

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Chief Joseph's Allies. By Clifford E. Trafzer and Richard D. Scheuennan.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6fz8d63c>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 17(2)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Wells, Merle

**Publication Date**

1993-03-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

survival, the question of surviving as Indians takes on quite a different form. The pertinent question becomes that of identifying what elements of traditional aboriginal cultures have survived and will continue to exist. To begin to answer this question, the author needs to expand her view to include the decision-making and leadership selection processes within existing aboriginal communities. In the end, however, despite my reservations, Dickason's book is a valuable survey of Canadian aboriginal history, and the author must be commended for accomplishing such an ambitious task.

*J. Anthony Long*  
University of Lethbridge

**Chief Joseph's Allies.** By Clifford E. Trafzer and Richard D. Scheuerman. Newcastle, California: Sierra Oaks Publishing Company, 1992. 112 pages. \$17.95 paper.

Prepared by specialists thoroughly familiar with their subject, this volume contributes a sound interpretation of useful information to an already extensive literature of Pacific Northwest Indian history, primarily from 1876 to 1885. A great deal of attention has been paid to ranching pressures against several Nez Percé bands in 1876 that led to their exile to Kansas and Oklahoma until 1885. But much less notice has attended any explanation of how, when Wallows Valley and Salmon River bands could not avoid military hostilities, similar troubles enveloped Palouse and other lower Snake River peoples. Problems of survival in Oklahoma and of returning to Idaho or Washington likewise have gained far less coverage. This presentation surveys both features.

Like other western Indians, independent Nez Percé bands encountered severe problems with settlers who wanted to exclude them from their traditional bases. A number of small bands identified as upper and lower Palouse spoke a Nez Percé dialect and, like all Nez Percé bands, pursued their own independent course as best they could after settlers invaded their country along the Snake River west of Lewiston. When mining in Idaho disrupted their culture, they did what they could to retain their ancestral lands and customs. Early military operations came through their domain, and ranchers bothered them when troubles focused on other Nez Percé bands. Some Palouse people were

driven to other reservations before 1876, and when White Bird's and Joseph's bands were forced to evacuate altogether during an army campaign that engulfed additional Nez Percé groups a year later, some Palouse members chose to go along in search of a new refuge. Two Palouse leaders gained prominence during that episode, and their participation is featured in this volume.

Two sections comprise this clear but relatively brief survey. An initial segment clarifies early Palouse participation in Nez Percé treaty negotiation and response to initial military operations that affected their area. A second summary deals with Palouse adjustment to adverse circumstances that followed.

When several Nez Percé bands concluded that they had no alternative but to seek refuge in Montana—where General Oliver Otis Howard followed in pursuit—a number of Palouse accompanied them. During an astounding trip of several months and as many battles, that group of exiles concluded that they were going to have to join Sitting Bull's Sioux refugees in Canada. Early in October, a showdown followed at Bear Paws in northern Montana. At that point, Joseph (who had not wanted to leave Idaho, anyway) made a deal with Colonel Nelson A. Miles and General Howard to return to Idaho as the guardian of many women and children and those unable to break out and go further. White Bird and a majority of men (whom Howard described as warriors) decided to go on to Canada. Some women and children escaped with White Bird, but a majority of Nez Percé refugees were in no shape to continue their journey. Joseph always had assumed primary responsibility for noncombatants, and he did not abandon them. Husishusis Kute (a prominent Palouse survivor) and some of his people accompanied Joseph, but military authorities diverted them to Kansas and Oklahoma. A second section of this volume deals with their misadventures there.

In an eight-year national campaign to return to their Pacific Northwest homeland, Joseph and his associates finally gained a lot of effective national support to counteract determined opposition from Idaho settlers who objected to letting them come back. An effective summary of his successful effort and of Palouse participation in that enterprise concludes this account. Palouse efforts to retain their traditional culture are emphasized, along with subsequent problems that Indian peoples encountered during and after that time. Those who chose at least temporary exile in Canada do not fit into this presentation, but their experience would make an excellent subject for future publication.

Although this entire presentation is remarkably free from distortion from old governmental misunderstandings of Nez Percé culture, a little of that taint still slips in. Federal authorities and local settlers went to enormous effort to disregard Nez Percé tradition and culture, especially with respect to land ownership and transfers. As this account shows clearly and accurately, Nez Percé or Palouse lands could, under no circumstances, be bought or sold: any such purported transactions were totally imaginary, and pretenses that they had taken place were utterly immoral. Nez Percé leaders, including Joseph, explained this feature time and again at great length, but military and government administrators were not quite bright enough to grasp that point. (If they had caught on, they simply would have taken over Nez Percé lands under some other pretext.) Recognition of Nez Percé culture simply could not have been achieved there in those years.

After a Nez Percé treaty establishing a large reservation that failed to protect Palouse bands was ratified and placed in effect in 1859, Idaho's gold rush showed it to be completely useless. When government negotiators decided to take over most Nez Percé lands by getting a new treaty ratified in 1867, they found that almost no Nez Percé signatories of 1863 would agree to relinquish anything. Lawyer and some of his Nez Percé associates who were disgusted with their 1859 treaty consented to a new one that might have offered them some help but did not presume to take away their lands. General Howard and other governmental agents claimed that Lawyer's action released other bands' lands, although it clearly did not. Lawyer and his associates knew perfectly well that they could not sell anyone's lands—and in fact, they didn't: their own lands were not involved. They knew that they could not bind Joseph's, nor White Bird's, nor anyone else's band, although federal agents blamed them—entirely inaccurately—for that alleged transgression. This volume quite properly indicates that other Nez Percé leaders naturally began to blame Lawyer. But a correction of that government error should be indicated more clearly. Nez Percé and Palouse dissension inspired by that episode is presented effectively in this account, which provides a sound treatment of an important phase of Pacific Northwest history. Inclusion of twenty-six excellent photographs enhances its value.

*Merle Wells*

Idaho State Historical Society