

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

YOUNG CHIEF (WEATENATEMANY) HEAD CHIEF OF THE CAYUSES ?-1859



This portrait of Weatenatemany (Young Chief) was created by Gustav Sohon. Courtesy Washington Historical Society.

The Cayuse people had a series of leaders named "Young Chief". The Cayuse chief who

attended the Walla Walla Treaty Council of 1855 was not the first, nor was he the last, to bear that English name. Weatenatemany, nephew of Tautau, the previous Young Chief, became the new Young Chief in October 1853, following a potlatch to mourn his uncle's recent death. (Portrait of Young Chief by Gustav Sohon)

The Walla Walla Council

Governor Isaac Stevens knew in advance who his friends and foes would be in the Walla Walla Council of 1855. In contrast to the spectacle of the over two thousand friendly Nez Perce arriving at the Council, the four hundred Cayuse and Walla Wallas arrived on May 26th in similarly grand fashion. Governor Stevens and his party felt threatened. They recorded that the Cayuse circled the treaty camp three times, whooping and shouting, glaring at the white troops, and boldly displaying their antagonism.

Weatenatemany, Five Crows, and the other Cayuse chiefs rode up to Stevens' and Palmer's tent, dismounted and shook hands. They were invited to smoke, but declined, saying they had not come to talk on that day.

The council officially began three days later.

Young Chief had no intention of signing a treaty and spoke frequently and passionately in the Council meetings. The records of the Council show his concern for the Cayuse people's connection to the land:

I wonder if the ground has anything to say? I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said?...The ground says, It is the Great Spirit that placed me here. The Great Spirit tells me to take care of the Indians, to feed them aright. The Great Spirit appointed the roots to feed the Indians on. The water says the same thing. The Great Spirit directs me, Feed the Indians well. The grass says the same thing, Feed the horses and cattle. The ground, water and grass say, The Great Spirit has given us our names. We have these names and hold these names. Neither the Indians nor the Whites have a right to change these names. The ground says, The Great Spirit has placed me here to produce all that grows on me, tree and fruit. The same way the ground says, It was from me man was made. The Great Spirit in placing men on earth, desired them to take good care of the ground and to do each other no harm. The Great Spirit said, You Indians who take care of certain portions of the country should not trade it off except you get a fair price.

When Looking Glass, Chief of the Nez Perce, arrived late in the council, Young Chief supported Looking Glass' claim that he, not Lawyer, was the Head Chief of the Nez Perce. Young Chief allied with Looking Glass to draw back from the agreements that appeared to be solidifying. By doing so, he likely

influenced the creation of a third reservation in the region.

Despite his misgivings, Young Chief signed the treaty in the end, but the Cayuse and Yakima were not pleased. The resentment they brought to the council would inevitably boil over into war a few months later.

War on the Columbia Plateau

The Yakima, Walla Walla and Cayuse peoples were incensed by a sudden flood of non-Native settlers. A newspaper article that prematurely announced that their land was open to settlement. It had been their understanding that they would hold their territory until the treaties were ratified. In October 1855, the tribes took up arms against the government.

Young Chief was drawn into the conflict. By spring, however, he and Five Crows, another chief, were weary of battle. Spokane Garry wrote a letter to Stevens relaying that Five Crows and Young Chief wanted peace and were "acting for the tribe". Garry went on to suggest that it might be acceptable to make peace with the Cayuse Nation, without involving the Yakima tribe. Isaac Stevens did not concur.

On August 30, 1856, members of the warring Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Tenino tribes began to arrive for a council with Stevens to discuss the conflict. The session- rife with tension- ended on September 17, with no agreement having been reached.

The Indians were called to one more council, this one with Colonel George H. Wright, who had been instructed to make peace with the region's tribes. During this second council, Wright explained that the army regulars understood the Indian point of view, and assured them that their lands would remain in their hands until the government ratified the treaties.



The map above shows three areas involved in the Walla Walla Treaties: Walla Walla (1), the Wallowa Valley (2) and the Lapwai Valley (3).
Courtesy Washington Historical Society.

Wright's actions initially restored calm to the region. However, resentment and conflict continued to build between the tribes and the non-Native settlers. The settlers believed that they had the right to settle where and when they pleased, regardless of the treaties that had been signed.

When the war with the whites was over, there were still hostilities with the Snake Indian tribe. Young Chief, Weatenatemany, was killed in a skirmish with the Snake Indians during the summer of 1859. His legacy was followed by yet another "Young Chief."

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