

OUR FIRST CITIZENS – Copied from the book Battle Ground In and Around (pages 17 & 18). This excellent historical reference book is available for sale at the museum and at the Literary Leftovers bookstore in Battle Ground.

Who were the first families to live on the land of Clark County? The Hudson's Bay trappers? The donation land claim settlers?.....No, the Indians.

Indians Use River

The county's Indians are often called the Cathlapootle tribe, with various spellings, though that is a name given to them by the white man since their territory covered the Cathlapootle or Lewis River country. Their main village and trail crossing was at the present Ridgefield on Lake River. Chief Stwire G. Waters in a 1920 interview concerning the death of Chief Umtuch, gave the Indian name of "Titon-nap-pam" to these people. The name is listed as "Twitin-apam" in the Bureau of American Ethnology Handbook of American Indians, a minor branch of the Klickitat tribe.

Life had not been easy for the Indian, even before the coming of the settlers. As the homesteaders found out, this was not the land of milk and honey. It took the entire length of the Lewis River to supply the Indians' needs. They lived on sturgeon, salmon and other fish from the rivers, blackberries, small blueberry-like huckleberries of Yacolt Prairie and wapato from the marshes of the lower river and the Columbia marshes. Wapato was a tuber similar to a potato which grew under the water, its arrowhead shaped leaves being at the surface. When carp from the Orient were introduced to the marshes, these scavenger fish depleted the wapato supply. Wild game was available but there was not always an abundance with forest fires and harsh winters depleting their numbers. There were also years of poor fish runs.

Diseases Take Many

The local Indian population had had several bouts with diseases reducing their number greatly before the first settlers came. One scourge occurred in 1776, possibly as a result of a Spanish ship's visit and one ravaged the population in 1829 after the arrival of a trading vessel. The Indian practice of using the sweathouse, similar to the Scandinavian sauna, and then jumping into a cold stream as a cure for disease hastened many a death.

It was difficult for the Indian of the Northwest to assimilate into the "new life" he was expected to live with the homesteaders. The settlers couldn't understand why the "lazy" Indian didn't settle down to the business of farming on his "own" land and the Indian's religion and philosophy was such that the land could only belong to the Creator and was too sacred to fence and till. Most Indians here had no concept of what an agricultural society was, never anything like it.

Most of the Clark County Indians were sent to the Yakima Indian Reservation after the treaties of the 1860's. However, some families stayed on unclaimed lands, or through education at the mission schools, learned how to figure out the red tape necessary to gain their own ground.

Though early families did not advertise the fact, many marriages in the county were between white men and Indian women. Chief Stwire Waters refers to forty "half-blood" soldiers as being among the volunteers who overtook the Indians who had escaped the fort in 1855 in the battle of Battle Ground interview.

Family Names Taken

The Daybreak area still had a few Indian families around the turn of the century, including the Petes, Jacksons, Eyles, Sipllyanns and Charleys.

Not having family names as the Americans did, some Indians chose last names for themselves which were borrowed from their white friends ...Pete, Charley, George, etc. Several Indian men had made themselves famous as dauntless log drivers and woodsmen during the great logging era. Among them was "Indian Charley."

Home Is Visited

Charley Koitzsch remembered peeking into the old cabin of Indian Joe and his wife when he was a boy in 1896. The home was built of three foot wide split cedar shakes and had a dirt floor and a chimney hole to let smoke out from the center open fire.

Burial Customs Told

An Indian burial ground is near Daybreak which has been vandalized and robbed through the years by the unthinking and the greedy. Mr. Koitzsch relates that when an Indian died and was to be buried there, the family grave box was dug up, the old bones were re-moved and re-wrapped in new reed matting. The new body, well wrapped, and the old bones were then deposited into a fresh box and buried together. Although this would save on cemetery space, one would hope the family deaths were far apart

Indians Are Remembered

Mrs. Sandy Ebert recalls that Chief Umtuch's grandson told her that newborn Indian babies were plunged into the cold water of the springs which feed Woodin Creek. This was to see if the children were strong enough to make "good Indians."

Some comments on Indians and their life in the county through the years are offered here:

August 1876, Vancouver Independent. Indians were said to "rule supreme" during this time of huckleberry picking.

1878, Vancouver Independent. False accusations were made about an Indian war dance at Yacolt which had scared settlers. It turned out to be a huckleberry picking party with children's foot races.

About 1890...John Thogerson found numerous elk horns as a boy at his Hockinson home. He stated that after the Indians left, there was no one to burn the animals' grazing lands in the foothills which then grew up to fir trees and the elk and deer left for higher ground. He also commented that the men rode horseback, the women walked and the children and supplies followed travois behind the horses.

About 1890..Robena Gasaway tells of the time when she as a child observed seven Indians coming across their place at Maple Grove on their way to the Allworth place, over Bell Mountain, up the East Fork and over to Yakima to trade. They stopped, hoping to be given some melons, but when her father cut one open and showed that they were not ripe, they moved on.

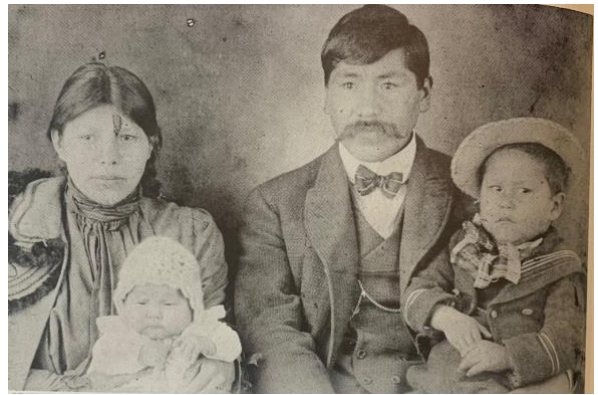
Early 1900's. Bill Allworth, Sr. recalls watching the Indians pass by their Crawford farm in the spring, driving sheep to the grazing lands in the Cascade hills. They returned after huckleberry season in the fall. Mr. Alfred A. Allworth, Bill's father, sat on the porch with a shot gun across his knees, fearing they might be "light fingered."

The 'Teens. Adelma Peterson Saari related that Mrs. Englestad was the only Indian lady in Venersborg and was married to a Norwegian there. She was happened upon by some children one rainy day, who observed her sitting squat-legged in front of a fire at a creek bank, meditating, in a typical Indian position.

1920's and 1930's. Mr. Sandy Ebert remembers some Indians coming to the Crawford store and asking that no one follow them as they journeyed to their ancestors' graves. They parked their car at the end of J. M. Burt Road* and went on into the valley.



Children of Johnny and Julia Eyle were members of the few families who remained in the Charter Oak area. Note the cedar batten board house in the background.



The George Charley Family is shown here. George was known as an expert log driver, saw filer, skid-road builder and was the first pitcher for the Lewisville baseball team. Mr.Charley was a nephew of Chief Umtuch who lost his life in the Battle Ground ""battle." The photo was taken in the late 1800's.