

The following interview with Mary Leschi, youngest wife of chief Leschi, is transcribed from a typewritten document recorded by Ezra Meeker. It was reported by J. A. Eckrom, who viewed the document prior to 1989 while doing historical research for his book *Remembered Drums: A History of the Puget Sound Indian War*. In the footnotes to the book, the author claims:

Mary Leschi lived until 1924. Sometime near the second decade of the 20th century, she was interviewed by Ezra Meeker for an abortive book he planned to call The Old Boy Scout. The transcript remains tucked away in one of the envelopes left over from the hop business that made Meeker first a millionaire and then a pauper. It has lain unnoticed in Box 16 of the Ezra Meeker papers in the Washington State Historical Society, apparently unused until now.

In October 2004, the document was again sought for use in the building of the Treaty Trail website. By this time, assuming the veracity of the description above, the original had apparently been lost or misplaced, but a photocopy of the original was found in a folder of general Indian information. The photocopy is not signed nor dated, so it is impossible to say with assurance that it is truly an interview by Ezra Meeker, but it does indeed appear to be an interview of Mary Leschi. The description of Leschi at the time of his trial is perhaps the best evidence that this document originated with Meeker, who was a juror at the trial. Despite its lack of provenance, it remains an interesting account of the relationship between Leschi, leader of the Nisqually, and his youngest wife, Mary, who accompanied him when he fled his home upon learning that he was about to be captured.

The Widow's Story

In a recent interview with the widow of Leschi, I learned more of the particulars of their flight and the part she took in the events following their escape from the Eaton Rangers, the force acting Governor Mason had sent to apprehend Leschi.

“We left home at night but did not go far,” she said, “only to Aubry’s place,” (Aubrey Dean about five miles distant) “and camped in a small clump of timber near the house. Next day we went to Tenalcut prairie,” (Connell’s) “but did not stop and went right on over to Greene [sic] River where we afterwards camped so long. I didn’t know there was to be a war. Leschi never told me anything about it. There were only five of us, three men and two women, that traveled together. The men sat up and talked nearly all night but I didn’t pay much attention to what they were saying. If I had known there was to be war I wouldn’t have gone. I didn’t know [sic] anything about there being war until I heard the guns a few days after we went away from home.”

“Did Leschi ever tell you there would be war?” I asked.

“No, Leschi never told me anything about his business. I was young. I was a big fool for marrying him.” (hias pelton) “He was old enough to be my father.”

“Then why did you marry him?”

“Oh well, Leschi was always making me presents, and he always dressed well and combed his hair nice and was almost as white as a Boston man; and then he was rich and had lots of horses and like a fool I married him.”

“Well, was he ugly to you or cross?”

“Oh, no,” (with emphasis) “not that. I never saw him angry in my life and he never spoke an angry word to me and always let me have all the nice clothes I wanted, but somehow he didn’t seem to want to stay at home much and didn’t talk to me much.”

“How did he get the money to buy you the nice clothes and make you presents?”

“Well, he would take a horse to the Fort and sell it and bring home a lot of things. We always lived well.”

In answer to further inquiries she said, “Leschi never worked much. He was nearly always on horse back unless we were away hunting and as soon as we would get home he would go away again and often stay away all night.”

“Tell us about your hunting trips, will you please?”

“We used to go away up the river” (Nisqually) “nearly to where the snow laid on the ground, not quite to it though. We would take horses with us and stay sometimes half a month and Leschi would kill lots of game, all we could pack out.”

“One time when we were way up in the mountains and out of water Leschi went way down into a deep place where we could hear the water running; ever so far down. While Leschi was down there he found gold and brought some of it up with him and showed it to me but I didn’t think much about it then and I know I could not find the place again and that is the reason I have always refused to try though some Bostons have offered me money if I would tell them where the place was.”

I had heard of this find of gold before, but Leschi in his life time never would divulge the secret as to the location—only said he found it in the mountains.

“How many horses do you think Leschi had when the war broke out Mary?”

“Well, I have no idea. I never counted them and Leschi never told me. There was a whole field full of them, I know, that I have seen at one time.” I should judge from the manner of expressing herself there were from one to two hundred head—certainly not less than a hundred.

I questioned her closely about whether Leschi signed the treaty but she said she did not know.

“There were a great many about where Stevens and Simmons tent stood and I didn’t go there much and didn’t know much about what they were doing. Leschi told Simmons he did not want land on the bay and said he wanted his own hunting ground. Simmons told the Indians they would get a hat full of money but when the talk was done they only got a few yards of calico and some “black strap” (black molasses) “and not much of that.”

Mary’s description of her former husband differs somewhat from my recollection, caused doubtless in a measure from the different conditions under which I last saw him and remember him best.

When I saw him last, he had just been captured after his long siege of constant activity in the war and of scant food for over a year, which had visibly changed his appearance. He was then on trial for his life and I was one of the jurors facing him. I shall never forget his searching eyes as he glanced over the jury with seeming contentment as he knew several of them. His hair at that time was long and countenance haggard, nevertheless the glow on his cheeks showed he was in good health. Mary said, “Leschi was white for an Indian and wore his hair short and combed back like a white man. He was round faced with a flush color on his cheeks which showed good health. He was a very strong man and seemed never to get tired.” She said, while visibly affected at the revival of old memories “but was always cheerful and good natured but he didn’t talk much.”

As she talked her manner showed she had been possessed of a burning jealousy that had left its lasting impress upon her and that had it not been for Leschi’s former wife, (then living) she would have been happier then than now with her present husband, a white man, to whom she has been married a great many years.

Mary said the report that Leschi had killed his own child to escape discovery from the noise he made was not true as they had no children with them. The little boy he thought so much of remained with its mother, Leschi’s first wife, who did not go to the war.

It was a pathetic story Mary told of the breakup at the end of the war. The Indians were scattered, Leschi had gone over the mountains and she with Mrs. Quiemuth and another Indian woman were left in hiding alone in the mountains. As near as I could gather [from] her narrative, these three withdrew far up White River into the mountains and traveled along near the head waters of the three rivers, White, Puyallup, and Nisqually Rivers, hunting grounds of the Nisqually, where they fell in with Yelm Jim and [o]btained food after three days without anything to eat. “Oh dear me” she exclaimed “what a time.” Sure enough, what a time.