

Lm 561
Moses' Capture, May 30, 1941 "NW Sec"

Recollections of Billy Curlew,

By Gull A. White.

Altho I had heard of Billy Curlew since 1909 as one of the most able, reliable horsemen among the Indians, I first met him on my return from War 1, July 1919. At the big Indian Celebration at Inchelium, his name out shadowed all others, by reason of the odd wager he was r~~isk~~ing on a horse race. \$500 said his Buckskin Horse would run the 20 mile rough road from Kettle Falls to Inchelium, faster than 2 big Canadian Indians could paddle their light canoe down the foaming Columbia, thru whirlpools & dangerous drift. Few people backed the horse, so Billy was able to obtain odds. Later he refused \$2,000 for the horse.

In May of 1920 my wife & I rode to Nespelem for her to see a real roundup of wild horses. Billy was Captain at his home ranch. Several hundred horses were held on a sandy slope by riders. No fence. No corral'. Ropers caught horses to be castrated or branded, while dozens of onlookers heated branding irons & helped pull colts in. While Billy was showing his buckskin to my wife the riders lost control of the main bunch, which scattered for the hills. Undaunted, Billy spurred his horse up the tough sand hill, passed the other riders & alone turned the band back. Again the Buckskin with sorre mane & tail proved that he was descended from some royal blood. His ancestors may have won chariot races in Rome & Crusades to the Holy Land.

Thru the years, Billy rented range to me & traded horses. I recommended him to the Smithsonian Research group as a guid to early habitats & trail routes of Chief Moses. For years he gave splendid service as to location & daily life & routine of Indians from 1870 on. Orphaned soon after Birth in 1862, he was raised in household of Moses. The unusual training made him a future leader. Shortly after earthquake of 1872, he helped drive horses & cattle from Vantage winter range to Moses Coulee & later to summer rangenear present Waterville, after the feasting, rootgathering, racing, horse & goods trading & romancing of the annual gathering south of Ephrata. On Badger Mtn, birds & berries were a welcome change from Salmon & Venison. Billy learned to snare Sage Roosters & prairie chickens on their "strutting grounds".

Capture in 1877

At the time of Moses' ~~Capture~~ to be held as hostage till he produced the murderers of Mr & Mrs Perkins, Billy was sent on an important mission for a 15 yr old. Sentiment was strong for hanging Moses as an example. Only the popular agent Wilbur saved his life.

Moses' great helper & favorite nephew was towering, handsome Chee-ha-leet-sa who in 1879 accompanied Moses to Wash. D.C. when they thought it was surrounded by salt water. Four years later they were surprised to reach it by railroad ON LAND. When it was found that Moses' life was fairly safe, Chee-ha-leetsa took Billy & brought the cattle from the Waterville country down to Vantage for wintering. When so many Indians & horses wintered near one spot, for mutual protection, it was essential that enuf firewood for a long winter be assured, along with good grazing. Wherever the Columbia deposited its heaviest surplus of drift wood, there would be the main camp. Sanitation also demanded frequent changes of camp to avoid epidemics.

On these Historical research trips, Billy gave us many intimate glimpses of his childhood around Ephrata & the present Trout Hatchery. With Senator Nat Washington, Dr. Robt Ruby & the professional archeologists he identified many historic sites, pit-houses, caves, battle grounds etc. From Vantage to Cashmere & from Crab Creek to Badger Mtn. He with many other Moses Indians was particularly gratified when our group dedicated a marble monument at the mouth of Moses Coulee, marking the grave of Moses' elder sister Sin-Sintq, mother of Chee-ha-leet-sa, who was a remarkable woman leader up to her death in 1842. She asked to be buried overlooking the Columbia Valley "so she could watch after her people".

If Billy was not sure, he would lead us to veterans like Long Jim, 102 yr old Peter Wapato and others. In 1958 when his health began to fail, he had plans made to donate a large steer for a bar-becue at Ephrata to let the Ephrata people get acquainted with the Moses People. We in tuen hoped to have him dedicate a marker to his birthplace near Ephrata's Episcopal Church.

On one of our trips, Billy met a door guard at entrance to Rock Island. Impressed by the uniform & cordiality, he became friendly. At a later date I was asked to arrange a tour of Rock Island Dam & was delighted to have the General Supt promise that he would personally take us thru. Billy usually looked forward to these tours, but something was terribly wrong with this arrangement. Hastily I conferred with interpreter Harry Nanamkin who explained that Billy felt humiliated in not getting the guard with the flashy uniform, instead of this very ordinary Gen'l Supt who did not even rate a uniform. Fortunately this latter chap was very broadminded & quickly assured Billy that proper homage would be paid him by permitting the uniformed guard to guide us. Immediately Billy became the life of the party & gave us valuable information

Billy Curlew #3.

Among Billy's treasured possessions, was an army letter of the early eighties, by an officer directing troops at Wenatchee. They were assisting the Indians to move to reservations from their ancestral haunts. This letter states that Billy is a reliable young man, not opposing the whites. As was Jim James' case, all of Billy's children & grandchildren died of T.B. & allied diseases of civilization. Later when he lost his faithful wife of many years, Billy did not remarry as did James.

Having ridden & worked with the top stockmen of Central Washington, from the Snake River to the Canadian Border, accepted as an equal Billy renewed acquaintances & began visiting them. For diversion he led a few "trading & racing horses. This he continued till past 90 years old. No one was hurt financially, but many were pleasantly entertained.

In 1956 to provide sound historical background for Columbia Basin settlers, the writer brought Billy Curlew & 94 yr old Chief Cleveland Kamiakin from Nespelem to Ephrata. En route they told many interesting stories of early camps around Soap Lake, before the coming of the white man. Chambers of Commerce, take note:

As do all Indians, they extolled the medicinal benefits of Soap Lake water for man or beast. Not only were the aches & pains of old age relieved by frequent bathing, but sorebacked pack & saddle horses were healed. The picturesque but cruel Travois (poles attached to saddles for dragging camp equipment, with a few babies & sacks of puppies tied on top of bedding) made bad sores, hard to heal.

That night as we neared Soap Lake, the reflection of many lights & colors, ~~colored~~ contrasted to the Soap Lake of 1885. Kamiakin whispered: "Many camp Fires Tonight". As I helped him down stairs into the Cafe of Bell Hotel, his legs cramped from the car ride, refused to track up properly. Pointing to his wobbly knees, Kamiakin said "All time Drunk"!

After 2 days of helpful co-operation with Sen. Nat Washington in locating & identifying more sites, these men finished their tour by speaking before a large & interested group of school children with their parents. Many questions were answered & the warm response given them, moved these men to give the best speeches of their careers. Unable to write their names, or to read a word, they deeply impressed all present with the urgent need of appreciation of our country, willingness to defend it against all enemies, (definitely citing communism) & of conserving resources. Taped recordings of these talks are preserved.

Billy Curlew #4

In early May 1957, Supt Phillips of the Nespelem, phoned me at Ephrata, Billy was quite ill with pneumonia. If I wished a final interview, I should hasten to his home. Arriving, I found a note that Billy had asked to be taken to Lake Owhi "To go fishing"! There I found him knee deep in its cold waters, happy as a little boy, & catching fish. To someone I am indebted for snapping pictures of Billy emerging dripping from the Lake & greeting me. Ignoring my plea that he hurry back home for dry clothes, Billy sat in the car for an hour, promising to help us with the forthcoming Moses Coulee Potlach at Art Allens Palisades School Grounds.

The cold water treatment must have helped, because Billy was the life of the party at this big Potlach & did not get a sniffle from this exposure. On Thursday morning, May 25th Billy joined Chief Jim James, whose funeral was at Keller, Tuesday May 23rd and Henry Covington whose funeral last Feb. at Keller, drew huge crowds. It is hoped that at the great Indian gathering at Soap Lake during last five days of July, the annual parade will include three riderless horses bearing equipment of these worthymen to whom Historians owe so much.

Now as

Now as I try to record details of Billy's large funeral with friends gathered from distant places to do him honor in again dropping handful of earth in a final gesture of farewell, the men going in one direction, the women in a separate line ~~line~~ going in opposite direction, I'm not ashamed of the wet spots appearing on these top sheets. My roof is not leaking in this particular room. I hereby pledge that at my Potlach the big heavy hat & the Angora riding Chaps which Billy wore for 50 years and were presented to me at his feast & Potlach after the funeral, will be duly presented to a permanent museum, where future generations can enjoy them.

For my mother, cut to suit
Curlew