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HENRY HARMON SPALDING AND IDAHO'S EARLY GOLD RUSH

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In contrast to all other early Pacific Northwest Protestant missionaries, Henry and Eliza Spalding succeeded in their objective of starting a permanent Indian church. Spalding had to move to Willamette Valley from 1848 to 1859, but his Nez Perce church continued to function under domestic leadership while he was gone. Nez Perce church authorities came occasionally to ask him to return to their land and to resume his missionary efforts--particularly after he took up a ranch in their country after 1859. Then in 1860, E. D. Pierce led a party of prospectors into Nez Perce lands and discovered enough mineral wealth to set off a gold rush. Few miners who joined Pierce's gold rush had any inclination to become missionaries of any kind. But they overran tribal lands and created a situation that brought a large number of adherents into Nez Perce church activities. White occupation of Nez Perce lands was strictly illegal prior to 1867, but no one could figure out how to stop a gold rush. After permanent mining settlements had intruded into Nez Perce lands, Spalding had an opportunity to resume his work around Lapwai--particularly after Governor Caleb Lyon of Lyonsdale strongly supported his endeavor.

Lyon came from Spalding's area of upstate New York and, as Idaho's superintendent of Indian affairs, overruled white officials who opposed Spalding. Spalding spent another six years trying to get into a position so that he could help his Nez Perce friends make their church grow, and after 1870, he succeeded in starting another, more successful membership campaign.

Spalding's efforts as a missionary had focussed upon encouraging potential Nez Perce converts to settle down to a farming economy in place of buffalo hunting, camas harvesting, salmon fishing, and other nomadic activities. Some of his Nez Perce farmers had profited substantially by supplying miners who flooded into their lands after 1860. Other more traditionally oriented Nez Perce leaders preferred to retain their old way of life. When most Indian lands were taken away by gold rush pressures, those Nez Perce bands subject to displacement (with an exception of Spalding's church leaders) continued to reject missionary appeals. But Nez Perce bands that could keep their lands were in a position to adjust to white settlement in neighboring areas. Nez Perce bands left without treaty recognition after 1867 were identified as nontreaty Indians, while treaty bands formed a separate faction with less compulsion

to resist white ways. Shortly after 1870, a substantial element of Nez Perce treaty Indians responded to Spalding's renewed effort, while others joined a Jesuit missionary movement introduced at Saint Joseph's Church near Lapwai.

In association with Marcus Whitman, Spalding had organized a Congregational-Presbyterian church, August 18, 1838, which had received only about 20 Nez Perce members by 1844; after his return to Idaho two decades later, his church membership grew to more than 900--about two-thirds Nez Perce and one-third Spokane.

From then on, two major Nez Perce churches emerged at Lapwai and Kamiah from Spalding's First Presbyterian Church of Oregon. Gold rush and settlement pressures accounted primarily for Spalding's success in his renewed work among Nez Perce treaty bands after 1870, and Nez Perce church development was directed along new lines in association with other Presbyterian churches that sprang up in other Pacific Northwest communities. A surprisingly strong, independent Nez Perce church that continued after Spalding's initial missionary activity was incorporated into a broader Presbyterian community, and until sometime after state admission was achieved in 1890, most Idaho Presbyterians were Nez Perce Indians. Not very many states where Presbyterians were active had that kind of record.

Nez Perce Indians who were interested in Spalding's religious teachings and in settling down to become farmers had an advantage in dealing with miners and settlers that occupied much of their country after 1860. Miners caused them less trouble than ranchers did, and expanding demands of stockraisers in Oregon and parts of Idaho brought on an army military campaign against nontreaty Nez Perce bands in 1877. After that, most nontreaty Indians were exiled to Canada, Oklahoma, and eventually to Washington. But those who preferred to join in Spalding's farming tradition were admitted to Idaho's Nez Perce reservation.

As a result of that military conflict, Nez Perce factionalism between treaty and nontreaty Indians grew more divisive. But a combination of Spalding's teachings and gold rush pressures resulted in Nez Perce church development that had substantial early government support. Evidence of federal assistance to Spalding's missionary campaign still survives in a Kamiah church building (1874), while other Nez Perce churches that grew out of Spalding's mission continue to serve Presbyterians in North Idaho communities.