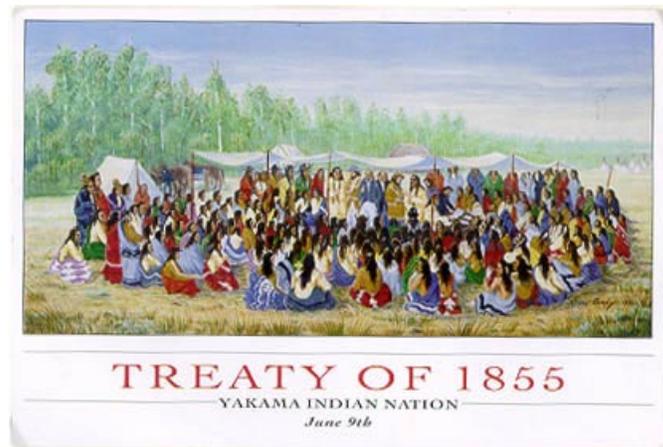


Tribal nations celebrate Northwest treaties of 1855

In recognition of the treaties of 1855, the Yakama Indian Nation and other tribal nations held “Treaty Days” celebrations last week, with events such as rodeos and salmon bakes in various locations. It was in 1855, from May 28 through June 11 at Fort Walla Walla near the present-day community of Wallula, that negotiations between the United States and the tribes and bands of the Yakama, Nez Perce, Umatilla, Walla Walla and Cayuse led to three separate treaties being signed within days of each other.



The Washington Territory had been established in 1853, and President Franklin Pierce had appointed 34-year-old Isaac Stevens as governor of the new territory. Stevens was a graduate of West Point, an officer in the Army Engineers and a veteran of the Mexican War. He arrived in Olympia with a triple mandate: govern the territory, negotiate treaties with Northwest tribes and plan for the northern route of the transcontinental railroad.

From 1853 to 1856, Stevens dealt with policies affecting more than 30,000 Northwest Indians. He authored and signed 10 Northwest Indian treaties.

A courageous people

Of the inland tribes, Stevens wrote in his diary: “They were a manly, athletic race, still uncontaminated by the vices and diseases which so often result from contact with the whites, stand far superior in courage and enterprise, as well as in form and feature, to the canoe Indians of the Puget Sound and coast.”

When the Walla Walla council opened May 29, 1855, at Fort Walla Walla, Yakama Chief Kamiakin told Treaty Secretary James Doty, “If the governor speaks hard, I will speak hard too.” Stevens spent the next two days explaining the proposed treaties at length, item by item, through interpreters.

That was not the end of strife between whites and Indians. On September 23, 1855, a white agent was killed by Yakamas while investigating an outbreak against white settlers. That was the beginning of what was to be called the Secone Yakama War.

After he was no longer governor, Stevens represented the interests of the territory before Congress and convinced the Senate Indian Affairs Committee that the treaties ought to be ratified. He also continued to give speeches on the Indian wars. He died in a Civil War battle in 1862.

Reservations established

Eleven points were agreed upon in the treaties signed at Fort Walla Walla in the spring of 1855.

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The Yakama treaty ceded the Native Americans' interests in nearly 10 million acres of ancestral lands, while designating 1.2 million acres for the new Yakama Reservation. Reservation lands were to be for the "exclusive use and benefit" of people affected by the treaty signing.

A second reservation of three million acres on the north side of the Snake River was to accommodate the Cayuse, Walla Walla, Umatilla, Spokane and Nez Perce tribes. The Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla opposed this plan and negotiated a third treaty creating a new reservation in the eastern Oregon Territory.

The treaties also included a perpetual guarantee of the right of tribe members to fish within reservation areas and outside of them "at all the usual and accustomed places," plus the right to hunt, gather roots and berries and pasture horses and cattle on unclaimed land. The Indians agreed to rights-of-way for roads through the reservation where necessary.

Annual federal expenditures and "goods and provisions" for the tribe were to compensate for land cession, and the government was obligated to consider the "wishes of the Indians" in allocating spending. Federal money would finance and staff schools and other facilities including industrial shops, agricultural centers and hospitals.

The federal government was given authority to survey reservation lands into lots for assignment to individuals and families for home construction.

In other treaty provisions, the parties pledged respect for the property rights of all, pledged not to conceal fugitives and not to wage war "except for self-defense." The U.S. Government was to serve as the arbitrator of intertribal differences.

The treaties also prohibited the use of "ardent spirits" on reservation lands. And they established the fisheries for the use of the Native Americans.

The treaties became law after they were ratified by the Senate in 1859 and signed by President James Buchanan.

In recognition of the Yakama Treaty of 1855, the *Yakama Nation Review* has published a series of articles and placed them on the World Wide Web at <http://www.councilfire.com>. For the actual treaties, go to: <http://www.councilfire.com/treaty/treat283.htm> for the Umatilla, <http://www.councilfire.com/treaty/treat284.htm> for the Yakama, or <http://www.councilfire.com/treaty/treat285.htm> for the Nez Perce. ♦