



Wallowa Soil Blended at Joseph's Grave

Nez Perces gathered about Chief Joseph's grave at Nespelem on Memorial day as two white women joined in ceremonies marked by a scattering of soil brought from Joseph's homeland in the Wallawas of Oregon. Another visitor was State Senator Nat Washington of Ephrata (at left of monument). —Photo by Mrs. Gladys Para.

Indians Gather for Chief Joseph

By GLADYS PARA

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in Okanogan county, for servicemen Copy 10c

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NESPELEM — The white children present in the cemetery were wide-eyed.

Their mothers had briefed them before the drive to Nespelem so they would understand that whatever ceremony the Nez Perce people conducted on Memorial Day was their own, and not a show put on for the benefit of a white man audience: no feathers and dances were to be expected.

Yet, suddenly in the small area of Young Chief Joseph's grave, a man in a sport shirt and crew cut raised his voice in the Nez Perce tongue, rang his handbell in a call to prayer, and received a chanted answer from the small group of Indians assembling.

Joe Redthunder, acting as master of ceremonies, led the nearly blind tribal elder, Charley Williams, through the narrow spaces among the many graves to a chair beside his wife Susie, full-blood daughter of Old-Man-Chief, where they waited beneath a tree growing exactly at the foot of Joseph's grave.

One of the women who had worked hard during the week previous, pulling every blade of weed and cheat grass from the mounds and paths, wondered aloud to a companion where the tree could have blown in from, as it was the only one in the cemetery and surely no one had planted it.

REDTHUNDER had gathered these families together because he had agreed to a request by two white women that they be allowed to participate in the Nez Perce Memorial day by providing earth from Joseph's Wallowa homeland to be scattered over his grave, and now he and his people were adding a short but meaningful postscript to their usual yearly observance.

In the words of Mrs. Velma Mende, Marlin, who with her friend, Mrs. Gladys Para, Othello, had made a small and private pilgrimage to Oregon, "Joseph lies in soil that is not his own; he could not be buried in the soil he loved, the soil that supported the life of his people and of his spotted ponies, that took its richness from the mountains and rivers of the Wallowa country. Some of this soil, then, is being brought to him, in remembrance of the life and the country he knew and loved."

She had climbed the hill commanding a view of the entire Wallowa valley and overlooking the main summer camp of Joseph's father, Chief Old Joseph.

From this site, at the woody confluence of the Wallowa and Lostine rivers between Minam and Wallowa, she had gathered earth to mingle with that from the present grave and monument to the old chief at the foot of Lake Wallowa, just outside the town of Joseph.

CHARLEY Williams, who wears his grey hair in the otter-wrapped braids and cut forelock of the old days, spoke in the language of his fathers to the group which had gathered, exhorting them to remember Joseph and what he fought for, to respect and honor his beloved memory.

Elijah Williams, who with Redthunder represents the two remaining men in Nespelem of full Nez Perce blood, recalled in English that he was glad to see public respect paid to their chief, and that it is good to honor the dead, for so also

would all present soon need to be honored.

He raised his hand to indicate a calling upon Almighty God, and the Indians present did likewise, with a lamenting "Aaaiyy" in answer.

When the three men had spoken and Mrs. Mendes' remarks were translated into Nez Perce — the handbell, the uplifted hands and chanted response interposed after each — the Indian women went singly to the basket of earth which Mrs. Mendes held, standing beside Williams, took up a handful and formed a large circle around Joseph's resting place.

The grave and tall white stone marker at its head are now surrounded by a rustic pole fence, recently placed by local Boy Scouts.

As the women walked in their circle, it could be seen that all, modern and aged alike, were wearing hand-made moccasins with leggings, whether they were dressed in the old manner or in a skirt and blouse. It seemed a most fitting way to mark, without ostentation, what was a truly Indian ceremony.

ONE OF THE sweet-faced women gave what seemed to be a personal testimony in the Nez Perce tongue and, at the sound of Redthunder's bell, joined with all of them in a most gentle and plaintive death-chant, mourning Joseph's spirit.

The ancient sorrowing it evoked started tears to the eyes of more than only those who were of Indian blood.

Each let fall her handful of earth upon Joseph's resting place and then turned around in a full circle in place, and again at the head and again at the foot of the grave, this circling in place being a reverential sign in the old Dreamer religion of the Nez Perce peoples.

The ceremony ended with a presentation by the local American Legion post, which fired a rifle salute and with the blowing of taps by an Indian who was an excellent bugler. This caused many present to mourn afresh for the Nez Perce lying there who gave their lives in the service of their country.

For Mrs. Mendes and Mrs. Para, the real ending came with the firm handshake and direct gaze given them by Joe Redthunder in farewell which bespoke his thanks, not only for the gesture which inspired the occasion, but for the simplicity with which it was offered.



Old Molson was dedicated. The sign are only two of

eat-grandson, Bob Irwin, Orville's postmaster. Another speaker, Mrs. Mildred Roylance of Greenwood, C., president of the Boundary Historical society, discussed the need of preserving and recording historical material. She was one of about 30 Canadians attending the Molson program. There are tentative plans to dedicate another historical marker, at the Pateros city park, on June 23. This marker concerns a U-bolt used by stern wheelers to winch themselves through the Methow gorges.

Weather Report

Mrs. C. D. McFarland
Observer

	H	L	Pr.
Wednesday	67	50	
Thursday	71	40	
Friday	75	41	
Saturday	75	57	.09
Sunday	78	55	.01
Monday	73	45	
Tuesday	76	52	