

Testimony of Yakima Chief White Swan
of the First Indian Camp Meeting at The Dalles, 1840
(as told at Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland, 1905)

"THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM"

Read by Don Gentry

White Swan, chief of the Yakimas in an address before the Methodist Congress held in Portland during the Lewis & Clark Exposition, 1905 said:

"If you ask me question, 'Have you seen Jason Lee, the first missionary?' I answer, 'Yes, I saw him.' Some ask, 'How old are you, White Swan?' and I answer, 'I am 86. I was old enough to understand everything, and this missionary he baptize me at that time,' and from that time I join the church camp meeting at Wascopam — The Dalles.

"When he started to work, he sent ten Indians from place to place to ask other Indians to come to camp meeting, and all the different tribes came together. Then he buy dry salmon and other things for the camp meeting and put them in one tent forty feet or more. That was the first time we saw wheel cart; he sent two men to haul wood for the Indians came all around, different tribes and they make seats to have the different tribes together.

"In the middle he make a place for himself to preach and read the Bible on a little table. He spoke through three interpreters for each tribe at that time, while he was preaching. It seems to me the missionary spoke strong words when he opened the Bible to speak to the Indians.

"While Lee was preaching the Indian chiefs sat smoking, not caring to hear the gospel. Three or four days while he was preaching all women and chiefs felt different just like something had melted and hot had come down, and they throw away their tomahawks and caps — war bonnets — and fall down and ask God to forgive them. People were surprised to see what kind of spirit came down, and then they look at each other and all see the tears run down each others faces, and then all fall down and worship God. They used to feel all right but found now that they were not right inside. They would look at one another and after a while they would join the church, and then raise up as one nation. At that time Jason Lee learn first the Indian language, and after a few months he never used an interpreter, he just preached himself. After the camp meeting closed he showed them how Christ used to do and sent them two by two among the rocks to pray, and the Indians used to pray just like birds singing among the trees.

"That is the way this first missionary worked for the Indians. White Swan is true witness. I saw and heard him myself.

"Truly this missionary brought light to the dark place for the Indian. He stops the fire (fight). After that all the Indian tribes never fall together against white people, they were friendly after that, but the Indians who had not heard the gospel were unfriendly."



Yakima Chief White Swan