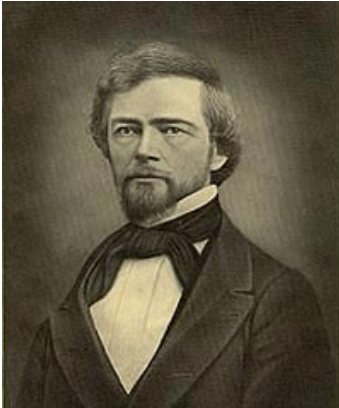


The Treaty Trail: U. S. - Indian Treaty Councils in the Northwest

BIOGRAPHY OF ISAAC INGALLS STEVENS



Portrait of Isaac Stevens, first Governor of Washington Territory (March 25, 1818–September 1, 1862). Courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

A small man of large ambition and keen intelligence, Isaac Stevens made a large

impact on the military and political institutions of the 19th century. Although his family was among the earliest settlers of Andover and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and played a prominent role in colonial society, Stevens insisted that "he rose from humble but honest circumstances to win education, forge a career, and emerge as a figure of national prominence."

Education and Early Military Experience

Following his education at Phillips Academy in Massachusetts, Stevens attended West Point Academy, where he graduated in 1839, first in his class. His skills in mathematics, engineering, surveying, military strategy, and politics earned him a job in the prestigious Corps of Engineers, a government agency responsible at that time for the largest public works projects.

As an officer in the War with Mexico (1846-48), he had his first taste of combat. He returned home with a commission promoting him to the rank of major, and convinced of his country's

"manifest destiny." Stevens returned to the Corps of Engineers for a time, later

joining the newly established U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. This was the agency destined to map the nation and its newly acquired territories.

Stevens' Political Career Begins

His active support of Democrat Franklin Pierce's 1852 candidacy for President launched his own political career. In 1853 Stevens successfully applied to President Pierce for the governorship of the new Washington Territory, a post that also carried the title of Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Not content with just two jobs, Stevens also lobbied for a position with the proposed transcontinental railroad survey. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis placed him in command of the survey of the northern route.

Stevens's survey expedition left Minnesota in June 1853. The expedition was responsible for documenting the potential route of the railroad, and recording information about the flora, fauna, and the Native American tribes whose homelands were being surveyed.

Wasting no time, Governor Stevens quickly organized a territorial government, settled claims by the British-owned Hudson's Bay Company, expended \$5,000 for books to set up a territorial library, and petitioned Congress for land on which to build a university. However, it would be his duties as Superintendent of Indian Affairs that would truly define his long-term impact on the future State of Washington.

In June of 1854, leaving acting Governor Charles Mason and the new legislature in charge, Stevens returned to the nation's

capital to lobby for money to cover the remaining debts from the railroad survey expedition, and to secure funding for the Indian treaty councils. He returned home with money to build military roads and funding for the treaty councils.

Stevens immediately plunged into the task of organizing the councils. He intended to make treaties with the Indians to secure the necessary resources for building the railroad and to obtain land sought by the ever-increasing stream of settlers flowing into the region. His agents had already been visiting the various Indian villages, selecting individuals to represent each tribe.

The Medicine Creek Council

On the day after Christmas in 1854, Stevens held his first treaty council at Medicine Creek in the Nisqually Delta. The Nisqually, Puyallup, Steilacoom, Squaxin, and other tribes, were informed in advance of the upcoming negotiations. They were anticipating fair payment for land settlers had already appropriated, and a reservation of land that would sustain their families and future generations.

What the tribes received were several widely separated small reservations. These brought different tribal bands together, but allowed the tribes to continue to fish, hunt, and gather food and other supplies in their usual accustomed places outside the reservations. The government also pledged to provide schools, blacksmith

shops, carpenters, and medical care. In return, the United States acquired 2.5 million acres of tribal land.

Understandably pleased at the positive outcome of the Medicine Creek Treaty, Stevens prematurely speculated that if the whole treaty program proceeded as smoothly, all the tribes would soon be on reservations. However, his lack of understanding of native culture led him to make some serious mistakes. He did not understand that Indian leaders had limited powers to represent their tribes, nor did he recognize that there would be resistance to moving tribes, who had traditionally been enemies, onto a single reservation.

News of the western treaties had quickly passed to the eastern Washington tribes, along with sad tales from the nation's interior and eastern states concerning the plight of the tribes in those regions. The Indians were aware that their lands had been ceded, and that just compensation and the promised services had

not been received from the "Great Father" in Washington, DC. They were understandably wary of Stevens and the treaty proceedings.

The Walla Walla Council

Although the Nez Perce, traditionally friendly to the whites, readily agreed to attend the Walla Walla Council, the Yakama, Walla Walla, and Cayuse bands were initially very reluctant to participate. Despite their misgivings, however, the Council formally convened on May 29,



This pair of epaulets in a metal case once belonged to Isaac Stevens. The epaulets are made of board covered with fabric and leather. A fringe made of coils of gold wire is attached around the outer edges. At the center of each epaulet is the symbol of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the shape of a castle. Courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

1855, with thousands of tribal members in attendance.

The Civil War

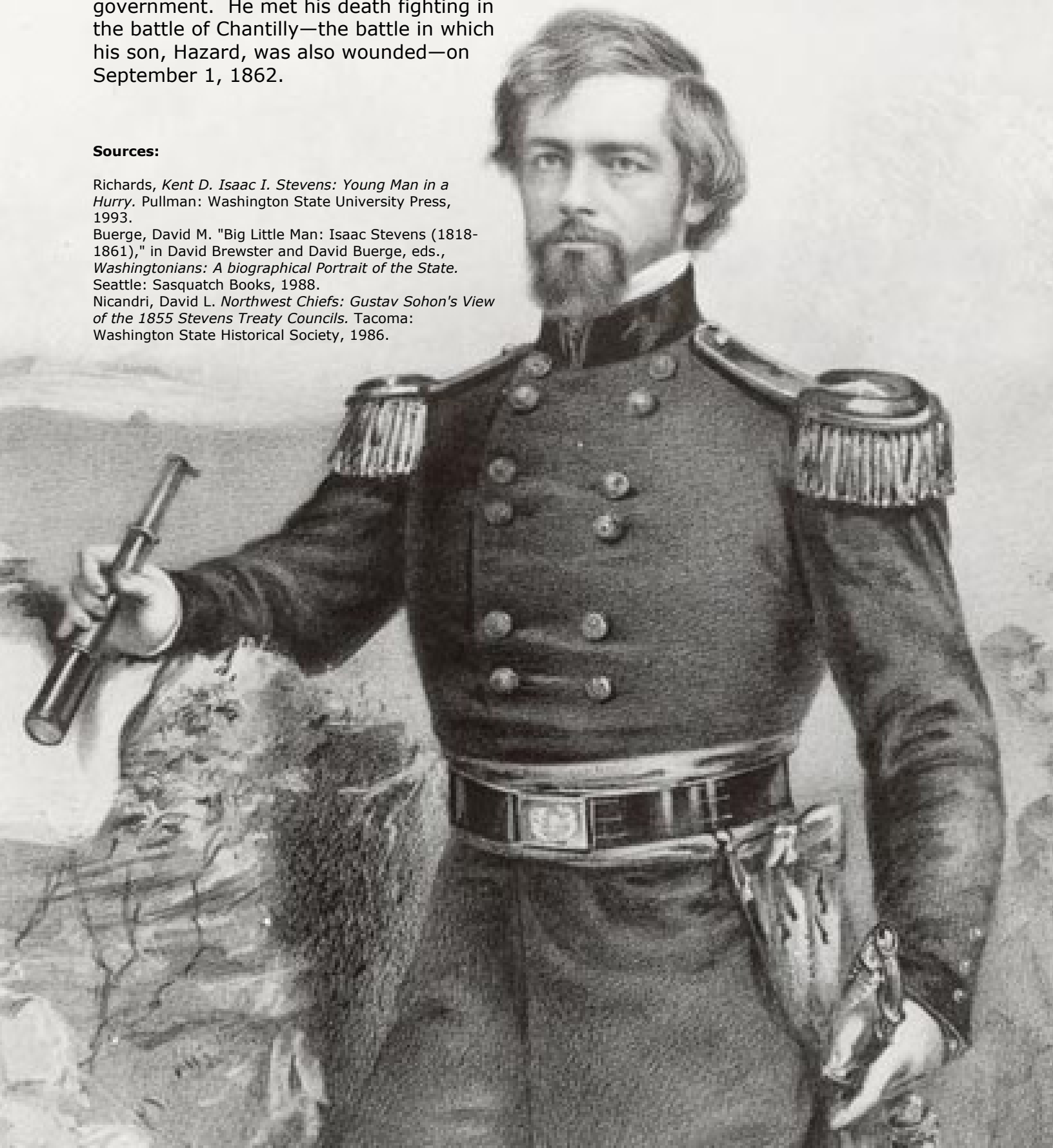
offered his services to the Union government. He met his death fighting in the battle of Chantilly—the battle in which his son, Hazard, was also wounded—on September 1, 1862.

Sources:

Richards, Kent D. *Isaac I. Stevens: Young Man in a Hurry*. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1993.

Buerge, David M. "Big Little Man: Isaac Stevens (1818-1861)," in David Brewster and David Buerge, eds., *Washingtonians: A biographical Portrait of the State*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1988.

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STUDENT READING: BIOGRAPHY OF "CHIEF LAWYER" OR HALLALHOTSOOT



Portrait of "Chief Lawyer" or Hallalhotsoot, portrayed as the Nez Perce leader of the Walla Walla Council by artist Gustav Sohon. Lawyer is pictured here wearing a silk top hat, decorated with ostrich plumes held in place by colored bands.
Courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society.

Hallalhotsoot was the son of a Salish-speaking Flathead woman and Twisted Hair, the Nez Perce man who welcomed and befriended Lewis and Clark in the fall of 1805. His father's positive experiences with the white explorers greatly influenced the boy. He firmly believed that the best prospect for the future of the Nez Perce was through friendship with non-native peoples.

"Lawyer" was a nickname given to Hallalhotsoot by the mountain men of the early 1830s. He was known as "the talker," and his speaking abilities and wisdom enabled him to influence both native and non-native peoples.

The Nez Perce and Christianity

In 1831, six Nez Perce embarked on a journey through the Rocky Mountains to invite Christian teachers to come to the tribes. Two of the party turned back at the mountains, but four proceeded on to St. Louis. The story was reprinted widely

in American newspapers, and set off a frenetic missionary movement to the West, one that changed the course not only of the Nez Perce people, but of the entire Northwest.

What is a missionary?

A **missionary** is a person sent out on a mission; specifically, a person sent out by his or her church to preach, teach and convert, especially those who practice a different religion.

One of these missionaries, Marcus Whitman, hired Lawyer to live at his mission and teach him the Salish and Nez Perce languages. Whitman provided food and clothing to Lawyer's family in return. It was here that Lawyer, once a buffalo hunter, began to adapt to the culture and religion of the white man. Lawyer emerged as a leader of the Nez Perce following the Whitman tragedy on November 29, 1847. He traveled to Salem to meet Joseph Lane, Governor of the Oregon Territory, and requested aid in the capture of the Whitmans' murderers.

The Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855

Lawyer's friendly attitude toward white culture led Isaac Stevens to select him as the designated leader of the Nez Perce at the Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855. Lawyer was one of the first chiefs to be sketched by the artist Gustav Sohon at that council, an indication of his importance among non-Native observers. Sohon's inscription describes Lawyer as Head Chief of the Nez Perce Tribe, but some observers believe he only became

the main spokesman after being selected by Isaac Stevens.

"My people, while I was gone, you have sold my country. I have come home, and there is not left me a place on which to pitch my lodge."

- Looking Glass, Nez Perce chief

After the Council

In the years that followed the Walla Walla Council, Lawyer was widely ridiculed by anti-treaty groups within the Nez Perce tribe after the terms of the treaties failed to be honored by the U.S. government. When the promised payments began arriving in the early 1860s, cynical observers would note that they seemed timed to coincide with the government's desire for more land from the Nez Perce. The second treaty, signed by Lawyer in 1863, reduced the area of the tribe's reservation by 90 percent, transferring away the homelands of many Nez Perce bands. This was done without their consent.

Lawyer defended his actions by arguing that resisting white encroachment was useless and that the wise and practical course was to simply adapt to changing circumstances.

Despite his trust that Governor Stevens and the American government had good intentions, Lawyer experienced great disappointment when promises made in the treaties were not honored. In a speech delivered in the goldrush boomtown of Lewiston, Idaho, in 1864, Lawyer spoke eloquently to the failure of the government to live up to its promises:

If [Stevens] had told us that the reservation was to be flooded with white settlers, or that the saw mill was to be used for the exclusive benefit of the Whites, we would never have consented to the treaty. That flour mill and saw mill were pledged to me and my people. All the stipulations of that treaty were pledged to us for our benefit. Nine years

have passed and those stipulations are unfulfilled. [W]e have no church as promised; no schoolhouse as promised; no doctor as promised; no gunsmith as promised; no blacksmith as promised.

Lawyer devoted his life to making peace with the white population and following the terms of the treaties he signed. Nevertheless, in 1870—after holding his post for twenty-five years—he voluntarily stepped down from the leadership of the Nez Perce. His descendants tell the tale of his death on January 3, 1876, in this manner:



On the back of this photograph, possibly taken in 1864, was handwritten the following inscription: "This picture of Lawyer was taken at Walla Walla by Castleman, I think. [signed] E. Evans."

Courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society.

It was Lawyer's custom to fly his American flag from a pole in front of his lodge or house. On the day that he died, knowing that his end was near, he instructed some member to gradually pull

down the flag. The flag would be lowered a bit and then Lawyer, after a time would say: "Pull it down a little more." So the flag

was lowered a little more. This was repeated several times and when the flag touched the ground, Lawyer died.

Sources:

Drury, Clifford M. *Chief Lawyer of the Nez Perce Indians*. Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1979.
Joseph, Alvin M. *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997.
Nicandri, David L. *Northwest Chiefs: Gustav Sohon's View of the 1855 Stevens Treaty Councils*. Tacoma: Washington State Historical Society, 1986.

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STUDENT READING: CAUSE AND EFFECT

INDIAN LIFE BEFORE RESERVATIONS

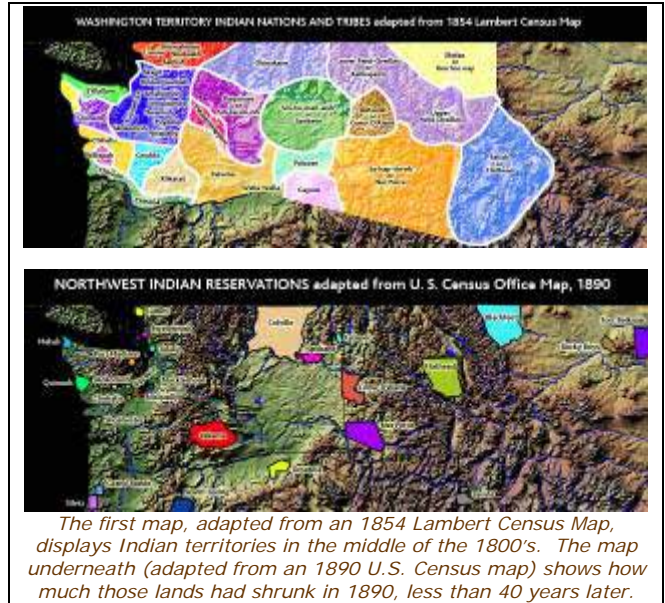
Before European/American arrival in the Northwest, there were no empty lands. The original homelands of native groups covered the entire expanse of lands now known as Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. These lands were places where Indians lived, traveled, hunted, fished, and gathered food. Sacred places where ancestors were buried and religious rites and ceremonies performed also were a part of these lands.

However, the U.S.-Indian treaties of 1854 through 1856 left Indian tribes with only a small part of their former homelands. Tribes gave up millions of acres in Washington Territory alone, in exchange for a guarantee or promise that their rights would be protected, that some lands would be reserved, and that many goods and services would be provided for them by the U.S. Government.



This picture of the Dalles, taken by Asahel Curtis in 1916, shows the Dalles as it was before the Dalles Dam. It was once a series of waterfalls twelve miles long, with its head, Celilo Falls having a 20 foot drop. Courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

Some of the richest natural resources of the region were shared among different tribes and brought different people together.



The first map, adapted from an 1854 Lambert Census Map, displays Indian territories in the middle of the 1800's. The map underneath (adapted from an 1890 U.S. Census map) shows how much those lands had shrunk in 1890, less than 40 years later.

For example, the fisheries around The Dalles and Celilo Falls provided an important food source for many native groups from different tribes. The gatherings at these important places were times for different tribes to trade, share information, and develop relationships with each other. Because many native people spoke multiple languages, they could communicate with other groups.

Native people used plants, animals, and other resources carefully so that their children and grandchildren would be able to use them as well. Caring for these resources was a way of respecting the land and treating what it had to offer as gifts. Each Indian community had responsibilities and obligations to care for the natural resources. These responsibilities and relationships with the land were different from the European idea of private property and ownership of land.

EARLY SETTLERS

In the 1820s, Congressmen and others urged Americans to consider the Oregon Country as a new place to live. Beginning in the 1830s and increasing dramatically in the 1840s, a large number of Americans came into the Oregon Country. The Willamette Valley was one of the first places settled.

As the United States continued to explore the western half of the country, the creation of new laws made it easier for settlers to cross the country. Accurate maps, enthusiastic reports, and trail guides helped attract people to the western territory.

Unfavorable living conditions in the rest of the United States also encouraged many people to choose to immigrate to Oregon Territory. In the Mississippi Valley, for example, nearly ten years of hard times began in 1837. Bad weather and widespread sickness worsened living conditions already made difficult by economic depression.



Detail from "Nez Perces" by John Mix Stanley. This picture, created in October of 1853, displays a meeting between Isaac Stevens' railroad survey team and a hunting band of Nez Perce Indians. Courtesy Washington State Historical Society.

THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD

In 1853 Isaac Stevens successfully applied to President Pierce for the governorship of the new Washington Territory, a post that also carried the title of Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Not content with just two jobs, Stevens asked for and was given a job with the proposed transcontinental railroad survey. Washington Territory Governor Isaac

Stevens was placed in command of documenting the northern route by recording information about plants, animals, Indian tribes, and topography of the land. The railroad would bring large numbers of people and economic development to the region.

THE TREATY TRAIL

From 1854 - 1855, Governor Isaac Stevens traveled hundreds of miles across the modern states of Washington and parts of Montana, Oregon and Idaho negotiating ten treaties that would open the territory for future, ongoing white settlement of the region. The American drive for occupation of Western land led to the creation of a reservation system established through the treaty councils.

The treaties attempted to isolate Indian society and remove Native Americans from their traditional land and culture. One of the goals of the Reservation system was to concentrate the Indians upon a few reservations, and encourage them to abandon Indian culture and adopt European types of farming, schooling, and prayer.

This period of United States History was greatly influenced by the vision of "Manifest Destiny", the belief that the United States had a mission to expand freedom and democracy. The term became used to describe expansion of the United States westward from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

The Treaty Trail in the Northwest changed how both Native American peoples and non-native peoples have experienced life in the United States since 1854. As a result some of our family histories involve triumphant journeys westward to start a new life; other family histories tell of displacement, survival, and innovation amid discrimination. By opening up the region to the commercial development of natural resources, even the landscape around us is evidence of the Treaty Trail.

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Treaties and Councils: What is a Treaty?

Today, all Americans live on what was once Indian land. Treaties transferred that land from Indian to United States control.

Treaties are documents that formalize relationships and understandings between two or more sovereign states. Sovereign states govern themselves, recognizing no superior power. Like the thirteen original states, Indian tribes were originally considered independent nations with established territories and the power of self-governance. Treaties brought Indian tribes into the Union with their inherent sovereignty intact, although federal statutes, court decisions, and administrative policies limited its actual exercise.



Shown here are the "Treaty Trees" at the site of the signing of the [Medicine Creek Treaty](#) on December 26, 1854. Photograph by Asahel Curtis and Walter Miller, 1914; Washington State Historical Society Collection.

Long before the American Revolution, Indian tribes formed complex networks of alliances. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin noted the contrast between the masterful alliances within the Iroquois Confederation and the inability of early colonial leaders to do the same:

"It would be a very strange thing if Six Nations of Ignorant Savages should be capable of forming a scheme for such a Union and be able to execute in such a manner, as that it has subsisted for ages, and appears indissoluble, and yet a like Union should be impracticable for ten or a dozen English colonies."

Letter to James Parker, 1751.

President George Washington signed the first treaties with Indian tribes for the newly independent United States. These first negotiations were between two bargaining equals and were treaties of peace. Both sides were militarily powerful.

Indian tribes believed the treaties became effective when they were signed. But United States law required Congress to approve all treaties after they were negotiated. Between 1789 and 1871, the United States negotiated approximately 800 treaties, but Congress ratified, or approved, fewer than 400-including the ten treaties negotiated by Isaac Stevens between 1854 and 1856.