

Fort Simcoe State Park

The Agency Period, 1859-1922. Post_Agency Period 1922-current

Fort Simcoe had its origin, although immediately not determined, at The Treaty Council of Walla Walla. At this council a Treaty with the Yakama was concluded June 9, 1855. But it was not until the treaty was ratified by the United States Senate March 8, 1859 and proclaimed by President James Buchanan on April 18 that year that an agency could be legally created.

Control of Indian affairs in Washington Territory was vested in the territorial governor, Isaac I. Stevens, when Washington Territory was created from ~~Washington~~ Oregon Territory, March 2, 1853 and Stevens became ex-officio superintendent of Indian Affairs.

He was then confronted with the problem of extinguishing the Indian held title to the land and embarked upon a treaty making expedition throughout the territory. One of these treaties was negotiated with the Yakimas, spelled Yakama at the council.

The treaty was one of 162 negotiated with Indians throughout the nation to establish reservations, clear Indian land titles and permit for settlement and occupation. Congress, by Act of March 3, 1871, terminated treaty making powers, although reservations could still be established by presidential proclamation.

The Yakima Treaty which eventually led to establishment of the Simcoe Agency, being confirmed by the U.S. Senate and proclaimed by the President, like the Constitution of the United States, became what attorneys call, a Supreme Law of the Land.

The Yakimas ceded 10,828,800 acres of land or 16,920 square miles to the United States and reserves for themselves 1,200,000 acres or 14,875 square miles.

There were 14 tribes and bands occupying and using the ceded land and they were Confederated as the Yakima Indian Nation by the Territorial Governor.

Capt. James H. Archer, commandant of Fort Simcoe when it was terminated as a military outpost wrote to Headquarters of the Department of Oregon on April 18, 1859:

"I have this day turned over all buildings to R.H. Lansdale."

Then the remnant troops stationed at Simcoe marched away to join the Northwest Boundary Survey.

Gathering of tribesmen began when F. Robie was local agent at The Dalles, Aug. 30, 1856, and Capt. Frederick Dent, brother-in-law of U.S. Grant was working on a 67-mile wagon road from The Dalles to Fort Simcoe. Maj. Robert Selden Garnett, the agent wrote "was getting on well" with construction of the military Fort Simcoe.

There were 900 Indians at White Salmon, 1,200 at the Cascades and The Dalles and another 1,200 were living in the Simcoe Valley.

Dr. R.H. Lansdale, the first regular agent at Simcoe, came from Olympia where he was that town's justice of the peace and doctor.

In 1859, the same year the Territorial Legislature formed Klickitat County, which it spelled Clickitat (Dec. 20.), and located the county seat at Rockland, now Dallesport, Lansdale was instructed by the Indian Department to remove the agency from White Salmon to Fort Simcoe.

On May 16, 1859, he wrote J.W. Newsmith, superintendent of Indian Affairs at Salem Ore.:

"Capt. Archer of the Ninth Infantry has been ordered by General Harney and as arranged by the general and yourself, turned over all public buildings at this place."

There were 21 buildings at Simcoe and he placed their value at \$30,000.

Lansdale arrived at Simcoe June 2 and commenced farming, having purchased crops of grain in the field which had been planted by the soldiers.

By spring he was feeding and taking care of stock and procuring rails for fencing and preparing an orchard and gardens.

Three hundred trees, mostly apples, were set out by Lansdale on the old parade grounds. And he wrote :

"The wheat sown last fall has proved a total failure because of alkali or lack of rain."

He contracted with James Knox of Linn County, Ore., for 100 head of cattle for which he paid \$10 a head for yearling heifers and \$17 for two-year-olds. A sawmill, for which \$9,000 was appropriated, was constructed. The appropriation included funds for a flour mill.

Then Lansdale was abruptly suspended.

W.B. Gosnell was appointed sub agent. He wrote of feeding 120 Indians and employes and working 21 yoke of oxen and 21 head of horses and mules. He listed 355 head of sheep, 50 lambs and wrote of neglected farms.

The agency boarding school was operated that year for the first time, and it was directed by the Rev. James H. Wilbur, a Methodist. There were 15 boys and three girls in attendance.

Charles R. Hutchins, special agent relieved Gosnell on June 1, 1861. He was succeeded by Ashley H. Bancroft, brother of the historian. Ashley H. Bancroft was appointed by President Abraham Lincoln. Bancroft discharged Wilbur as teacher and also the agency physician, Dr. S.H. Roberts on the grounds "he attempted to incite the Indians against their agent."

Bancroft reported on Jan. 13, 1862 of issuing annuities to 1,458 men, women and children. Under the treaty at least 3,500 were entitled to be fed. Stevens had estimated the Indians under the Yakima treaty at 3,900.

Wilbur went to Washington in February, 1864 and returned with appointment of agent after presenting protests over operations of the agency, to Lincoln.

Then he introduced what became known as the "Bible and Plow" policy when he began duties in 1865. He held the position of agent nearly 18 years, excepting in 1869-70 when Lt. James H. Smith was assigned to Simcoe at the period the military returned to control of agencies and reservations for

a short time.

His boarding school system became the pattern for the Indian Service throughout the nation. He worked to instruct Indians in farming and irrigation, and to Christianize them; to help them build homes, fight for their fishing rights at the fisheries along Celilo, He preached to them to give up a plurality of wives. He aided them in acquiring teams, wagons and plows and cattle. And two boarding schools, one for boys and one for girls were eventually built at Simcoe.

Wilbur resigned Aug. 15, 1882 and died Oct. 8, 1887 when he was 76 years old. He was commonly called "Father" Wilbur. Mrs. Wilbur, who died shortly after her husband's death, was sometimes called "Mother Wilbur."

Gen. R.H. Milroy, former superintendent of Indian affairs in Washington succeeded Wilbur as agent. And in turn agents assigned were: (noted in files as probably not complete)

Milroy, 82 to fall of 85

Timothy A. Byrnes, few months in 1885.

Charles H. Dickson, few months in 1885.

Thomas Priestley, 86-89.

Webster Stabler, 1890.

Jay Lynch, 91-93.

L.T. Erwin, 93-97.

Lynch, 98-1909.

S.A.M. Young 1909 to June 30, 1912.

Don M. Carr, 7/1/1912 to 1924.

E.W. Estep, 10/1/24 to 9/1/30.

H.W. Camp, 8/1/30 to 8.24/30.

C.W. Whitlock 8/25/30 to 4/30/43.

M.W.A. Johnson, 8/1/36 to 4.30/43.

Luman L. Shotwell, 5/1/43 to 1/1/50.

Perry Skarra 9/1/50-1954.

D.E. Lecrone, 1954-55 and in turn

Floyd Phillips, Melvin Robertson and Charles S. Spencer, current.

Wilbur had left the reservation and it was during Milroy 's tenure the Northern Pacific Railroad, building the Cascade Branch of the pioneer northern transcontinental railway, entered the Reservation, through consent of the Yakima Tribe. The railroad line reached Yakima City, now Union Gap, in midwinter of 1884-85 and then built on to XNorth Yakima, now Yakima.

By 1890 the boarding school enrollment was 125 pupils.

The Wapato Irrigation Project, now matured with 138,000 acres under irrigation had its beginning in 1897 although irrigation was started in Wilbur's time. Larger scale irrigation was authorized in 1902.

Legislation in 1922 provided for removal of the agency headquarters from Simcoe to Toppenish. The boarding school was closed and children grew up to new lives on the reservation or outside it and were absorbed in public schools.

Although Wilbur surveyed some land and gave it out to individual Indians, allotment of land, the granting of 80 acres to each Indian for farming, more for timber and grazing, systematic allotment did not begin until later years. And by 1914 when allotment ceased, 4,506 Indians had been individually granted land.

Enrollment began in 1941 to prepare for per capita payments, money from tribal revenue such as grazing, leasing and timber. The first per capita payments were made in 1954.

Kamiakin, the Yakima war chief, never went onto the reservation when it was created and refused to accept his payment of \$500 annually as chief. Spencer was appointed head chief in 1864 and was succeeded by Joe Stwire or White Swan on Jan. 1, 1868 and he in turn by his "brother," ~~the~~ or adopted brother, the Rev. Stwire G. Waters, a Methodist minister ordained through work of the Rev. James H. Wilbur.

In the early days of the agency, after the parade grounds had been converted into a two and three-fourth acre orchard, Indian farms were located along Simcoe Creek, the south fork of Simcoe Creek and Toppenish Creek. There were five acres planted to garden, north and south of the rows of agency buildings. The Lone Tree agency farm was operated west of White Swan.

The title, "Indian Agent" was changed to "Indian Superintendent" by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1902.

Yakima, originally spelled "Yakama" in the Treaty and in correspondence before 1890 from the Yakama Agency was spelled both Yakama and Yakima from 1890 to 1891 and then it became gradually, Yakima.

The Wapato Irrigation Project, operated by the Indian Service and developed to 138,000 acres brought in returns of from \$20 to \$23 million annually from 51 crops. Much of the project land was leased to non-Indian farmers and part of it became alienated after Indians, obtaining allotments, sold their land.

The Yakima General Council, or tribe as a whole, approved the first commercial timber sale June 20, 1941, and the first major cut was in 1944. By 1953 timber was returning as much as \$1,625,984 annually, fluctuating with the economics of the industry.

Yakima Indian Forest reserves, the half million acres tribally owned after allotments of land to individuals, has been estimated at \$67 million. A sustained yield program of timber cutting has been developed by the tribe with cutting administered by the tribal forestry department.

There is an estimated 8.5 billion feet of saw timber on the Yakima Indian Reservation, making this the largest volume of timber on any reservation in the nation. And timbering, overlooked by Wilbur and other early agents except as a source of construction material, has become the Yakimas' greatest asset.

Click Relander, 37 01 Commonwealth Rd.
Yakima, Washington.

Notes on "Restoration of Fort Simcoe" to augment other material.

"Indians Restore Fort Known to Warriors of Old." Yakima Sunday Herald,
April 2, 1939.

...With tractors, shovels, hammers and saws, youths of the Indian---
descendants some of them of warriors who parleyed with the soldiers that ~~here~~
marched over the hills in 1856 to build the army post--are smoothing away
the wrinkles of age and neglect.

Minor repairs, clearing up of debris and general improvement of the
spacious grounds have been under way since December 1 as the preliminary
phase of an ambitious project aiming at complete restoration of the frontier
stronghold, one-time Indian agency and educational center.

M.A. Johnson, superintendent of the Yakima reservation, is pleased with
the showing of the winter 's activities.

Fear, voiced by some that the restoration might be coupled with a move to
take control of the place away from the Indians is without foundation,
Johnson has assured the tribal council. The sole purpose of the project is
to preserve the fort in its original quaint charm for the edification
of present and future generations, to maintain it as a living monument to
brave men and romantic days long gone...

...Scraped and patted first, the parade ground has been seeded to hardy
tufted wheat...

...Built to endure, stock-brick buildings as they would have been
called in the old South because of their brick walls masked by weather-
boarding, each residence is a gem of architectural simplicity.

...Superficial examination of recesses and scratched away patches in the
gabled mansion indicates that a warm yellow wash, happier treatment than the
final coat of somber gray, was the initial application of the walls....

July 27, 1951

A.E. Demaray, director of the National Park Service announced that preservation of Fort Simcoe as a site of great historical significance would be most worthwhile .

U.S. Sen. Warren G. Magnuson said:

"It is my sincere hope that appropriate measures may be taken to preserve the fort by some agency in the State of Washington, such as the State Parks and Recreation Commission."

The Fort Simcoe matter has been under study by the National Park Service since 1935. In 1937 the Advisory Board of National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments considered the historical importance of the site and decided it is one ~~of~~ with historical values which should be preserved by state or local government. (Magnuson office release)

December 2, 1952. Yakima Republic

Boundaries for the projected Ft. Simcoe State Historic park, to contain about 140 acres, were delineated yesterday afternoon by representatives of the State Parks and Recreation Commission and representatives of the Yakima Indian tribe at a meeting at the old army post and Indian agency.

November 26, 1952, Yakima Republic

A draft of a constitution and bylaws for the association being formed in connection with the Ft. Simcoe restoration program received the approval of the organization's advisory committee yesterday in the Hotel Chinook.

Advisory committee members at the meeting were Lew Garbutt, president pro tem (he was secretary of the Yakima Chamber of Commerce) Mrs. Randolph Cunningham, Walter J. Purdin, Angus McDonald, George M. Martin and H. Dean Guile.

Jan. 18, 1955. Yakima Republic.

Long-range planning for development of Fort Simcoe is really projected into the future--to year 2054 in fact--under terms of HR 1802 introduced at the first session of the 84th Congress by Hal Holmes (R-Wash).

The legislation, sought by the Fort Simcoe at Mool Mool Restoration Society at the request of the State Parks and Recreation Commission contemplates a 99-year lease from the Yakima Tribe. The State Parks Commission's policy does not permit extensive development unless on a long-term basis.

1955
Notes in parks folder, 1953, after interview with park officials.

" Started in 1953. Work expended roughly in the neighborhood of \$50,000 by this time. One of five historical parks in the state.

Dedicated as a State Park, Aug. 12, 1956.

Archaeological work, summer of 1955, from interviews in field.

Trenches dug by field party which arrived early in July, opened four trenches from 100 to 25 feet near the parade ground, east of old officer's row. Trenches five feet wide and from two to three feet deep.

Party directed by Edward Larrabee, Reed College, graduate student at University of Washington, assisted by John Ormanson of Camano Island, graduate student of anthropology; Del Stedham, Tacoma, 1954 student at Washington State College (Now Washington State University) and Del Corsette, Michigan.