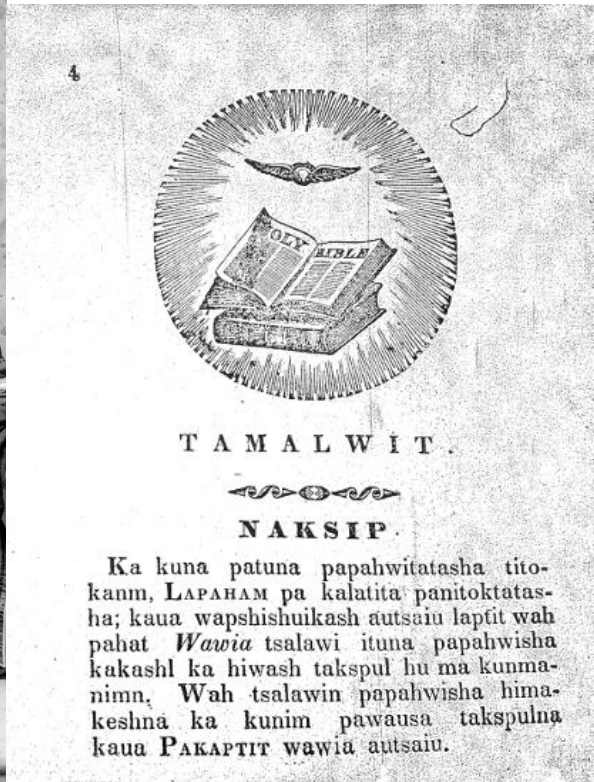


*Úuyitpe hiwéeke c'íiqin: The Creation and Reception of Written Nez Perce in the 19th Century*



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## Cast of Characters:

**Henry Harmon Spalding** – Presbyterian missionary and inventor of the written language

**Eliza Spalding** – Wife of Henry Spalding and teacher at the first missionary school

**Asa Bowen Smith** – Congregationalist missionary who writes the first grammar of the language and aids translation efforts in the first missionary period

**Timothy** – One of the first converts to Christianity and central leader of the Christian faction of Nez Perce. Chief of the Alpowa village.

**Ellis** – First Head Chief of the Nez Perce, educated at the Anglican Red River School in Manitoba

**Lawyer** – Second Head Chief of the Nez Perce who was present at the treaties of 1855 and 1863, and intimate ally of Spalding

**Old Joseph** – Early Convert to Christianity and chief of the Wallowa band of Nez Perce, father of Young Joseph

**Young Joseph** – Leader of the non-treaty Nez Perce in the war of 1877

**James** – Traditionalist chief in Lapwai who opposed Spalding during the 1830s and 1840s

**Sue and Kate MacBeth** – Presbyterian missionaries who arrived in the 1870s and helped run the school for native ministers

### ***Introduction: The Nez Perce and Writing***

This paper documents the history of how the Nez Perce language was put into writing, and the politically and religiously significant role it took on during the 19th century. The question is this – how was written Nez Perce, once created, used by Americans to influence the tribe, and then how was it used by Nez Perce people for their own purposes? After investigation, it can be shown that the written language was first utilized by missionaries to spread Christianity. Secondly, tribal elites used it during the treaty-making process to further their own political interests, and the US used it to help create a centralized tribal government. And finally, the written language became central to the Nez Perce churches that blossomed at the end of the nineteenth century, which came to form the core of Nez Perce social organization during that period. The introduction of literacy and its consequences within the tribe have been an overlooked yet important part of Nez Perce history – it was a tool of acculturation, and a political tool in Native hands. It was part of a missionary project of Christianization, but also allowed the Nez Perce to build vibrant religious communities stewarded by Native leadership. It is a story of cultural adaptation and survival.

### ***The State of Research***

This is a difficult subject to treat adequately due to the fragmentary nature of source materials. The primary sources themselves rarely come from Native perspectives, and the introduction of writing is intertwined with a complex political history. Because of this, it will be necessary to include religious and political context for many of the primary sources, even if this paper is focused on the written language and cannot give a complete account of Nez Perce

history. The Idaho Gold Rush, Nez Perce War of 1877, and the 1855 and 1863 treaties are simply too complex and extend too far past the subject of study to cover, however information will be included insofar as it helps explain the Nez Perce reception of the written language.

There has never been a historical study of the Nez Perce written language itself and how it was used by the Nez Perce. Yet the literature connected to Nez Perce history is robust, with two main threads of historiography which often interact quite differently with the historical material. The older literature is the extensive historiography on missions in the Northwest. Presbyterian minister and historian Clifford Drury wrote extensively on the first Presbyterian mission to the Nez Perce in his biography *Henry Harmon Spalding*, and compiled primary sources such as *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith*. He specialized in Presbyterian history of the American West and was sympathetic to mission efforts, tending to portray missionaries and their converts quite positively. Wilfred Schoenberg continued this historiography in the book *The Lapwai Mission Press*, which examined the printing effort of the first Presbyterian mission; and Lewis's *Creating Christian Indians: native clergy in the Presbyterian Church* discussed the history of Nez Perce and Dakota clergy in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This was unique in how it was primarily a Native history rather than a missionary history, but continued the tradition of a positive history of Christianity in the region.

The second category of scholarship has focused on the political history of the tribe, with a heavy emphasis on the War of 1877. Josephy's *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, Allen Slickpoo's *Noon Ne-Mee-Poo*, and McWhorter's *Hear Me, My Chiefs* all fall under this category. This literature tends to focus on the duplicity of the American government in its treaty negotiations and the resistance of non-treaty bands of Nez Perce, often with Chief

Joseph as the main protagonist. Chiefs Lawyer and Timothy and the treaty bands are either treated neutrally or quite negatively, with McWhorter describing these Christian chiefs as traitorous and the missionaries as oppressive. This is the literature that tends to color contemporary writing, including the commentary within the excellent compendium of primary sources, *Encounters with the People: Written and Oral Accounts of Nez Perce Life to 1858*.

So, there is a divide both in the subject matter covered, and the ethical assessment of different historical actors within the historiography on the Nez Perce. These differences reflect not only a divide in scholarship, but also a divide in how many Nez Perce view their own history to this day. On the one hand, the missionary historiography can skew towards an uncritical acceptance of missionary perspectives in the primary sources, which were often quite unsympathetic to non-Christian Nez Perce. While on the other hand, the political history can ignore the fact that the majority of the tribe did in fact convert to Christianity and did not participate in the War of 1877. It is a very important history, but the historical agency of the majority of the tribe that remained on the reservation is neglected. The written language is undoubtedly more closely tied to the missionaries and Christianized Nez Perce and much less connected to political history, so this paper will track more closely with the former historiography than the latter. Yet this paper will strive to present the history of the written language without vituperation or panegyric, and the reader can decide for himself how to view the various historical actors.

Even if it is less connected to later political history, the subjects covered do have notable implications for the tribe's history as a whole. The first chapter discusses some of the cultural context of the Nez Perce and the event that led to missionaries creating the written form of the language. The second chapter discusses how a combination of a missionary school and press

played into Native reception of this missionary invention, noting how different groups reacted variably to missionary presence. The third chapter documents how leading men in the tribe used the written language for their own governmental purposes in council with the US government. And finally, the fourth chapter describes how even as the tribe lost much of its political autonomy, Native clergy used the written language extensively within religious contexts. Each of these sections shows how literary culture shaped the tribe's history as a tool in the hands of Americans and Natives.

## Chapter 1: *The Nez Perce, Cultural Diffusion, and Missions*

The Nez Perce, or Nimípuu, have resided in what is now north Idaho, southwestern Washington, and northwestern Oregon for as long as we have records.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many tribes, there are not even legends of how they settled in the region. Part of the Plateau cultural grouping and Sahaptian language family, the Nez Perce traditionally made their living via a semi-nomadic lifestyle of hunter-gathering across the vast expanse of prairies, canyons, and mountains that make up their historic lands.<sup>2</sup>



*The light green marks traditional Nez Perce territory, and the dark green marks the 1863 reservation.*<sup>3</sup>

Being placed on the far East of the Columbia Plateau, they received significant cultural influence from the Plains tribes, with horsemanship being a particularly important part of Nez

<sup>1</sup> The names of the Nez Perce were analyzed by the linguist Haruo Aoki thus, “The Nez Percés called themselves /nimí·pu·/. The neighboring Indians called them *šíwaniš* 'stranger, *šukwíšukwi* 'dark brown' (Sahaptin dialects), *sêhápten* (Flathead), *cugádikaʔa* 'kows eater,' *sáidukaʔa* 'people under the tule' (Bannock), *cóigaʔa* 'kows people' (Shoshoni), *kúmunuitsitapi* 'dark green or dark blue people' (Blackfoot). The whites called them Nez Percés, Pierced Noses, Chopunnish, Blue Earth Indians, Blue Mud Indians, Green Wood Indians, and Flatheads. /nimi·pu·/ is analyzable into /nimi·/ and /pu·/. The former occurs only with /pu·/, and the latter means 'people.' Together, they mean 'the Nez Perce people.' Aoki, *Nez Perce Grammar*, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, *Conflict and Schism in Nez Perce Acculturation. Second Edition.*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Columbia Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, *Nez Perce Territory*, <https://critfc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/nez-perce-map.png>.

Perce life. As the horse spread across the Americas after its introduction by the Spanish, the Nez Perce became expert horsemen, renowned for their breeding skills and possessing vast herds. Much of what we know about the prehistory of the Nez Perce has to be deduced from subtle clues and archaeology as technological and cultural influences spread across North American much faster than actual settlers. But it seems that Nez Perce social structure and religion was quite simple – small independent bands and belief in shamanism and tutelary spirits characterized pre-contact Nez Perce life.<sup>4</sup> It seems that the tribe was very open to new religious movements and technologies, which is relevant to the subject of study. Nez Perce people were quick to receive writing and to use it for their own purposes.

#### *Syncretism and Expectation*

This openness expressed itself in very tangible ways. Prior to any Christian missionizing the Nez Perce had significant influences both directly and indirectly from Europeans. The waves of disease, arrival of the horse, and new syncretistic religious practices had transformative effects on all aspects of life likely before any direct contact with whites. And when direct contact finally came, it was no less impactful. Business with French traders and Christianized Iroquois through the fur trade and the extended interaction with the Lewis and Clark expedition made change accelerate rapidly. By the time Protestant missions were established in the 1830s, Nez Perce culture had already been indelibly transformed, with many eager for more influence from whites.

Some of the most significant imports were new supernatural beliefs – anthropologist Deward Walker notes, “by 1832, a cult with many Christian elements had reached a late stage of

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<sup>4</sup> Walker, 9.



development among the Nez Perces.”<sup>5</sup> Upon traveling through the region, Benjamin Bonneville, a captain in the US military, mistakenly assumed that the obvious Christian influence was due to missionaries.<sup>6</sup> The Sabbath day, priests, emphasis on songs and dances as forms of worship, and many other things were derived from indirect Christian influence; and by the arrival of the Presbyterian missionaries would be well established in the Nez Perce cultural consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, events in 1831 particularly heightened religious interest. Two Spokane boys returned from the Red River School in Manitoba, Canada, where they had been sent by the Hudson Bay Company to learn the rudiments of Christianity and to read and write. The Spokane tribe lived slightly to the north of the Nez Perce in what is modern-day Washington, and were their historic allies with extensive intermarriage. The more influential of the two who returned, Spokane Gary, started preaching about Jesus, heaven and hell, and the necessity of Christian observance. Many traveled to see his copy of the Bible and hear him read from it, including Nez Perce leaders, creating an urgent desire among some Nez Perce leadership to obtain this book and whatever supernatural power it revealed.<sup>8</sup>

In the fall of the same year, four Nez Perce men traveled all the way to Missouri and met with William Clark, whom Nez Perce had met many years before when the Lewis and Clark expedition had passed through their territory. Though the details are fuzzy, historians agree that they desired the bible, missionaries, or some sort of religious instruction. The Nez Perce understanding of what this sought-after supernatural knowledge constituted is unclear, and there is a plurality of conflicting accounts regarding the motivations of the journey. They likely hoped

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:79.

to obtain their own copy of the bible, but this is impossible to establish definitively given the language barrier between the four Nez Perce men and the Americans, and the fact that none of the four made it back to their homeland.<sup>9</sup> However, this surprise arrival of an Indian delegation caused a sensation among American Christians, who immediately advocated for a mission to be sent to the Nez Perce. For example, Rev. E.W. Sehon wrote in the New York *Christian Advocate and Journal*, and *Zion's Herald*, proclaiming that if this native appeal was not heeded, “Will not these Indians rise up in the day of judgment to the condemnation of hundreds and thousands who live and die unforgiven in Christian lands?”<sup>10</sup> Rev. Alexander M’Allister wrote, “Already it would seem that a door is open, and the Indians from the lofty summit of the Rocky Mountains look far east with burning desire to behold the coming of the messenger of God.”<sup>11</sup> This excitement among American Christians ultimately led the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), an interdenominational Protestant group, to establish Henry Harmon Spalding’s mission to the Nez Perce by 1836. And by 1839, the ABCFM had established two more missions in the region alongside Spalding: one at Waiilatpu headed by Dr. Marcus Whitman about twenty miles east of Hudson Bay’s Fort Walla Walla, and one at Tshimikain on the upper Columbia, headed by Reverend Elkanah Walker and Reverend Cushing Eels.

Cultural diffusion before contact and the interchange over the first three decades of the nineteenth century prepared the Nez Perce to be receptive to many of the beliefs and practices of missionaries, especially writing. Interest in Christianity went hand in hand with the interest in Spokan Gary’s bible and the power of the written word. Other American practices, such as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 10:86.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 188.

agriculture, were not received with such keen interest when missionaries attempted to introduce them, as they undermined the customs of the tribe. However from the very beginning, it was Native interest and initiative that brought both formal instruction in writing and Christianity to the tribe.

*Spalding and the Alphabet: 1831-1847*

The period of the first Presbyterian mission, bookended by the sensation in St. Louis in 1831 and the Whitman Massacre in 1847, is crucial for understanding the history of the Nez Perce and of the Northwestern tribes.<sup>12</sup> It is the time when the missionaries created the written form of Nez Perce that remained dominant into the twentieth century and established its religious and political uses. It is the period in which the US imposed a unified tribal structure on the Nez Perce utilizing the new written language, and it is the period in which a tribal elite formed that would control mechanisms of political power. Even though a relatively small percentage of the tribe converted to Presbyterianism during this period, the few who converted and became literate, such as Chief Lawyer and Chief Timothy, then gained influence using their literacy.

Having received the ABCFM commission in the aftermath of the St. Louis expedition, Henry Harmon Spalding and his wife Eliza arrived in what is today Lapwai, Idaho in 1836. They were pleasantly surprised to find that they were met by widespread celebration by the tribe, which got them off to a very optimistic start.<sup>13</sup> Spalding was a polarizing figure wherever he

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<sup>12</sup> Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were fellow Presbyterian missionaries among the Cayuse, a closely neighboring tribe. In 1847 a number of Cayuse murdered whites at their mission in Waiilatpu, leading to a missionary withdrawal from the region.

<sup>13</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:234.

went – born out of wedlock in 1803, he had a difficult childhood and his personality reflected his rough upbringing. He tended to clash with people he worked with, and the mission field turned out to be no exception. As a young adult he converted to Presbyterianism and attended Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati before he and Eliza as newlyweds volunteered for native missions. They were briefly stationed with the Osage in Indian territory, but were then appointed to go to the Oregon country after the broad excitement about the Nez Perce delegation.<sup>14</sup>

Spalding himself was the main instigating force behind the production of written Nez Perce, even though he was far from an excellent linguist, much to the chagrin of his fellow missionaries.<sup>15</sup> Initially he found the Nez Perce language absolutely inscrutable, and hoped that he could simply teach the Indians to read or write English.<sup>16</sup> Nez Perce, or *nimipuutímt*, is a heavily inflected, grammatically complex and phonetically difficult language. Entire sentences can be expressed in a single verb, which have extensive systems of tenses, suffixes, and affixes in ways completely different from English.



*A portrait of Spalding later in life; a painting of the Spalding-Whitman party arriving at the Summit of the Rockies<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> Schoenberg, *The Lapwai Mission Press*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:171.

<sup>16</sup> Drury, IV:237.

<sup>17</sup> *Eliza Spalding. Arrival of the Whitman-Spalding Party at the Summit of the Rockies*, 1936,

However, luckily for Spalding, reinforcement arrived in the form of the Congregationalist Rev. Asa Bowen Smith and Andrew Rodgers, who were much better linguists. Smith was not a particularly cheerful man and his letters are full of complaints, but he was trained in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew and managed to produce the first comprehensive grammar of the language.<sup>18</sup> While not perfect, even according to contemporary standards it was an excellent work of scholarship picking up on many of its complex grammatical nuances.<sup>19</sup> And while Rodgers was not as educated as Smith, he had learned Nez Perce interacting with their buffalo hunting expeditions in the Great Plains and had achieved a high level of fluency.<sup>20</sup> In 1841, Dr. Marcus Whitman wrote concerning their various linguistic abilities,

Mr Smith & Mr Rogers are the best linguists in the Nez Perce language but although Mr R is the best yet he cannot supply Mr S place in the classification of the language for want of a more extended education. Neither Mr Spalding nor myself are properly able to write the language & Mr Gray is far behind. It is our joint opinion that Mr Spalding cannot master it so as to be able to translate, or be relied on for books, or as a standard in any sense.<sup>21</sup>

This is a harsh assessment of Spalding's abilities, yet it is indeed consistent with other testimonies. Nonetheless, he was able to learn the language at least to some degree, and well enough to attempt to publish a pamphlet in Nez Perce on his own. He requested a used printing press from the Congregationalist mission in Honolulu in order to print the booklets, and proceeded apace.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, it was full of errors, and was totally rejected by other

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Oil on canvas, 9, 1/2" x 13, 1/2", <https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/masc/id/111/rec/3>, Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Peculiarities of the Nez Perce Language*, *Washington State University Libraries' Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections*, 1841.

<sup>19</sup> Hovdhaugen, *And the Word Was God*, 71–72.

<sup>20</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:110.

<sup>21</sup> Baird, Mallickan, and Swagerty, *Encounters with the People*, 238.

<sup>22</sup> Schoenberg, *The Lapwai Mission Press*, 11.

missionaries as a failure when they arrived.<sup>23</sup> This initial pamphlet used a writing system of Spalding's own devising, and Smith dismissed the pamphlet as "almost entirely useless," while he described the writing system as "unclassical and outlandish."<sup>24</sup> However abysmal of a start, it still holds the honor of the first published work ever in the Nez Perce language, even if it made its way into very few native hands.

Starting over, the missionaries had to devise a new alphabet for their translation work, and ultimately chose to modify the Pickering alphabet, which had been designed as a universal system to be applied across many different tribal languages. John Pickering laid out the reasoning behind his system in the 1820 essay *Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North Americas*, in which he emphasized that in creating the system he had not intended to "to give a universal alphabet on strict philosophical principle for the use of the learned, but merely a practical one."<sup>25</sup> While the system was far from capable of representing the Nez Perce language's expansive sound system, it was more workable than Spalding's and had a track record of success. It seems that it was picked up by tribal members relatively readily, and the lack of precision in its representation of the Nez Perce sound system was not much of an obstacle for native speakers. It had already been used for Hawaiian, and was also used for Abnaki, Chippewa, Choctaw, Muskogee, Osage, Ottawa, Seneca, and Sioux.<sup>26</sup> While later linguists might wince at its rude character, it seems to have somehow done the trick.

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<sup>23</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:100.

<sup>24</sup> Drury, IV:120.

<sup>25</sup> Hovdhaugen, *And the Word Was God*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

*Spalding's system when compared to a later linguist's had only 14 letters to represent 36 sounds*

FIRST BOOK.			
<b>Key to the Alphabet.</b>		Vowels	
<b>A</b>	pronounced as <i>a e o</i> and <i>u</i> in the following words:—father, hall, man, what, men, not and hut.	i	[i] as in the English words pin, tin, kin
<b>E</b>	pronounced as <i>a</i> in hate.	e	[ae] as in the English words pan, tan, ca
<b>I</b>	“ as <i>e</i> in we, <i>i</i> in pin and <i>y</i> in you.	a	[a] as in the English words father, rathe:
<b>O</b>	“ as <i>o</i> in note.	o	[o] as in the English words go, no
<b>U</b>	“ as <i>u</i> in bull, <i>oo</i> in moon.	u	[u] as in the English words, put, soot
<b>H</b>	} pronounced as in English.	Consonants	
<b>K</b>		stops	
<b>L</b>		p	[p] as in the English words pin, cap
<b>M</b>		t	[t] as in the English words tin, cat
<b>N</b>		c	[c] as <i>ts</i> in tsetse fly, hats
<b>P</b>		k	[k] as in the English words king, neck
<b>S</b>		q	[q] as voiceless dorso-postvelar stop
<b>T</b>		ʔ	[ʔ] glottal stop
<b>W</b>		p̥	[p̥] glottalized bilabial stop
		t̥	[t̥] glottalized apico-dental stop
	c̥	[c̥] glottalized apico-alveolar stop	
	k̥	[k̥] glottalized dorso-velar stop	
	q̥	[q̥] glottalized dorso-postvelar stop	
<b>AI</b>	“ as <i>i</i> in time.	spirants	
<b>AU</b>	“ as <i>ou</i> in south.	t̥	[t̥] voiceless apico-alveolar lateral spirant
		s	[s] as in the English words set, dress
		x	[x] voiceless dorso-velar spirant
		x̥	[x̥] voiceless dorso-postvelar spirant
		h	[h] as in the English words hat, hand
		nasals	
		m	[m] as in the English words man, thumb
		ɱ	[ɱ] as in the English words nose, can
		m̥	[m̥] glottalized bilabial nasal
		n̥	[n̥] glottalized apico-dental nasal
		semivowels	
		w	[w] as in the English words wet, cow
		y	[y] as in the English words yet, away
		w̥	[w̥] glottalized bilabial semivowel
		y̥	[y̥] glottalized palatal semivowel
		laterals	
		l	[l] as in the English words lip, pill
		l̥	[l̥] glottalized lateral
<b>B D F G R V Z</b>	used only in proper names.		

<sup>27</sup> Aoki, *Nez Perce Dictionary*, xi–xii; Spalding, *Nez Perces First Book*, 1839.

## *Chapter 2: Schooling and Literary Culture*

During the 1830s and 1840s, hundreds of Nez Perce of all ages were trained in the new alphabet. The missionaries used the printing press they received from Honolulu to produce a number of publications in Nez Perce, and ran a school in Lapwai that provided instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The translation of Scriptures, hymns, and educational materials became the backbone of the usage of the written language – something that was widespread, persistent, and socially impactful for Nez Perce culture into the twentieth century, as long as *nimipuutímt* remained the language of Nez Perce communities. These religious texts formed the core of regular textual activity, and this literate culture promoted by school is then what allowed for the political use of the language to develop, discussed in the next chapter. And it was at the school and at the churches where tribal division over missionary influence first became pronounced.

Given that very little has been preserved outside of the missionary archives for this period, it is impossible to obtain exact numbers of Nez Perce who learned to read and write in their own language, and it is even more uncertain how many exactly went on to regularly write on their own. Yet we do have rough estimates of school attendance. In 1840, Desire Griffin, an assistant to Eliza Spalding at Lapwai, wrote to Mrs. Elkanah Walker at Spokane about the state of the school. Describing numbers, she wrote “I have been engaged in a school this winter for Mrs S and have had some part of this time a hundred & twenty-seven, but the number at present is about sixty, as many of the people are gone away for food.”<sup>28</sup> In 1840, Rev. Smith gave a similar estimate regarding the student population – at its peak around one hundred fifty, and at its

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<sup>28</sup> Griffin to Walker, 15 February 1840, Box II, entry 79-5, Oregon Mission Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.



lowest around sixty.<sup>29</sup> During the same year, Smith described the school as having been taught for six and a half months averaging about four hours a day and mentioned that at the record lowest attendance was twelve students.<sup>30</sup> The semi-nomadic nature of the Nez Perce year at this early period caused major fluctuations in the student population, something that Rev. Smith griped about at length. However, it would make sense that schooling would fit into the more sedentary part of the calendar, even if Smith disapproved and it made logistics somewhat difficult for the missionaries.

The student numbers climbed as time progressed and as there was more material for the missionaries to utilize in the classroom. By February of 1845, Philo B. Littlejohn wrote from Lapwai to Rev. Eells and Rev. Walker in Spokane about the situation at the school, indicating that many Nez Perce of all ages were eager to learn, and that the student population had greatly increased. He reported, “There are as many as three hundred in the school of all ages. There is as great a thirst for knowledge as I have ever seen, especially for the word of God [there] is probably over a hundred pens moving daily in the hands of the people printing scripture lessons.”<sup>31</sup> His estimate is over twice as high as Miss Griffin’s five years before, and is much more emphatic about their zeal for their studies. Overall, this indicates that over the several years the school operated hundreds of Nez Perce learned to read – many more than officially converted to Christianity during the same period. This is a radical shift in literacy when just a few years

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<sup>29</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:159.

<sup>30</sup> Drury, IV:182.

<sup>31</sup> P.B. Littlejohn to Eells & Walker, 25 February 1845, Box II, entry 79-11, Oregon Mission Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

prior, Spokane Gary's bible was such a surprising sight. Though far from universal, literacy had become well established in Nez Perce society by the time the missionaries left in 1847.

*Native Scribes?*

While native testimony is lacking for this period, we do have two volumes comprising one hundred and sixty pages of handwritten scripture passages remaining from the 1840s. This is almost certainly a mere fraction of what was produced, given that even preserved printings from this period are incredibly rare. Their existence shows that at least some Nez Perce people were heavily invested in literary production – dedicating significant amounts of time and energy in copying out texts by hand. If this were not already evident by the hundreds who were willing to show up to the Spalding schoolhouse, we can see this by how some were involved in longer form scribal work well beyond ‘copying out their scripture lessons.’ The booklets include translated passages of scripture that never went to print, such as fragments from the book of Acts and Revelation. Even if Nez Perce people were not the primary translators from English, they almost certainly would have been active as editors and crosscheckers in the process, ensuring the intelligibility of the texts.



The images above are samples of this Native handwriting. What takes up these two pages is a translation of the Lord's Prayer in its long Matthean form, which given its devotional popularity is unsurprising to find. It is a good example of the unique handwriting used – many of the letters seem to be imitating a seraph font, the form of the letter *i* being especially idiosyncratic. This seems to indicate attempts to copy the script of printed materials. The irregular separation of syllables by dots is rather unusual and distinct from any printed materials, and throughout the book the scribes are often creative with the forms of capital letters and decorative geometric pieces. It is unclear what individual scribes meant by particular motifs – perhaps it was simply a way to fight the boredom of copy work, or possibly a way for the scribe to show off their creativity. A description from the late nineteenth century of the school dynamics during the first missionary period indicates that many enjoyed this copy work.

There was no trouble to get pupils near, for at that day the people were not living scattered in families, but in bands, in long houses or own tent ... If they felt so disposed, the whole community, or tribe, could easily pick up and pitch their tents near their teacher. Once the writing and reading were started, the progress would be fast, for ambition to excel each other is one of the leading traits of the Nez Perces character. The printing by hand of the lessons was very attractive to them, men, women and children. I have seen some of it which would be a credit to a present-day pupil.<sup>33</sup>

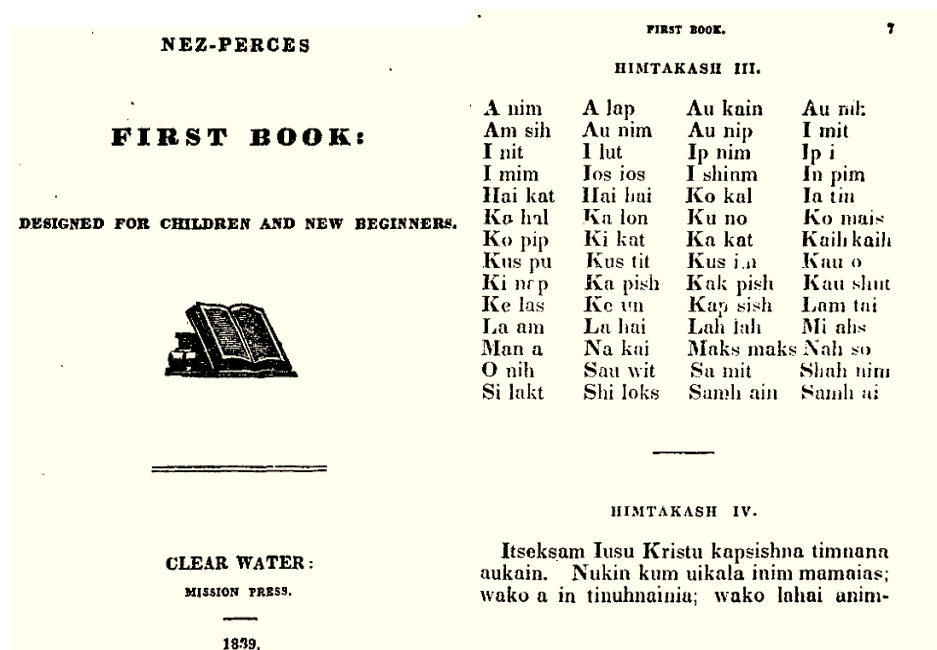
This account claims that printing by hand was attractive to tribal members, and that due to a sense of competition people would strive for excellence in writing. Perhaps this explains the creative designs seen in these booklets, and gives a bit of insight into the perceived value of the written word at this time. Whatever the case, significant time went into this writing. And the survival of these materials into the twenty-first century evidences their successful circulation and use by Nez Perce people well beyond the time of the first Presbyterian mission.

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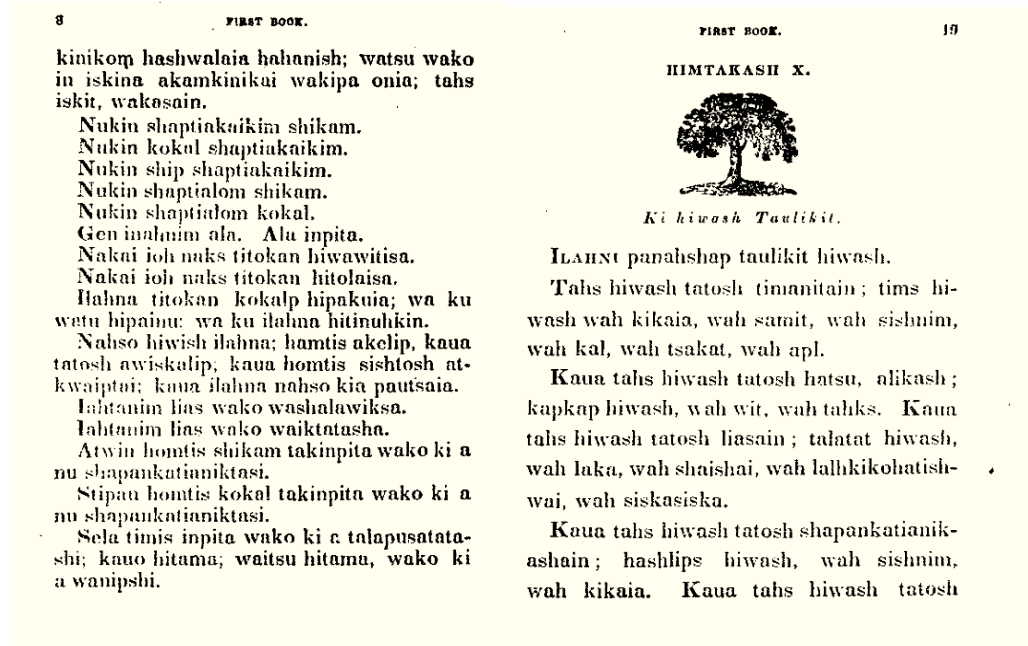
<sup>33</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Perces since Lewis and Clark*, 44.

*Printed Materials*

Even more than the scribal activity, the publications printed from the Lapwai mission press formed a lasting foundation for the written language. While only so many people could study in Lapwai, these pamphlets and booklets could circulate throughout the tribe while also providing a basis for lessons in the school. Even for the Nez Perce who could not read the language, the existence of written texts in their communities and people who could read them rapidly became part of daily life; specifically a hymnbook, educational primers, and the Gospel of Matthew formed the core of printed Nez Perce. By 1839, an imprint was made for a booklet: *Nez Perces First Book: Designed for Children and New Beginners*. Five hundred copies were made, intended for the audience described in the title, students in reading.<sup>34</sup> Shown below is a sampling of the material, including the cover page, Lesson 3, Lesson 4, and Lesson 10 which represent the different types of lessons.



<sup>34</sup> Schoenberg, *The Lapwai Mission Press*, 25.



This booklet mixes missionizing and pedagogy, as might be expected. The first pages are a straightforward depiction of the alphabet and its sounds, with practice for letter writing. The first three exercises are simply lists of single words, presumably intended to be sounded out and printed out by the student; while lessons four through seven include longer words and phrases to copy out, as well as smaller texts with theological themes. Finally, lessons eight, nine, and ten are slightly longer texts, discussing random topics ranging from different types of fruit, hats, and the prophet Jonah. For example, lesson four starts like this: “Jesus Christ says to me, ‘Throw away your evil heart. Come here all of my children; now I have died for you; now for a long time the Devil made his sons. Now no more, I some time ago gave the way [to] heaven; now this is the way, for life.’”<sup>36</sup> This is clearly a missionary text – but then the lesson immediately goes on to describe driving buffalo and horses into water. It is all quite eclectic. The student at Lapwai

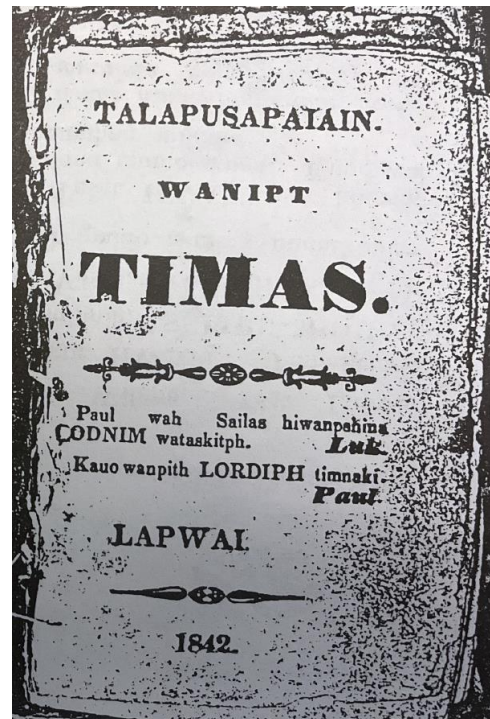
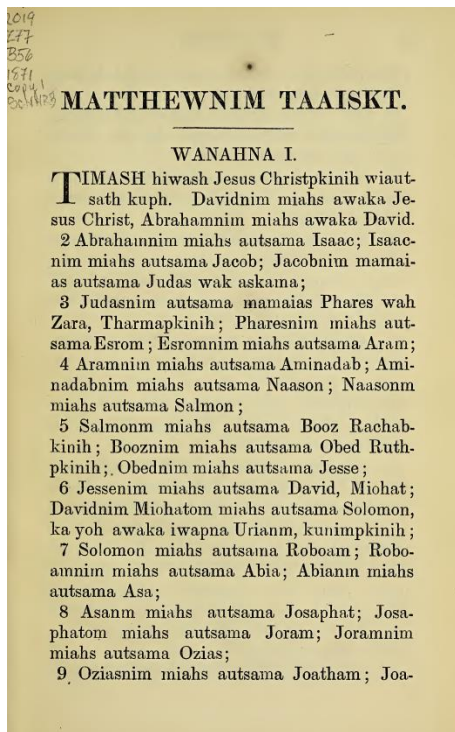
<sup>35</sup> Spalding, *Nez-Perces First Book: Designed for Children and New Beginners*, Lapwai, ID, 1839.

<sup>36</sup>The translation is my own. Here is the text in current orthography: “hic’iicem Iusu Kristu qepsi’sne tim’neene ‘ewqin. Nuukin kuum ‘oykala ‘iinim mamay’ac; waaqo ‘ee ‘iin tin’uxna’ynya; waaqo leehay ‘enimkin’ikuum hacwalayaya hahanis; weec’u waaqo ‘iin ‘iskine ‘aqamki’nikaay waqipa ‘ew’niye; taaq ‘iskit, waq’iis’ain.”



would have experienced his share of both boring reading lessons and evangelization, even in the school materials that were not explicitly religious texts.

By far the longest cultural impact would be felt from the publications crafted for public religious life. Our knowledge of the reach of these books is fuzzy for the first missionary period, but they clearly had a longevity. The crown jewel of the missionaries' translation efforts was a complete Gospel of Matthew, which is by far the publication most used by the tribe in the written language's history. The hymn book contained twenty-seven hymns, and was evidently printed for community worship. This helped facilitate a tradition of hymn singing that lasts to this day, all building off of this core of songs.<sup>37</sup>



*The first page of the Nez Perce Gospel of Matthew (a later printing), and the first Nez Perce Hymnbook.<sup>38</sup>*

<sup>37</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:269.

<sup>38</sup> Spalding, *Matthewnim Taaiskt*, 1871; Spalding, *Talapusapatain Wanipt Timas*, 1842.

When the missionaries left in 1847, they reported leaving 400 copies of Matthew and 300 copies of the hymn book in the printing house – likely hundreds more were distributed.<sup>39</sup> Not only had hundreds been trained in reading and writing, there was now a significant amount of text present in Nez Perce communities intended to be utilized in public contexts. Communal religious services were now able to utilize text, both in public reading and music.

### *The Seeds of Contention*

Clearly some Nez Perce were willing to sink significant amounts of time and energy into writing, and the missionaries themselves labored intensively to facilitate this. It is worth noting, however, that not everyone took kindly to the influence of the Spaldings, especially when it came to their disapproval of traditional Nez Perce religious practice. There are two or three discernable factions in the sources: religious traditionalists, friends of Spalding and his project, and possibly an intermediate group who were interested in gaining new knowledge but unfriendly to Spalding's strictures. The tensions between these groups almost certainly shaped individuals' attitudes toward the written word and the innovations that it represented. Given that students were described as busily copying out scripture lessons and hundreds of copies of religious texts were printed, religious dynamics are quite relevant to how the Nez Perce first encountered literacy.

We see this tension regarding the school quite clearly in at least one instance. A figure by the name of Old James seems to have led the faction in Lapwai interested in defending indigenous spirituality and hostile to the missionaries and their converts.<sup>40</sup> He was definitely the

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<sup>39</sup> Schoenberg, *The Lapwai Mission Press*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:193.



minority in Lapwai and the surrounding area, as a number of very prominent men were on the side of the missionaries. However, Spalding on a number of occasions writes of difficulties with James. In his journal entry for October 9<sup>th</sup>, 1840, he wrote about a confrontation where a couple of young men threatened Eliza Spalding at the school, and he subsequently found out they were part of James' band.<sup>41</sup> Spalding very pointedly described the young men as 'painted,' wearing traditional paint, and how they looked 'barbaric.' The diary entry records how a very large contingent of people near Lapwai had become ambivalent to the missionary presence, and were loath to rebuke the people who had intimidated Mrs. Spalding. Yet this record is from 1840, and the school is far from its peak attendance described in 1845, so apparently a decline in interest in the missionaries did not necessarily mean a decline of interest in writing in the following few years. It is also noteworthy that the school was the initial locus of the conflict. Perhaps it was meant to disrupt the school activities specifically, in addition to threatening Eliza Spalding.

This religious tension was made explicit in another conflict with Old James. It is a great example of how the different attitudes towards the white influence coexisted with one another – in this case Old James was attending a church service. Spalding recorded the ensuing scene in his journal, when he preached strongly on how one must “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Old James seeing too much light for his sorcery rose in a rage & said he had received the Waiikin when young & could not throw it away & by this he had power over the winds & clouds & that he could cause the winds to blow or the clouds to give rain when he pleased. This stirred up the zeal of Timothy who answered him very closely but the old man soon stopped him by force & attempting to speak, I told him to sit down. The sorcery & many other things convince me that this people are very much under the power of the devil.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Drury, IV:300.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, IV:325.

Besides the strong language of Spalding, we can garner quite a bit from this conflict. When Old James spoke out against the message given, it is almost entirely in favor of traditional Nez Perce religion – referencing the spiritual power supposedly derived from one’s *wéeyekin*, or tutelary spirit. While biased, Spalding was generally an optimist, and the fact that he felt that most of the people sympathized with the traditional beliefs is an indication of how few devoted followers he had accrued. However, Old James, while being hostile to the missionaries, still attended some of their religious services. This exhibits how even the Nez Perce hostile to the missionaries were willing to patronize missionary establishments. Perhaps this could explain why even as interest in the missionaries declined, the number of their students grew, indicating that initially interest in literacy was not strictly tied to one’s sympathies regarding the missionaries.

#### *Spalding’s Allies*

The most powerful men of the pro-missionary faction included the first two baptized converts to Christianity and a man who would eventually convert in the 1870s – Timothy, Joseph, and Lawyer. They were all chiefs in their respective bands, and quite prominent men in the tribe. Joseph is now generally known as ‘old Joseph,’ as opposed to his son young Joseph who later led the non-treaty Nez Perce in the War of 1877. He was a chief of the Wallowa band, whose territory is now in northeast Oregon. Old Joseph was one of the first baptized by Spalding, and regularly promoted Spalding’s religious activities. He later left Christianity, but for the duration of this missionary period he was a steadfast ally to Spalding.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Drury, IV:280.



*The three chiefs Timothy, Joseph, and Lawyer: sketched in 1855 by Gustav Sohon.*<sup>44</sup>

Timothy himself was incredibly dedicated to Christianity, and played an important role in the later treaties of 1855 and 1863. Though he was un-ordained, he effectively played the role of a minister and was the first Nez Perce to take up a sedentary lifestyle.<sup>45</sup> He named his village Alpowa, meaning the place where the Sabbath is observed, which was located on the Snake River below the confluence of the Clearwater.<sup>46</sup> Of the leading men sympathetic to Spalding, Timothy seems to have been the most zealous in his new faith. He was also a strong political ally. In the conflicts mentioned, he was of the few who actively discountenanced the behavior of the young men towards Eliza Spalding, and also confronted Old James during the scene in church.

<sup>44</sup> Gustav Sohon, *Te-Ma-Tee Nez Perce Chief*, 6/7/1855, Washington State Historical Society, <https://wshs-collections.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/1918.114.9.57.jpg>; Gustav Sohon, *Joseph Too-wet-tak-hes Chief of the Nez Perce Indians*, 5/29/1855, Washington State Historical Society, <https://wshs-collections.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/1918.114.9.58.jpg>; Gustav Sohon, *Lawyer Hal-hal-tlostot Head Chief of the Nez Perce Tribe*, 5/25/1855, Washington State Historical Society, <https://wshs-collections.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/1918.114.9.53.jpg>.

<sup>45</sup> Drury, IV:26.

<sup>46</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:177.

Perhaps the most politically significant ally to the missionaries and their language project was Lawyer – a headman from around Kamiah who later went on to become head chief.<sup>47</sup> Missionary William Gray described how he was “named by the American trappers, Lawyer, on account of his shrewdness in argument, and his unflinching defense of American against British and foreign influences.”<sup>48</sup> Lawyer was a great help to the missionary translation efforts, and both Revs. Smith and Spalding report him as having been their teacher in the language.<sup>49</sup> Lawyer worked very closely with the missionaries as an informant about Catholic activities in nearby tribes as well as internal conflicts.<sup>50</sup> Once Smith reported Lawyer as having gotten into an argument with a Catholic priest defending the Protestant missionaries, actively militating against certain Catholic teachings.<sup>51</sup> This is interesting given that he was not willing to get baptized until decades later. But he was very supportive of adopting white practices, and clearly aided their language efforts immensely

The final relevant character is a chief by the name of Ellis, who soon after Spokan Gary’s return was also sent to the Red River School in Manitoba. Having been trained in Anglicanism, it seems that he remained aloof and uncooperative with the missionaries and was much more friendly to various indigenous practices. He must have been a very influential man given that he was later chosen as head chief. It is likely that his education obtained independently of the missionaries combined with friendliness toward traditional practices made him an appealing choice for those who wanted to learn from whites while not adopting the strictures of Spalding. It

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<sup>47</sup> Josephy, 10:156.

<sup>48</sup> Gray, 109.

<sup>49</sup> Walker, *Conflict and Schism in Nez Perce Acculturation. Second Edition.*, 33; Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:180.

<sup>50</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:193.

<sup>51</sup> Drury, IV:193.

seems that a large number of people were in this category – not so cleanly allies nor openly hostile. At one point Spalding noted that cultural tensions were cropping up that worried the missionaries, writing that, “The minds of the people have been rather turned away these few days past. I will mention what seems to have been the cause. As Elymas the sorcerer tried to turn away the deputy from the faith, So Ellis the head Chief by sending round to have dreams made.”<sup>52</sup> The fact that the tribe supported a literate, Christianized Indian such as Ellis who was willing to retain some traditional practices for head chief is telling. But even if he remained aloof, he did not cause the missionaries much trouble. Joseph, Timothy, and Lawyer were crucial for the successful operations of the missionaries among the Nez Perce given the ambivalence of many and hostility of some, making the creation of the written language possible. Without these Nez Perce leaders’ help and support, it is unimaginable that the missionaries could have accomplished a fraction of what they did in both their language efforts and missionizing.

### *Conclusion*

The event that put an end to this first missionary chapter was the Whitman massacre, which took place on November 29, 1847. Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were the missionaries sent to the neighboring Cayuse tribe by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions – but due to many factors the Whitmans failed to have as much success among the Cayuse. Having blamed them for disease outbreaks, a group of nearly sixty Cayuse massacred the Whitmans and a number of others.<sup>53</sup> Peter Skene Ogden of the Hudson Bay Company

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<sup>52</sup> P.B. Littlejohn to Eels & Walker, 25 February 1845, Box II, entry 79-11, Oregon Mission Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

<sup>53</sup> Addis, “The Whitman Massacre: Religion and Manifest Destiny on the Columbia Plateau, 1809-1858,” 243–44.

successfully ransomed eight women and thirty seven children, but the men of the mission had been killed.<sup>54</sup> This sent shock waves through the United States, leading to the ABCFM withdrawing the Spaldings from the Nez Perce and the Jesuits withdrawing from the Flathead, allowing for the growth of the syncretic Dreamer religion in the absence of Christian organizations.<sup>55</sup> This ushered in a new era for the Nez Perce and their use of the written language.

The school, printing, and collaboration with sympathetic headmen in the tribe had left their imprint on Nez Perce society – their effects would be felt well beyond this first missionary period. Hundreds were trained to read and write in the language, and a literary culture was established with texts for educational and religious purposes. The sources demonstrate that there was significant division regarding how to relate to the Spaldings and their teachings, and it is clear that many in the tribe were suspicious of their hostility to indigenous beliefs. However, it is equally clear that many enthusiastically adopted the written language and sunk their own time and effort into its propagation. Headmen aided the missionaries in learning the Nez Perce language, and numerous nameless scribes copied out Christian texts by hand. By the withdrawal of the Spaldings' in 1847, literacy had become a well-established in the tribe.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 244.

### *Chapter 3: Writing in Politics*

This chapter examines the key political document that was produced in the first missionary period and then the continued political usage of the language by the tribe. This is an incredibly important time for the political transformation in the region. The Walla Walla council of 1855 was held by Governor Isaac Stevens of the Washington Territory, and established the Nez Perce reservation. War broke out between the US and many of the Nez Percés' neighbors in 1855-58, and the 'Thief' Treaty of 1863 sets in motion the events that lead to the Nez Perce War of 1877. Written culture was an important element in the formation of a centralized tribal government and then the ensuing councils. Council records throughout this period bear witness to official tribal record keeping, a written culture used to maintain prestige and political heft among the tribal elites.

#### *Dr. White's Laws*

In October of 1840, a Dr. Elijah White left the Methodist mission in Willamette Valley to return East with his family. He had served there for three years as a missionary doctor, but was dismissed as "morally unqualified for the post."<sup>56</sup> But he was destined to return to the region shortly thereafter as the United States' first Indian agent to natives in the Oregon Territory.<sup>57</sup> At this point the territory was jointly claimed by the United States and Britain, but White proceeded to strengthen US claims to sovereignty through his diplomatic work.<sup>58</sup> During the fall of 1842, he visited the mission stations of Waiilatpu and Lapwai, where he met with tribal leaders and

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<sup>56</sup> McWhorter, *Hear Me, My Chiefs!*, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Drury, *The Diaries and Letters of Henry H. Spalding and Asa Bowen Smith Relating to the Nez Perce Mission, 1838-1842*, IV:299.

<sup>58</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:210.

established official diplomatic relations between the United States government and the Nez Perce and Cayuse, instituting a set of laws for tribal governments.

Legitimizing and promoting these laws were closely tied to the new written language. They were first adopted at a grand council in Lapwai, with many Nez Perce chiefs present.<sup>59</sup> Then, at the Nez Perces' prompting, the Cayuse adopted the laws in a council at Waiilatpu.<sup>60</sup> After the Lapwai council, Spalding published an edition of these laws in Nez Perce, started promoting them in the mission school, and presumably distributed them among literate Nez Perce. These laws established a centralized tribal government for the first time ever – setting up a head chief over all the different bands, introducing standard penalties for certain crimes, and responsibilities for the execution of the penalties for Indians and whites respectively.<sup>61</sup> Ellis was chosen for this task by the Nez Perce given his prominence and popularity at the time – both due to the number of warriors he commanded, and possibly his status as a headman who had obtained his literacy and Christianity separately from Spalding

Dr. Elijah White was not forthright in the representation of these laws to the Nez Perce and Cayuse, presenting them as in some sense divine. The printed Nez Perce edition only played into this further. During the second council at Waiilatpu, the proposed laws were read out loud before the chiefs, first in English and then in Nez Perce. It is then recorded that a Walla Walla chief asked "I have a message to you. [White] Where are these laws from? Are they from God or from the earth? I would that you might say, they were from God. But I think they are from the earth, because, from what I know of white men, they do not honor these laws." In response,

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<sup>59</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Perces since Lewis and Clark*, 50.

<sup>60</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:255.

<sup>61</sup> See Appendix 1.



White told the Cayuse that the laws were “recognized by God, and imposed on men in all civilized countries.”<sup>62</sup> Following two more days, the Cayuse finally agreed to accept the laws.<sup>63</sup> The punishments required by this legislation were extreme and contrary to native custom, and it is likely the divine framing was necessary for them to gain initial acceptance. A later missionary working among the Nez Perce commented on the punishments, “It is hard now to believe that the Nez Percés ever submitted to this.”<sup>64</sup>

This divine association was accentuated by the Spaldings, given how both the printed edition and the mission school were integral to how the *Laws and Statues* were received by the Nez Perce. This was the first time a document that was neither educational, such as primer, or strictly religious, such as scripture and hymns, was received by the tribe. A later source records, “After Dr. Elijah White’s visit, the Code of Laws adopted for the government of the Nez Percés, was printed on this press and studied in school as a lesson. Mr. Spalding wrote at this time, ‘All they care for is the Bible and the Laws,’ meaning this code of Dr. White’s. It is just the same now, the Bible is the book of books to them.”<sup>65</sup> Immediately upon printing, the school became a vehicle for the study of this new law alongside the Bible. The written word already had an extremely close relationship to religion within the Nez Perce context even prior to contact with the missionaries, so divine associations would have only been compounded by this practice in the school.

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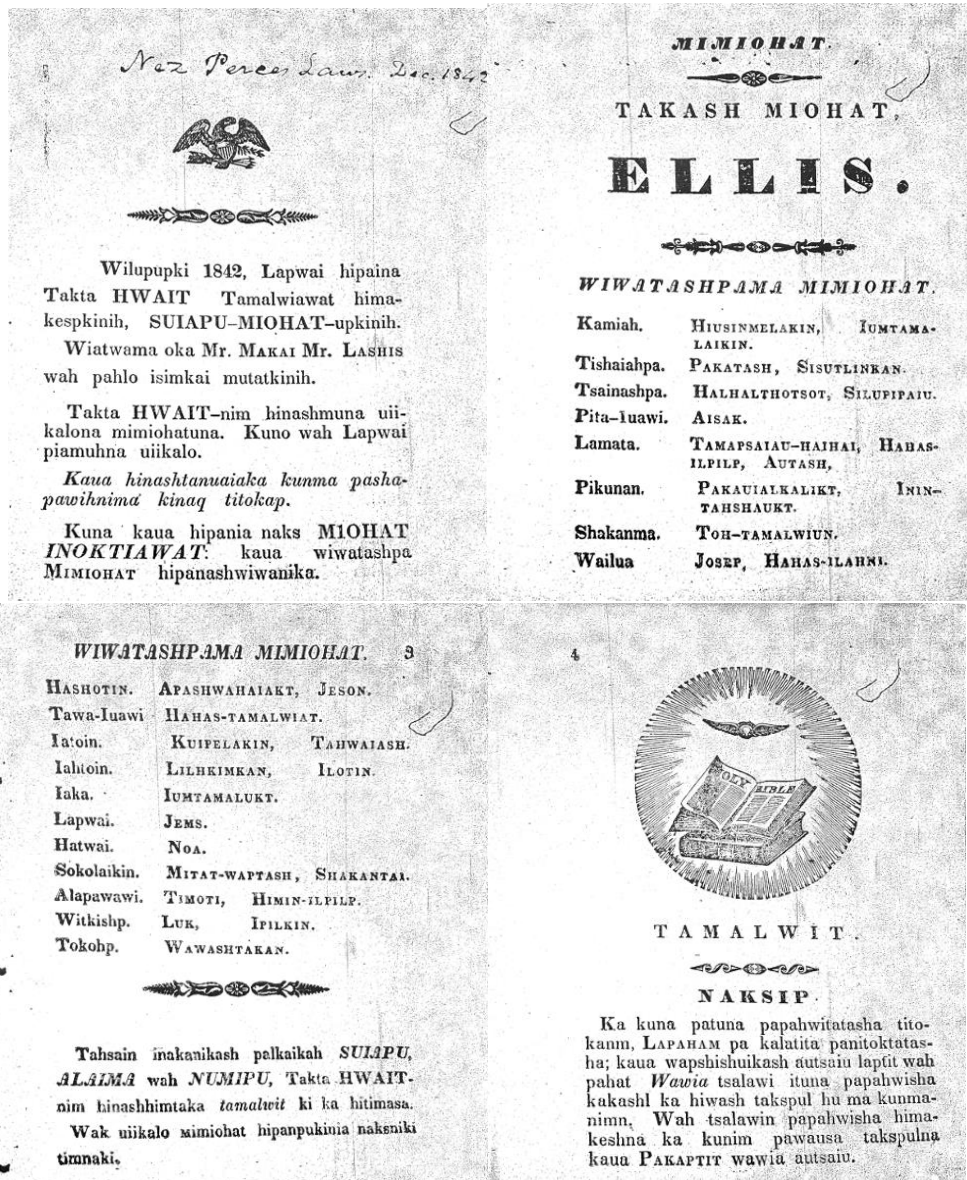
<sup>62</sup> Hines, *A Voyage Round the World: With a History of the Oregon Mission ... To Which Is Appended a Full Description of Oregon Territory, Its Geography, History and Religion; Designed for the Benefit of Emigrants to That Rising Country*, 179.

<sup>63</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:228–29.

<sup>64</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Percés since Lewis and Clark*, 55.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

The mixing of governmental and religious imagery can be seen in the design of the pamphlet itself. Pictures of the first four pages are included below – and there are a number of features that are important to note. Firstly, the laws are introduced by the statement that Dr. White was the representative of the “great Whiteman chief,” with an American eagle



<sup>66</sup> Spalding, *Nez Perce Laws*, 1842.

emblazoned on the head of the page – clearly American imagery. Secondly, the list of chiefs present at the council is topped by a huge “ELLIS” in a massive font, emphasizing the newly established role of head chief. And thirdly, the section labeled *tamáalwit*, meaning *law*, is headed by a very religiously loaded image. There is an open book labeled ‘Holy Bible’ surrounded with divine light, with the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove – in fact the same design that was used for the first Nez Perce printing of Matthew. While it does not explicitly state that these laws were literally from God, it is clearly using this imagery to legitimize the laws and to associate them with the Scriptures. Both how the laws were presented by White and then published by Spalding exploit both Nez Perce interest in Christianity, and the religious ethos that the new written language held.

*Translation and Commentary on the Laws and Statutes*

A recent translation of the Laws and Statutes as published by Henry Spalding in Lapwai was published in the 2018 linguistics dissertation. Given the centrality of this document in shaping Nez Perce political structure, it is worth examining certain excerpts, and the entire translation will be included in an appendix. It is worth noting that every published work of history which includes these laws merely reflects an English version, not an actual translation of a document as printed for the Nez Perce. Below, the pamphlet notes the initial convening of the Lapwai council, describing the scene where a chief in a ceremonial manner enumerated all the leaders present.

In January of 1842, Doctor White came to Lapwai, a law enforcer from the great Whiteman chief. He had accompanying him Mr. McKay, Mr. Lashis and five others who are also from the down river area. Dr. White summoned all of the chiefs. And there toward Lapwai all the people were gathered. Then he would inquire of whom he was

made to come to among these very people. Then there came one chief, a leader who then named each of them, the chiefs of every land.<sup>67</sup>

Ellis is listed as the head chief, and then the various signatories are listed under the place/band where they lived, with a wide representation across the entire tribe. Joseph, Timothy, and James all appear here with their English names associated with Wallowa, Alpowa, and Lapwai respectively: “Wal’áwa [Wallowa River, OR] Cósip [Joseph] ... Łéepwey [Lapwai, ID] James ... ʔAlpáwawiy [Alpowa Creek, WA] Tímoti.” A very wide range of chiefs are signatories of this document, from all different bands. The reasoning given to the Nez Perce for the laws in this document is to establish good relations between the Americans, Nez Perce, and French (Canadians): “For the sake of good relations towards both sides, the AMERICANS, the FRENCH, and the NEZ PERCE PEOPLE, Doctor WHITE has shown to them the law he has now written.” Even though Dr. White claimed that the laws were divinely sanctioned, it does explicitly say that he had written them. And as noted before the Oregon Territory was still contested at this point and subjects of the British Crown, most notably French-Canadian fur trappers, still operated in the region.

The main body of the text stipulates the punishment for crimes such as the theft of goods and horses – restitution and lashes. Both murder and setting fire to a building with people inside are punishable by death. Those laws, while unusual for Nez Perce practice, are not the most interesting. The treatment of private property was much more subversive. In Law 4, there is a strict right to privacy in a private building that is asserted, with lashing as punishment for forcible entry.

Maybe there is a house for people to enter at all times, but if there (in that house) which they are (to be) making things, or are residing, no one is to enter without just cause, and

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<sup>67</sup> Cash Cash, *Language Use on the Southern Indigenous Plateau*, 2018. See Appendix 1 for full text.

whoever was about to have exercised force upon entering at such places where he is not to be entering, then the chief shall judge (however many) lashes or the kind of punishment.

This concern about private buildings, and Law 3's legislation about gardens, fences, and livestock are clearly intended to promote a more sedentary lifestyle and the associated private ownership of land, which were historically unknown among the Nez Perce.

Whoever is about to have entered someone's garden or field and thereupon he will destroy the garden or field, or he tears down the fence (allowing) cattle to enter that place where (they) will destroy the garden then (for the damages) to that garden he shall have paid it, (and) he shall have repaired the fence soon thereafter, then again his punishment will be twenty-five lashes, (and) of all the times it was done, he will be (punished) as many times as it will happen.

The laws which promoted a more American conception of private land ownership are notable, but the most important element in this document is how it set up a centralized tribal authority structure. Ellis was chosen as head chief, and that allowed for a unified tribe. But all other chiefs were then deputized to enforce these new punishments on Indians in a way that was completely new. When an Indian committed a crime against a white person, it had to be reported to the chief, and the chief has a duty to enforce a punishment. Likewise, the Indian Agent was responsible to take reports about white misbehavior and mete out punishment appropriately. All of these changes were nothing less than revolutionary.

If any such person among the Nez Perces shall "ignore or break" these laws, then from among the various chiefs, they shall be made to correct him. Then, at the same time, if any such person among the Whitemen or Frenchmen shall "ignore or break" these laws against these people, they are then to report it to Doctor White then he will correct him for that.

As noted earlier, the demands for lashing and capital punishment were contrary to traditional practice. In fact, anthropologist Deward Walker notes that Nez Perce social units were "marked by a conspicuous absence of individuals or groups with delegated authority to settle

disputes and punish offenses. Retaliation ... appears to have been the outstanding means of social control.”<sup>68</sup> An absence of any official entity tasked with settling disputes or punishing crime might seem strange, but this indeed was the historic situation and that is not the role that chiefs filled. It was the promulgation and publication of these laws that helped facilitate a paradigmatic shift regarding the role of leaders of the Nez Perce community. William H. Gray, one of the missionaries, described the system as it developed a bit later in this way, “The Nez Percés have one governor or principal chief, twelve subordinate chiefs of equal power, being the heads of the different villages or clans, with their five officers to execute all their lawful orders, which law they have printed in their own language, and read understandingly. The chiefs are held responsible to the whites for the good behavior of the tribe.”<sup>69</sup> This is a notable point in the history of the written language, intertwined with a central point in the history of the tribe. The US had successfully leveraged the new missionary invention for its own political interests.

This structural shift went anything but smoothly, and the system of punishment very quickly failed. However, even if the system didn't fully function, it still fundamentally restructured much of the tribe. Ellis initially pursued the punishments quite strongly, but within a year enforcement collapsed. The resentment that the people had for such punishments greatly weakened the position of the chiefs, and as this dissatisfaction spread it greatly damaged the influence of the pro-Spalding faction for a time. Ellis took hostile action against the Spaldings to regain ethos among the people, “ordering a drumming and dance around the mission, and

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<sup>68</sup> Walker, *Conflict and Schism in Nez Perce Acculturation. Second Edition.*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Gray, *A History of Oregon*, 227.

advising the Indians to paint their faces in the schoolroom.”<sup>70</sup> This seems to have not been enough, as eventually Ellis fled to Montana, where he died prematurely.<sup>71</sup>

Even with this turbulence, the tribal restructuring was permanent, and the political usage of the written language established. Even if the particulars of the laws failed to last, it is still one of the most significant documents in the tribe’s history. The newly minted written language and the missionary press was used immediately as a significant tool in the hands of the US government, playing heavily into the religious associations of the written word. In this case, it was a tool of American power that helped transform the governance of the tribe forever, and was determinative of how the tribe related to the US in council.

#### *Council of 1855: Scribal Work and the Laws*

Some of the most politically significant moments in Nez Perce history were to take place within fifteen years of the missionary withdrawal in 1847. The United States sought to establish treaties with the Nez Perce, gold was discovered on Nez Perce land, and a regional war broke out in which the Nez Perce aided the US. Nez Perce support for the US seems to have been relatively strong at the outset of this war, as they believed the Cayuse were violating the *Laws and Statutes* and the 1855 treaty. However, as Nez Perce saw how Oregon volunteers treated the Cayuse, many soured on the Nez Perce-US alliance and sought a way out of the structure that the *Laws and Statutes* instituted. This splintering of Nez Perce sympathies by the end of the 1850s led to a disastrous outcome for the tribe. In 1863, Lawyer and his faction signed a treaty which purported to yield most of Nez Perce territory to the United States, including the entire territory of the

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<sup>70</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:226.

<sup>71</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Perces since Lewis and Clark*, 52.

Upper Nez Perce, which happened to be the most anti-American of the bands. This was entirely without their consent and directly resulted in the war of 1877. This story is beyond the scope of this study, but a brief examination of the council of 1855 will illuminate how the tribe used the written language in this period.

In May of 1855, the Nez Perce, Yakima, Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla met in council with Governor Isaac Stevens of the Washington Territory. It was this council that created the Nez Perce, Yakima, and Cayuse-Umatilla-Walla Walla reservations, and still sets precedent legally to this day. It was most important for how it reinforced the head chief system, since very little land was ceded. Lawyer succeeded Ellis, and though he faced intense opposition within the tribe, this treaty confirmed Lawyer's position in the eyes of the U.S. government.<sup>72</sup>



*Arrival of the Nez Perce Indians at the Walla Walla Treaty Council, May 1855.*<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Walker, *Conflict and Schism in Nez Perce Acculturation. Second Edition.*, 45.

<sup>73</sup> Gustav Sohon, *Arrival of the Nez Perce at Walla Walla Treaty May the 24 1855*, 5/24/1855, Washington State Historical Society, <https://wshs-collections.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/1918.114.9.36.jpg>.



Among the tribes at the council, the Nez Perce stood out for the use of writing in their own language. Tragically, these original records are lost. But we do have very clear testimony of their existence. At the beginning of the council, Lawyer is recorded as having preserved official writings from Ellis to read out to everyone. This is the translation given in the commissioners' record of the proceedings.

Lawyer opened a book containing in their own language the advice left to them by their Great Chief Ellis, and read as follows: Ellis said, "Whenever the Great Chief of the Americans shall come into your country to give you laws, accept them! The Walla Walla heart is a Walla Wallas; a Cayuse heart is a Cayuse; so is a Yakamas heart a Yakamas; a Nes Perses heart is a Nes perses heart; but they have all received the white law. They are all going straight, yes! While the Nes Perses are going straight, why should they turn aside to follow others who are going straight? Ellis' advice is to accept the white law. I have it to you to show my heart."<sup>74</sup>

We see that records were being passed person to person, and it seems that it bestowed some measure of legitimacy on Lawyer, given he was able to represent the previous Head Chief's wishes after his death. Unless Lawyer misrepresented the message, which is possible, Ellis seems to have been very pro-American. The next day's minutes include another very interesting detail about Chief Timothy, saying, "Timothy, a Nes Perses chief acted as crier for his nation and he will record in their language the full proceedings each day of the council and this will be preserved among the archives of the nation and handed down to future generations."<sup>75</sup> Both of these instances indicate that the pro-Christian leadership was directly applying their new literacy to governance of the tribe. It is unclear what the 'archive of the nation' is supposed to be other than Timothy's personal record, but it is nevertheless intriguing. Later in the council, Lawyer tells Governor Stevens, "I have got your talk here (pointing to his notebook) and although a poor

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<sup>74</sup> Baird, Mallickan, and Swagerty, *Encounters with the People*, 351.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 353.

man I can look at it from time to time. I can take care of that; my brother.”<sup>76</sup> Apparently Lawyer had a personal notebook as well. And an image by Gustav Sohon suggests that they were not the only two.



*‘Nez Perce Indians preparing the records of the Walla Walla council June 1855’ by Gustav Sohon.*<sup>77</sup>

This image of Nez Perce preparing records is very unique. The sight of a tribe keeping records in their own language was attention-grabbing enough for Sohon to document. Within the image all of the men are interacting with the texts in some way – two men are writing, two are reading, and one is holding an ink-pot. Sohon would not have illustrated this if it were not actually taking place, given his main job was as a portraitist. Perhaps the fact that multiple men were involved in making records indicates that Timothy’s record indeed was ‘official’ in some way, if many of the chiefs kept personal records. Indian Agent Richard Lansdale recorded that two young men were also tasked with keeping records, “Many of them can read and write ... Two young men take

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 374.

<sup>77</sup> Gustav Sohon, *Arrival of the Nez Perce at Walla Walla Treaty May the 24 1855*, 6/1855, National Anthropological Archives, <https://plateauportal.libraries.wsu.edu/system/files/atoms/image/08540200.jpg>.

down the speeches of the comrs. & Indians, in N.P., or did for many days, still fatigued.”<sup>78</sup> It was clearly a priority for the tribe to keep records, and both young men and senior chiefs were involved in it. Timothy and Lawyer at least appreciated the political power of having their own witness to the events of the treaty council.

For a final note about the council, every single Sunday many of the Nez Perce would hold Christian worship services led by Timothy. Christian worship continued apart from missionary presence. Richard Lansdale also records,

May 27<sup>th</sup> ... Attended religious services in N.P. camp. They consisted in scanning the Scriptures, singing hymns, prayer, another hymn, Sermon, then hymn and prayer with [unclear] all in N.P. language by Timothy, a N.P. chief. The services were orderly and dignified, and showed quite a good knowledge of the Gospel; and though in an unknown tongue, I was profited.<sup>79</sup>

On June 10<sup>th</sup>, he notes that he “attended religious services in N. Perce camp as usual – sermon by Timothy – who conducted all the services, except a few comments on Matt. XXIV – by Levi.” An army officer, Lawrence Kipp mentions that on May 25<sup>th</sup>, “We procured our horses and rode over to the Indian camp to pay another visit to our friend Lawyer. We found the old chief surrounded by family and reading a portion of the New Testament, while a German soldier [Gustav Sohon] of Governor Steven’s party was engaged in taking his portrait.”<sup>80</sup> Clearly religious use of the written language persisted among the Christian Nez Perce, especially usage of the Gospel of Matthew. It is clear from records of the 1855 treaty council that the political and the religious forms of the language persisted quite effectively after the mission period.

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<sup>78</sup> Baird, Mallickan, and Swagerty, *Encounters with the People*, 401.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 396.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 402.

*Council of December, 1855*

This political use of written records by the Nez Perce seems to have directly influenced the Nez Perce decision to aid the United States against their historical allies in the region. The regional Wars of 1855-1858 are complicated, and it seems that the Nez Perce tribe was in some chaos. However, in December of 1855 all the major chiefs gathered in a second council with Lawyer presiding, as Stevens sought their aid.<sup>81</sup> The chiefs showed much less sympathy to the Walla Walla and Cayuse, and signaled respect for previous law handed down with significant emphasis on how they had this law preserved in writing. There is significant ambiguity when they use the word ‘law’ in the records – it can refer to the *Laws and Statutes*, the law of God in the Bible, and the 1855 Treaty. But in each case, this is tied to Nez Perce records and texts.

With the Chief Lawyer presiding, there was extensive discussion among various chiefs. A chief from Kamiah spoke about the need to respect the previous council when discussing whether to side with the Walla Walla, “I have said to my people ‘the laws already given to us will not be lost, if they are killed in that country ... I also told them that those people like ourselves, had the laws given to them, and they did not listen.’”<sup>82</sup> He placed the blame squarely on the other tribes for not holding to the ‘law’ given them, i.e. the 1855 treaty. Chief James added to the discussion, “It is long since we have had the Laws set among us. The Law was, to love the White people.”<sup>83</sup> This cannot be in reference to the recent treaty – perhaps it is to the *Laws and Statutes*, or the Spaldings’ moral teaching. Then Chief Bald Eagle said, “My heart is the same as it was at the Walla Walla Council. I hold the Book in which the talks at the Council

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 420.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 421.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 422.

was written. I kept it. I can never lay it down and turn my face to where those Indians are doing bad. The Bible teaches, to not go to war.”<sup>84</sup> Here we see another example of written records from the council playing a role – with Bald Eagle referencing them as a guarantor of the council’s sanctity. Finally, Talking Tabacco stated, “when I heard what the President said to me, I said yes to his laws, and said for him to keep my words. And I have the laws he gave me. I am holding them. I am showing you what my heart is.” He also indicated that he has a copy of the treaty records, and how this influenced his decision to support the United States. Even if many of the references to the laws are ambiguous, the written records were politically significant for a number of the chiefs.

### *Conclusion*

The publication of the *Laws and Statutes* set precedent for a governmental use of the language, and made clear associations between white men’s laws and the Scriptures. While enforcement of its particular criminal code failed to be implemented in the long term, the centralized tribal structure it created was an enormously influential for the tribe. Written Nez Perce was at the heart of the formation of the Nez Perce tribe as a singular political entity. The idea of having laws written bore significant weight for many in Nez Perce leadership, and they prioritized documenting the minutes of the 1855 treaty council. These very records were then instrumental in how many in leadership retrospectively viewed the council and their political obligations during later conflict. It is unfortunate that none of these records are known to have survived, but they were clearly unique and politically significant. And the Christianized elites, Timothy and Lawyer, paired this use of the language with continued devotional use of the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

translated Scriptures and hymns. For a large number in the tribe, the written word had permanently become an important part of their community life.

#### *Chapter 4: The Second Mission Period, 1872-1899*

By the second mission period, the political situation of the Nez Perce had changed significantly. Out of sheer necessity, we must gloss over some of the most important events in Nez Perce tribal history: the Idaho Gold Rush, the Thief Treaty of 1863, and the War of 1877. All of these events led to schism between the different factions of the tribe, and made it more and more difficult to lead the traditional semi-nomadic lifestyle as more whites came into the region. Because of this, it is impossible to treat the Nez Perce as having a unified experience of this period. The non-treaty Nez Perce, the Protestant Nez Perce, and the Catholic Nez Perce all had very different experiences. The written word was definitely most important to the Christianized factions, who were both the majority of the population and remained within the reservation boundaries. As such, this chapter primarily addresses their history, and focuses less on the War of 1877 and the non-treaty exile in Oklahoma.<sup>85</sup> Government schools were founded, and education in written Nez Perce was banned. The traditional writing system was relegated to Presbyterian usage and their private schools. Presbyterians as the majority retained levers of

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<sup>85</sup> Much ink has been spilled over the War of 1877, its leadup, and aftermath, and it is too much to cover here. Chief Joseph, son of the early convert Old Joseph, led his band and other non-treaty Nez Perce in a conflict with the United States which ended with exile in Oklahoma. These bands mostly followed the apocalyptic Dreamer religion which stringently rejected agriculture and other white practices. Joseph specifically stated that he did not want schools in the Wallowa valley, and we do not have any known writing in Nez Perce from these bands.

power on the reservation, but by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century their use of the written language was becoming more and more relegated to religious uses alone.

### *Government Schools*

When the Spaldings initially came, syncretic practices, trading with fur trappers, and the interactions with the Lewis and Clark Expedition had created high expectations for white culture. But excitement over the missionaries quickly turned to disappointment, and by the end of the 1840s only around twenty Nez Perce had been baptized. But when Henry Spalding returned, it was to run government schools. As early as the negotiations in the Treaty of 1855, the US government promised to fund and run two schools on the reservation.<sup>86</sup> This promise was slow to be fulfilled. In 1858, when some Nez Perce helped US troops in their war against the Spokane, Palouse, and Coeur d'Alene tribes, Chief Lawyer was asked what the tribe wanted as payment. He replied, "Peace, plows, and schools."<sup>87</sup> But it was only by 1862 that a schoolhouse was constructed, seven years after it was pledged.<sup>88</sup> In the 1863 Thief treaty, funds were promised for schools as well.<sup>89</sup> All of this was instigated by the pro-Christian element in the tribe, and is only representative of their attitudes to education, but they clearly saw it as a vital aspect of the advancement of their people. Spalding was then requested to return to fill the role of Superintendent of Education, arriving back in Lapwai by 1863. He resumed preaching in the area and great numbers flocked to his services.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:326.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 10:377–78.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 10:401.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 10:420.

<sup>90</sup> Drury, *Henry Harmon Spalding*, 376.

Spalding's tenure as a government employee was extraordinarily turbulent. He had long blamed the Catholics in the area for having instigated the Whitman massacre, and raised an enormous fuss when Catholic priests arrived in Lapwai interested in missionizing. Personal conflicts with other officials led to his removal in 1865.<sup>91</sup> Due to a Native petition after a new Indian agent arrived, Spalding was reinstated as Superintendent of Education in 1868, but use of the Nez Perce language was to be banned in school by order of the Indian agent. Government policy was to support English language learning, not Nez Perce language literacy.<sup>92</sup> This marked an extremely important shift – with white populations swelling, knowledge of English was increasing among the tribe, and this was the only thing that the US saw as worthy of encouragement. From that point on, written Nez Perce was primarily relegated to religious usage. Spalding disliked this policy, even calling the government's chosen textbooks, the Wilson's series of readers, "works of the devil." He wanted to use his translation of Matthew in the schools, yet the Indian agent refused to let him fully control the education policy.<sup>93</sup> After making strong accusations against the newly appointed Indian agent, John Monteith, Spalding was released from his duties on July 1, 1872.<sup>94</sup> After Spalding was restricted in his preferred curricula, Nez Perce was not to be the subject of study in government schools. While training in the Latin alphabet would indirectly benefit literacy in the Nez Perce language, mass training in Nez Perce reading and writing had come to an end.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 381.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 385.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 399.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 401.



*Native Revival and Presbyterian Establishment*

Even if at first Spalding was enormously disappointed with the first six years of his return, the last three years of his life fulfilled some of his biggest hopes for the tribe. Even as the situation with the non-treaty Nez Perce spiraled out of control leading into the War of 1877, an intense resurgence of Christianity took place among the treaty bands, and the Federal government directly supported Presbyterian work on the reservation. This revived the role of the Nez Perce written language, as during the intervening decades no mechanism of propagating literacy in the tribe had replaced the first mission school, and religious texts remained the primary corpus in the language. But in the 1870s through the turn of the twentieth century, the religious use of the language flourished, and became more central to the treaty Nez Perce than ever before. Over a dozen Nez Perce ministers were ordained, and the Jesuits started their own mission with their respective translation efforts. This combination of the development of independent Nez Perce-run churches and Catholic missionizing marked the high-water mark of written Nez Perce regarding its role in Nez Perce communities, even as the English language became all the more common around them. Churches and churchmen served as one of the main sources of social organization and leadership even as the tribe's political autonomy came to an end, and this was conducted in Nez Perce.

Due to political wrangling in DC, in July of 1870 Congress prohibited the appointment of military men to civilian posts, which removed almost all the acting federal Indian agents.<sup>95</sup> To fill this void President Grant proposed that 'established missionaries' in various reservations could select who would serve as the Indian Agent, and that the established denomination would

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<sup>95</sup> Keller, *American Protestantism and United States Indian Policy, 1869-82*, 32.

have special privileges and even control of their respective agencies. A religious denomination was determined to have the ‘right’ to a reservation if they had established the first mission.<sup>96</sup> The Presbyterian Church was able to claim this for the Nez Perce, and for the ensuing decades the tribe effectively had a Presbyterian church establishment. To this day, the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee has an official chaplain – a role that was long filled by Native Presbyterians.

This, however, is only a part of the story. In June, 1870, a Yakima lay preacher by the name of George Waters joined a Nez Perce gathering on the Weippe prairie.<sup>97</sup> He had married into Chief Timothy’s family, and started holding worship services at the camp.<sup>98</sup> A religious revival broke out with not a single white American present – simply the Yakima preacher and a Nez Perce audience. A later report describes a dramatic scene where people “threw away their bottles” and renounced the power of their tutelary spirits, noting that revival was large enough that the location became known as ‘The Place of Weeping.’<sup>99</sup> Spalding was alerted of the movement, and responded quickly, and being removed from his government position in 1872, spent his final years in ministry. Traveling and preaching throughout Nez Perce territory, he baptized over six hundred converts before his death in 1874.<sup>100</sup> It was described as “one continuous revival among the Nez Percés for years,” and the government funded two Presbyterian churches to be built, one in Kamiah and one in Lapwai.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Keller, 34.

<sup>97</sup> The Yakima tribe is resident in what is now central Washington. They historically had very close cultural ties, speaking a sister language to Nez Perce, as well as political allies with extensive intermarriage like many of the fellow Plateau peoples.

<sup>98</sup> Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians*, 47.

<sup>99</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Percés since Lewis and Clark*, 78.

<sup>100</sup> Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians*, 48.

<sup>101</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Percés since Lewis and Clark*, 80.

While the missionaries themselves often had political and cultural ends tied up with their conceptions of Christianization, it is important to recognize the impetus behind what seems to have been a sincere Native-led movement. For the decades after the first mission, a small dedicated group of converts had held fast to their beliefs, regularly holding worship services where they would read from the Scriptures and sing hymns, and maintaining daily prayers and Sabbath observance.<sup>102</sup> Presumably it was this group that primarily used the written materials from the first mission – the hymn books, gospels, and handwritten scriptures. Even as the political fragmentation of the tribe commenced, with the Dreamer religion taking solid root among the non-treaty bands, it seems clear that the Christian faction had significantly influenced the formerly ambivalent majority in their favor. It is rather incredible that Spalding returned over twenty years later, and baptized thirty times the number of converts in a mere three years. And the fact that this was on the heels of an entirely native-led revival is equally impressive.



*First Presbyterian Church of Kamiah, established Dec. 25, 1871, and the oldest church in continuous use in the state of Idaho.<sup>103</sup>*

<sup>102</sup> Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*, 10:275.

<sup>103</sup> Slickpoo, *Noon Ne-Mee-Poo*, 158.

In 1873, a year before Spalding's passing, Sue L. MacBeth arrived in Lapwai. She along with her sister Kate were staunch Scottish Presbyterians, and were the two who continued missionary education after Spalding's death. The Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions had nominated her to teach at the newly established government school, and she was the central figure who promoted the education of native Nez Perce ministers.<sup>104</sup> The fact that the religious resurgence was motivated internally made finding local candidates for ordination all the more obvious of a step. Through the 1870s white ministers often filled the pulpits of the native churches, but over time Sue McBeth trained twelve Nez Perce ministers, and her sister Kate went on to train even more.



*Ten of the men who after their conversion to Presbyterianism, were trained by Sue McBeth and then ordained as ministers.*<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Percés since Lewis and Clark*, 82.

<sup>105</sup> Slickpoo, *Noon Ne-Mee-Poo*, 204.

On one level, the urgency to educate the tribe more broadly in their own written language seems to have been less of McBeth's priority than it had been Spalding's. She focused on the young seminarians, having them practice translation of biblical passages into Nez Perce as well as sermon preparation.<sup>106</sup> These men were to be capable of translating from English to Nez Perce whatever was needed for their flock, and to present Christian doctrine ably in the language for pastoral purposes. This policy of training native ministers was paralleled among the Dakota during the same period, with half of all Presbyterian Native ministers coming from the Nez Perce and Dakota.<sup>107</sup> Translation efforts for the Dakota paralleled the Nez Perce as well, with missionaries publishing primers, a hymnal, and some of the gospels by 1841, a grammar and dictionary by 1852, a complete newspaper by 1871, and even a complete Bible by 1879.<sup>108</sup> Even if given the Nez Perce's smaller population the translation efforts never became quite expansive, the ordination of native ministers and the translation of Scripture was consistent with Presbyterian policy elsewhere. Overall, the combination of factors led to a strong Christian elite among the treaty Nez Perce whose knowledge and use of the written language was important for their place in the community. Official government support, Native-led revival, and ministerial training ensured that vibrant Native-led Nez Perce-speaking churches characterized the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Idaho.

#### *New Publications*

Presbyterianism, like all Calvinist traditions, centered on the Scriptures and this meant that these new church communities centered on the written word. And at this point, the preaching, the

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<sup>106</sup> Lewis, *Creating Christian Indians*, 61.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, x.

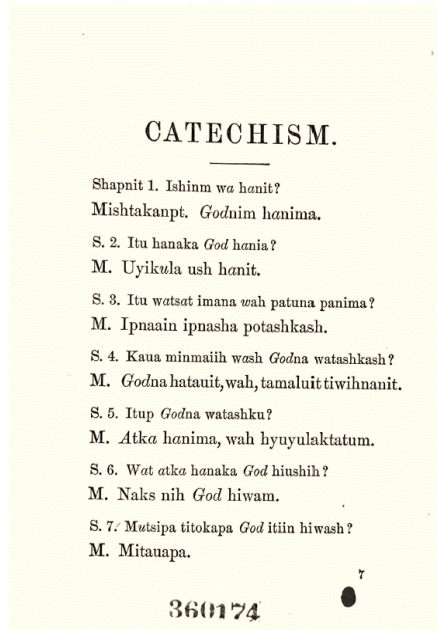
<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

reading, the praying, and the singing were all conducted in the Nez Perce language. This could not have been possible apart from the missionary work in the 1830s and 1840s creating the nucleus of texts to build off of. But this period does see more extended translation efforts of new religious texts as well. The gospel of Matthew proved to be the central text for these native ministers, as it had been since the first missionary period. Before returning to Idaho, Henry Spalding ordered a thousand new copies of Matthew, with most surviving copies being from the second edition.<sup>109</sup> However, both the Gospel of John and the First Epistle of John were translated in Nez Perce, as well as new catechetical materials. Many more hymns were translated in this period, with two more hymnals published. The ministers, being trained in translation, would have been involved in all of these later efforts. There is tantalizing evidence of correspondence in Nez Perce, yet it seems that no full letters survive from the Protestant faction. It is certain that the native ministers had personal writings in the language, given their need for regular translations and sermons in the language, but almost all personal writings have been lost to time.

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<sup>109</sup> Drury, *Henry Harmon Spalding*, 391.





Question 1. Who made you?

Answer. God made me.

Q. 2. What did God also make?

A. He has made everything

Q. 3. On what account did he make you and all things?

A. He glorified Himself for Himself, He is exalted.

Q. 4. Then how are you to praise God?

A. Love God, and keep his Law

Q. 5. Why will you praise God?

A. For he made me, and ...

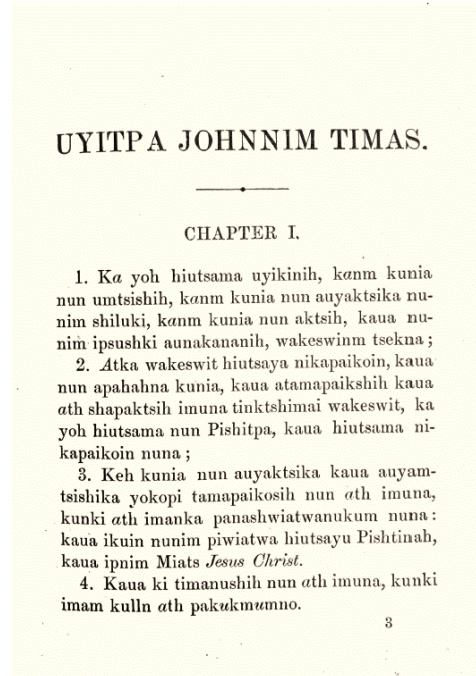
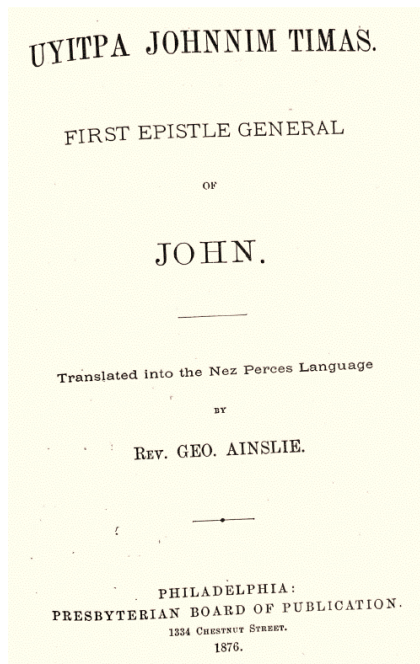
Q. 6. For are there also other gods?

A. There is only one God

The image above is an image of the first page of the catechism with a translation of the first six questions. Presumably this was meant for new converts and children, and would have been a basic catechetical tool in the native churches. Regarding the text, it is clearly derived from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which is not surprising given its common usage in American Presbyterianism. The text is definitely simplified and is far from a direct translation. It might be viewed as a very loose translation, or maybe even a new composition with the Shorter Catechism as a general topical guide. The Nez Perce language had always been the vehicle of early childhood education for the tribe, and the language was able to retain this role among Presbyterian Nez Perce heading into the 20<sup>th</sup> century using such texts.

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<sup>110</sup> Ainslie, *Catechism for Young Children Translated into the Nez Perce Language*, 1876.



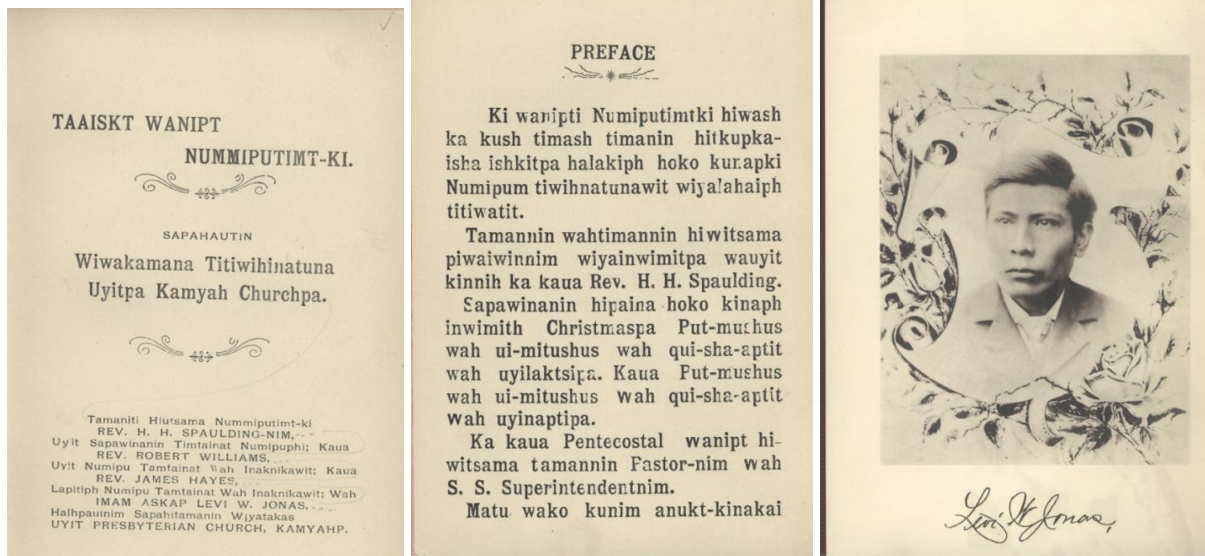
*The First Epistle of John, translated by Rev. George Ainslie and published 1876.*<sup>111</sup>

By the later publications, one can note that there is a coexistence between written Nez Perce and English. The books may have a preface or headings in English, such as with the Gospel of John shown above. With the Nez Perce hymnody, there is an interesting interface between oral tradition and the published hymnbooks, which document songs previously unpublished which had become established among Nez Perce without writing, even if their initial translation by a missionary or native minister used pen and paper. One can see the prominence of Nez Perce ministers in this effort – Rev. Robert Williams, Rev. James Hayes, and Levi W. Jonas are all tribal members that get attribution on the title page of this collection and in the Preface of this hymnbook.

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<sup>111</sup> Ainslie, George. *Johnnim Taaiskt. Gospel According to John Translated into the Nez Perces Language*. Philadelphia, PA: 1876.





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The Preface, which has both a Nez Perce and an English version, gives an account of the translation history of a number of these hymns. Some are attributed to the missionary Spalding, but most are attributed to native translation efforts, likely reflecting both Jonas's training in a boarding school and Williams and Hayes's ministerial training. Within the Preface there is also an allusion to divisions that had emerged within the Nez Perce Christians over the 1880s and 1890s. Rev. Williams is described as having "led his triumphantly through their early struggles with heathenism, and who well deserved the title of "The St. Paul of the Nez Perces," given him by Miss S.L. McBeth."<sup>113</sup> 'Heathenism' did not simply refer to non-Christian Nez Perce at this point. There had been a massive conflict between Rev. Lawyer, son of Chief Lawyer, and McBeth surrounding the retention of certain traditional practices, which were deemed as a compromise with 'heathenism' by McBeth. Robert Williams led the congregation which stayed loyal to McBeth, and was most supportive of her agenda.

<sup>112</sup> Axtell, *Taaiskt Wanipt Nummiputimt-ki*, 1896.

<sup>113</sup> This is also in the Nez Perce Preface, "hiwaka kaiyih wanikin ipinin himtakawatupim Miss Susan L. McBeth-nim Punik-kana "Numipim Church-nim Apostle Paul."

*Sabbath-School and Women's School*

For Nez Perce Presbyterians, education in the written language continued, even if it was no longer taught to the entire tribe. Sue McBeth opened a Sabbath-school in Kamiah that would operate after church services, as well as a small women's school. At this stage, this form of the written language can be seen as shrinking to serve Protestant Nez Perce particularly. The Catholic priests end up developing their own writing system from the language, working on an entirely different system. This became the Protestant way of writing Nez Perce in this period. A prerequisite to learning with McBeth was a strict refusal to entertain any practices seen as pagan. Kate McBeth records that even with her strictures, "The desire of the people to know and to read were so great, she knew she could draw the lines tight, and still have good schools."<sup>114</sup> People were extraordinarily eager to read the Bible in their own language, as Kate records, "To be able to read the Bible in her own language is the longing of each heart. To them, it is the book of books."<sup>115</sup> Just as in the first mission period, this mostly centered around the Gospel of Matthew for both men and women.<sup>116</sup> But unlike the first mission period, more and more time was given to English, "Now this little Bible and hymn-book the women carry in the pocket, wrapped up in a handkerchief, for in Sabbath-schools we always sing the English. The lesson is in both English and Nez Perces."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Perces since Lewis and Clark*, 103.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

### *Church-Village Complexes*

The creation of a new elite by these factors fundamentally reshaped Nez Perce social patterns. Anthropologist Deward Walker notes a couple of central shifts involving this new Presbyterian upper class. All of these shifts are notable for our history, given that usage of the written language characterized these men who now led reservation life.

It is clear that Presbyterian church organization in conjunction with the church-village complexes and native-preacher elite came to substitute for much of the older social organization. In effect, there was a replacement of the limited power of the chiefs with the much greater power of native preachers and a general shift from band and village memberships to church membership.<sup>118</sup>

The reorientation of social structures around church elites instead of the chiefs fundamentally undermined the local band structure among Christian Nez Perce, centering life around various church-village complexes. Native preachers came to bear more power than the chiefs themselves.



*Rev. Mark K. Arthur, Rev. James Hayes, Rev. Enoch Pond, Kate McBeth, and others at Kamiah First Presbyterian Church. Note the Western style clothing and hairstyles.<sup>119</sup>*

<sup>118</sup> Walker, *Conflict and Schism in Nez Perce Acculturation. Second Edition.*, 55.

<sup>119</sup> Mark K. Arthur, James Hayes, Robert Parsons, Dick Brown, Charles McConville, Peter Gould, Enoch Pond, Kate McBeth, and Felix Corbett at Kamiah First Presbyterian Church, WSU Libraries Digital Collection, <https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/npsnezperce/id/3330/rec/31>.

Church membership replaced band membership, driving a wedge between non-Christian non-treaty bands, the Protestant mainstream, and a growing Catholic minority. One can note how the men in the picture below are all in western-style clothing and haircuts. The Presbyterians very deliberately shed native tradition, with the traditional blankets and long hair symbolically abandoned by the new Presbyterian leadership. For the Christians, these social changes made the written word more central than ever. This new churchly power was centered around men who were literate.

### *Summary*

This final mission period was characterized by the fragmentation of the Nez Perce society along religious lines, and the political divorce between the treaty and non-treaty Nez Perce. For the treaty Nez Perce, Christianity took root in a way that it had not earlier in the 19th century. This was partly because of the return of Spalding to the area, partly due to the government support of the Presbyterian church, but most significantly it was due to native-led revival. This resurgence of interest in Christianity allowed the devotional use of written Nez Perce to expand into a mainstream phenomenon in the tribe. And with the training of Nez Perce men for the ministry, a new elite class arose in reservation society. Church membership overcame band membership, and preachers surpassed chiefs. These religious communities became the outlet for self-governance and use of written Nez Perce, even as knowledge of English was becoming more and more common. This new elite based much of its legitimacy on their literacy, and among Presbyterians much of church life revolved around the written word. Catechetical materials, further scripture translation, and more hymns were published, building off of the Nez Perce corpus from the first missionary period. Even as Nez Perce society fragmented, written Nez Perce became commonplace in the experience of much of the tribe.

### *Conclusion*

The Nez Perce first interacted with writing in a religious context. When Spokane Gary returned from the Red River School with a bible, it spurred religious interest in the region, ultimately leading to the Nez Perce delegation to St. Louis. It was this interest that brought the Spaldings to Lapwai. Little did the tribe know how much life was going to change in the next few decades. Regarding the language, the written form was invented in the 1830s and its most influential uses established in the 1840s. The Gospel of Matthew and hymns were translated, the mission schooled educated hundreds in the basics of reading and writing, and the *Laws and Statutes* were published. These three things combined with the influence of Timothy, Lawyer, Joseph, and Ellis to determine much of the tribe's development during the rest of the nineteenth century. The fact that so many people learned how to read and write Nez Perce during this period fundamentally reshaped the tribe's relationship with the written word. Native copyists and scribes copied out texts and Spalding printed numerous pamphlets and books, which continued to circulate for many years in the tribe. While the tribe was divided on the influence of the Spaldings, the Christian faction took up the use of the religious texts and used them to perpetuate native Christian observance on their own for decades.

The translations and conversions shaped religion, which in turn, combined with the innovations of the *Laws and Statutes*, set precedent for a politics and a governmental use of the language. After the Whitman massacre, we see that tribal leadership used their newly acquired literacy as a tool in the council of 1855, and this was influential in how the tribe then engaged with the Wars of 1855-1858. Lawyer and Timothy most conspicuously made use of written records in Nez Perce during the Council of 1855, even reading out a message from the deceased

Ellis. Due to the loss of these tribal records, little can be known apart from their existence and usage among the Nez Perce chiefs in US records.

The decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by the fragmentation of Nez Perce society along religious lines, and the political divorce between the treaty and non-treaty Nez Perce was rendered final in 1877. For the majority of the tribe that remained in Idaho, these final decades of the nineteenth century were shaped by intense religiosity that rendered the religious use of the written language central to the newly formed Church-village complexes. The Native-led revival, the return of Spalding in his old age, and governmental support catapulted Nez Perce Presbyterianism to the mainstream of Nez Perce life. This later period, while marked with increasing white influence, was also marked by greater and greater native leadership in these churches who utilized written Nez Perce in their ministries. The MacBeth sisters helped develop one of the largest native clergies in the United States, who in turn served as central leaders in tribal government going into the twentieth century. Even as English-language education became more common, textuality in the native tongue became an integral part of much of the tribe's experience.

Overall, written Nez Perce had a crucial role in some of the most important events for the tribe over the course of the nineteenth century. Spalding, MacBeth, the US government, and Nez Perce leaders all used it for their own ends in important ways. Any further writing on this period ought to take this into account. And as Nez Perce people continue to strive to preserve their language in the twenty-first century, when they use written materials they are building on a nearly two-century old legacy of education in the language.

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## Appendix I: Laws and Statutes

In January of 1842, Doctor White came to Lapwai, a law enforcer from the great Whiteman chief. He had accompanying him Mr. McKay, Mr. Lashis and five others who are also from the down river area. Dr. White summoned all of the chiefs. And there toward Lapwai all the people were gathered. Then he would inquire of whom he was made to come to among these very people. Then there came one chief, a leader who then named each of them, the chiefs of every land.

The Chiefs. The senior Chief ELLIS. The Chiefs of the various locations.

Qémyex̄p. [Kamiah, ID] Hiyúusinmelaykin, Hiyúumtamalaykin.

Tišayax̄pa. [White Rock] Páaqataš, Sisyúutilinqan.

C'éynešpe [Foot of the hill] Tukulxucúut, Silupipáayu.

Píite [Mouth of Creek] ?Iyíwewiy. Isaac.

Lamáta [White Bird, ID] Ta?mapcáayo Xayxayx̄, Xáxaac ?ilp'íl̄p, ?Éewteš.

Píik'unen [Snake River] Páaqawaylq'iliikt, hínintax̄šawkt.

Šáqanma. [Gorge People] T'oxtamáalwiyun.

Wal'áwa [Wallowa River, OR] Cóosip, Xáxaac ?iléx̄ni.

Hašóotiin. [Asotin, WA] ?Apášwahayqt, Jason.

teewe?iyíwewiy [Orofino Creek, ID] Xáxaac tamalwiyaw'áat

Yatóoyn. [Potlatch Creek, ID] KUIPELAKIN, Tax̄wayá?š

Yaḫtóoyn. [Potlatch Creek, ID] LILHKIMKAN, ?Ilootín

Yáaka. Hiyúumtamaluk

Lapwai [ID] James

Héetwey. [Hatwai Creek, ID] Noa

Soqóolaykin. [River Bank Edge] Mitáat Wéep̄teš, Šaq'antáayx

ʔAlpáwawiy [Alpowa Creek, WA] Tímoti, Hímiin ʔilp'íl

Witkíišp [Alder Tree village] luk, IPILKIN

Toqóoxp. [Village on Clearwater River] Waw'aʔštaqin

For the sake of good relations towards both sides, the AMERICANS, the FRENCH, and the NEZ PERCE PEOPLE, Doctor WHITE has shown to them the law he has now written. And the chiefs of all the people take a hold of it (as it was given to them) with one heart.

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The Law.

1. Whereupon one may be stealing a person's things, he shall give back generously TWICE the amount; then his punishment will be twenty-five lashes; when the thing he steals is of a certain amount, and it is of beaver or of that kind, and just the same, he steals (something) that exceeds the value of a beaver, he will receive fifty lashes.
2. Whoever is about to take away any horse for one's self then he is about to ride that to where he is taking it along, or wherever he is about to take for one's self, (such as) an axe or any all (such objects) which is for making things and when that is to be made apparent (found out), then for that which he has incurred a debt, he is to return in payment to him. then he will receive twenty lashes as punishment, or thirty, forty, or perhaps as many as fifty (lashes) as the chief determines.
3. Whoever is about to have entered someone's garden or field and thereupon he will destroy the garden or field, or he tears down the fence (allowing) cattle to enter that place where (they) will destroy the garden then (for the damages) to that garden he shall have paid it, (and) he shall have repaired the fence soon thereafter, then again his punishment will be twenty-five lashes, (and) of all the times it was done, he will be (punished) as many times as it will happen.
4. Maybe there is a house for people to enter at all times, but if there (in that house) which they are (to be) making things, or are residing, no one is to enter without just cause, and whoever was about to have exercised force upon entering at such places where he is not to be entering, then the chief shall judge (however many) lashes or the kind of punishment.
5. Whoever shall have killed a person, he is to be hanged until dead.

6. Any Nez Perce who shall take a weapon against a Whiteman or Frenchman, then the Whiteman or Frenchman will report it to the chief, whereupon the chief shall mete out punishment on him. in the same respect, any Whiteman or Frenchman who shall take a weapon against a Nez Perce, then it will be the duty of the Nez Perce to report him to Doctor White, then there Doctor White will straighten him out.

7. Whoever was about to set fire to a house and there people were residing in (that) house, then that very house burned, he (that person) is to hang until dead.

8. Whoever was about to set fire to a house that which is used to store things or a shop to make things, he will receive fifty lashes then he is to be incarcerated for six months in the strong house, in addition to all of this, he will pay (for damages) to the house and up to all which was burned.

9. Any person who, willfully or by negligence, will set on fire a house, or anything as a fence or crop, he will pay for (damages) up to all which has burned.

10. Only those shall own a dog which they, in traveling to various distant places, (hunt) deer. Whose ever dog shall kill any such thing as a domestic calf, a pig, or any such thing which is plainly corralled, it will be that he (the owner of the dog) will pay him for (damages), at which the owner of the dog will then kill the dog.

11. If any such person among the Nez Perces shall “ignore or break” these laws, then from among the various chiefs, they shall be made to correct him. Then, at the same time, if any such person among the Whitemen or Frenchmen shall “ignore or break” these laws against these people, they are then to report it to Doctor White then he will correct him for that.

The Nez Perce Chief. Ellis. <sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Translation provided by Cash Cash, Phillip E. *Language Use in the Indigenous Southern Plateau*. Phoenix, AZ: University of Arizona, 251-299.