Oregon Historical Society
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February 27, 1978

Mr. Cliff Crawford
PO Box 396
Stevenson, Washington 98648

Dear Mr. Crawford:

Enclosed is a seven page transcription of Erskine Wood's speech presented at the Oregon Historical Society's last Annual Dinner. The tape has not yet been catalogued with the proper legal release form signed by Mr. Wood. The Society is therefore providing you with this material under the condition that it must only be used as general reference and background information. No direct quotations from the transcript should appear in print.

Thank you for your interest in this historic recording. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding its content or restrictions.

Sincerely,

Charles Digregorio Oral Historian

CD:df

enclosure

With which are now incorporated The Battleship Oregon Museum, Oregon Geographic Names Board, Oregon Landmarks Committee, Oregon Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation Committee, North Pacific (Irkutsk) Archival Research Group

Erskine B. Wood
Novermber 10, 1977
Memorial Coliseum, Portland, Oregon
Oregon Historical Society Annual Meeting

"My Journeys to Chief Joseph's Camp at Nespelem"

Here we are one hundred years after Joseph's time, meeting to honor his memory, to speak of his life and his exploits. Do we think of what he went through a hundred years ago? Joseph, today, could say if he were living, "You are honoring me here tonight, you have paraded me over the streets of New York and Washington, you have taken me to Grant's Tomb, you brought a sculptor out from New York to do my medallion, you named an ocean steamer after me, one of the great bridges across the Columbia River you named the Chief Joseph Bridge. But let me ask you, where is my home, the Wallowa Valley that you took from me in violation of every right and treaty? Where are the chiefs of my tribe, Looking Glass, Tu-hul-hut-sut, my brother Alokut? Where are they? All killed by your soldiers. Where are my little children that died in the malarial flats of the Indian Territory where you sent me? Where are all these things so precious to me? There is no answer to that. But it is just as well for us not to forget them. Here was a great and noble man whom I wish to speak of tonight briefly.

I am the only living person that knew Chief Joseph. I consider it a privilege that I have worn all my life. The way I came to live with Chief Joseph was through my father's acquaintance and subsequent friendship with him which grew out of the Nez Perce campaign. To understand a little bit of my life with Chief Joseph, I want to speak briefly of that campaign. The campaign began because the army under General Howard, under orders from the Indian Department in Washington, they insisted upon forcing Joseph onto a reservation. The campaign began in 1877 and the surrender was in October of that year. Joseph was willing to go rather than have bloodshed. But some of his younger troops of another band, White Bird's, ran wild and killed some settlers. The fight was on. Indians, knowing there was no hope of anything peaceful gathered in White Bird Canyon and there the first battle took place where the Indians killed practically all of the soldiers.

Then they started their long retreat. Their object was not to be aggressive, not to fight the white people offensively, just to escape, to get away, that is all they ever tried to do. So they made their long retreat seventeen hundred miles across the Rocky Mountains, twice, in their endeavor to reach Montana and Canada. They fought three bloody battles on the way. One at Clear Water, a bloody battle at Big Hole, where my uncle, General Gibbon was in command and was wounded and again at Bear Paw. The Indians stood the troops off every time. Every time. Until at Bear Paw they at last surrendered with Miles on one side and Howard coming up

with my father as his aide. After five days of desperate fighting and many killed, Alokut was killed there, Looking Glass was killed there, Tu-hul-hut-sut, also, they finally surrendered. Joseph surrendered, but he surrendered on express terms given to him by the army officers in command, Howard and Miles. He would be sent back to his home in Idaho, in the northern climes, to which he was suited. Instead, the army officers' agreements were disregarded by Washington and Joseph was sent to the Indian Territory where in that malaria stricken bottom, many of his people died. That is the story of the campaign.

His retreat has been likened to Xenophanes' famous retreat in the "March of the Ten Thousand Greeks" from the inland of Persia back to Greece. Many think that Joseph, while on a smaller scale, was more remarkable. Xenophanes had his soldiers only, Joseph had women, children and the wounded always to carry along with him. Of course, the losses were terrible. At the final surrender at Bear Paw, there were only seventy-nine warriors left alive and half of them were wounded. Joseph's speech at the surrender, of course, is rather famous. It is preserved because my father was in the habit of carrying a little black notebook because as aide to the general he wanted to take notes of the general's orders. When Joseph began to make his speech through the interpreter, my father realizing the importance of it took out his little notebook and wrote the speech. The original manuscripts have been lost but my father remembered and this is the way it was, speaking through the interpreter. "You tell General Howard, I know his heart. What he told me before, I have in my heart. I'm tired of fighting, the chiefs are dead. Tu-hul-hut-sut is dead, Looking Glass is dead. He who led the young men in battle, Alokut, the old men are all dead. It is the young men now who say 'yes' and 'no'. My people have run away to the hills, some of them. It is cold and we have no blankets, they are hungry and we have no food. My little girl has run away up on the prairie. I want to have time to go look for her. Hear me my chiefs! From where the sun now stands, Joseph will fight no more forever." He followed by going into Indian Territory which was a disgrace.

Somewhere it is said in the notice, I think, that I went to Joseph's camp because my health was frail. That is entirely a mistake, my health was never more robust than it was at that time. My mother was threatened with tuberculosis, the household was breaking up. My father had received an invitation before to send me to his camp. My father taking advantage of the household disorganization sent me to Joseph's camp. That is how I happened to go. I came back fatter than I had ever been and rounder in the face. The joking name they gave me was a word that meant "Red Moon" or "Round Face".

The teepee life is very comfortable, when you know how to live in it. It is warm and comfortable. The smoke hardly ever fills the teepee due to the flaps at the top that can be adjusted to meet the breezes. You don't choose to stand up in it anymore than you would stand up all day in your own house. You sit down or lie down in a teepee. If there is any smoke at all you are out of it. When you go in the flap door the first thing you see right in front of you is the center fire. On the right, in Joseph's case were the two squaws and their household goods, cooking utensils, food and so on. Then, came next the living part of the teepee. The floor was wild rye grass which is about six feet long, makes a good matting and then canvas and blankets to lie on.

Around the outer circumference of the teepee are the rolled up beds where they are stored after the night's sleep. The teepee was about thirty feet in diameter. It was a very comfortable habitat.

Joseph, I should pause to say, was not his real Indian name. His father was named "Old Joseph" and Joseph took that name or the whites gave it to him after he became chief. The Indians never called him Joseph. They called him by his real Indian name, "Hin-mat-too-ye-let-ket," which means "Thunder Rolling in the Mountains." Joseph shared his teepee with a friend the first visit I was there which lasted five or six months. He shared it with a friend named Looking Down, with a wife. The wife had a baby when I was there. It was interesting how they did that. The other squaws made a little teepee out on one side about one hundred feet from the main teepee. They made her comfortable over there and took care of her and helped her with the birth. Four or five days later, she was back in the teepee with Joseph. Joseph had two wives, Iyat-too-we-a-net-en-my and Wawintip-yay-la-yal-e-cotcot. Can you say those? They got along in perfect harmony. Joseph slept between the two of them right here and I slept here and Cool-cool-smool-mool, another boy adopted by Joseph, slept there and then Looking Down's family had the other half of the teepee. It was a very comfortable way to live. Especially adapted to a nomad people like these horse Indians who wanted to travel.

Joseph was really a religious man. I don't know where he got that, from the mission schools when he was a boy or how, but anyway he was. On Sunday mornings, he called five or six of his chief men in the teepee and had breakfast. His squaws would prepare a nice breakfast and they would all sit around. Before the breakfast was touched though, Chief Joseph would offer up a prayer to the Great Spirit thanking him for the food he had been given. Joseph kept a calendar; that is how he knew when Sunday came around. The calendar was a bunch of little white sticks tied at one end hanging loose, about ten inches long. Nice, neat and clear white, they were neatly shaped with four sides. Everyday Joseph would take a file and file a little notch in the stick for that day. On Sunday, he would make a little round hole; that was Sunday. The sticks must have covered several years. On Sunday, it was a great day in the summer for horse racing. The Indians loved their horses, and they loved racing and they loved gambling.

On Sunday morning, especially after one of Joseph's breakfasts, we would ride four or five miles out onto the prairie from where he was camped. We had horse races out over the prairie. I would say about half or three quarters of a mile out and turn around and come back. The usual betting was with blankets. If I wanted to bet such and such on a horse, I would wave the blanket up in the air and challenge anybody that wanted to take me on and if somebody did my opponent would tie his blanket on to my blanket, we would throw them in a pile. Sometimes the pile would be from the floor down there up to me. That was the usual bet but the bet could be anything; horses, saddles, rifles, anything except men or women. They never bet their women. When the race was on, it was ridden by young men, eighteen to twenty years of age. They were stripped naked except for their breech-clout and moccasins. They rode bareback and the only bridle was a hair rope tied around the horse's lower jaw. They would start out over the prairie in a whirl of dust and while

they were gone the crowd would mingle a little on their horses. They never left their horses, they always sat on horse back all the time. They would mingle around and chat and wait for the returning racers. In about three or four minutes they would come and you would see the whirl of dust coming back at you. The horses would be on a dead run. When they got within about two hundred yards of the finish, some of the men, especially those who bet heavily on the race, would ride down the track a ways. They would arrange themselves alongside the racing horse and try to whip him in ahead of the others. I went down there one time, just riding down to be with the crowd and the racers. For a joke they arranged themselves alongside me and whipped me in ahead of everybody. I didn't count, of course, but that was it. They love a joke. Don't get the idea the Indians don't like fun, they do.

The boy that lived with me in Joseph's teepee, the first year that I was there, was named Nicky-Mowitz. The second year I was there he was named Cool-cool-smool-mool. I don't know what he was, but I think he was an orphan from the war and Joseph adopted him. He was about a year or two older that I was. I was twelve years old when I first went there but I soon had a thirteenth birthday. Our job was principally to take care of the horses. Joseph had a horse herd of about fifty or seventy-five horses and they would range out in the hills for pasture. We had to go out, Cool-cool-smool-mool and I would have to go out and keep track of them at least every other day and drive them to water.

The horses were grazing in the pine forests with the hills sloping down to the valley. We would drive them to water. We would turn the ones lose we had ridden, and lasso fresh ones to take in to camp for use the next two or three days. That way Joseph always had fresh horses. The reason we drove them to water to catch them is because it was the middle of an opening in the river. That, with the willows around it, made a natural corral. We could drive the herd into that confined space and the horses would stand in knee deep water. We could catch them much more easily.

On the fall hunt, when they go into the mountains to lay in the supply of winter's meat, venison, lasted about ten days. They would go into the mountains which were at the head of the valley and beyond. They would go in about the middle of October or the end of October and the band would split up into several groups. The whole band can't hunt in one area. So they split up into different groups. I was always with Joseph's group, which would be about eight families. They would hunt together. They would put their teepees all together. Instead of a round teepee, they would have one long teepee. Instead of a fire in the middle, it had four fires going down the length of the teepee. The teepee would be fifty feet long or more. Those fall hunts were what I enjoyed immensely. They were exciting, they entailed hardship, it was cold and there was snow on the ground. We would have to get up long before daylight. The squaws would have breakfast ready for us. We would have breakfast. We would take a hot bath first, before breakfast in the dark. They would make a little hot water bath first in this way: They would dig a circular pit about two feet deep. They would build a fire alongside it to heat rocks. They would build it right close to the creek with only a small bank between the two so the water would seep through the bank from the cold creek into this invented tub of dirt. Then we would get in there and roll the hot rocks into the water and have a very good hot water bath. Then

you would get out of the bath and to show their bravado, they would go down to the creek with just a little skim of ice on it and squat down just as if they didn't give a damn that it was cold. I couldn't do that. The object of these baths was to take the scent off our bodies so the deer couldn't smell us. It is a very good thing to know, we white people don't do that, but the Indians always take those baths every morning of the fall hunt.

I had one experience on one of the fall hunts. I was on two hunts, one each year. This was in the second year. We had been out over night, horseback, hunting and we camped on the side of the mountain, cold as the dickens, to catch them is because it was the middle of an opening in the river. That, with the willows around it, made a natural corral. We could drive the herd into that confined space and the horses would stand in knee deep water. We could catch them much more easily.

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Lawyer, author dies at 103

Eskine Wood

Erskine Wood, who was born nearly 104 years ago at Vancouver Barracks and was a Clark County resident much of his life, died at his McLoughlin Heights home this morning following a monthlong illness.

Mr. Wood is survived by his second wife, Louise, a son, Erskine Biddle Wood of Vancouver; three daughters, Rebecca Watkin of Kentfield, Calif., Deborah Rieser of New York City, and Lydia Noyes of Portland; 11 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

A memorial service is scheduled for 11 a.m. Friday at the Riverview Cemetery Chapel, 8421 S.W. Macadam Ave., Portland. Mr. Wood last resided at 607 Umatilla Way.

A partner in the Portland law firm founded a century ago by his father and now headed by his son, Mr. Wood practiced law actively until last summer and continued attending the firm's board meetings and giving speeches until his recent illness.

He specialized in admiralty and marine cases and was admiralty counsel of the United States Shipping Board in 1920.

He was also an author. His biography of his father, "Life of Charles Erskine Scott Wood," was published in 1976. His father was a lieutenant of infantry involved in the Indian wars when Mr. Wood was born at the local military base Sept. 1, 1879.

That was two years after the senior Wood participated in the long campaign against Chief Joseph's Nez Perce band. As a teen-ager, Erskine Wood was sent to live with the chief for nine months and later published a diary of his experiences.

Mr. Wood graduated from Harvard in 1901, shortly before he was stricken by tuberculosis. After several years spent recovering on a ranch in eastern Oregon, he attended the University of Oregon and won a law degree in 1912. He was admitted to the bar that same year and joined his father's firm.

He married Rebecca Baird Biddle of Vancouver in 1900 and became a part-time Vancouver resident at the Biddle estate on the Columbia River near Ellsworth.

After his first wife's death in 1951, he married Louise Pippel Cunningham of Minneapolis.

While the family considered Clark County home, Mr. Wood's professional and

social life was mostly Portland-oriented.

He was a past president of both the Waverly Country Club and the Arlington Club, an exclusive men's club in Portland. He was senior among the 500 members of the 116-year-old club and played dominoes in the clubrooms at 811 S.W. Salmon St. at lunch most days until last summer, the club manager said.

Mr. Wood befriended Gen. George C. Marshall when he was stationed at Vancouver Barracks during 1936-38, and the general came back to the Northwest to fish with the Wood family during and after World War II. In later years, Mr. Wood served as a trustee of the George C. Marshall Research Foundation in Lexington, Va.

Mr. Wood was a longtime member of the Oregon Historical Society, and the family has requested that memorial contributions in his name be made to the society at 1230 S.W. Park in Portland.