

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

LEWISTON (SILCOTT) FERRY T36N, R6W, Section 36

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William Craig constructed a ferry boat at Spalding in the spring of 1861 and floated the boat down the Clearwater River to his ferry site on the Snake River. On January 1, 1862, Craig wrote to Charles Hutchins, Indian Agent for the Nez Perce reservation, requesting permission to continue his ferry operation in partnership with A. H. Robie and H. D. Sanborn. Since the ferry site was located on the reservation and he considered himself a legal resident of the reservation,* he considered himself within his rights to operate the ferry. [Washington Superintendency of Indian Affairs, 1853-74, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior, Record Group 75, Microcopy M-5, Roll No. 21.] Agent Hutchins was unsure about the legality of his agency's granting a ferry license, but he concurred with Craig's reasoning and gave his consent for the continued operation of the ferry. (Ibid.)

In May 1862, B. F. Kendall, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Washington territory, notified Craig that he was canceling Craig's right to run the ferry. Craig, upon receiving this notice wrote to Agent Hutchins on June 2, 1862:

I wish to state by complying with said order I shall receive damage to my property in the amount of several thousand dollars in loss and destruction of my Ferry--this order being harsh, tyrannical and unjust to me, and as B. F. Kendall has been removed from his office, I again make application to your office for permission to run my ferry for the same purposes as set forth in my first application, confidently believing that I shall receive justice at the hands of his successor. (Ibid.)

On June 3, 1862, Agent Hutchins once again granted permission for the operation of the ferry. Before Kendall had left office, he had granted Judge Gilmore Hays the right to reside on the reservation and operate a ferry across the Snake River. Hays had also received a charter from the Washington territorial legislature on January 22, 1862, to operate a Snake River ferry. Agent Hutchins on July 15, 1862, wrote a lengthy letter to Kendall's successor, Calvin H. Hale (who had also endorsed Hays and the rescinding of Craig's operation), defending the right of Craig to run his ferry. Hutchins questioned the authority of both the Superintendent and the Washington territorial legislature to grant Hays the authority to reside on the reservation and run a ferry, as under the terms of the treaty with the

Nez Perce no white man could legally live on the reservation without the permission of the tribe and Hays did not have the blessing of the tribe for his planned operation. (Ibid.)

In July 1862, Hutchins was replaced by J. M. Anderson, who received further instructions from Superintendent Hale to rescind the ferry privileges of Craig and recognize the right of Hays to operate his planned ferry enterprise. On August 27, 1862, Anderson wrote to Hale, questioning the legality of his right or that of the legislature to grant ferry privileges on reservation land. He agreed with Hale that Craig's loyalty to the Union was suspect but knew of no such concern about his partners, Robie and Sanborn. Apparently, Superintendent Hale believed that if he couldn't remove Craig by revoking his application, he could possibly have him removed for being disloyal. On September 25, 1862, Agent Anderson ordered Craig to suspend his operations and remove his boats, buoys and other obstructions: Anderson had been authorized by Hale to recognize the validity of a license granted to Gilmore Hays by superintendent Kendall on April 3, 1862. (Ibid.)

Craig refused to cease his operation. On September 29, 1862, Anderson asked Major J. S. Rinearson, commanding officer at Camp Lapwai, to send a small detachment of troops and remove Craig's ferry from the Snake River. (Ibid.) Rinearson did not send any troops but did write a letter to Craig on October 2, 1862, notifying him that a request had been received in his office from the Indian Department to remove Craig's ferry. Rinearson hoped that Craig would respond accordingly and avoid any future confrontation. Rinearson considered his letter to Craig an adequate response to Anderson's request. Craig responded to Rinearson's letter on the same day:

Sir, I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this date, & hasten to answer the same without delay.

You say that a requisition has been made to you by the Indian Department, to remove from Snake river, a certain ferry boat & fixtures, which is now in operation near Lewiston. And placed there by me without authority Allow me to state that those charges are without foundation in fact. Before commencing to build the boat in question, I obtained in writing a permit from the principal Chief. and by the consent of the Subordinate Chiefs of the Nez Perces tribe of Indians and having had a donation of 640 acres of land donated to me by the Gov of the United States on this Reservation and a necessary mode of crossing this said river, is apparent to all. After Ag't Hutchins took charge of the agency on this Reservation I applied to him and obtained a permit to keep a ferry at that place; and that permit I presume is on file in that office. In addition to that Capt Smith who commanded the U.S. troops on this Reservation last year gave me a verbal permit and said the Ferry was a military necessity and convenience. . . .

Subsequently to the establishing of the Ferry Sup't Geary told me that the gov't never intended to give me a Donation of Land and then deprive me of the privilege of going to and from my home. And with the above mentioned

authority & encouragement, I have established the ferry and to make it safe have gone to the expense of over \$7000. The wire and other fixtures were brought from California and I hope that those who wish to deprive me of this ferry have other reasons than pecuniary ones I have the honor to subscribe myself. (Ibid.)

Craig's persistence won out and he continued to run his ferry until 1864, when he sold the operation to Theodore Schenk. Although Hays had the support of the Washington Superintendency of Indian Affairs and the Washington territorial legislature, it is not known for certain if he actually operated a ferry or not. In the fall of 1863, he left the Lewiston area and moved to Silver City. Schenk ran the business for a short time and then sold out to John Silcott, D. M. White, and E. C. Percy. In 1867, the owners posted the following toll rates on the Washington side of the river:

For each wagon and pair of horses, mules or oxen, \$3.00
 For each wagon loaded with 4,000 lbs. Or over, \$4.00
 Additional pair of animals, \$1.00
 For each pack animal, .50¢
 Man and horse, \$1.00
 For each loose horse or stock, .25¢
 For each loose sheep or hog, .10¢
 Footmen, .25¢
 One horse vehicle, \$2.50
 Double rates at nights.
 (Lewiston Tribune, February 8, 1900, p. 3, c. 4.)

These rates remained in force until the advent of the railroad at Riparia in 1883. At that time, they were reduced one-half. The old rate board remained in place until Percy removed it on February 7, 1900. He later donated the board to Lewis-Clark College. (Ibid.)

In addition to his interest in the Lewiston Snake River ferry, Silcott also owned an interest in ferries at Alpowa, on the Snake, and at Lewiston, on the Clearwater. In 1864, he added yet another ferry when he leased Plante's ferry across the Spokane River. (Washington Statesman, April 22, 1864, p. 2, c. 6.)

Important Route to Lewiston. SNAKE RIVER AND LEWISTON FERRY via the Alpowa. The undersigned have completed their two Ferries over Snake and Clearwater Rivers, for which But one charge is made for both Crossings, Whereby the distances between the Alpowa and Lewiston is greatly lessened, and the hills (upon the old wagon road) avoided.

Experienced and obliging ferrymen will be in attendance. Our facilities are such that no delay need attend the patrons of this route.

SILCOTT & CO. (Ibid., May 10, 1862, p. s, c. 6.)

In the 1880's, Silcott left the Lewiston Snake River partnership to pursue his other business interests. The remaining partners continued to run the ferry until early 1909. The construction of a toll steel bridge by the Lewiston Concord Bridge Company in 1899

greatly reduced the business previously enjoyed by this ferry. In an attempt to retain some of their business, the owners reduced their tolls.

For two-horse team, .10¢
 For four-horse team, .20¢
 For footmen, .05¢
 For horsemen, .05¢
 For single rig or horse, .05¢
 Ladies free if a special trip is not made.
 (Lewiston Tribune, February 8, 1900, p. C., c. 4.)

In 1900, Pearcy and the White estate subleased the ferry to Dan Wann. After over forty years of ownership, they sold the ferry to William Emerson in 1909.

The ferry was able to remain in business until the tolls were removed from the bridge in 1913. At that time, the ferry was sold to John E. Boyer, who operated a large fruit ranch on the south shore of Snake River opposite Truax. On May 7, the Tribune reported,

The cable was lowered yesterday and will probably be sent to the lower river today. The boat with the towers and other equipment will be floated down within a few days and it is believed the Truax crossing can be made quite a fruit and grain center for the lower river country. For the past four years the ferry has been operated by William Emerson, who will take the boat to the lower river and will be in charge of its operation until the service is thoroughly established. (p. 8, c. 3.)

*Craig's donation Land Grant of 640 acres was recognized in Article 10 of the 1855 treaty with the Nez Perce. He had filed his land grant on June 4, and the treaty was signed on June 11, 1855. Although his grant was excluded as part of the reservation, his land was situated within the boundaries.

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