

THE INDIAN SIDE OF THE STORY by Wm. Compton Brown

Historians have habitually said Kamiahkin was the prime mover in this attack on Stevens' party. They even go into detail and tell what orders Kamiahkin gave and how he conducted the engagement and what he said about it. My information is all to the effect that Quil-ten-e-nock and the youthful Qualchen led the fighting, and it was to them that the young looked for inspiration and directions.

The spirited young Quil-ten-e-nock was the head chief of the "Half-Sun" people or so-called Isle de Pierres Indians. The famous Chief Moses was his younger brother. Quil-ten-e-nock was not notified of the first Walla Walla Treaty Council and his people had no representation there...When Kamiahkin and the rest signed the Yakima Treaty, it ceded away the Half Sun lands...Quil-ten-e-nock became filled with a... desire to see Governor Stevens and lay the matter directly before him and get him to right the wrong....

When Quil-ten-nock got no consideration from Stevens, he was greatly disappointed and angered. In consequence, Quil-ten-e-nock and some of his followers attacked Stevens' escort and some sharp fighting ensued....He is said to have been very reckless himself and during the fighting had two horses shot under him.

Qualchen's younger brother Lo-Kout, was in the forefront of the scrimmage all the afternoon and evening. He got caught in the sortie that Shaw and a detachment of the volunteers made from the white camp after dark and was so severely wounded as to render him helpless. A white volunteer came up and struck him with the butt of his gun in the forehead and left him for dead. This resulted in a conspicuous scar in the shape of a big depression in his forehead which was carried all the days of his life. He lived to a good old age and died here at Nespelem on the Colville reservation...

(Gov.) Stevens, in his report of this fighting, says, "We fought four hundred and fifty Indians, and had one man mortally, one dangerously, and two slightly wounded. We killed and wounded thirteen Indians." Hazard Stevens (son of Gov. Stevens) has this to say about the attack: "One half of the Nez Percés, one hundred and twenty warriors, all of the Yakimas and Palouse, two hundred warriors, the great bulk of the Cayuse, Walla Wallas, and Umatillas were in the fight.

The principal war chiefs were the son of Ow-hi and the Isle de Pere chief, Quil-to-mee." From what I have gathered I don't think over three or four Indians were killed. And as for four or five hundred Indians having joined in the attack, I am inclined to think that there is certainly very much of an exaggeration unless the on-lookers from a distance be counted.

In the party that came over with Quil-ten-e-nock there could not have been over fifty or sixty young men and they were the only ones that participated in the demonstrations, as I understand it, except a small sprinkling from the other tribes assembled there that could not be restrained by their chiefs.

Location of the Fighting

The location of the 1856 council sites and the ensuing skirmishing was the subject of a workshop organized by Walla Walla 2020 and held on February 11, 2006 at Walla Walla Community College. The purpose of the workshop was to compare historical accounts, to visit likely sites, and to discuss potential commemorative activities during the sesquicentennial of these events. Participants included historians, archaeologists, tribal representatives, and interested local residents.

Fifteen points of activity were described by those present during the September 19-20, 1856 attack on the party of Governor Stevens in the vicinity of Mill Creek in the Walla Walla Valley:

1. *The point where the Stevens party crossed a stream not more than three miles after leaving Steptoe's camp and was first attacked.*
2. *The course of the train from the initial point of attack to where a corral was formed.*
3. *The place where the wagons halted and the corral was formed.*
4. *The site of the first Volunteer charge, led by Lt. Hunter.*
5. *The east hill where Lt. Hunter retreated after the first charge, and pickets were established by the Volunteers*
6. *A second hill where pickets were established by Volunteers to protect the corral.*
7. *The area where Volunteer pickets were placed in the brush.*
8. *The hill where the second Volunteer charge took place.*
9. *Where Indian spectators were located to the left of the south hill.*
10. *The area where Elijah Hill, Co. K, was killed.*
11. *The area where Sgt. C. Riggs, Co. K, was gravely wounded.*
12. *The hill where Volunteer rifle pits were dug in, abandoned, then retaken.*
13. *The area where Steptoe's troops fired the howitzer as they approached the corral.*
14. *The course of the train during its return from the corral to Steptoe's camp.*
15. *Steptoe's camp further up the Mill Creek Valley where the final skirmishes occurred on Sept. 20.*

A contour map placing each of these points on the ground in the Rooks Park- Bennington Lake vicinity, together with first person descriptions of them by participants in these events is available online at www.ww2020.net/historic-sites, along with other information regarding this history, and the text of an interpretive sign placed by Walla Walla 2020 along the south levee of Mill Creek just above the Yellowhawk/Garrison Creek diversion dam.

Further details are given by Andrew Pambrun, Stevens' secretary, guide, and interpreter, who writes a colorful account in "Sixty Years on the Frontier in the Pacific Northwest."

Historic Sites & Markers Project. *If you would like to help with the marking & interpretation of these and other significant sites in the Walla Walla area, please send tax-deductible donations to Walla Walla 2020, PO Box 1222, Walla Walla WA 99362, email ww2020@charter.net or call 509-522-0399 for more information.*

SECOND TREATY COUNCIL & STEVENS SKIRMISH OF 1856



Gustav Sohon drawing of 1855 Council



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The Second WW Treaty Council and Stevens Skirmish

Though the Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855 is well known, few people know that in 1856 Governor Isaac Stevens held a Second Treaty Council in Walla Walla, ending in a major skirmish with regional Indian forces.

In an attempt to end the Indian war that had broken out after the Treaty Council of 1855, Stevens again called all the inland tribes to Walla Walla in September of 1856. Failing to convince them to surrender either their lands or their arms, Stevens and his party were attacked as they attempted to return to The Dalles.

The initial attack led to fighting in the upper Mill Creek area throughout the afternoon and night of September 19, 1856, and into the following day. This skirmishing in the Walla Walla area was the only instance of combat with Indians by Stevens, who later died as a general in the US Army during the Civil War.

Site where the Council began

Stevens and his party arrived on August 23, 1856, and established the council grounds at the camp of Col. B.F. Shaw of the Washington Territorial Volunteers, who had been in the Walla Walla valley since early July. According to Stevens' letter of August 25, 1856 to Lieut. Col. Edward F. Steptoe who was in charge of federal troops assigned to the area, "We are on a little tributary of Mill Creek, and about one mile from it."

This initial camp, called Fort Mason, was placed by historian W.D. Lyman and others as being two miles above the grounds of the 1855 council, which had been held east of where Mill Creek crosses the present intersection of Main and First streets in downtown Walla Walla. The only significant branches of Mill Creek in that vicinity are Yellowhawk Creek, about a mile south of Mill Creek, and Garrison Creek, about a half mile south of Mill Creek.

To satisfy these descriptions, the most likely location for the initial grounds of the Second Walla Walla Treaty Council is between the present School Avenue and Berney Drive, near the Yellowhawk Creek crossings, in the vicinity of Leonetti Cellar winery.

Site where the Council ended

On September 14, because of hostility on the part of the majority of the Indians present, Stevens moved the council to a site several miles up Mill Creek where hundreds of federal troops were camped under the command of Lt. Col. Steptoe.

In 1901 Historian W.D. Lyman refers to Steptoe's location as being "at a camp which was on the island on the present Gilkerson Place." The 1905 Standard Atlas shows Gilkerson family property extending from Five-Mile Road to just above Seven-Mile Road.

According to Stevens' Oct. 22, 1856 letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Maypenny, he moved the Council to within a quarter mile of Steptoe, meeting Kamiakin on the way, who reestablished his camp with other Indians a quarter mile from Stevens, separated only by Mill Creek and its wooded bottom.

The precise council location has not been determined, but the descriptions would put it in the Mill Creek canyon, probably just below the current Seven-Mile Road on the island created by Titus and Mill Creeks.

Failure of the Council

The council continued at the upper Mill Creek site until September 17, when it ended in failure. The Indian position can be summed up in the words of Speaking Owl, a Nez Perce chief close to Looking Glass: "Will you give us back our lands? That is what we all want to hear about; that is what troubles us. I ask plainly to have a plain answer."

The unsuccessful result and the reason for it are made clear in the governor's report:

"At the conclusion of this council, in a brief address to the Indians, I expressed my regrets that I had failed in my mission—that no one had said "yes" to my propositions, and that I now had only to say, "follow your own hearts; those who wish to go to war, go....My propositions were unconditional submission..."

When the reconvened council ultimately failed, Stevens left for The Dalles.



Isaac I. Stevens



Chief Kamiakin, by Gustav Sohon



Edward J. Steptoe

The Attack

On September 19, Stevens prepared to leave for The Dalles with his party of 38 wagons pulled by 80 oxen, 50 teamsters and quartermaster's men, 69 Washington Volunteers, over 50 friendly Nez Perces, and more than 200 head of loose livestock.

According to the governor, "In the afternoon (of September 18) Lieutenant Colonel Steptoe...appointed the next day, a little after noon, for a special conference. The Indians did not, however, come to see Steptoe at the time appointed. They previously set fire to his grass, and following me as I set out about eleven o'clock on my way to the Dalles, they attacked me within three miles of Steptoe's camp at about one o'clock in the afternoon."

"So satisfied was I that the Indians would carry into effect their avowed determination...to attack me, that, in starting I formed my whole party and moved in order of battle. I moved on under fire one mile to water, when forming a corral of the wagons and

holding the adjacent hills and the brush on the stream by pickets, I made my arrangements to defend my position and fight the Indians. Our position in a low open basin, 500 or 600 yards across, was good, and with the aid of our corral, we could defend ourselves..."

The Fighting

In describing the fighting, Stevens recounted, "The fight continued till late in the night. Two charges were made to disperse the Indians, the last led by Lieutenant Colonel Shaw in person with twenty-four men...Just before the charge the friendly Nez Perces, fifty in number, who had been assigned to hold the ridge on the south side of the corral, were told by the enemy, they came not to fight the Nez Perces, but the whites. 'Go to your camp,' said they, 'or we will wipe it out!' Their camp, with their women and children, was on a stream about a mile distant; and I directed them to retire as I did not require their assistance..."

An account by one of the participants published in the Oregon Statesman on October 14, 1856 states, "small parties of Indians began to pass us on the left, and soon commenced firing on our rear...But we drove on, the volunteers, and occasionally a teamster, returning the fire, until we had reached a small spring branch, where we corralled our wagons, including our stock. A place where three small valleys met, and as many elevations of about 30 feet, standing close in the form of a triangle...By the time we were camped, we were surrounded and fired upon from all sides. The three points having first been secured to keep the enemy from annoying the train, a charge was made upon the Indians in our rear to the left."

Col. Shaw: "The firing was kept up...until late in the evening, when I took all the available force...charged a body of Indians on a hill some 500 yards south of the camp. The object of this was to see how many of the spectators who were congregated in large numbers on the left, were fighting men. The whole party advanced at the top of their horses speed, and on ascending the hill, the whole body of Indians fired a volley; the balls fortunately passed over our heads. We fired a volley when close to them, which made them give back some distance. By this time, the body of supposed spectators came down on the full run, and cut us completely off from camp. I then ordered the command to turn and charge through them to camp; for a moment it seemed doubtful whether we could force our way through them or not...On seeing this, the large party which we first charged, came down on the full run, waving their guns and hatchets...They were however soon checked by a wall of well-directed fire from a picket in the brush; after this the whole body retired some distance..."

During the night, Stevens sent a request for help from Steptoe, who dispatched an escort, and the Stevens party was able to return under fire to Steptoe's camp with the aid of a howitzer, which was also used the next morning to end a further attack.

After construction of a blockhouse and stockade which was the first military Fort Walla Walla, on September 23 Steptoe and Stevens marched together to the Dalles without further problems.