James Lawyer came in the carpenter shop and told me the Indians had killed a Frenchman on Salmon River and had killed Mr. Norton on the prairie, and he feared they were coming to Kamiah and would murder us. I said "You are the chief of the Nez Perces. You can call the Indians together and defend us." He said that the Indians about us had no arms, and that they had been taught never to shed the blood of a brother and that many were related to the hostiles. But he said he would do what he could and was greatly excited and urged me to take my little family, wife and three children, and go to the school buildings, taking Miss McBeth with me. I did so, taking my Smith and Wesson pistol, but after waiting an hour or so, only three

*A friendly Indian.

Indians came, and they had guns but no ammunition. In the mean time Lawyer had sent out his scouts, George Waters and, I think, Felix Corbett⁷ was the other. They returned before night and reported no Indians coming, so I took my family and went back home.

On Friday before noon I received the two letters following. They were brought by a long haired Indian. His dress also showed him to be one of the wild type—shirt, leggins, moccasins, and blanket about his waist, and nothing on his head. It was this class of Indian that brought all messages to me during the war.

Lapwai, Idaho Territory
June 15, 1877

Dear Frank:—

If you have not left Kamiah, you had better take all employees and come out immediately on the hill this side of the river and arm yourselves as best you can. Of course you have heard the news from Camas Prairie about the Indians. Move as fast as you can & with caution.

We fear for you.

In Haste,

J. B. Monteith
Per, C.E.M.⁸

And this letter in pencil to wit:

Lapwai, Idaho Territory, June 15, 4 A.M., 1877.

Redfield:—

Dear Sir:

The soldiers left last evening for Cottonwood to hold the Indians. All of you come soon, if not already started, and have James Lawyer get a guard and come with you. All the troops are in the field.

Truly yours,

Jno. B. Monteith.

I have been up all night.

The employees at this time at Kamiah consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Fee, Miss McBeth, Peter Stagg, Mr. Sharpe, and myself and family, Mr. Robie, the Carpenter, having resigned in March and left the agency.

After getting the above letters, I was anxious to get the employees away, but from the scouts I learned that the hostiles were guarding the trail up the hill, so I suggested that we take the boat, that I had made in April, and go down the river. But Peter Stagg, who was an old sailor, and had once made the trip by boat down the river, declared it to be most dangerous, owing to the high water and rapids. He also spoke of the big

⁷The surname may be incorrect; it is inserted in pencil and is almost illegible.

⁸Charles E. Monteith, who served as secretary to his brother, John B. Monteith, the Indian agent.

eddy or whirlpool in the river. As there seemed to be no safety in trying to get away, we abandoned the idea for the time being.

During the day, Friday the 15th, rumors were brought to us that the Indians were killing a large band of horses on the Camas Prairie, belonging to one Alfred Chapman, and later that they had killed the band and were heading for Kamiah. This last news was late in the evening. I ordered all canoes brought to our side of the river, and it was past nine o'clock at night when I had the horses saddled. Sharp and I placed Miss McBeth on old Tom,* (she was greatly frightened) and Mr. Sharp led her horse. Mr. Fee and his wife each had a horse. My wife with the baby, Ethel, in her arms rode old Bob. I rode Grant, and held my little boy Bertie in front of me. Charlie was placed behind me. Peter Stagg rode his gray horse. We then made our way up in the hills and nearly a mile from the Lolo Trail, in a canyon, spent the night. As soon as daylight appeared, Mr. Sharpe and I went out. It was very foggy. When we were near the old Ferry landing, Maggie, a squaw who had been living with Mr. Chapman, came across the river in a canoe. She informed us that the Indians, after killing the horses, had started for Kamiah, but when near the hill above, had turned and gone in the direction of Mt. Idaho.

This news was a great relief to us. Mr. Sharpe and I went up to the buildings, provided ourselves with bread, ham, coffee, and other eatables and returned to the canyon. After breakfast, I wanted all to return to our homes, but no one except Mr. Stagg, Sharpe, and myself were willing. The women and Mr. Fee felt secure in their retreat, as no Indians could see or know where they were. My wife and the baby were both sick, and I wanted them in more comfortable quarters; but the women refused to go out, so later in the afternoon I took Kentuck and Felix, two friendly Indians, up to the camp and revealed the hiding place. My wife and Miss McBeth both cried, and I was blamed for the act. But the result was they all came out, and that night we all went to the log house occupied by the men, where we spent the night, Saturday.

Between four and five o'clock Sunday morning an Indian knocked at the door. He appeared exhausted, lay face down, on the floor after giving me the following letter:

Lapwai, Idaho Territory

June 16, 1877

Redfield

Dear Sir:

I wish you would send by the bearer where you are and your condition. I hear from the hostile Indians every few hours by runners and

*Miss McBeth was partially paralyzed.

have not learned of their going to Kamiah. The troops are on the Cottonwood. As far as I know, 13 have been killed on Salmon and the Prairie. I am watching these Indians close and have news from all directions every little while.

The Inspector and Gen'l Howard here. If you are on the road, send the bearer right back with a note.

Truly yours,

Jno. B. Monteith

We gave the Indian some hot coffee and breakfast. He told me that he had two horses which he changed from time to time. He said that on the hill, the hostiles killed one of his horses and that we could not go out that way.

Learning from the above letter that the troops were on the ground, I felt comparatively safe, and Sunday afternoon took my family home, some 200 yards away.

About 5 o'clock on Monday morning, an Indian brought me the following letter, to wit:

Lapwai, Idaho Territory
June 17th, 1877

Redfield

Dear Sir:—

Take all the women in the wagon and mount the employees and start for Lapwai under guard of James Lawyer and the friendly Indians immediately upon receipt of this. You ought to have started before on receipt of my letters.

Col. Perry¹⁰ has been defeated by Joseph on Salmon River. I have sent all the folks to the fort as I expect Joseph will strike for the Agency and burn it. Reinforcement will come tomorrow from below.

Move as soon as this reaches you.

Truly yours,

Jno. B. Monteith

The defeat to which the letter refers took place at the head of White Bird Canyon. In this fight, Lieut. Theller and 33 soldiers were killed. The fight occurred on Sunday. I have talked with several Indians who were present at the time who explained to me all the details. They were friendly Indians who had met with the hostiles and had induced them to surrender the guilty parties, which was agreed upon, but when the troops arrived and an Indian went forward with a white cloth on a stick, in token of surrender, they were fired upon by some volunteers, who were with the command. Of course a fight ensued. The Indians had but few

¹⁰Colonel is either a mistake or an honorary title. Mr. Redfield is right in speaking of him as Captain Perry. See Bancroft, 501.

arms, but as fast as a soldier was killed, they took his gun and pistol. The soldiers had dismounted to ascend the hill. The firing frightened the horses who broke away, some running back to the fort, 60 miles away. The soldiers, being on foot, were an easy prey for the Indians.

Upon the receipt of the above letter, and learning from our scouts that the guard had left for the fight, I at once harnessed the four horses and hustled every one, except Sharpe and Stagg, into the wagon, not waiting for a change of clothes, and started for the ferry where I had my boat that was attached to the steel cable. The boat would hold ten persons. I took them all across, came back, put my harness in the boat, turned the horses loose in the river, which was very high, with a strong rough current. Old Bob took the lead, and the other horses all followed. Upon reaching the opposite shore, with no one at hand to guide their landing, they all turned and came back to where I was. I was greatly worried fearing that the hostiles which I have mentioned might come upon us, as they had undoubtedly heard of the fight at White Bird. At this time, Nine Pipes appeared; and I gave him a pair of California blankets to swim the horses. He afterwards joined the hostiles. I then crossed with the harness. No one helped me harness except Mr. Fee. I had some straw in the bottom of the wagon. Mr. and Mrs. Fee, Miss McBeth, and my boy Charlie sat flat on the bottom of the "dead ox" wagon.¹¹ My wife, and Bertie and Ethel, the baby, on the seat with me. I had four large horses, and it was all they could do to draw that wagon and load up the hill. It was as steep as any house roof you often see. It was 60 miles to the fort. I only stopped once and watered the horses at the holes, and reached the fort about five o'clock. James Lawyer and some forty friendly Indians came with us. They were not armed so in case we had met with hostiles, could have only used their influence in our behalf.

A Chinaman, who cooked for the men at Kamiah, stayed behind. He told me that about an hour after we had left, the Indians came up from the river and my house was the first ransacked. They took or destroyed everything we had, broke into the cellar and took all our groceries, took away our bedding and cooking utensils and set the house on fire, or attempted to do so. But they immediately left for the other houses, when the friendly Indians put out the fire.

I have as a memento a broken vase I picked up in the wood shed, also our family Bible and a pair of white blankets that were saved for me by a Blackfoot squaw, who had a cabin near the mill. She was the mother of Maggie, of whom I spoke above. I had been the Si-kip-te-wat or doc-

¹¹A wagon without springs. The term was frequently applied to the heavy freight wagons.

tor, and had prescribed Hi-hi-si-kip-tar-tas, that is, quinine, for certain ailments, and on another occasion when Maggie gave birth to a child.

On Friday, before we left for the hiding place, I had buried two trunks, filled with my wife's and the children's clothing, in a large pile of Early Rose potatoes in the root house on the hillside back of our home, which trunks the Indians failed to find although they killed my pig and left the hide hanging at the root house entrance. Of course they took what potatoes they needed.

The next morning after arriving at the Fort, I took my wife and the three children to Lewiston, when Mrs. Chas. Bunnell¹² called in the ladies of the Presbyterian Church and they made dresses and clothing for all my family. Some two or three days were spent in Lewiston, when the steam boat was ready to return to Portland. All my family were placed on board and left for Albany, Oregon, where we owned a house, the same house in which I am now living forty-seven years later.

Little Bertie was quite sick in Portland but a doctor attended him and he recovered after one or two days' illness. My wife had two brothers living in Albany and she stayed with her brother John's family while getting furniture and bedding for our home.¹³

On Sunday, June 17th, 1877, Captain Perry with two cavalry companies attacked the Indians in Whitebird Canyon. In this fight Lieutenant Theller and thirty-three soldiers were killed.

On June 22nd, General Howard took charge of the campaign in person and by July 1st, had a force of between five hundred and six hundred troops, and on July 11th and 12th in a fight on Cottonwood Creek, southeast of Kamiah, the Indians were defeated the second day of the battle and fled across the Clearwater at Kamiah below where our ferry boat was located. The only boat now was one I built that would carry ten men. General Howard crossed his troops in this boat. On July 17th Joseph began his retreat over the Lo Lo trail. General Howard stayed in the Kamiah country for several days until July 27th, when he began his thirteen hundred mile pursuit after the Indians.

GOING FOR THE TRUNKS

On July 14th after the fight on Cottonwood Creek, I decided to go to Kamiah and get the trunks that contained the wife's and children's clothing that I had buried in the Early Rose potatoes in the cellar in the hillside back of our house.

¹²Mrs. Charles Bunnell, formerly Mrs. Charles Sprenger, kept a hotel in Albany, Oregon, at which Mr. Redfield made his home during the winter of 1865-66. After Mr. Sprenger's death, she married Charles Bunnell, a hardware merchant of Lewiston, who was long prominent in business and municipal affairs.

¹³John Farrell and P. H. Farrell.

One night about eight o'clock I took two Indians with me and left Fort Lapwai for Kamiah 60 miles away; not a house on the road. We had ten miles of timber to go through on Craig's Mountain. We arrived at Kamiah about five o'clock in the morning where I found General Howard and his command camped on the south side of the river. My house was on the north side. I took breakfast with the General and learned that two days before he had driven the Indians across the river and had crossed his troops, some five hundred men, in pursuit of them, but the Indians had gone up the Lo Lo trail and in the attempt of the soldiers to follow, several had been killed and the soldiers had retreated, and on this day the soldiers were to return to our side of the river.

The entire day was spent in recrossing. Ten men were taken over at a time in a boat (the one I had built six weeks before). I saw several mules drowned in swimming the river that day. General Howard had given orders that no one should cross the river from the south side as they might be killed, but I had come for the trunks and was determined to get them; so I went up the river to the cabin of a friendly Indian and persuaded him to take me over in a canoe. Once across, I went up the bank that was lined with cottonwood trees, and, looking in all directions, I saw no one. I crossed the road opposite my house, went back to the root house and saw the hide of my pig hanging on the end of the ridge pole of the root house. The door was open but there were plenty of potatoes left. I eagerly dug into them for the trunks, and great was my joy in finding them still undiscovered.

I was hauling out the first one when the surprised exclamation of a squaw at my back startled me. She was a Blackfoot squaw and had a cabin near the mill. She was the mother of Maggie who had lived with Alfred Chapman (of whom I have heretofore made mention). She did not wait to talk but ran away, much to my surprise. I had but pulled out the second trunk when she returned bringing our family Bible and a pair of white woolen blankets that she had saved for me when our house was ransacked. She helped me carry the trunks to the river, and told me how those Indians that I refused to give flour and bacon had wanted to get me, so took their revenge by taking all my provisions that were in the cellar and house.

I might state here that the reason why this Blackfoot squaw was particularly friendly to me was that nearly a year before,—1876, she came to my house one Sunday morning, crying, and told me Maggie was dying and urged me to hurry. I went with her to the cabin by the mill and on entering found several squaws there. Maggie was being confined. She was sitting on the floor beneath a tripod, and was holding a buckskin thong hanging from the center. A squaw was seated behind her in front

of the fireplace and had her arms about Maggie. I soon discovered that the baby was dead. I hurried back to my office and took up my doctor book. I learned that ergot of rye would stimulate pains in such cases and found some among my medicines. I administered several doses and worked with Maggie until the baby was born. It was quite dead. The navel string was about its neck and the face was black. It was a large baby. Maggie had some very nice clothes made for it and the squaws dressed it neatly. I made a little coffin for it and lined it with muslin and we buried it near the church. Maggie when she got well went back to live with Alfred Chapman on Camas Prairie.

To resume about the trunks. I got two seamless sacks and taking the trunks across the river, I emptied them, dividing the clothing between the two sacks. At night I took my two Indians and two ponies and, dividing the sacks in the middle, slung one on each pony as we had no pack saddles. We left General Howard's camp about nine o'clock P.M. and started for the Fort sixty miles away.

When we reached the top of the hill above Kamiah we ran into a band of Indian ponies belonging to hostile Indians and my men insisted on driving them along to the Fort. It was a very dark night and I could not see whether my packs were all right or not and could not distinguish them among the drove of horses, so I inquired from time to time if they were with the band. We had ridden fast; had not stopped or got out of the saddle. When we reached the Fort before clear daylight, the Indians rounded the horses up before the parade ground. I could not see my packs but the Indians said they were all right. We only stopped for a minute or two, then continued on our way to the Agency, three and one-half miles to the Clearwater River. When we lined up before the agent's office, it was daylight and my packs were missing. I led my horse over the bridge across Lapwai Creek to the stables, removed the saddle, and my horse lay down immediately, completely given out.

I put my saddle on a horse that Col. Watkins rode when at the Lapwai Agency. The horse was a large powerful gelding, cream color, white tail and mane, a beauty. I mounted and took the road back to the Fort as hard as the horse could run. On reaching the Fort I crossed Lapwai Creek and among the cottonwood trees feeding were the horses with my two packs. The pack on one horse was hanging under its belly and the rope that held it cut through the hide on its back. I immediately cut the rope. The other pack was still in place. I went over to the Fort and got a soldier to come and help me arrange the packs on both horses. I then drove to the Agency, removed the packs, put the horses in the corral and my riding horse in the stable. It was a hard struggle for me to get over

to the Agent's office. The Agent had a bed in the back room which I was able to reach and I knew no more for some time.

When I came to myself, Dr. Calloway was working over me injecting morphine. I was in fearful pain and could not lie still. It was two days before I could get up. The Doctor told me afterwards that he thought I would surely die in spite of all his effort. I had not had a moment's sleep for two nights after leaving the Agency, had ridden one hundred and twenty miles besides working one day getting the trunks. As soon as I was able I removed the contents of the sacks, packed the clothing in a box, and sent it to my wife in Albany, Oregon. I remained on the Agency until October and made several trips back and forth from Kamiah during the war.¹⁴

I resigned and went to Albany, October 1st, 1877, to be with my family.