

## **Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians**

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**Photo 1: Chief Joseph standing in Pendleton Robe**

**Lee Moorhouse Photo, Pendleton, Oregon, c. 1901**

**Courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society Neg. # 52504**

**One of the most famous Indians in American history, Chief Joseph was born in 1840 near the Grand Ronde River in present-day northeast Oregon. The warm and dry interior of a natural cave provided a safe place for a family on the move to give birth to their child.**

**Son of Old Chief Joseph (Tuekakas), a Cayuse-Umatilla-Nez Perce, and Khapkhaponimi, a Nez Perce (pronounced Nes Purse) woman whose name translates “strong leader of women,” Young Joseph was named Hinmahtoo-yahlatkekht, “Thunder Rising over Loftier Mountain Heights.” The name reflects the place he was born, the life he led, and the legacy he left behind.**

**Illustration 1: “Joseph, Toowe-tak-hes, Chief of the Nez Perce Indians,” pencil sketch by Gustav Sohon, artist at the 1855 Walla Walla Treaty Council,**

reproduced courtesy of Washington State Historical  
Society, Tacoma.

The Nez Perce called themselves “Nee-Me-Poo,” which translates “the people.” A custom among the Nee-Me-Poo was to allow outsiders to intermarry, thereafter assuming affiliation with the band or band leader of that particular group. Such was the case with Joseph’s father, whose maternal lineage included Nez Perce heritage. At the time of young Joseph’s birth, Tuekakas was a respected leader of the Wallamotkin (or Wallowa) Band of the Nez Perce in present-day Oregon.

Hinmahtoo-yahlatkekht was raised as a traditional Nez Perce in the village of In-nan-toe-e-in, one of seven children. His older brother, Sousouquee, his younger brother, Ollokot (meaning “Frog”) and his sisters were all close and important to Joseph. The children grew up trying to understand new ideas and pressures as whites came into their lives. That tension dates back to 1839 when their parents were married in 1839 by a Presbyterian missionary sent from the east coast to live among the Nez Perce. Henry H. Spalding and his wife, Eliza, established a mission and school at Lapwai in 1836 near present-day Lewiston, Idaho. Joseph’s father was one of the first to show interest in Christianity. Because of this, Young Joseph was baptized with the biblical name, “Ephraim.” The family moved between the Wallowa Valley and the Clearwater River country, where Spalding’s mission had been built on Lapwai Creek. Late in life, Joseph recalled being a student of Mrs. Spalding and liking his experience, but many Nez Perce stayed away and very few converted to Christianity due to the Spaldings’ rigid attitude and

lack of tolerance of Nez Perce customs and religion. To Spalding, the Bible and the hoe were the tools that would lead the Nez Perce to a better life. Most Nez Perce could not accept this point of view.

**Photo 2: Henry Harmon Spalding with Bible and hoe; Courtesy National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historical Park, Neg. # 1789**

During Joseph's youth, the Wallamotkin Band of Nez Perce numbered several hundred people. They spent their days in relative peace, breeding and herding horses, fishing for salmon, hunting, and gathering camas bulbs and other foods native to the Plateau, a region distinguished by dramatic changes in elevation from valleys and canyons a few feet above sea level to mountains higher than 10,000 feet. In this diverse environment, the Nez Perce lived amidst forested mountains, rolling hills covered with grass, large rivers with extensive flood plains, deep canyons, and flat highlands (i.e. the geographic term, "plateau").

Chief Joseph's ancestors are thought to have been residents of this area for at least 13,000 years. When first described by the white explorers Lewis and Clark in 1805, the Nez Perce lived in around seventy villages, each with several extended families. Their population was estimated to be 7,850 individuals. Prior to this, it is difficult to know how many Nez Perce lived at any given point in time. A hundred years earlier, it is likely that they had a larger population living in as many as 100 villages, but beginning in the 1780s, their population began to decline as European and Asian sailors landed and introduced

new diseases into the region. The worst of these was smallpox, which spread up and down the Columbia River in the 1780s killing at least half of the native peoples living between the Pacific Ocean and the Rocky Mountains. Other diseases spread by water, air and contact with infected peoples' clothing or skin further reduced the Nez Perce. Measles, mumps, chicken pox, and influenza or the common cold—"childhood diseases" that could also kill white children and adults, took many Indian lives causing disruption of normal patterns of life.

The Nez Perce had many close relatives, who spoke various dialects of the same language within the language family called "Plateau Penutian." Some bands such as those at Kamiah and Kooskia in present-day Idaho were described as "upriver bands;" others closer to Joseph's people were called "downriver people." All spoke *Nimipuutimpt*, "Nez Perce." Others within the same language family spoke a related dialect called Sahaptian. These included the Yakimas, Walla Wallas, and Palouse in present-day Washington State, groups along the Columbia River in present-day Oregon including the Umatilla (near Pendleton), and the Celilo (near The Dalles). Yet another group within the family spoke Klamath, whose homeland extended as far south as present-day northern California.

**Map 1: Close up of Map, "Native Languages and Language Families of North America," from *Languages*, vol. 17 of *Handbook of North American Indians*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996, end map)**

**Map 2: “Nez Perce territory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with modern town and reservation locations” from *Plateau*, ed. Deward E. Walker, Jr., vol. 12 of *Handbook of North American Indians* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), p. 421, Fig. 1.**

**Some Nez Perce traveled beyond the region of their language family to hunt buffalo, to visit distant friends, and to trade. Their closest friends were other speakers of Sahaptian such as the Umatilla and Yakima along the Columbia River and its tributaries. They also had close ties with the Coeur d’Alene to their north in Idaho, the Salish and Pend d’Oreille of the Bitterroot and Mission valleys in western Montana (both named by the French and later called the Flathead Indians), and the Crow of eastern Montana and Wyoming.**

**Map 3: “Neighboring Tribes to the Nez Perce Indians,” from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 11. Courtesy of the Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho.**

**On the long trips into Montana and northern Wyoming, the Nez Perce used buffalo-hide tipis such as the ones seen below in this first photograph ever taken of what**

are believed to be Nez Perce people camping somewhere on the Yellowstone River in 1871.

**Photo 3:\_ “Encampment on the Yellowstone River,  
near mouth of Shields River, Mont., 1871.” William  
H. Jackson, photo from the DeLancey Gill Collection,  
Bureau of American Ethnology. Courtesy National  
Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural  
History, Smithsonian Institution. Neg. # 2976.**

**Photo\_4:\_ “Skin lodges in encampment on Yellowstone  
River near mouth of Shields River, Mont, 1871.”**

**William H. Jackson, photographer. Courtesy National  
Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural  
History, Smithsonian Institution. Neb. # 2979.**

**[Note: The men in this photo have been recently  
identified as Looking Glass and his brother, No Hunter].**

**We have no photographs of “Ephraim” or Joseph as a youth. His formative years in the Wallawas of eastern Oregon were a mix of learning traditional Nez Perce language and customs and new ideas and lifeways introduced by missionaries, settlers, and Indian agents. He grew up in a mat-lodge similar to the one pictured below, which served as a three-season dwelling made out of local reeds woven into mats which could be tied together**

to form a comfortable house.

**Photo\_5: Mat lodge; Lee Moorhouse photographer  
Courtesy National Park Service, Nez Perce National  
Historical Park, Spalding, Idaho, Neg. # 1590**

On camping trips, families often used hide tipis, which were folded and packed on two tipi-poles and dragged behind horses, a system the French called the “travois” after witnessing dogs and later horses carrying loads in this manner.

**Photo 6: “Woman with Travois, Pendleton Roundup,” photo by  
W. S. Bowman. Courtesy Oregon Historical Society,  
Neg. # 855-S**

By the time Joseph and his brothers and sister were growing up in the 1840s, the Nez Perce had acquired many items of European manufacture including metal pots and kettles, knives, guns, and woolen blankets, which made life easier and served to decorate and soften life in a traditional mat lodge or tipi.

**Photo 7:\_ “Encampment of Nez Perce”  
Jane Gay photographer, 1889-1892.  
Courtesy of National Park Service, Nez Perce**

### **National Historic Park, Spalding, Neg. # 2808**

**The Nez Perce were horse rich, having acquired this “miracle animal” over a century earlier from trade with the Shoshone. Once horses were brought back to Nez Perce country, they were selectively bred for the best short-legged stock that could endure long trips up and down the mountainous terrain of their traditional homeland. In time, these horses would be given the name of “Appaloosa,” often distinguished by their coat pattern with sprinkles of white or large dark spots on lighter bodies, to complete leopard-like appearance. Bred for strength in their stocky forelegs, rather than for color, Appaloosas became the ideal horse for steep mountain trails and passes such as those connecting Idaho with Montana.**

**Photo 8: Appaloosa horse; photo by Don Shugast, courtesy of The Appaloosa Horse Club of America, Moscow, Idaho.**

**The Nez Perce provided food, shelter, and horses to the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1805, after which they were well known among fur traders for their kindnesses and willingness to allow whites to pass freely through their country. During the 1830s, only a handful of missionaries and fur traders settled on their lands, but by the mid-1840s, hundreds of emigrants passed through their lands annually en route to Oregon and California. From a Constitutional and international law perspective, the United States had no right to allow missionaries into Indian country prior to formal treaty proceedings, but under an agreement made with Great Britain in 1818, the “Oregon Country” was**

considered “shared territory” and many interest groups including churches, fur traders, farmers, and prospectors felt they had the right to enter the territory without permission of the tribes whose land they invaded. No white was ever killed despite disruption of many hunting and fishing areas.

Peace was interrupted in 1847 when the missionary, Marcus Whitman, his wife, Narcissa, and twelve other whites were killed by the Cayuse near present-day Walla Walla, Washington following a severe outbreak of measles, which killed many Indians and for which the missionaries were blamed. The Nez Perce and all other Indians in the Northwest were affected by this event. Many were sympathetic to the Cayuse and the affair compromised relations between Indians and whites throughout the region.

Tensions had been mounting since 1842, when Joseph was only a year or two old. In that year, Joseph’s people, had become subject to a new system introduced by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs. This Washington, D.C.-based office was created in 1824 to serve as a liaison between Congress and the tribes with which the United States had entered into treaties or tribes living in territories newly acquired by the United States. It was under jurisdiction of the Secretary of War, who had the power to appoint “agents” and to distribute annuities (annual monies and goods such as flour, sugar, tools and blankets promised in treaties). Dr. Elijah White, a missionary and U. S. agent to the Indians of Oregon, determined to simplify his administrative district by consolidating all Nez Perce under one “head chief,” a system alien to the Nez Perce, traditionally divided into several autonomous bands and villages, sharing ancestral heritage but no centralized political authority. The system was bound to fail. “Ellis,” the first “head chief,” was ill-suited for the artificial position and spent much of his time in present-day Montana,

hunting buffalo.

We have no photograph or drawing of Ellis, who died in 1850 of measles, whereupon Halalhot-suut “the Lawyer,” was named by American authorities as his replacement, a position he would hold under much controversy until his death in 1876. Lawyer had befriended mountain men and early settlers since the mid-1830s and preferred peace and compromise over resistance to white trespass and demands.

**Illustration 2: “Lawyer, Hal-hal-tlos-stot,  
Head Chief of the Nez Perce Tribe”  
Gustav Sohon, artist at the 1855 Treaty of  
Walla Walla; courtesy Washington State  
Historical Society, Tacoma**

In fairness, it was not an easy time for any Nez Perce leader and Lawyer must have thought he was doing what was best for his people. In 1853, Congress created Washington Territory, carving the Nez Perce homeland into two “American” political areas, all of it Indian land yet to be negotiated with the United States. Seeing the need for a federal right-of-way for emigrants heading to Oregon and California and for a Pacific transcontinental railroad, Congress sent a surveying party through the region with the goal of establishing formal Indian reservations separate from “public domain” lands. In 1855, Governor Isaac I. Stevens gathered the region’s chiefs together at Walla Walla for a treaty council. A great feast was prepared and several days of negotiating followed.

**Illustration 3: “Chiefs at Dinner, Walla Walla Council,**

**1855; Gustav Sohon, pencil sketch; Courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma**

**Lawyer was present, as was Old Joseph, who is reported to have carried a Bible at the convention. “Apash,” or “The Looking Glass,” a leader from the Kamiah area of Idaho, named for the translucent arrowhead he wore as a necklace, rode in from Montana’s buffalo country, parading his warriors and hunters into the treaty-camp in a very dramatic manner. His son, also called “Looking Glass” was destined to play a major role later in Nez Perce history.**

**Illustration\_4: “Arrival of Nez Perce Indians at Walla Walla Treaty, May 1855,” Gustav Sohon pencil sketch; Courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma**

**Illustration 5: “Looking-glass, Apash-wa-hay-ikt, Chief of the Nez Perce Indians,” Gustav Sohon pencil sketch, Walla Walla Treaty of 1855; Courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma.**

**Old Joseph, along with all other Nez Perce leaders present, agreed to cede land in exchange for a large reservation and the right to live, hunt, and fish on their former**

**territory. The 1855 Reservation consisted of 7.5 million acres and seemed a reasonable middle-ground for Indians and whites to coexist in a region gaining popularity among miners and settlers.**

**Map 4: “Reservation Boundary by Treaty of 1855,”  
from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 110,  
courtesy of The Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho.**

**What began as a potentially workable solution to white demands for fertile farm lands and Native need to preserve sacred sites and resource habitat soon turned violent. The Yakima and other Columbia river tribes rose in revolt, feeling betrayed by Stevens, whose treaty had not been ratified by the U. S. Senate, but who had already opened up Indian lands for white settlement. The Nez Perce remained non-combatants in the Yakima War, which lasted from September, 1855 to November, 1856, and resulted in several dozen deaths on both sides. Soon thereafter, the Nez Perce experienced trespass on their own reserved territory, when gold was discovered on their land in 1860. Hundreds of miners invaded the Nez Perce Reservation and a supply point was illegally established at Lewiston in 1861.**

**Map 5: “Gold Strikes in Indian Territory,”  
from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 150,  
courtesy of the Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho**

**By 1862, over eighteen thousand whites had settled on Nez Perce land. Fearing violence, federal Indian commissioners arrived in 1863, determined to reduce the size of the original 1855 Nez Perce Reservation. Old Joseph and two-thirds of the Nez Perce band chiefs refused to sign this second “steal” or “thief” treaty” of 1863. However, cooperative headmen were designated as signatories for the entire “Tribe,” and the reserve was reduced by seven million acres, leaving the Nez Perce approximately one-tenth of lands originally negotiated in 1855. From this point on, the tribe was split between the Lower Nez Perce or “non-treaty” group and the Upper Nez Perce or “treaty” group.**

**Map 6: reduction of Nez Perce country**

**from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 159,**

**courtesy of The Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho**

**Old Joseph (Tuekakas) died in 1871, having renounced Christianity and all treaties, at which time his people remained in the Wallowa Valley on their ancestral lands, but outside the “official” boundaries of the 1863 reservation. Hinmahtoo-yahlatkekht succeeded his father as chief of the Wallamotkin (or Wallowa) Band and was known thereafter as “Chief Joseph” by non-Indians. His older brother Sousouquee, remembered as taller than Joseph and equally handsome, had been dead six years, reportedly killed by other Indians. Now the eldest, Joseph was married to a Nez Perce woman known as Wawin-te-pi-ksat, the daughter of another important Nez Perce band leader of the Lapwai area named Whisk-tasket. Their marriage produced one daughter named Kap-kap-on-mi, born in 1865. Joseph would later remarry to a woman remembered as “Springtime,” who**

**also bore a daughter in 1877. During his life, Joseph had several wives and many children, some his own, others adopted into the family after their parents had died.**

**Photo 9: Chief Joseph with family during imprisonment in Kansas. Joseph is believed to have been thirty-nine or forty years old. F. M. Sargent, photo artist, Anthony, Kansas, 1878 or 1879. Courtesy National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historic Site, Spalding, Idaho. Neg. # 128.**

**Problems mounted for the Nez Perce after 1863. The United States Senate finally ratified (approved) the Treaty of 1863 in 1867, but promises made by the United States were not being met back in Idaho. In 1868, a delegation of four Nez Perce leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., where they met with representatives of the United States to iron out their differences. Three of the four were photographed wearing white man's clothing during their trip to the East.**

**Photo 10: Nez Perce delegation to Washington, D.C., 1868. (From left to right seated: Timothy, Lawyer, and Jason, all chiefs of the Nez Perce. A. Zeno Shindler, photographer. Courtesy National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historic Site. Neg. # 395.**

**Upon their return, the situation with white ranchers and farmers grew tense. An**

**1873 executive order from the President of the United States gave the title to the Wallowa Lake region to Joseph's descendants, but white homesteaders demanded that these fertile lands be renegotiated. In 1875, the Wallowa country was reopened to non-Indian settlement. A commission met with Nez Perce leaders in 1876 and recommended to the Indian Bureau that all non-treaty bands be persuaded to move into the formal 1863 reservation boundaries, and that they be forced to do so after 1 April, 1877. General Oliver O. Howard was placed in charge of relocation.**

**Map 7: "Non-Treaty Bands, 1877" from Bill**

**Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 188. Courtesy**

**The Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho.**

**A striking, broad-shouldered man possessing unusual oratorical skill, Joseph held his own against Howard, but he eventually acquiesced, arguing that it was "better to live at peace than to begin a war and lie dead."**

**Photo 11: "Chief Joseph" F. T. Cummins, photographer,**

**c. 1903. Courtesy National Anthropological Archives,**

**National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution,**

**Neg. # 52868.**

**In good faith, Joseph and his brother, Ollokot, a warrior and leader of buffalo hunters, agreed to move the entire Wallowa Band of Nez Perce from to Idaho.**

**Photo 12: “Ollokot or Frog or Little Frog, Chief Joseph’s brother, sitting between two men.”** photographer unknown, ca. 1876. From the scrapbook of James E. Taylor, “Our Wild Indians in Peace & War,” p. 106. Courtesy of National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Neg. # 56599. [note the label has Chief Joseph, but this is not correct. Ollokot is in the center WRS]

**In leaving Oregon, Joseph’s people had to cross the Snake River, which was running high and fast with spring rains. Many horses and some cattle were lost, but the Nez Perce made it across and continued toward the reservation in Idaho. They rested at Tolo Lake, only a two days’ ride from the agency at Lapwai and not far from locations where whites had committed depredations and murders against Nez Perce without penalties or police action.**

**Map 8: “Route taken by the Wallowa Nez Percés, June, 1877,”** from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 199. Courtesy The Caxton Press, Caldwell, Idaho.

**On 12 June, 1877, several young Nez Perce sought revenge for the murder of their relatives in the Salmon River area. Joseph and Ollokot were absent from the camp. When they returned, seventeen whites had been slain to avenge the deaths of at least forty Nez**

**Perce in recent years at the hands of white ranchers and miners from settlements along the Snake and Salmon rivers. The Nez Perce War had begun!**

**Fearing retribution, the Nez Perce sought refuge in White Bird Canyon, but were attacked by civilians and soldiers on June 17. At the end of the day, thirty-four white soldiers were dead; only two Nez Perce were wounded, and none were killed. Despite this attack, the Nez Perce continued in an effort to reach the new reservation. Three more skirmishes on the trail toward the reserve and two battles within the new reservation boundaries on the Clearwater River in July convinced Nez Perce leaders that they would have no peace in Idaho.**

**Map 9: from Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 217.**

**Courtesy The Caxton Press, Caldwell, Idaho.**

**Joseph opposed continued violence and further flight, and hoped to negotiate with General Howard, but the consensus of the rest of the leaders favored leaving Idaho Territory.**

**Photo 13: Young Looking Glass in buffalo country. Courtesy**

**National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian**

**Institution, Neg. # 2953-A). [note the top hat he is wearing WRS]**

**By now, the Nez Perce patriots consisted of two hundred men and approximately 550 women and children. They rounded up and packed 2,000 horses and fled toward the**

**buffalo country in Montana, intent upon reaching friends among the Crow.**

**Map 10: from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*,**

**p. 234. Courtesy of The Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho**

**During the next four months, the Nez Perce trekked through Montana and down into Wyoming's Yellowstone country, pursued by generals O. O. Howard and Nelson Miles of the United States Army.**

**Photo 14: General Oliver Otis Howard. Courtesy**

**of the Idaho Historical Society, Boise.**

**A surprise attack against the Nez Perce encampment at the Big Hole River on 9 August left between sixty and ninety Nez Perce dead, most women and children. Every Nez Perce family suffered at least one loss. Sixty Nez Perce sharpshooters held off a superior force of United State Seventh Infantry under Colonel John Gibbon, while Joseph led survivors out of immediate danger. By the end of the battle, thirty or more Nez Perce warriors had died, killing twenty-five soldiers, five civilian volunteers, and wounding another thirty-eight. Of the seventeen officers with Gibbon, fourteen lay dead or suffered wounds. Although Looking Glass survived this battle, faith in his leadership had been shaken. From this point on, the people placed in Chief Hototo (Lean Elk) and in Joseph more authority and responsibility.**

**Map 11: from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 253,  
courtesy of The Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho**

**Due to the casualties inflicted upon Gibbon’s troops, the U. S. Army was not able to pursue the Nez Perce immediately. Joseph organized the surviving women, children, and elderly men while the warriors regrouped under Lean Elk, who had friends among the Crow in Montana and Wyoming. Thinking that the Crow Tribe, would help them out, the survivors crossed Horse Prairie and Bannock Pass and reentered Idaho, turning east toward Yellowstone National Park. Along the way, more Nez Perce warriors, as well as several women and children who had been wounded at the Big Hole died, adding to the level of frustration and grief among the remaining people. Chief Joseph and other leaders attempted to restrain those seeking revenge, but three ranches were raided for horses and five white ranchers, as well as another five civilian freight-teamsters were killed en route, prompting the whites throughout the region into a “siege mentality,” taking up arms in stockades.**

**This turned the eastern press against the Nez Perce. Harper’s Weekly, a very popular magazine of the day gave its readers the following images of the war, with “Joseph and his brethren” depicted as wild and drunk.**

**Illustration 6:\_ “Chief Joseph” *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct. 27, 1877**

**Collection of W. R. Swagerty**

**Illustration 7:\_ “Joseph and his brethren” *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct.**

**27, 1877. Collection of W. R. Swagerty**

**General Howard continued his pursuit and almost cornered the Nez Perce but a party of warriors led by Ollokot, Looking Glass and Toohoolhoolzote held them off and ran off the army's mule herd, temporarily immobilizing them. By late August, the Nez Perce had entered West Yellowstone and began moving up the Madison and Firehole rivers.**

**Newspapermen throughout the country were now involved in reporting the saga of the fleeing Nez Perce, especially since they had entered the nation's only "national park" where tourists were "at risk." Nine were actually captured in one tourist party, and ten in another, adding to the hysteria. All but two were freed or managed to escape, suffering minor wounds, but the nation was angry in the wake of the defeat of General Custer and his entire column of troops the year before at Little Big Horn. Americans demanded revenge.**

**Illustration 8: Scenes of the Nez Perce War from *Harper's Weekly*, Oct. 22, 1877, collection of the author [note how the Nez Perce are depicted attacking tourists and driving off General Howard's livestock WRS]**

**The Nez Perce realized their plight and decided to head north out of the park. They ascended Pelican Creek, headed on to the Lamar River and eventually threaded the Absaroka Range to Clark Fork River and on to the Yellowstone itself, a difficult trek.. A rearguard of warriors ran into more parties of Yellowstone tourists, killed two of them,**

**and burned a ranch, adding to the charges leveled against the Nez Perce for not coming into the reservation back in Idaho on time.**

**Illustration 9: “Sketches of the Nez Perce War,” *Harpers’ Weekly*, Oct.**

**22, 1877. Collection of W. R. Swagerty.**

**Once in Crow country, the Nez Percés’ hopes of living among their buffalo-hunting friends were shattered when the Crow denied help, fearing the U. S. Army would turn against them as well. And so they pressed on. After crossing the Musselshell, they passed through the Judith Basin and finally reached the Missouri River, deciding at some point to make a run for Canada to live among the Sioux under Sitting Bull who had been there since the end of the Little Big Horn campaign the year before.**

**Map 12: from Bill Gulick, *Chief Joseph Country*, p. 277, courtesy of The Caxton Printers, Caldwell, Idaho**

**By late September, a weary group of survivors struggled to reach the Canadian border, only forty miles away. They hoped to find refuge there with Sitting Bull’s exiles, who had been given temporary sanctuary by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police after the Battle of Little Big Horn. A final battle near the Bear’s Paw Mountains held off U. S. troops long enough for some Nez Perce to escape to Canada. Sixty women, eight children, and 103 men under the charge of Chief White Bird eluded detection and slipped across the**

**border. On October 5, with Ollokot and Looking Glass dead, Joseph was left in the main leadership position. Chief Joseph surrendered himself, 86 other men, 184 women, and 147 children, with a pledge from U. S. officials that his people could spend the winter on Tongue River and return to Idaho in the spring to live on their reservation in peace. It was at this point that Joseph was photographed for the first time.**

**Photo 15: “Chief Joseph,” photographs taken by John Fouch, a local photographer operating in the Tongue River country shortly after his surrender, October, 1877. Courtesy National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Neg. # 2905-A-2. [note: these are considered the first photographs taken of Joseph. On the left he wears a striped Hudson’s Bay Company trade blanket and a store-bought shirt with a traditional choker around his neck and braids. On the right he wears a Nez Perce hide shirt, elaborately fringed and decorated with porcupine quills. Joseph is in grief, but he is not a broken man WRS].**

**Shortly after these first photographs were taken, the Nez Perce were taken to Bismarck, North Dakota. Another photograph was taken by O. S. Goff, whose camera captured Joseph wearing the same neck choker as in the first photograph, but he has an embroidered shirt and bandolier across his shoulder, much more typical of Indians of the Great Lakes region than the Northwest. Photos like this were sold as souvenirs by frontier photographers, eager to make money on heroes and “villains” of the Indian Wars of the West.**

**Photo 16: “Chief Joseph.” Three photographers have been credited with this photograph, but it is likely that Orlando S. Goff actually took it. Courtesy National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Neg. # 43201-B**

**The promise made by General Howard was broken. For the next eight years, Joseph and most of his people remained prisoners-of-war in Indian Territory (modern Oklahoma), where many died of disease and despondency. The place is still remembered to this day as “Eeikish Pah,” or “The Hot Place” and is thought of as a time of imprisonment. Joseph made several trips back to Washington, D.C. and to New York City on behalf of his people, the first in 1879. He dictated his own account of the Nez Perce War hoping to draw sympathy and support from those in power, but the government did not move quickly on his appeals.**

**Photo 17: Chief Joseph in Washington, D.C., 1879.**

**Charles Milton Bell photographer. Courtesy National Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Neg. # 2906.**

**Finally, in 1885, the Nez Perce in “The Hot Place” were allowed to return to the Northwest. Those who had converted to Christianity were allowed to return to Idaho, but those who continued to practice the old ways were exiled to Washington State. Joseph and 150 of his non-Christian band were sent to the Colville Reservation in central Washington,**

where the chief lived out the rest of his life traveling and speaking on behalf of his people.

**Map 12: “Relative Locations of Colville and Nez Perce Reservations, 1885,” from Bill Gulick, Chief Joseph Country, p. 281. Courtesy of The Caxton Press, Caldwell, Idaho.**

At Colville, Joseph had a log cabin, but he preferred the old way of living in tipis and mat lodges. His camp was photographed many times and became a classroom for younger Nez Perce and white friends to learn the old ways and to hear stories of the Nez Perce War.

**Photo 18: Joseph’s “longcamp” at Nespelem, Washington. Edward H.**

**Latham, photographer, 1901. Courtesy National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historic Site, Spalding, Idaho. Neg. # 66.**

Joseph died, age sixty-four in September, 1904. His burial was a major event in the area. Many speeches were given and his white admirers had a large tombstone erected, complete with his image carved on the stone. It remains today at the cemetery in Nespelem, Washington on the Colville Reservation.

Some authors state that by the time of his death, Joseph had a total of nine children, but we will never really know how many boys and girls he took in due to Nez Perce customs of caring for orphans and those in need from other families. One son reported to have been

**Joseph's was "Otto," who was photographed.**

**Photo 19: "Otto, son of the Nez Perce's Chief Joseph"**

**courtesy National Anthropological Archives,**

**Smithsonian Institution. Neg. # 56601.**

**It is generally thought that all but one of his own girls died before reaching adulthood. The daughter Kap-kap-on-mi from his second marriage survived the Nez Perce War by fleeing with Chief White Bird to Canada. When she returned, she changed her name to Sarah. In 1879, Sarah married George Moses, but they had no children and she never saw her father again. Her mother survived to 1929, dying in Nespelem on the Colville Reservation. Joseph's nieces produced direct descendants, who still identify as the Joseph Band of the Nez Perce at Colville. Today they bear the proud legacy of Joseph and have surnames that include the Red Thunder, Half Moon, and Red Star families. In 1972, A United States postage stamp was struck in Chief Joseph's honor. Three generations of his descendants through one niece attended the ceremony in Washington, D.C. and are shown in the photo below:**

**Photo 20: Ceremony unveiling the "Chief Joseph Stamp"**

**1972. Photograph by Harry Newfield, Courtesy National**

**Anthropological Archives, National Museum of Natural History,**

**Smithsonian Institution. Neg. # 72-8411**

**Illustration 10: Chief Joseph. United States Postage stamp, original**

**art by James E. Doak, 1972. Collection of the author.**

**A second U. S. postage stamp was released as part of the series, “Legends of the West” in 1993.**

**Illustration 11: “Legends of the West Series,” United State Postal Service, 1993.**

**Illustration 12: Close-Up. “Chief Joseph Stamp.”**

**The back of the stamp reads:**

**Illustration 13: [Scan of back of the Chief Joseph Stamp]**

**In addition to his unblemished reputation among his own people, Joseph made many friends in Washington and among Indian reform groups. He met and befriended Buffalo Bill Cody and even became friends with General Gibbon, his foe during the Nez Perce War.**

**Photo 21:\_ Chief Joseph with Buffalo Bill. Photographer unknown, 1897. Collection of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center, New York, NY. Courtesy of National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historical Site, Spalding, Idaho. Neg. # 2338.**

**Photo 22:\_ “Chief Joseph with General Gibbon on the shore of Lake Chelan, 1889.” Photographer unidentified.**

**Courtesy National Anthropological Archives, National  
Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution,  
Neg. # 43201.**

**Ironically, among white Americans and Europeans, Joseph was regarded as a celebrated war chief, and was called the “Red Napoleon” and “the noblest Roman of them all.” In 1901, the Pendleton Woolen Mills featured Joseph on the cover of its catalogue.**

**Illustration 14: Pendleton Woolen Mills, 1901 catalogue.**

**Indians had been wearing blankets of their own manufacture or animal hides and robes before the white man arrived in North America, but the wool cloth blanket with its warmth, color, and designs had largely replaced the older robes by the time of Chief Joseph’s last years. The tradition of the Indian Blanket continues to this day. Beginning in 1926, the “Chief Joseph Robe” was offered by Pendleton. To this day, it remains the most popular design among buyers of Indian-style blankets.**

**Illustration 15: Pendleton Woolen Mills Blanket Catalog, 2001  
“Chief Joseph,” p. 20. Courtesy of Bob Christnacht  
and the Pendleton Woolen Mills, Portland, Oregon.**

**Today, Chief Joseph, America’s favorite “patriot chief” of the late nineteenth-century Indian wars, is remembered as a statesman-diplomat, an advocate of peace and justice, who resorted to violence only to protect the women, children, and the elderly**

throughout the fifteen-hundred-mile ordeal of the Nez Perce in 1877. Several events in Nez Perce country keep his name alive. “Chief Joseph Days” in Joseph, Oregon, is an annual parade and rodeo. The Tamkaliks Celebration (formerly Wallowa Band Descendants Friendship Feast and Pow Wow) is another annual event held in Oregon.

**Photo 23: “Chief Joseph Days, 1960,” Cecil Carter  
Collection, courtesy National Park Service, Nez Perce  
National Historic Site, Spalding, Idaho. Neg. # 2103**

The Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho honors Joseph with his image on their official tribal logo and annually hosts the Chief Joseph and Warriors Powwow in Lapwai during June. The Joseph Band of the Nez Perce honor their ancestor at Colville Reservation in Washington State and wherever band members live throughout the country.

**Illustration 16: Chief Joseph on official logo,  
Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho.**

author: *William R. Swagerty, Department of History, University of the Pacific, Stockton, California* Updated 8 June, 2005

### **Suggested Reading:**

**Axtell, Horace, with Margo Aragon. *A Little Bit of Wisdom: Conversations with a Nez Perce Elder*. Lewiston, Idaho: Confluence Press, 1997.**

**Gidley, Mick.** *Kopet: A Documentary Narrative of Chief Joseph's Last Years.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981.

**Greene, Jerome A.,** *Nez Perce Summer, 1877: The U. S. Army and the Nee-Me-Poo Crisis* Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2000.

**Gulick, Bill.** *Chief Joseph Country: Land of the Nez Perce.* Caldwell, Id.: The Caxton Printers, 1981. Reprinted, 1985.

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**Josephy, Alvin M., Jr.** *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Pacific Northwest.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965. Reprinted in an abridged edition, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978.

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**Slickpoo, Allen P. Sr., with Deward E. Walker.** *Noon Nee-Me-Poo (We, the Nez Percés: Culture and History of the Nez Percés.* Lapwai, Idaho: Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, 1973.

**Wilfong, Cheryl,** *Following the Nez Perce Trail: A Guide to the Nee-Me-Poo National Historic Trail with Eyewitness Accounts* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1990).

**Yellow Wolf, as told by L. V. McWhorter.** *Yellow Wolf: His Own Story.* Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1940.

For younger readers:

**Allard, William Albert,** "Chief Joseph." *National Geographic Magazine*, vol. 151(3) March, 1977, pp. 406-434.

**Lassieur, Allison, with Josiah Pinkham, Cultural Resource Program, Nez Perce Tribe and William R. Swagerty, University of Idaho.** *The Nez Perce Tribe.* Mankato, Minn: Bridgestone Books and Capstone Press, 2000.

**McAuliffe, Bill. *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce. Photo-Illustrated Biographies.* Mankato, Minn.: Bridgestone Books, 1998.**

**Raymer, Dottie. *Welcome to Kaya's World, 1764: Growing Up in a Native American Homeland* (Middleton, Wisconsin: Pleasant Company Publications, 2003).**

**Trafzer, Clifford E. *The Nez Perce.* New York: Chelsea House, 1992.**

**Trafzer, Clifford E., with Richard D. Scheuerman, *Chief Joseph's Allies.* Newcastle, Calif.: Sierra Oaks Publishing Co., 1992.**

**Websites to Visit:**

[www.nezperce.org/](http://www.nezperce.org/) Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho

[www.wallowanezperce.org/](http://www.wallowanezperce.org/) Wallowa Band of the Nez Perce

[www.wallowanezperce.com/](http://www.wallowanezperce.com/) Tamkaliks Celebration of the Wallowa Band of the Nez Perce

[www.colvilletribes.com/](http://www.colvilletribes.com/) The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

[www.fs.fed.us/npnht/](http://www.fs.fed.us/npnht/) Nez Perce National Historic Trail

[www.nps.gov/nepe/](http://www.nps.gov/nepe/) Nez Perce National Historic Park