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HISTORIC FT. SIMCOE AGENCY SOON A RELIC

Yakima, Feb. 25 (Special to the Post Intelligencer)--After standing for sixty-two years as the stern reminder of military authority in the Yakima Valley, the Fort Simcoe Indian agency, located at the extreme edge of the Simcoe Plain, is likely to soon become a thing of the past, or at most merely an empty shell of government buildings.

Since the military post was established in 1856 and occupied by a force under Col. George Wright, the 3,000 Yakimas have looked to the agency superintendent for their governmental regulations and their allotments of money. Now there is a bill pending in congress for the transfer of the agency and appropriating \$50,000 for the change, which means that in time to come the agency affairs will be handled from Toppenish or Wapato. The agency, of which Superintendent Don M. Carr has had charge since 1912, does a business of close to a half million dollars in its yearly handling of tribal funds and land leases for the Yakimas on the reservation. The center of this Indian population is close to Wapato, which seems most likely to be chosen as the coming headquarters.

After going for miles across the dusty sage plain of the reservation, Simcoe seems like a mirage. The government buildings, including the schools, offices and homes for the agency staff, are the meticulous white which one associates with the ancient New England villages, and, like those cottages of the earliest American settlers, are shadowed by marvelous oaks. The narrow streets are lighted at the corners by lamps much like those used in the East before the development of electricity. The only discordant note is to be seen on the hillside at the right, where a worn blockhouse indicates that Simcoe in its day was the center of Indian

fighting. The blockhouse is the only one of four left standing and shows plainly its battle scars. There is every reason to associate Simcoe with New England, for the first buildings were constructed by the Eastern military, and the finishing lumber in the houses was shipped around the Horn and up the Columbia to The Dalles, and thence over the reservation via the old military road. The heavier lumber was swed out by mule power.

Simcoe, while its actual business annually is increasing, is no longer the center of all Indian activity. Until a few years ago a school was maintained at the agency, but now the Indian children are sent to the white man's schools, in accordance with the changed viewpoint of the Indian department. The girls' dormitory is standing idle and other unused buildings are decaying because there are neither funds nor staff to keep them up properly. In line with the idea of training the Indians to handle their own affairs as far as possible, Chief Caesar Williams, hereditary leader in the Warm Springs tribe and married to the cousin of the head of the Yakimas, Chief Meninick, is Indian police chief, and is assisted in his task of keeping order on the reservation by some deputies from among his own people. Chief Williams' duties are largely to prevent the sale of liquor to the Indians and to stop the feuds which occasionally break out.

Fort Simcoe is in truth one of the historic spots of Eastern Washington. Col. Wright wrote in 1856 in recommending the location: "The roads from The Dalles, Ore., Kamas Lake, and from the North and Walla Walla all unite here." Maj. Robert Garnett had the task of establishing the fort, which he did with the aid of two companies of the Ninth Infantry. For a time Capt. Frederick Dent (Grant's father-in-law) was at work upon the construction of a wagon road from The Dalles to Fort Simcoe. In 1859, with the transfer of Indian hostilities to the west side of

of the state, the big military contingent at Simcoe was removed, but the agency forces retained.

Twelve men in turn have been located as superintendents at Simcoe. Superintendent Carr, now in charge, has served ten years and has become known throughout the Yakima Valley as a wise guide for the red men and a most capable business man in conducting the affairs of the government.

R. H. Lonsdale, appointed in 1860, was the first agent and managed to be thoroughly discredited before he was relieved two years later. A. A. Bancroft, brother of the great historian, who was appointed by Lincoln, also proved a dismal failure. He was succeeded by Father James Wilbur, zealous Methodist minister, who served until 1882, and who was an inveterate worker for the betterment of the Indians.

A whole mythology, almost, has grown up about Father Wilbur, one of the most delicious stories being that of how he bribed the Indians to attend his church by working in the fields for them for the same length of time as they remained at his services. Wilbur was the founder of the Oregon town of that name and also of the old Portland Academy. During the days when rivalry between Catholic and Methodist mission in their campaign to save the souls of the red men was keenest, Wilbur went to Washington, D. C., and succeeded in getting President Grant to issue an order allotting the spiritual welfare of the Yakimas to the Methodist Church.

Other agents at Simcoe have also played an important part in Northwest history. Outstanding among them was R. H. Milroy, father of Walter Milroy of Olympia and Bruce Milroy of Yakima, both attorney, and L. T. Erwin, till recently territorial judge in Alaska. The complete list of superintendents, from Wilbur on, with the time of their service is: Milroy, 1882-1885; Charles H. Dickson, 1885-1886; Thomas Priestly, 1886-1890; Webster L. Stabler, 1890-1891; Jay Lunch, 1891-1908; S.A.M. Young, 1909-1912; Don M. Carr, 1913--.

two-column underline accompanying pictures with this story:

Street in Simcoe Indian Agency. The old-fashioned street lamp at the corner adds in the likeness to New England seen in this street. Many of the buildings were constructed of lumber brought around the Horn and hauled to Fort Simcoe, Yakima County, in wagons from The Dalles on the Columbia River.

Caesar William, police chief on Yakima Reservation.

Don M. Carr, superintendent, since 1912.

Girls' School. This is one of several large buildings that are now unused.

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Fort Simcoe, one of the Northwest's most picturesque historical landmarks is gradually deteriorating for lack of funds for repair the decaying buildings and the wooden water pipes serving the orchard and gardens that once made the spot a veritable oasis in a land of sagebrush and sand.

Major Evan Estep superintendent of the Yakima Indian reservation laments the decline of the famous army post and Indian agency and while doing what he can to keep up the appearances of the place, fears that unless the government takes action soon, it will be only a few years before the fort at Many Springs will be beyond restoration for any practical use except at a heavy cost.

While at the former agency headquarters over the weekend with Mrs. Estep the major put in long hours planting a garden in the backyard of the seven gabled house of pre-Civil war day architecture occupied in turn by army officers who later won distinction in the Union and Confederate armies and Indian campaigns and by the agents who lived there after the post was turned over to the Indian bureau. He also spent much of his time there pruning the fruit trees in the orchard on the site of the old parade ground and set out 36 young fruit trees in the orchard plot and in back of the former officers' quarters.

Trash and leaves have been raked up by the Indian prisoners and everything done within means at hand to make the place presentable.

"It seems too bad that some use cannot be made of this place he commented. "It could be made an ideal tuberculosis hospital as we have the buildings, the old school dormitories and the houses for the staff. Or, perhaps it could be used again for an Indian school which would benefit the young Indians. There should be some place where they could gather together and keep away from evil influences.

Toppenish, Nov. 25 —While Major Evan Estep, superintendent of the Yakima Indian agency does not look forward with great pleasure to moving from Toppenish to Fort Simcoe in the middle of winter, he is otherwise well content with the order received yesterday transferring the Indian agency back to the historic fort.

Toppenish business men are hopeful that the order may be rescinded and the agency remain at the reservation center but Maj. Estep considers it unlikely as it is the fixed policy of the comptroller general to have federal offices located in federal buildings when possible and not to use rented quarters.

Maj. Estep has been asked to send in a request for authority to make repairs and December 31 fixed as the final date for the occupancy of the quarters. When the Fort buildings were vacated in 1922 the reason given was that many of the structures were in poor repair. The water system for the agency consists of a wooden pipe bringing water from far upstream and the system has not been extensively repaired for about 29 years, Estep says. A number of other improvements are needed.

Even if it is inconvenient and disagreeable to move in winter, Major Estep expects to keep warm when he once lands in the superintendent's house as it has no less than nine fireplaces and a great supply of firewood at the back door.

"Long hairs" among the Indians as the red men who adhere to the early tribal customs are called protested bitterly when the agency was first moved to Toppenish after Toppenish and Wapato businessmen had engaged in a bitter rivalry for the agency. The "long hairs" sent a delegation to Washington to ask that the agency remain at Fort Simcoe but the younger Indians favored the change to Toppenish. At least once removal of the agency, unless some curb was placed upon the activity of Toppenish bootleggers, was threatened.

Toppenish Commercial club leaders have wired Charles Burke, Indian commissioner and other Washington officials asking that the agency be retained in Toppenish and

pointing out that Toppenish businessmen erected an agency building with the special understanding that Toppenish be the Indian's staff's headquarters. It is stated that several of the agency employes say they will give up their positions rather than be marooned at Simcoe for the winter.

—THE YAKIMA REPUBLIC
November 25, 1925

Business men of White Swan are taking an active part in the campaign being waged to have the Yakima Indian Agency moved back to Old Fort Simcoe and have raised a fund of \$600 to be used in improving the road from White Swan to Simcoe.

County officials, including men from the engineer's staff and J. E. Marble, county commissioner, were at White Swan yesterday and changed the present road line so it will conform with the section line.

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December 11, 1925

With his hands full of booklets about various kinds of heating and power systems, Major Evan Estep, superintendent of the Yakima Indian agency is spending today in Yakima arranging for the removal of the agency to Simcoe by December 31 in accordance with orders received from Charles Burke, Indian commissioner.

Mrs. Estep is also in the city doing her part of the planning incident to a move to a house with nine fireplaces, a kitchen the size of a small banquet room and not a modern convenience.

"I have not heard of any countermanding orders to move," Major Estep said, "and am going ahead with the planning."

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On a rise of ground in back of the reservation buildings is an old blockhouse erected by the army...there are two other buildings of the original group standing at Fort Simcoe but they have been modernized by new siding, new roofs and new floors and windows.

—SEATTLE TIMES, Oct 26, 1930

The old fort stands in an isolated spot west of White Swan and some 10 miles west of the Cedar Valley section of Klickitat county.

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The headquarters of the reservation were in Fort Simcoe until 1923 when due to the increased business and the difficulty of travel in certain months of the year the government decided to move to Toppenish.

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KLICKITAT AGRICULTURIST, 1934

Blue uniformed soldiers garrisoned Fort Simcoe until 1861⁵⁹ when it was turned over the Indians for a school. In 1920³ the school was moved and the buildings vacated. A few Indian families are its only inhabitants now.

Restoration of the fort sponsored by the Colonial Dames of Washington with the aim of making it a state historical shrine has been halted temporarily by the opposition of the Yakima Indian tribe, legal owners of the sixty acre post, but eventually it is hoped to restore the fort as it was built originally.

//Bricked up and whitewashed now this old Dutch oven in the commandant's kitchen is one of the relics (accompanying picture) //

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Early American architecture demanded both comfort and simplicity in interior design. In every room of the officers' homes a brick fireplace was built; in the living room of the commanding officer's residence, an arched cupboard with drawers that pulled out to form a desk near the hearth was placed conveniently..

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant once stood on the historic porch of the headquarters building to review troops when he paid a visit to the isolated military post