

## TO THE BRINK AND BACK

### The Bannock War Pounds at the Door to Washington Territory

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*Reporter: What Indians are engaged in this late uprising?*

*General George Crook: The Bannocks, Paiutes, and some of the Shoshones....*

*Reporter: Is it not rather hard that men and officers should be sent out there to be killed by the Indians, when all the trouble has been brought about by thieving agents?*

*General Crook: That is not the hardest thing. A harder thing is to be forced to kill the Indians when they are clearly in the right.... I do not wonder, and you would not either, that when these Indians see their wives and children starving, and their last source of supplies cut off, that they go to war.*

*Reporter: It seems to me that it would be cheaper to treat the Indians justly.*

*General Crook: Of course it would be cheaper.... Our treatment of the Indian is an outrage.*

*—Interview with General George Crook, Omaha Herald, June 21, 1878 (reprinted in the Pendleton East Oregonian, July 13, 1878)*

More than any other armed conflict between the United States and the indigenous peoples of the Northwest, the so-called “Bannock War” of 1878 left a lasting impact on all who lived in the region, an impact far exceeding its modest casualty figures and its relatively brief duration. This was especially true in the eastern portion of Washington Territory, a locale where there were no formal campaigns or battles. Panic and fear were at fever pitch on both sides, and the area came within a hair’s breadth of being engulfed in a conflagration that might have forever changed the development of the territory and the state.

In that season of fear there were two tragic confrontations in the eastern part of the territory, each pushing the region closer to the edge of catastrophe. Both occurred in July and involved unprovoked attacks against noncombatants—bands of Columbia River Indians minding their own business, and a rancher and his wife heading for Yakima to visit relatives. Due to their horrendous nature, both attacks were seared into the memory of their respective peoples, and the accounts were passed down to later generations. These confrontations came at one of the many flash points of the war, when the situation was so dire that the governors from both the state of Oregon and Washington Territory visited the front lines to assess the situation, call for more arms, and confer with the commander, the famous “Praying General,” Oliver Otis Howard.

The Bannock Indians lived near Fort Hall in southeastern Idaho. They had suffered through the near extinction of the northern buffalo herd, administrations of mediocre Indian agents, and woefully inadequate government food rations. Frustration gave way to anger, then desperation. The final straw came in May 1878 when whites took to raising livestock on Camas Prairie,

“reasonable portions” of which had been set aside by treaty for the Bannocks 10 years earlier. Ranchers had brought their hogs onto the Bannocks’ root grounds, destroying yet one more vital food source. The Bannocks shot and wounded three of the ranchers, and the war was on.

### A Climate of Fear

*People who did not experience that Indian war do not realize the terror and bloodshed and loss it incurred. There is a lot of misinformation about the Bannack [sic] War, and much of it has gotten into print.*

—Darius H. Smith, 1929, Harney County Pioneer

There are a number of reasons why this particular war created a palpable climate of fear. Unlike the Nez Perce War of 1877, which began in the region but left fairly quickly, the Bannock War was first and last a Northwest conflict, with its swath of destruction and terror swirling around the region’s interior like a resident tornado. First of all, neither local settlers nor native villagers could ever feel at ease, fearing that hostile warriors, unfriendly cavalry, or mounted volunteers could appear at any moment. This attitude of dread was exacerbated by the fact that, unlike the Modoc War of 1873, the Bannock War was not a static campaign, contained in a relatively small geographical area, but rather a series of brief but violent fights conducted over a wide area in a five-month time period. Although it began in a faraway corner of Idaho in late May, the war quickly escalated into a fast-moving, intense guerilla campaign that exploded into eastern Oregon, then galloped northward toward the Columbia River and Washington Territory. After a battle the Bannocks and their allies would melt away into the landscape like ghosts, only to appear miles away, often when and where they were least expected.

Second, unlike the more famous Nez Perce War, this conflict brought out the worst in humanity, with both sides resorting at times to mutilating their enemies’ bodies and attacking civilians. Farmers, ranchers, peaceful natives, women, and children were all targeted at one time or another. In fact, out of the 40 American citizens reported killed, only 9 were soldiers. On the other hand, army gunboats on the Columbia had no qualms about firing artillery and Gatling guns indiscriminately into groups of natives without provocation, undertaking their own campaign of terror and slaughter.

Third, the flames of panic and fear were fed by a mode of journalism that favored sensationalism over reporting the truth. Frontier newspapers played a critical role in communities lucky enough to have one, but papers often became an official sanction of the worst of social mores and beliefs—exacerbating panics and hardening intolerant attitudes. The Dayton News had set the tone with its vitriol during 1876 and 1877, taking every opportunity to lambaste the government for its weak Indian policy, claiming that it was time to quit –coddling the local natives. Indians were termed “pests” and “squirrels,” and the paper did not hesitate to state that even the “meanest” of the whites killed by the Nez Perce “was of more value to the world than a hundred Indians like Joseph.” Pendleton’s East Oregonian was not far behind the News, sermonizing that “Indian agents may cry peace, peace, but there can be no peace until the last one of the red demons [dies]...and every time one of them bites the dust every good citizen will say Amen; so be it; bless the Lord; hallelujah!”

In fact, such invective-laden journalism had even come to be known as the “Oregon Style,” a genre of reporting that specialized in personal attack, mirroring the situation of the times. Editors also published material they could easily lay their hands on, printing pieces from other papers, rumors and hearsay from friends, freighters, and unknown travelers, with little patience

to check on the story's accuracy. A Lakeview, Oregon, attorney, Chandler B. Watson, spoke of the newspapers' unreliability during the summer of 1878, complaining that citizens "were subjected to floating rumors and the tales of adventurous souls...and much that they told we put down to fiction." Thus, newspapers were both a blessing and curse, providing information to news-starved settlers but often proving to be conduits of mere fiction when truth was most needed.

Fear feeds off the unknown, and the great unknown that summer was the disposition of the last remaining Northwest native leader who had not been either killed or relegated to a reservation: Chief Moses, who had assumed his father's name, Sulktalthscosum, or "Half-Sun." Would the chief stay out of this fight as he had the Nez Perce War the year before, or would this be the year that he would finally lead a vast federation of warriors against the settlers? The residents of eastern Washington had faint hopes for the former, but were deathly afraid of the latter—and for good reason.

Moses was the acknowledged leader of many of the Columbia Salish or Sinkiuse peoples, and called much of modern-day central Washington home. He had marital and family ties to numerous tribes and bands throughout the region, and his camps in the eastern part of Washington Territory were magnets for growing numbers of disaffected warriors and their families, products of wars and failed governmental policies. By 1878, Moses had achieved significant renown amongst both natives and whites, and there can be little doubt that there were many warriors who would willingly fight under his leadership. Thus, as the region baked in the July sun, all eyes were on the Columbia River: it was common knowledge that the Bannocks and their allies would sooner or later attempt to cross, trying to link up with Moses.

### **War Comes to the Territory**

Standing on the north bank of the now-placid waters behind McNary Dam, some six miles upstream from Umatilla, this place looks anything but menacing. Water laps gently against moss-covered rocks and puffs of breeze flutter the small, sage-colored leaves of the Russian Olive trees that line the bank. It is hard to believe that this peaceful setting was once the scene of stark terror and the spot where the Bannock War arrived at the door of Washington Territory on July 8, 1878. But we need to peel back the layers of modernity—the sounds of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe trains and the images of river tugs pushing slow water. Buried far beneath the reservoir, the basalt cliffs themselves would tell a story that is just as turbulent as the river they once guarded.

The cliffs had provided pockets of shelter for numerous native fishing villages at this location, but these same rocks would show the deep scars and pock marks of artillery and Gatling guns, the forerunner of the modern-day machine gun. The scars came from a torrent of shells unleashed by the gunboat Northwest on peaceful natives who were drying their catch of eels and summer-run salmon in the July sun. That is what the land tells us; as to why, the human witnesses tell sharply conflicting stories. The act of firing on non-aggressive Indians here and elsewhere in the vicinity was called "heroic" by the army, "cowardly" by the natives. What is not in dispute is that these encounters supplied potent fuel for revenge.

In early July numerous reports stated that the Bannocks and their allies were indeed heading north and would at last try to cross the river to join Moses. This scenario of a Sinkiuse-Bannock alliance worried General Howard more than any other possibility, and he directed Colonel Frank

Wheaton to obtain steamboats outfitted with artillery to patrol the Columbia River and “intercept the hostiles.” Wheaton in turn hired the steamboats Northwest and Spokane, the former to patrol between Wallula and Umatilla Landing under the command of Lieutenant Melville C. Wilkinson, and the latter vessel covering the river below Umatilla under the command of Captain John Kress. In this region the Columbia flows mostly through low hills cut by numerous draws leading to the river; the terrain supplies numerous crossing points for both people and animals. Old maps show trails fanning out to the north, and the old wagon road from Umatilla to Seattle roughly parallels present-day Interstate 82 on its way to Kennewick.

According to the army’s version of events, the patrol boats were a great success, preventing large-scale crossings of hostile natives. In fact, these engagements were apparently the stuff of which heroes are made, –prompting the army to award Kress the –Distinguished Service Cross in 1925 for “extraordinary heroism in action near Umatilla, Oregon, July 8, 1878,” and for his “gallant and fearless leadership in frustrating the [Bannock’s] plan of spreading the war among the Indians to the North.” General Howard also expressed his public approval with the actions of both gunboats, stating that it would be “necessary” to treat combative Umatillas “just as Kress and Wilkinson are doing.” Kress himself reported two “very lively skirmishes” with the natives, and in his official report praises his crew “for standing firm at their posts under fire.” Andrew D. Pambrun, a former Hudson’s Bay Company employee who reported being on the Spokane during one of these expeditions, describes the rifle fire of the Indians as “almost riddling the Pilot House.”

Even at the time, though, there were whispers that perhaps some of the gunboats’ actions were far from heroic and that the fights may not have been as fierce as Kress and others led the public to believe. Upon examining the Spokane just two days after the battles, an Oregonian reporter wondered why gunboats were firing on Indians who had “offered no violence to any one,” and was also surprised to find just two holes made by bullets, surmising that rumor had augmented the combat. Also, according to Kress’s official reports, he himself initiated these fights, firing artillery and Gatling guns at people whose only hostile action was either to cross the river or to ride away. Such actions seem far from being extraordinarily heroic. Even Kress’s reported skirmishes on land lack that level of bravery.

If there are reasons to be suspicious of Kress’s “heroism,” there is even less support for the actions of –Lieutenant Wilkinson on board the Northwest. Steaming down from Wallula, he fired his artillery and Gatling gun without the slightest provocation into a group of peaceful natives camped there, killing at least two men and one woman, wounding others, and laying waste to the entire camp. Even some of the settlers of the period reacted to his action with distaste, Pambrun calling the it a “massacre” and stating flatly that “there was no excuse” for what Wilkinson had done. The following month the Walla Walla Union heaped scorn on the lieutenant’s action, sarcastically predicting that Wilkinson’s new post would likely prove a more difficult venue in which to garner the same sort of “honors” that he did on board the Northwest.

Beyond the dubious ethics of these expeditions there were undeniable and dangerous results from the gunboats’ tactics. The Baker City Bedrock and Democrat had its doubts about “Wilkinson’s wild raid up the Columbia” and opined that it would cause the very opposite of its intended result, driving Moses into the arms of the hostiles. Oregon Governor Stephen Chadwick was also convinced that Wilkinson’s actions would bring the Sinkiuse into the battle against the whites, and he almost proved a prophet, with only the relentless arguments of the Umatilla and Cayuse chiefs preventing their northern brethren from joining the Bannocks.

Worse yet, the horror of the gunboats' attacks had even reached Moses' ears, causing the chief "great distress of mind," and he wondered if the attacks signaled a general massacre of all Indians. The Reverend James Wilbur, a long-time Indian agent at Fort Simcoe, used his friendship with Moses to reassure the chief that such attacks were "mistakes" and not part of any larger plan.

If the gunboat attacks made some whites uneasy, they infuriated and grieved those whom the army could least afford to antagonize. The attacks of July 8, especially Wilkinson's shelling of the fishing village, were burned into the collective memories of the Umatillas and Sinkiuse. Their stories—even told nearly 40 years after the fact—reveal the very real pain the attacks caused and leave no doubt of the connection between these attacks and what soon followed.

*It happened that a party of old people, men, women, and children, were sal-mon fishing along the Columbia, between Umatilla and the mouth of Rock Creek, and a steamboat passing fired on these defenseless people and many of them were killed. Then after this, some of the families and friends of these old people and children killed, found a man and woman [Lorenzo and Blanche Perkins] and killed them in retaliation.*

—Mrs. Caesar Williams, 1916 (as told to L. V. McWhorter)

*The white people from The Dalles, they all organized and got guns and got a steamboat and went up to the village and they killed all the old people, [who] don't do nothing, all the old ladies and all the old men and before these Indians got back to their home they were all dead so part of them went up to the Umatilla River and then part of them went up the Columbia River and crossed the Columbia River...and they came there to a white man and his wife and some of the Indians says, "Here the white people have killed our fathers and mothers and they were not doing any harm, now I am going to kill this white man to make even."*

—Shaw-ou-way-coot-shy-ah, n.d. —William Charley, interpreter (as told to L. V. McWhorter)

*A steamboat came on the Columbia River, and fired on a camp of Indians at a place called Now-wow-wee, but none were hurt. On the same day a band of Indians crossed the Columbia River at Oom-i-tal-lum (Umatilla language), and pitched camp on the Washington shore. There were women and children in this camp, all peaceable, the men not having many arms. A steamboat came down the river, and without any warning opened fire on us with what seemed like a machine gun. A man named Wah-la-lowie, belonging at La-qwa, on the Columbia, was shot in pit of belly and killed. He was a middle-aged man. A middle-aged woman named Wah-lul-mi, from Ti-che-chim, on the Columbia, was shot in the forehead, and fell dead....*

*They fired at me at where I lay hid but did not reach me.... Some of the Indians fleeing north came upon the white man and woman in the Rattlesnake Mountain, and killed them. This was to even up for their people being killed by the steamboat men.*

—Jim Sch-yowit, 1917, Louis Mann, interpreter (as told to L. V. McWhorter)

While these actions of the gunboats may have discouraged the Bannocks from a large-scale Columbia River crossing, they also created groups of angry warriors, some bent on revenge. One group proceeded north across the Horse Heaven Hills and was reported to have crossed the lower Yakima River at "Rocky Ford," just south of present-day Grandview. Old maps show numerous trails leading north from this point across the Yakima Valley and over the Rattlesnake Hills, with one leading directly to Rattlesnake Springs. When this group of angry men arrived at the springs they saw a white couple eating their lunch, and they had no way of knowing that their plans for revenge would have far-reaching repercussions.

## Murder at the Springs

*The Perkins Murder was one of the cruelest events in all the long and cruel history of Indian warfare.*

—W. D. Lyman, *History of the Yakima Valley, 1919*

Rattlesnake Springs lies on the southern fringes of the Hanford Reach National Monument, its waters nourishing black willow and wild rose and the surrounding hills carpeted by waving stands of bluebunch wheatgrass. The very word “monument” comes from a Latin root meaning “to remind,” so it is fitting that we let this place remind us of the tragedy that took place here. Unlike the Columbia near Umatilla, the physical environment around the springs has changed relatively little since 1878. There are no dams, trains, or barges, and virtually the only sound is the afternoon wind sighing in the grass.

Heading west around a nearby hill are the well-defined traces of the old wagon road between White Bluffs and Yakima. Etched into this same small hill are the deep ruts of an even earlier pack road used by miners heading to the mines of Canada and Montana. Important native trails also converged here, including a route that went south up the canyon through what is now called Snively Basin and over the Rattlesnake Hills toward the distant Columbia River. The springs were the intersection of great trading and migration routes for a variety of peoples and cultures, and by the late 19th century its dependable water had made it a popular camping spot for stockmen, natives, and travelers.

Today, a close look reveals a long-hidden reminder that this spot was not always so quiet and this once--important crossroads was marred by a profound tragedy. About 200 yards north of the main springs, a six-foot steel rod has been driven deep into the rocky ground, marking the spot where the bodies of Lorenzo and Blanche Perkins were found in late July 1878 by Stick Joe (a Yakama from Fort Simcoe) and John Edwards. The location was marked by Edwards and historian L. V. McWhorter in 1922.

In June 1878 Edwards and a group of friends had accompanied the Perkinses to look for land and stock in the rich Palouse country. Worried about the spreading Bannock War, they had urged the couple to return to Yakima City with them. Lorenzo Perkins, --however, wanted to look after his stock at their ranch in White Bluffs, so the couple detoured to the ranch, telling Edwards they would see him in Yakima City for the Fourth of July. After the couple was overdue, an extensive search conducted near the springs discovered the bodies buried in separate piles of rocks. The horrible news was carried back to Yakima City by one of the searchers.

*Well there is a terrible excitement about the Indians, there are thousands of reports flying; One is that the Bannac Indians are coming for Yakima and Kittitass and going to clear the valley's and maybe here tonight or tomorrow night, nothing certain. Purdy, Mr. York, Correl and Niburn have started down the river to see about it; signal fires were out last night, we are realy in danger, every one admits that this valley could easily [be] swept of every thing, I may never write in this again. However, I am willing to say, "God's will be done." If he choses to save us why all right, if not, all right, I am ready and not afraid to die.*

—*Journal of 14-year-old Hettie M. Flint, Yakima City, July 10, 1878*

The murders threw an already panicky Yakima region into an uproar. The Perkinses were a popular couple (it was said that Blanche was pregnant), and these killings confirmed every settler's nightmare about the terrors of the Bannock War. Sod forts were hurriedly constructed or improved west of Yakima City in the Wenas and the Ahtanum Valleys, and many of the

settlers in the Lower Valley fled to Yakima City, taking refuge in Centennial and Schanno Halls. Volunteer militia assembled and drilled in both Klickitat and Yakima counties, farmers worried about mysterious signal fires on the summits of the Horse Heaven Hills and Rattlesnake Hills, and posses were raised to hunt for the killers. Stark panic filled the air, and it was a common belief that the Bannocks, Paiutes, Sinkiuse, and Wanapums were uniting to sweep the valleys clean of settlers. As one writer put it, “the whole country was in the throes of a wild excitement.”

The murder investigation began promisingly: two Indians were arrested fairly quickly, and one of them gave Edwards a full account of the murders as well as the names of five others who were involved. The trail grew cold, however, and as summer gave way to fall, the settlers focused their frustration on one man as the target for their fear and rage—Chief Moses. Surely, they reasoned, this man who claimed to be chief of so much of the country either was behind the killings or, at the very least, sheltering the murderers. Unlike Kamiakin or Joseph, Moses had managed to avoid leading a full-scale war against the army, but dark rumors persisted of miners and cowboys disappearing on lonely trails. Moses himself admitted that in his early years he had been “up to his elbows in blood.”

The Perkins murders, like the attacks on the peaceful natives near Umatilla, brought the cruelty of the Bannock War to Central Washington—the war was here now, people could feel it—and both settlers and natives had reached their limits. Never mind that late summer saw the Bannocks and their allies begin to dissolve as a cohesive fighting force and slip out of Oregon to the east; the damage had been done and the sparks were already smoldering in Washington Territory. The only question remaining was what new event would set them off.

### **The Chief and the Preacher**

*The situation is one of great peril, and it is now looked upon as almost certain that war with Moses and the other tribes is inevitable.*

—The Willamette Farmer, *quoted in the Pacific Christian Advocate, March 13, 1879*

*Now, this day I have a hard knot given to me to untie.*

—Chief Moses, *letter to General O. O. Howard, written at Fort Simcoe, February 19, 1879*

The region was marching inexorably toward war. With the unprovoked attacks near Umatilla and at Rattlesnake Springs hanging over the area like a pall, each camp had radicals wanting to settle things once and for all: anti-Moses groups and factions had organized in Yakima City and Kittitas, and the number of frustrated and angry warriors was growing around the chief’s own fires. Since there was not yet even the semblance of an official organ for news in Yakima City, wild and outlandish rumors completely took over the town, and it was a rare day when strident voices did not blast from saloons and stores about the latest Indian depredations or government weakness and failures. Citizens were further enraged in mid September when they learned that Moses had had the temerity to request an even a larger reservation from General Howard than he had the year before.

At his winter camp on lower Crab Creek, Moses fared no better. Settlers had long overestimated the amount of control he exercised over the large numbers of diverse natives now residing in the region, and the chief continually worried that one or more of them would commit some act for which he would be held personally responsible. He knew full well there were many who wanted him dead, and Yakima City hotheads apparently had planned at least one attempt to

waylay him. Agent Wilbur knew that Moses' life was at risk, and that "there were those who would kill him [at] the first opportunity." This hatred and disrespect for the chief only provided fodder to those warriors in Moses' camp who wanted action against the whites, not words; and some of the bolder ones even dared to call Moses "an old woman" for his reticence to fight.

As 1878 wound down it was apparent that matters had finally reached an impasse and that if war was somehow to be avoided the government needed to take a stronger role in crafting some proactive solution. If General Howard represented the sword of the government, it was Agent Wilbur who was its ambassador to natives in the region, and he would have to take a leading part in the delicate maneuvering that was needed.

Beginning in the fall of 1878, the interplay between Wilbur and Moses became a fascinating study in the flawed but important world of frontier diplomacy. There were many missteps along the way—one of them nearly fatal—but it was this strange pairing that helped nudge the region along the bumpy road toward peace. Wilbur had just gotten back from talking to his superiors in Washington, D.C., about how to resolve this very issue, and in October the Indian Bureau, desiring to hear Moses' side of the matter, requested that the agent ask Moses to come to Simcoe.

This conference, held on December 7, went well enough to prompt Wilbur to play a risky gambit: Would Moses accompany him to Centennial Hall in Yakima City, both to reassure the local population and to lend assistance in finding the remaining Perkins murderers? Moses matched Wilbur's boldness, agreeing to go, and there was reason for hope when the pair traveled to the very heart of the opposition—one of the actual buildings used to shelter settlers during the recent panics. Although it is doubtful the chief made many converts amongst the skeptical audience, he did offer to lend some of his own warriors to help find the Perkins murderers, and it was agreed that Moses and some of his own men would meet a party of volunteers near the mouth of Crab Creek.

In hindsight, there were reasons for guarded optimism. One was Moses' strong desire to have his own reservation. He knew full well that any hostile movement on his part now would forever extinguish his dreams of a "Moses Reservation." Thus, whatever his feelings or motives, it was certainly in his best interest to remain peaceful.

Another reason for hope was the good relations demonstrated between Moses and Agent Wilbur at Simcoe. The latter looked at his job as a religious calling and duty. Wilbur was one of the longest tenured agents in the entire service, and his incredible work ethic and willingness to labor amongst the Yakamas had found admirers in the tribe, army, government, and local citizenry. His long experience had also given him some clout and a sense of how the Indian Service operated. He was currently working with his fourth presidential administration, outlasting countless functionaries and bureaucrats. Like the majority of his fellow Methodists, he was paternalistic and legalistic, but he also had a consistent track record of putting his duty and adherence to the laws above his own self-interest.

Finally, the government was taking an active interest in this specific case, partly because of Wilbur's recent visit to the capital and partly because of the spate of worrisome headlines coming out of Washington Territory. The bureaucrats were motivated to solve the "Moses problem," and perhaps a new reservation, far from the troublemakers in Yakima City, might be a good way to defuse the situation while giving both sides something to celebrate.



However, any nascent trust evaporated instantly after a confrontation just south of Saddle Mountain Gap on December 11. Moses and approximately 90 of his men faced a contingent of Yakama Tribal Police and some 40 citizens led by William Splawn. Through what was in all probability a miscommunication on where the two groups were to link up to begin their search for the murderers, the situation deteriorated into a stand-off that resembled a Western movie. Splawn and Moses were only a few feet apart—the match was at the fuse—but the restraint of both men carried the day, and war was averted once more. Both sides, however, suspected the other of treachery, and Splawn's group took Moses as a temporary hostage to ensure his good intentions.

On hearing this latest report, Wilbur reacted hastily. Reasoning that the safest place for Moses was back in Yakima City and perhaps hoping that he could now convince Moses to accept the Yakama Reservation as his home, he wrote Splawn in the field, requesting that the volunteers bring Moses back to town. The next day Wilbur rethought this stance; realizing that having Moses arrested might actually push his tribesmen to attack the settlers, he wrote Splawn again, countermanding his earlier letter. The second missive arrived too late, however, and Moses found himself headed back to Yakima City as a captive.

Wilbur still had an ace to play. Incurring the wrath of those who wanted Moses locked up in the local jail, the agent negotiated Moses' release to his own custody at the agency, and thus began one of the most remarkable sagas of the period. For the next two months, Wilbur and Moses became the original "Odd Couple" of Fort Simcoe, with Moses being confined in the fort's guardhouse only when the agent was entertaining local visitors. Wilbur spent much of this period trying to convince Moses to call the Yakama Reservation home, but the chief was equal to this verbal assault, keeping his replies flattering and amenable, yet vague. An army lieutenant who happened to be present during some of these exchanges was amazed at the level of shrewdness and calculation exhibited by both men.

His failure to convince the chief to live on the Yakama Reservation left Wilbur concerned for Moses' safety. When word of Wilbur's lenient treatment of the chief leaked out to the radicals in Yakima City, they repeatedly sent the sheriff to arrest Moses and return him to the Yakima jail—even threatening Wilbur with arrest. The Methodist-preacher-turned-Indian-agent was a former deputy sheriff himself and refused to budge. At last, on February 18, 1879, a telegram arrived that changed the entire complexion of the case: Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz instructed Wilbur to invite Moses to join a delegation that would travel to Washington and meet with the president to discuss the issue of a new "Moses Reservation."

Surmising that if Moses traveled east to meet Schurz and President Hayes it would be all the more difficult to treat him as a common criminal, the anti-Moses clique played its last card. The group arrested Moses yet again for complicity in the Perkins murders, hoping that new evidence would prevent his departure. But the redoubtable Wilbur was up to the task—he paid for counsel, waived examination, and posted bond for the chief. In a letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. A. Hayt, Wilbur clearly divined the sinister motives of the group and foresaw that Moses "would have been left in prison from March to October (if he had not been killed before)." His enemies' efforts finally thwarted, Moses began the first leg of his journey to Washington on March 17, 1879, replete with a new suit of clothes and Wilbur's letter of introduction, which referred to the chief as "a man of good sense."

### The Verdict of History

The Yakima hotheads' prediction turned out to be right. After returning from his trip to the nation's capital, Moses was indeed a celebrity, and even the homegrown Yakima City grand jury did not indict him. The chief did obtain his reservation, but the Moses or "Columbia" Reservation was short-lived. Within a few years Moses and other native leaders were being pressured to cede it to the government and move to the Colville Reservation, which they did in 1883.

Agent Wilbur returned to the Simcoe Agency where he retired in 1882, one of the longest-tenured Indian agents in the history of the service. Often held up as proving the worth of the government's model of assimilation, the Methodist preacher was worn out from struggles with eager Catholic priests, bookish government inspectors, angry settlers who thought he "coddled" his charges, and traditional Yakamas who refused to adopt Wilbur's strict way of the "Gospel and Plow." The events of the Bannock War took their toll on the 67-year-old preacher and added more names to the list of settlers who wanted him out. It is hardly surprising that Wilbur left the Yakima Valley upon retirement and took up residence in Walla Walla where he died in 1887, one of the old guard of Methodist missionaries who had come to the Northwest with such high hopes.

It is ironic that the very lack of a newspaper in Yakima City during the crisis no doubt benefited the cause of peace in the long run, given the journalistic tendency to use each and every incident to ratchet up the tension between natives and settlers. The Perkins murders indeed made headlines in several papers, but the delay in getting the news from Yakima City had the effect of dulling the immediacy of the tragedy. The last of the Perkins murderers, said to be Umatilla men whose relatives were among those shot and killed by the Northwest's Gatling gun, was finally executed in 1882.

Despite the dire threats and crises that hammered the territory almost weekly, there was no grand battle or general massacre to mark the climax of the Bannock War north of the Columbia River. Unlike so many conflicts elsewhere between Indians and the U.S. Army, there was no "last stand," no romanticized charge, no poignant surrender to find its way into dime novels. Due to skillful maneuvering and parrying by Agent James Wilbur and the restraint exercised by Chief Moses and William Splawn, enough time was gained to allow the government to intervene and diffuse the situation, precisely when the outlook seemed bleakest.

Sadly, the Colville Reservation proved to be neither panacea nor paradise for Moses, and his last years ebbed away in the midst of staving off trespassers and trying to collect rents due him from ranchers. Moses, who had once been the master of a seemingly endless domain that stretched across the vast steppes of Washington Territory, never did adapt well to the more sedentary life required by agriculture on a reservation. He loved attending and participating in horse races, and he demonstrated an over-fondness for alcohol. But the sadness of Moses' last years cannot efface his accomplishments of that frenzied summer in 1878. During this period Half-Sun was a man to be reckoned with, a respected leader who commanded forces far more powerful and numerous than any of the volunteer forces that could be mustered by the isolated ranchers and farmers of central Washington. Those early settlers understood this disparity well enough, but they largely misjudged the motives and intentions of Half-Sun. General Howard, who knew Moses as well as any white leader, was right when he attributed part of the chief's greatness to his knowing "when not to fight."

Moses' restraint and leadership had more long-term benefits as well, no doubt influencing modern-day political boundaries and retaining at least a semblance of a homeland for his people. By 1878 the Colville Reservation had been in existence for some six years, but its survival was precarious; miners and ranchers brazenly set up shop in the prohibited lands almost at will. The government's warnings for settlers to stay out were halfhearted, and over the years the reservation was whittled down to its present-day size of 1.4 million acres. The late 1800s saw a rising tide of public sentiment for breaking up the reservations altogether, granting instead personal land allotments to individual tribal members.

If Moses had chosen to join the Bannocks in one last and doomed stand against the settlers and the army, any short-term gains and victories would have been utterly destroyed in the long run. Such recalcitrance would have given the anti-reservation forces all the momentum they needed to obliterate the Colville Reservation altogether. But in that hot summer of conflict, when so many people were losing their heads in a mad and panicked rush to war, Half-Sun demonstrated an innate ability to intuit the right course amidst stormy seas, helping achieve for his people a land that today remains a vital part of his legacy.

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