

History of Nez Perce Begins with Myth of Creation, Including Heart of Monster at Clearwater Valley

Idaho County Free Press - Wednesday, June 30, 1976 - 2A

By Lillian Pethel
KAMIAH—In this bicentennial year, much review of history is being pursued and much written. However, in the Kamiah Valley, there is history in the making - a first. A local

Nez Perce trails on a special grant received by the University of Idaho on the Nez Perce National Historical Park.

He wrote his thesis in 1974 when he received his Master's Degree in anthropology on the Nez Perce. This thesis, entitled 'Nez Perce Dress - A Study in Culture Change', covers a period of more than 250 years beginning before 1770 and ending in 1920. The initial manuscript of 360 pages was printed in offset. Only 200 books were printed and they are now collectors items.

At the present time, Doug (as he is called at Kamiah or Steve as he is known at the University) is writing a book for Doubleday that will include much of the original manuscript and perhaps much of the research now being done regarding the travel routes of the early people, their method of travel and the campsites and villages.

The present day roads out of Kamiah follow a hub pattern and the early roads of the pioneers followed the Nez Perce Indian trails, also a hub pattern from this valley.

The beautiful myth of creation, written by Kate McBeth (perhaps the first book written on the Kamiah Valley after notes in the journals of Lewis-Clark) truly describes the area.

The Myth of Creation
Kate McBeth.
"The Kamiah Valley is

young man is making a career of exploring early history and recording it for posterity.

Stephen Douglas Shawley, the son of Mr. and Mrs. William Shawley, is at the present time researching the

celebrated for its beautiful scenery. It is named from the Kamiah (now Lawyer's Creek which enters into the Clearwater in the eastern part of the reserve. Just where the creek empties into the river, the valley is about two miles wide. Mountain ranges are on both sides of the river, not bare, steep mountains such as you might imagine, but made up of buttes (little hills), one rising back of and higher than the other, until the fifth, sixth, or seventh, with its pretty fir trees, makes heaven seem but a step farther up. Here and there a canyon divides the mountain ranges, letting the snow water out in the spring and early summer, to make its annual trip down the Clearwater, Snake and Columbia Rivers to the grand Pacific Ocean.

"Now here, in this beautiful valley, down by the old ferry, there is a mound so large it looks like a hill. It is surrounded by level ground (now a center of the Nez Perce National Historical Park). The Nez Perces call it 'The Heart' and tell the story of how it came to be there.

"After the world was made, but no people yet, in Kamiah there lay a great monster. He was so large he filled the valley. That mound marks just where the heart of it was. He did not need to search for food, for he could draw in animals, great and small, for a distance of many miles and swallow

them alive. Many a council was held, at a distance, to devise some means to destroy this enemy of all beast-kind, for the valley was white with the bones of their friends. Only one among them dared to approach the dreaded animal. This was the coyote, or the little wolf, for always, when he drew near, the creature shut his mouth tight saying "Go away, go away!" One day, after the coyote had gathered some pitch-pine and flint, he crept quietly up alongside the monster, and hit the shut mouth so that it opened with a jerk, and in a moment the little brave was inside the great prison house. What a company he found there, the sick, dead, and dying! Soon with his pitch and flint he kindled a fire, and the smoke came puffing out of the mouth, ears and nose of the monster. The little commander inside ordered all yet alive to make their escape. The great white bear said he was not able to go, but finally went out through the ear gate. All this time the coyote was sawing away on the great heart with his flint, listening with delight to the sick groans of the dying beast.

"When all the captives were out and at liberty, there stood in the silence only the coyote and his friend the fox. What should be done with this great body? They finally decided to cut it in pieces, and from the pieces, people the world. So the Blackfoot Indians were made from the feet, the Crows and Flatheads from the head, and other tribes were made from other parts of the body and sent off to their own lands. The two friends were left alone. The fox, looking up and down the river said, "Why, we have no people for this beautiful valley, and nothing left to make them from." "True," said the coyote, "nothing but a few drops of the heart's best blood on my hands. Bring me some water from the river." This was done. While the coyote washed his hands, he sprinkled the

ground with blood and water, and lo! the noble Nemepoo (Chosen Ones) sprang up."

Kamiah was since the beginning of recorded history and before, the winter home of the Nemepoo - Nez Perces, the name given them by the French fur traders. Little archeological digging has been done here and it is now with the work of Doug Shawley that the area is truly coming into its own.

Meriweather Lewis and William Clark camped for a month here in 1806 enroute back to the then so-called civilized world. They made their camp where the sawmill of the Twin Feathers Unit of the Potlatch Corporation now stands. For years, in the field just south of the Lewis-Clark campsite, the foundation rocks lay of the French Fur Trading Post.

The present town of Kamiah (the name means tattered ends of hemp) is the third one, the first being on Nekesa Creek in the area now called East Kamiah; the second being at the railroad depot along the Clearwater, and the third and present town being located in 1905.

The present school site is the fourth one for Kamiah, the first being located on the Adams Grade near the site of the Walter Asbe home; the second being at the depot; and third being located across the street from the Community Presbyterian Church; and the fourth building being razed just a year ago to make room for the additions to the present education complex.

Just as the people of today mark the highways and byways, to allow for ease of travel, the Nez Perces did the same. Two such identify markings are very much in evidence - a rock across the Clearwater River from the first town of Kamiah and the Ceiling of the now named Kitchen Cave in Lawyer's Canyon. The paint used to identify these two areas has not been duplicated or solved as to solution. The meaning of the hieroglyphs are lost in antiquity.