

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

NEZ PERCE AGENCY

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A provision of the Nez Perce Treaty, signed on June 11, 1855, created a reservation and an agency. William H. Tappan was appointed as the first agent, even though the treaty had not yet been ratified, but made no attempt to set up an agency on the reservation. In 1856, Tappan was discharged, and William Craig was appointed as a special agent. Due to unrest among the Nez Perce in 1857, Craig was directed to establish the agency in the Walla Walla valley under the protection of the U.S. Army's new camp. His residency there was the beginning of the town of Walla Walla. In 1859, the treaty was ratified and Craig was succeeded by A. J. Cain, who remained in Walla Walla. After the discovery of gold on Orofino Creek in 1860, within the boundaries of the reservation, Cain sent Charles H. Frush to act as sub-agent. Frush established himself at the mouth of Lapwai Creek adjacent to Henry H. Spalding's old mission, and this was the physical beginning of the Nez Perce Agency on the reservation. Early in 1861, Cain received the first money, \$60,000, to be expended under the provisions of the treaty for the erection of buildings and improvements at the Agency. On September 1, 1861, Charles Hutchins arrived at the Agency and replaced Cain. In a letter to B. F. Kendall, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Washington Territory, dated September 16, 1861, Hutchins reported:

The site selected for this Agency is at the confluence of the Lapwai creek with the Clearwater river and in point of central proximity with the lands of the Nez Perce's tribe is well taken. But the fertile lands in vicinity of the Agency are in such small and detached parcels as to cause any farming operations conducted for the support of the Agency to be done under great disadvantage.

I found on taking possession, the public buildings to be as follows: one log house one story in height 20 x 50 feet used as a dwelling and boarding house for the employe's [sic]. This building is without a floor (except in one portions where a few rough boards are laid) and is as barren of any finish or convenience for civilized white men as to reside in as an Indians' lodge. The value of this "house" even at the present high cost of labor in this region would not exceed \$1000. There is one other log frame partially constructed, dimensions 14 x 30 feet which was intended when completed to be a dwelling for employe's. The carpenter shop is a structure of poles, not floored, entirely too small for its purposes, The Blacksmith shop is a log building and is amply sufficient for its purposes. These four described houses comprise all the buildings of this agency,

and the total value of the whole of them would not be more than \$2000. There are no farms or gardens at the Agency, not a fence has been built or enclosure of any kind, and no land has been broken for Agency agricultural purposes, and there are no barns, stables, corrals or any adjuncts which are indispensable for the maintainance of any Agency in this distant wilderness. . . . (Washington Superintendent 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.)

Kendall visited the Agency during the latter part of September, and while he avoided directly accusing Cain of misusing the appropriation funds, he reported his unfavorable impressions of Cain's efforts in a January 21, 1862, report:

Not far from sixty thousand dollars have been expended by the Agent heretofore in charge of that tribe [Nez Perce], and I regret to say that the visible results of this liberal expenditure are meagre indeed. Though it appears by his accounts . . . that Mr. Cain had all the treaty employees under pay and some ten laborers . . . employed . . . breaking up and fencing farms I sought in vein to find the first foot of land fenced or broken by him or his employees: and the only product of the agricultural department that I could discover consisted of some three rails [which cost the government \$7,000]. (National Archives, M234, Roll 907, B. F. Kendall, January 21, 1862, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, as quoted in Historic Resource Study Spalding Area. Erwin N. Thompson. Denver Service Center, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, September 1972, pp. 89-90.)

Cain had effectively managed to avoid overspending on construction and improvement efforts at the Agency, but did not apparently neglect his personal ambitions. His imaginative bookkeeping set the stage for Governor Caleb Lyon, March 12, 1864 to June 14, 1866, who not only misdirected Nez Perce funds, but upon leaving Boise on April 27, 1866, took with him over \$46,000 in undisbursed Indian funds. Interior Department efforts to recover Lyon's defalcation never succeeded.

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