

Fred White Letters to the Government, Dec.-Jan (1856-57). Copied from Leonard Lerwill's notes, Nov. 1954.

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Columbia River, Wednesday,  
December 31, 1856.

To the Government:

I let you know how it happened to me. The morning the Indians took me prisoner we went across the Yakima river, made a fire, eat a little and then proceeded on. On the 3d day we reached the Columbia river, where I am now, and can tell you that I am alive yet, how I may get along from this out I do not know yet. It looks bad. Till now they treat me well, and say they do not know yet what they will do with me. That I must wait the arrival of Kamiakin and all the rest of the chiefs. Skilloom & Showawash say they heard that the Government gave to the Indians on the Natchess and Toppenish, flour, meat, sugar, etc. They want to know why you are doing that! That these Indians have no right to that land, that it belongs to Kamiakin, and that he has paid these Indians for that land, that he fed them, gave them horses, clothing, etc. Before this war began, and that now She-Kusken, and all those who call themselves Chiefs, say we are Chiefs & not Kamiakin. As soon as we (Skilloom & Shawash) heard this it made our hearts sore. One said come let us go & see who has the best right to that land. But when we came as far as where the herd was & when we saw all the cattle and horses, we stopped and camped & had a council what was best to be done. The young warriors wanted to go that night into the tents & kill all the whites and take the Indians prisoners, but I (Skilloom) said you shall not do that, let us take the cattle and horses. The government gives thousands and thousands of dollars to Indians who have no business on this land, & who steal our wild horses & sell them. Let them pay for the oxen and horses. That they are false like dogs, with two hearts and two tongues. They come to us and speak badly of the government & then go to the government and speak badly of us. We have but one heart, & that heart is not false. When we make peace, we make it for good. Up to this time we do not know yet what to do, because we do not know what the Government thinks.

Therefore we should like to know their intention, whether they want peace or not. If you want peace let the Government speak to the Chiefs Shekusken and Kaman, on what terms, & let them tell those chiefs to tell us the truth and not tell us any falsehoods. We are afraid to come to the Government ourselves. But if you do not want to make peace, let us know so, as soon as possible. It is the same to us whether we die today or tomorrow. If we do not make peace now, it shall be war for life time. We'll swear then never & never to give up our arms as long as one of us lives. Not only Kamiakin and his men, but all the Indians will take up arms against the Americans. We know well the Americans are a good many, but we are not afraid. We much rather die than live like dogs. When we returned after taking the cattle we met three of our women with two Indians. The women were running away like wild beasts. We followed them, brought them back and when we asked the women what induced them to run away, they answered that the Chief from the Natchess, the old Skaman, had sent for them and told them, that, if they did not

immediately come to the Matchess the soldiers would come and kill every one of them. What do you think our feelings are? We do not know of anything else to write. We expect a letter as soon as possible. If you send a letter let a couple of Indians bring it to us, as they need not be afraid that we will hurt them. Send the Chief from Toppenish, his name is Soder, and Grown's brother and tell them all you have to say.

Skilloom & Showawash

Mr. Allen:

As soon as you hear that I am dead, please pay to Mr. Lucas \$102, one hundred & two dollars, that I owe him, as I am not sure of my life a single hour. Write as soon as possible & send the letter by the Indians and should it be in your power to save me, I hope you will do your best. I do not know of anything else.

I remain till Death,  
Your very devoted servant,

Frederick White

Near the Yakima River,  
December, 1856.

To the Officer in Command  
of the U. S. Troops in the Yackama Country.

Sir:

I understand you are giving flour and other provisions to some of my people, for nothing. Why do you do this? Trade and sell to them, but do not give it to them for nothing. They are good for nothing. and double faced, and have forked tongues, and two hearts. Perhaps when the snow goes they will take your horses and fight against you. I wish you to send them all back to me, and then if you wish to treat with us, the Chiefs, who have the power and right to sell the lands we will sell a part of our country, and we will then take provisions, clothing, and money from you for our lands but we do not wish any of our people to have them for nothing.

As ~~there~~<sup>now</sup> will ~~be~~<sup>soon</sup> go I wish to know if you wish to fight, or to stop and make a treaty. If the latter get all the chiefs of Colville, Epokane, Okanogan, Nez Perces, Yakima, etc. to meet in one grand council & if you will talk straight and to the point, we will all have a good talk and make a straight and good treaty. But you must give your word that all our people who come to this talk will not be molested in any way and that they will be free to go and come when and where they wish, and further it must be understood that both the whites and the Indians stop fighting on both sides during and for five after the talk. My heart tells me if the white and Indian chiefs meet & have this talk we will make a good and straight peace, & treaty, & both of us live together in peace, all through our country. All the trouble we have had has been brought about by the bad talk of Stevens at the grand talk at Walla Walla.



I wish you to understand that the head chief of the Yakima country is Kamiakin, and should like to know at once if we are to have a big talk, or to fight. If the former, I wish the talk to take place as soon in the spring as possible.

(Signed) Skilloom, A Chief of the Yakima Nation.

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Fort Simcoe, W. T.,  
1st January 1857

Skilloom, a Chief of the Yakima Nation.

Sir:

I received today by the hands of two Indians a letter from you dated, "Near Yakima River, December, 1856," in which you propose holding a council to talk over the terms of a treaty of peace between the whites and the Indians.

I have no power to make any such treaty, and have therefore sent your letter to Col. Wright, whom you know as the "Whiteheaded Chief." He is my chief and he will answer you.

Col. Wright has always been willing to make a fair treaty, and you now have it in your power to gain his good will by kind treatment of your prisoner Fred White, and by sending him safe back to me.

Fred White says you have treated him well -- I hope you will continue to do so, and send him safe to me. -- Then will I tell Col. Wright, my Chief, that Skilloom, Chief of the Yakimas, is a true man, and has but one heart and one tongue.

(Signed) D. Woodruff,  
Capt., U. S. A.  
Comdg. Fort Simcoe.

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Thursday January 1, 1857.

To the Government:

Last Tuesday I heard that they had sent out an express to assemble all the Indian Chiefs and to see what was to be done. He says, how come it that the Government thinks so ill of him, when he told one or more Americans that he will leave them alone. I treat you as well or better than I do my own people. What vexes him ~~the~~ most is he knows that you are feeding all the Indians and he who has the most rights gets nothing. (That is Skilloom) I learnt today that they will keep me here until all the Indian Chiefs assemble to write another letter, that I may then go wherever I please. They have told me also how they killed Mr. Bohlen. They say six of their young people went to The Dalles to buy fish. They met Mr. Bohlen on the way. One of these Indians had been out hunting and five Indians with their wives met Mr. Bohlen. Their names, Mitchell, Showawash son), Wattashin, Nanginim, (an old man)

(these two live on the Kabisk), Woppy, Sukei, and Stuchen. Three out of these six killed Bohlen. The one by the name of Stuchen caught him by the beard and cut his neck with a knife. Woppy held him by the arms and Sikei by the feet. When Skilloom and Showawash heard of this they were very angry, as Skilloom and Bohlen were great friends.

January 12, 1857.

Since I have been a prisoner I have learnt a good deal about the origin of the war. The Old Chief told me to let the Military Authorities know by letter. First how Dr. Whitman was killed, then the Americans, and Mr. Bohlen. When Dr. Whitman first settled in Walla Walla the Frenchmen living there went to the Indians and told them not to allow Dr. Whitman to settle there, to drive him away from there, and if they did not do that, that it would fare badly with them. If the whites find out, that yours is a good country, they will come and drive you out of it. Then the Indians held a Council, and concluded to kill Dr. Whitman, which they did. Next the priests came among them, and told them, we are learned and wise and have come to tell you what is right and what is wrong. We have letters from the Americans and have heard that they want to cheat you out of your lands. Then came Gov. Stevens & said I am the Boston Chief. I was sent by the Americans to buy your land, if you will sell with a good will. If you will not sell with a good will, I'll come with my soldiers & fight for it. When we heard this, we hung our heads low and did not know what to say. But we had a Council & said, he did not give us that land, why will he take it from us? When our land is taken from us, where will we get clothing or food. Our hearts were heavy, and we did not know what to do, whole days. We sat in Council with him, but when we saw that all the talking did not better it any we thought, let us give this land and see then what he will do with us. When our people heard this they came to Kamaiakin and said: You are our Chief, do not give our lands up, leave us our liberty & we'll fight for you to death. These are the same Indians who now call themselves your friends and whom you feed. For example, William Kaskiki, Mac Kallivash, Zicks, Kibob, Mininu, Stockwittle, Zeakat, Littpana, Inhus, Juis, etc. These are the Indians who first commenced the war. But Kamaiakin called them together, killed oxen, and said, all the rest of the Chiefs have done the same, why shall not we do it too, and so let us wait 2 or 3 years and (see) how the Americans treat us. Should they treat us false then it will be time enough to wage war against them, for the present leave things as they are. After a short while the Americans come to go to the mines, a good many of them are killed without the knowledge of either Skilloom or Kamaiakin, or Showavash. In about 2½ months they found it out. They came to Kamaiakin and told him, we have killed so and so many whites. When Kamaiakin heard this he hung his head and said nothing. The young people asked him, Why do you not speak? You are our Chief, why don't you protect us, he giving no answer. Every day they came to him to go to war. It costs him a good deal to feed all his Indians. Since that time six Indians went to The Dalles to buy fish. Meeting Mr. Bohlen they killed him without the knowledge of any of their chiefs. When they heard of it, they were all very sorry, because Mr. Bohlen was well known by all of them. Then they made ready to fight. Skilloom was very sick. They have told me a good deal about the war from the beginning to end, which I cannot



describe. On the 6th January five Indians came from Walla Walla. One is a relative of Pu Pu Mox Mox. His name is Zalokin. He is a Chief. He says he was one of those who robbed Mr. Zohlen's store, but that he was not the first one, but that 3 Half-breeds & six Nez Perces were there before him. Two are named Barsibakett, father and son, and one Antivain, one of the Nez Perces, was hung last winter. They asked Skilloom, why he did not kill all of us, as he knew that there were but few of us, the Americans. If they caught 4 or 5 of us would not give us our lives. Look, for example, what they done with Pu Pu Mox Mox. But he said, it is not my way to kill 4 or 5, because he thinks if an American officer had been there that Pu Pu Mox Mox would not have been killed. They asked me how it came that Colonel Steptoe sends so often for ~~for~~ the Chief of the Walla Wallas, Zaloksaun. That he may likely serve him in the same way as was done to other Indians. But I told him, if an American officer sends for them, they would not be hurt. Skilloom says that Indians are not to be trusted too far, as before our eyes they will pretend friendship, but as soon as they turn their backs, they had other thoughts in their heart, not only against whites but also against the Indians. For example, first they came to Kamaiakin to ask him to fight, and when the war commenced, they returned to the Americans, not to be friends but merely to be fed when they think Kamaiakin has nothing left, that he gave them all he had, not only he but all the rest of the Chiefs had to support them. That is the reason it vexes me the Government feed them. They and the Americans have impoverished us. What we did not give them, they and the Americans stole from us. For that reason we stole your cattle and horses. With me, (Skilloom) it is otherwise. I have but one heart, that is friendly or not friendly, that depends on the Government. Will the Government have peace with us. Let them send all our people back to us. Let the soldiers leave ~~the~~ Simcoe Valley and return to The Dalles. Then we will make peace, which will last forever, that is my heart. I don't know yet what the heart of the rest is.

Columbia River  
January 12, 1857.

Dear Mr. Allen:

Your letter I received on the 12th and learnt that you sent me all I asked for, receive my kindest thanks and I hope these lines may find you enjoying good health. But I must tell you that I did not receive all you sent. The overcoat, the blanket, tobacco, paper, and half the victuals I did not get. Please send me 4 pounds of tobacco, soap, & a fine comb, a razor and some paper. When I read your letter to Skilloom he seemed to be very glad, but the Indians say that Captain Woodruff told them, see what Your comrades have done! They have driven off our stock! How do you think all this will end? The Americans have already driven you into the mountains and they will drive you farther if you don't soon change your course. When Skilloom heard this he got as mad as a lion & said, does he think to scare us as Governor Stevens did? But I am not afraid. He asked me then how many hearts and tongues the Government had. One comes and says we will make peace, another talks of drivings us to the mountains. Let one speak. Let him tell us his mind and peace will soon be established. But with force they won't

drive us into it. Then he asked why Captain Woodruff did not send the Indians. There is a chief there. If he had sent the Indians everything would have reached me. Mr. Allen I have three horses with the Old Chief at the Toppenish. Should you want any horses, I wish you to tell the Old Chief to give them to you. They are good horses. I do not know of anything else. As my paper is run out.

Please let Case translate this into English. Skilloom wants a copy of this to be sent to Col. Wright. But few of the cattle are alive, 8 have been killed and a good many have died. I am living like an Indian. What he eats, I eat. Where he sleeps, I sleep also, but I cannot complain of bad treatment.

Your servant,

Fred White.

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White wrote his letters in German.

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In A. J. Splawn, Ka-mi-akin, 1917, p. 207, an account of meeting White at Fort Yale on Caribou road and of White's experience with Indians and with Garnett on his campaign, as a packer.

White held by Skloom two weeks at White Bluffs, then gave him a horse and saddle and sent him back to the fort.

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