From the online library at www.worldwisdom.com

WALLAWALLA, UMATILLA, CAYUSE

THE Wallawalla[1] were a strong Shahaptian group inhabiting the Walla Walla valley and the adjacent bank of the Columbia from Snake river southward to the territory of the Umatilla, in Washington, their principal village being near the mouth of the Walla Walla. Geographically and linguistically they were closely associated with the Nez Percés. On their return up the Columbia in 1806 Lewis and Clark were met by the Wallawalla chief "Yellept," whose acquaintance they had made the preceding year, and by him conducted to a village of fifteen large mat lodges on the northern bank opposite the mouth of Walla Walla river. Later they were ferried across the larger stream, and encamped near the principal village. The explorers have this to say of the tribe:

"these people ... are very well dressed, much more so particularly their women than they were as we decended the river last fall most of them have long shirts and leggings, good robes and mockersons. their women wear the truss when they cannot procure the shirt, but very few are see with the former at this moment. I presume the success of their winters hunt has produced this change in their attire they all cut their hair in their forehead and most of the men wear the two cews over each sholder in front of the body; some have the addition of a few small plats formed of the ear-locks and others tigh a small bundle of the docked foretop in front of the forehead. their ornaments are such as described of the nations below and are woarn in a similar manner." ... "sometime after we had encamped, three young men arrived from the Wallahwollah Village bringing with them a steel trap belonging to one of our party which had been neglegently left behind; this is an act of integrity rarely witnessed among Indians. during our stay with them they several times found the knives of the men which had been carelessly lossed by them and returned them. I think we can justly affirm to the honor of these people that they are the most hospitable, honest, and sincere people that we have met with in our voyage." [2]

The Umatilla lived within what is now Oregon, occupying the

1 The word is *wála*, river, reduplicated to form the diminutive: hence Little River. Compare *kosíkosi,* dog (literally "little horse"), the diminutive of *kósi.*

2 Lewis and Clark, op. cit., IV, 337, 345.

valley that bears their name, and the country about its mouth on the southern bank of the Columbia. Linguistically they are most closely akin to the Yakima, from whose speech their own differs but slightly.

The Cayuse were a sullen, arrogant, warlike tribe ranging near the Blue mountains in Washington and Oregon, from the head of Touchet river to that of John Day river. Of alien speech, they were on such intimate terms with the Shahaptian tribes of that region that even in 1851 their language was becoming obsolete, and for many years there has been none who could speak it. There is still current a tradition that long ago a portion of the tribe left the others and moved southward, but they were so harassed by the Shoshoni that they were forced westward and have never since been heard of. These were doubtless the Molala, the only tribe known to have used a dialect akin to that of the Cayuse, and found at a later date between the Cascades and the Willamette. The tradition says that these people occupied underground dwellings, which is the only indication of the primitive culture of the Cayuse. Since they were first observed by white men they have not differed in culture from the Shahaptian tribes, although in language they were totally distinct, belonging to the Waiilatpuan[3] linguistic family.

The name of the Cayuse has been well known because of their slaughter of the whites at Whitman mission. The mission had been established by Doctor Marcus Whitman in 1838 near the site of Walla Walla. Nine years later an epidemic of smallpox spread among the Indians, who believed that the white men were killing them by means of sickness placed in the flour ground at the mill, and that the Doctor's medicine was administered for the purpose of making their destruction sure. A number of them, principally Cayuse, murdered Whitman and many of his associates, and took captive several women and children. The prisoners were ransomed about a month later by agents of

3 The name by which this family is known to us is derived from *Waiilatpu,* the Shahaptian name for the Cayuse and their habitat. Our appellation for this tribe is a Salishan place-name designating a region south of the Columbia (probably the historical habitat of the Cayuse), which region was formerly occupied by some of the Salish bands found in the eighteenth century on the Columbia above Snake river. The word is preserved in the Kalispel name for these bands-*Sinkaiéus (sin*-being a prefix forming tribal names from place-names).

the Hudson's Bay Company, and volunteers were despatched to the scene by the governor of Oregon. The Cayuse fled to the hills, and for two years led an unsettled, wandering existence, afraid to return to the lower country because of the presence of the soldiers. In the spring of 1850 they surrendered five of the principal culprits, who were hanged at Oregon City.

An account of these events was obtained from Yellow Bull, a Nez Percé, whose memory was aided by his Cayuse wife, the daughter of one of the principal actors in the tragedy.

"When the white men arrived at Waiílatpu about seventy years ago, Whitman built a mill, and the Indians there took their grain to it, and they lived well. The tribes seemed to feel as if he were their father. All at once some kind of disease came from the flour. A Nez Percé named Kulkulshmúlshmul, my mother's brother, went to Waiílatpu, where he had a wife. When he came back he gave an account of what was going on there. He was crying because his wife had died of the siackness: she had taken some of the Doctor's medicine, and spots came out on her face. Two hundred people had died. An employe at the mission, a man who had many wives,[4] told the Indians that Doctor Whitman was putting poison in their medicine and killing them. One of the Indians made himself sick in order to test the Doctor, saying that if the Doctor's medicine killed him they would know that he was the cause of the death of the others. He took the medicine and died. Then the head-men met in council and made an agreement that the Doctor should be killed because two hundred of the people had died after taking his medicine. In the morning several men rode up to the Doctor's house. He did not know why they came. My mother's brother was with them, but did not go into the house with them. One of the Cayuse chiefs, named Tílôkaikt, said, 'Tamáhus is not here.' So Tamáhus, who was a medicine-man, was sent for. He was the father of my wife. He was asked why he had not come, - if he was afraid. He answered,

4 Yellow Bull means a Mormon. It is scarcely possible that, as some Indians believe, Mormon influence had anything to do with the massacre. The source of the allegation that the Indians were being poisoned was Joe Lewis, a mixed-blood, who had arrived at the mission in the company of an overland train, and had been given employment by Whitman.

'I am not afraid.' He entered the room, and the Doctor gave him a seat at his side. Whitman said to him, 'Fill the pipe, and let us smoke.' Tamáhus and Whitman were great friends. While they smoked, two or three other Indians went in and asked Tamáhus: 'Why are you smoking? How long are you going to smoke? Are you afraid of him? You did not come here to fill a pipe and smoke, but to kill this man.' The pipe was a tomahawk-pipe with a steel blade. After smoking, Tamáhus turned out the ashes, and, sitting at the right of Whitman, he struck him on the head with the tomahawk. So Tamáhus murdered Whitman, his friend. The other Indians then began to shoot. Five other white people butchering cattle outside were killed, and some at the sawmill, so that about twelve were killed altogether.

Whitman's wife was killed while carrying a bundle down the stairs. The Indians thought this bundle contained something which would be death to all those outside. One old white man, who had run up to Tamáhus and begged for his life, had been spared, and he told them after the massacre not to throw this bundle into the creek, for if they did it would poison the people.

"After the killing a council was held, and it seems that there was some disagreement as to who had made the plans for the killing and should assume the responsibility. After two years Tílôkaikt decided that it was better for the tribe that the five give themselves up to be hanged. So they surrendered, because the people were accusing them and making discord in the tribe."

In 1855 these three allied tribes signed a treaty by which they accepted their present reservation at the head of Umatilla river, in Oregon. They were active in the war that followed, as they had been industrious in their opposition to the treaties and sedulous in their efforts to unite the Indians in a plan to destroy the commissioners and their escort.[5]

At the end of the war they were gathered on the Umatilla reservation in Oregon, where they now live, so much intermarried among themselves and with the Nez Percés, whose language they all have adopted, that a separate enumeration is impossible. Their total population in 1910 was 910.

5 For their part in the war see Volume VII.

"*Wallawalla, Umatilla, Cayuse*"
From
The North American Indian: Volume 8
by Edwards S. Curtis
All Rights Reserved. For Personal Usage Only
www.worldwisdom.com