

## **Yellowhawk and other memories of the Area by Mrs. Edith Gray**

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*Mrs Edith Gray, 1221 S. Mill St., Milton-Freewater, is a daughter of Eastern Oregon and Eastern Washington pioneers. Her mother rode a horse from Kansas all the way west.*

*Like many before her, Mrs. Gray regrets not having been attentive to details of her family's history at an earlier age than she did. Feeling she has something to offer to local readers in these memories and early day people of the region, we are turning, over this week's column to her.*

### **CHIEF YELLOWHAWK OF THE UMATILLAS**

**By Mrs Edith Gray**

On Highway No. 11, between Milton-Freewater and Walla Walla, when I cross the Yellow Hawk Bridge, I often think of an event in the life of the "Chief of the Umatillas," that should be recorded for historical data.

Yellowhawk must have been an intelligent, remarkable, Indian and very widely known.

The Union-Bulletin has mentioned him from time to time. Recently an item mentioned that at one time his body was buried on the Thomas land, as if it had later been moved. I suppose the records of his life are on file at the mission, but other than his association with the Wagon Train, that my grandfather Charles W. Harder with his large family came west in, the spring and summer of 1878; I know very little.

Yellowhawk's squaw and mother of his young son, had recently died. The Bannocks had stolen his race horse. He with his son, about sixteen years old, had gone east to find his prized horse; that he did find him is another part of this story.

Grandfather had been a delicate boy who was smuggled out of Germany into the U.S. by a benefactor, who claimed him, as his son. He was trained to be a millwright. The family had moved from Illinois to homestead the land in southeast corner of Kansas, where Yates Center, now stands.

At that time after the Civil War, the refugees and left-overs had spread out over the west to cause recklessness, lawlessness, and gruesome crimes.

The area east of the Chisholm Trail, which runs from San Antonio through Wichita to Abilene, then on to Dodge City, was especially wild.

This part of our history had been very well publicized on TV.

**Vigilantes Called Him**

It was required that grandfather belong to the vigilantes. He would be called out at night, to go with them to hunt out a criminal. This was not to his liking. They sold their farm and with a train of sixty wagons, came west on the Oregon Trail.

They carried \$16,000 in cash under a false floor in the wagon. Just here I wish to say a very great deal of money was carried west this way. I've never seen any reference of any money being found with the remains of burned trains. Money did not especially interest Indians, horses and cattle was their major concern. Many such raids were instigated by Brigands, white or half white.

The leader of the train is supposed to be buried in the Old Key Cemetery between Weston and Athena. The only name, I am sure of was Markham, the barber, who built the large house overlooking the Valley, north of Umapine. Umapine was also a Umatilla Chief.

My mother, Margreta, rode her horse, Fly, the entire way beside the wagons. She was 12 years old and remembered many events pertaining to the trip. I never heard her mention hardships. She rode with her brother Charles. Aunt Mary, five years younger, rode behind him. They helped with the cattle at an age when all was a glamorous world. However, she spoke with dread, the crossing of the Platte and the Snake Rivers in flood. The men would ride to the highest hills to hunt a camp site. Much of the Indian trouble on the plains was over by 1878, although the memory of Custer, 1876, was fresh in people's minds. She said, the women cried a lot at night. They met a woman who had been scalped. This healed in a white scar tissue over the top of her head. I might add, regardless of the director's idea of a heroine with long, flowing tresses, it just didn't happen, too easy for a marauding Indian to grab those coveted tresses. Their hair was tightly braided or hid under a sun bonnet.

### **Indians Raced Train**

She spoke of the Indians racing with the train, which as we know joined east and west, May 10, 1869, the Centennial of which is being celebrated this year.

When they reached Fort Bridger, Yellowhawk, with his party, came into the picture. He had gone on to the Dakotas to buy more horses and, while there, married a young Sioux squaw, not much older than his son.

He had retrieved his horse, Uncle John said, "Oh, he wasn't a race horse like we think of them today. He was a large black and white stallion. He could run"

It would be interesting to know how he accomplished this. My guess, he would negotiate through the Nez Perce chiefs. Mother spoke so often of the handsome Nez Perce.

The French Voyageurs had been going up the Missouri and down the Columbia from Canada in their long boats, decades before Lewis and Clark. Their policy was to marry, to promote good relations for safety to trade and trap.

The Nez Perce's were the proud aristocrats. The Snakes were the workers, they represented the middle class. They made many of the garments; war bonnets, moccasins, and regalia that we so

much admire. But to a Nez Perce, the Bannock's were scum. The spelling varies; Bannack, Banak, or Bannock. No other place in Indian history was the caste system so well defined. The Nez Percés were a superior tribe. The speeches at their pow wows sounded like a bunch of Greek philosophers.

### **Tribes Went to War**

In the meantime while Yellowhawk was in the east, the Bannock and Umatilla's went to war. He was stranded. Most likely the US Army arranged for his safety on the trip home. At the meeting of the heads of each family, it was decided it was safer to take him than to refuse because they were going into his territory. It seemed the humane thing to do. He hid in the wagons the entire way, through hostile country which was part of Wyoming, across Idaho and Eastern Oregon. Sometimes he and his son were covered with blankets. The young wife and sometimes the son rode beside the train with their horses. The braves would swoop down from the hills, surround them to buy or trade. They would glower at her and the horses but she never spoke, and seemed to be equal to the occasion; no incident occurred.

When they came to the high ground, above Powder River, overlooking Grand Ronde, they were safe in their own territory; the war was over. He left them to return to the mission on the Umatilla near Pendleton.

On U.S. 395 Pendleton. John Day Highway, at Battle Mountain Park, Troops under General Oliver O. Howard, won a decision engagement of the Bannock Indian war near here in 1878.

Chief Egan, Indian leader, was betrayed and his scalp delivered to camp.

Another marker, S-95, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada Highway. Aroused by loss of treaty lands to white's. Bannocks had resorted to war in 1878, the last and most severe Indian uprising in the Pacific North West.

The train was not allowed to go into the valley on account of the black diphtheria, which struck so savagely. This is proved by the many little grave stones in the Walla Walla Cemetery.

The recent article regarding the vandalism of the graves on Bowlus Hill, of seven small children, who died of this terrible plague, is so shocking. We hope it will never strike again. It seems to me, to disturb those graves could be dangerous.

The train followed the road through Waitsburg. I don't know where they disbanded, but grandfather went on through the Palouse and homesteaded the land, where the Potlatch Lumber Company now stands.

Until recently, there stood the cabin where my Uncle Benjamin was born. The winter was terrible; bears killed and carried off their pigs and calves.

When asked later, "Why he had gone to Potlatch?" he said after the long trip across the palin's, they were looking for wood and water. The next year they came back to Huntsville and with a

man named Richardson, cut and hewed the timber to build the Huntsville Flour Mill. This is recorded in the annuals of the Preston Schaefer Milling Co.

The family, finally settled on Dry Creek between Milton and Weston, where a grandson, Harold Harder, now lives.

There is a sequel to this story which I remember.

On their way to fish on the Columbia, the Umatilla's sometimes camped under a large elder tree in our front yard on Dry Creek between Milton and Weston.

I was very young, but it was amazing to me how quickly the wigwams would go up and the pots boiling on the fires. The bucks would sleep after eating, but the squaws sat in a big circle working on their gloves and moccasins. One time, mother visited for a long time with one of them. She told me later that this was Yellowhawk's wife who had come from Fort Bridger with them.

It seems tragic to me now that I didn't understand the importance of dates and names and interesting details of this trek west.