

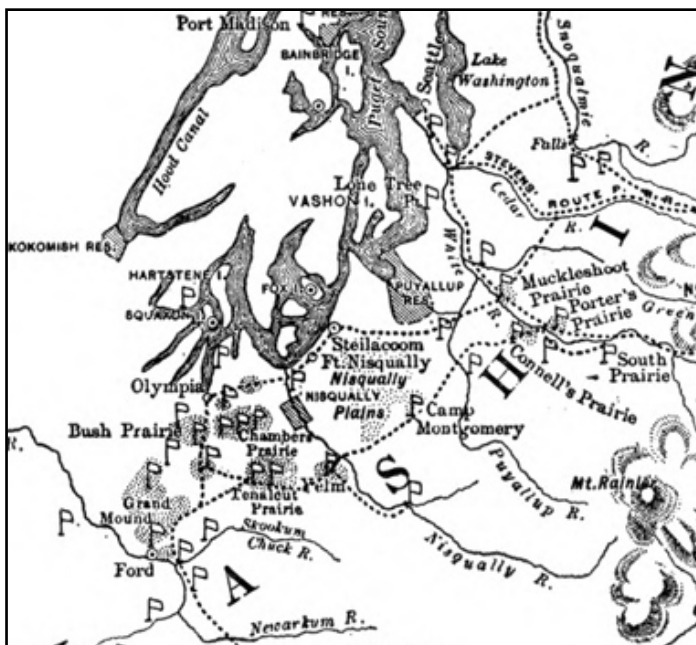


LESCHI

L leader." "Husband." "Enemy." "Role Model." "Murderer." How can these words possibly apply to just one person? There was a man who lived more than one hundred and fifty years ago who has been called all of these things. Even though he died in 1858, this man continues to touch the present, inspiring many people and puzzling others. His name was Leschi; eventually he became known to the Nisqually Nation and the non-Native settlers of Washington Territory as "Chief Leschi."

Use your imagination to go back in time to the early 1800s. Take away the miles and miles of highways, the countless buildings of brick and steel, the telephone poles and cell phone towers. Take all of that away. Undo the endless suburban neighborhoods. What do you see? Let the grasslands and forest take their place. The area now known as Western Washington State did not even belong to the United States when Leschi was born in 1808. When Leschi was a young man, his people were getting along fairly well with the "newcomers" in their territory. At first these settlers were British citizens who were working for the Hudson's Bay Company and living at trading posts, such as Fort Nisqually.

Leschi was probably comfortable with trying to understand people of other nations. His mother was from the Yakama Nation, east of the Cascade Mountains and his father was Nisqually. Many Native American peoples lived within a one-day journey on horseback and they all spoke different languages. Leschi's family cared for a large herd of horses. They were among the Nisqually families who lived on the grassy slopes below the mountain, Tacobet (now known as Mt. Rainier). As the glacial snow on Tacobet melted, it flowed to the sea in a river that today bears the



The detail from Isaac Stevens' map of the Indian War battlefields shows several of the key locations in which Leschi's battles were fought. The entire war with the Nisquallies was fought in a five mile radius.

name of the people who lived along its length, the Nisqually River. Leschi and his brother, Quiemuth, began to work with those who lived at Fort Nisqually.



Washington State Historical Society Collections.

How can we know?

How can we know what Leschi's life was like so long ago? We can find clues in some of the historic records and in Native oral history. We can look at some of the records of Fort Nisqually that have been preserved. These tell us that Leschi was among those Native Americans whose skills supported sheep shearing and potato harvesting at Fort Nisqually. Leschi was an expert horseman and he tended horses for the Hudson's Bay Company on the Yelm Prairie.

These pictures by unknown artists portray Leschi (left) and Quiemuth (right), the brothers chosen by territorial governor Isaac Stevens to act as Nisqually chiefs in signing the Medicine Creek Treaty.

The man in charge of the fort, William Tolmie, wrote about his experiences and memories. He remembered that Leschi and his brother "continued to be our steadfast friends" despite the strain of having the Hudson Bay Company farm and raise sheep on the Nisqually Plains. Also, a white settler named Ezra Meeker interviewed one of the women who married Leschi and she remembered him as "...always cheerful and good natured but he didn't talk much". We also know from written records that on February 19, 1858 Leschi was put to death in Steilacoom, hung by officials of Washington Territory.

What went wrong in the years before 1858?

If Leschi was respected by his own people and by those who lived and worked at Fort Nisqually, what happened between Leschi and the American government? The answer is the Oregon Land Donation Act, the Medicine Creek Treaty, and the conflict that followed, known as the Indian Wars.

More than 10,000 settlers had moved into the Pacific Northwest by 1849, driving Native American peoples from their homelands. The United States Congress decided that they wanted to move Native peoples to free up this land for settlers. They decided that they needed to negotiate treaties or agreements where tribes would "cede" or give up their lands to the U.S. government. Before these treaties occurred, however, Congress passed the Oregon Land Donation Act which "gave away" thousands of acres of Native land to settlers. If settlers farmed their land for four years in a row, they received the "title" or ownership of the land "as the free gift of a generous nation." The government was giving away land that did not belong to them. As Governor of Washington Territory, Isaac Stevens was put in charge of negotiating treaties to secure settlers' rights to the land.



Lt. Augustus Kautz would be one of those who would fight for an appeal for Leschi.



Dr. William Tolmie was a friend of Leschi's. He advised Leschi to avoid the authorities in October 1856.

Governor Stevens called together the first council or meeting of tribes. The Nisqually people were one among many there.

Stevens wanted to create an official document that would record the agreement, a treaty. And, he needed Native leaders to sign it. Stevens named Quiemuth as "chief" and Leschi as "sub chief" of the Nisqually. William Tolmie wrote that Leschi did not like Stevens' plan:

"Leschi, I have learned from both whites and Indians who were present at the treaty making at Medicine Creek in the winter of 1854-5, protested vehemently there against the reservation originally appointed for the Nisquallies."

Some say Leschi refused to sign the treaty at all and that he did not make the "X" marked next to his name.

What we know for sure is that the Treaty of Medicine Creek protected the Nisqually rights to fish. However, the treaty did not protect enough land to support Nisqually farming or to care for large herds of horses. With their way of life in danger, many Native peoples felt that they had to fight back. This included Leschi. The territory was their homeland. Without it, where would they go? How would they live?

Flight, Betrayal and Capture

In October of 1855, Leschi and his brother, Quiemuth, were plowing fields to prepare for planting. Then they heard that a militia unit named "Eaton's Rangers" was riding out to capture Leschi and take him to Olympia. They mounted their horses and fled. During the following year, Native peoples expressed their outrage at the loss of their homeland. On Halloween in 1855, along the Naches Trail, a group of Native peoples attacked a seven-man militia unit returning from Yakima. One of the men, Abram Benton Moses, was shot and killed. Was Leschi the person who shot Moses? Leschi was accused of being the murderer and Governor Stevens offered a reward for the capture, dead or alive, of Leschi, his brother Quiemuth, and other Native leaders.

COMBATANT

A combatant is a person who is involved in fighting or in armed combat as part of a war or military action.

Leschi and A.B. Moses were both considered combatants in the Indian Wars.

Leschi escaped capture for some time. Then, in 1856, Leschi's nephew, Sluggia, heard about a reward. Sluggia led authorities to his uncle and betrayed him. Soon after, Quiemuth surrendered,

giving himself up to a friend of Governor Stevens.

Meanwhile, Leschi faced a long imprisonment as Washington Territory attempted to prove that he had murdered A.B. Moses. Moses had been a military combatant, working with the United States Army at Fort Steilacoom.



The picture above shows Fort Steilacoom in the mid 1800's. This fort was where A.B. Moses served as an adjutant to the U.S. Army.

Innocent or Guilty?

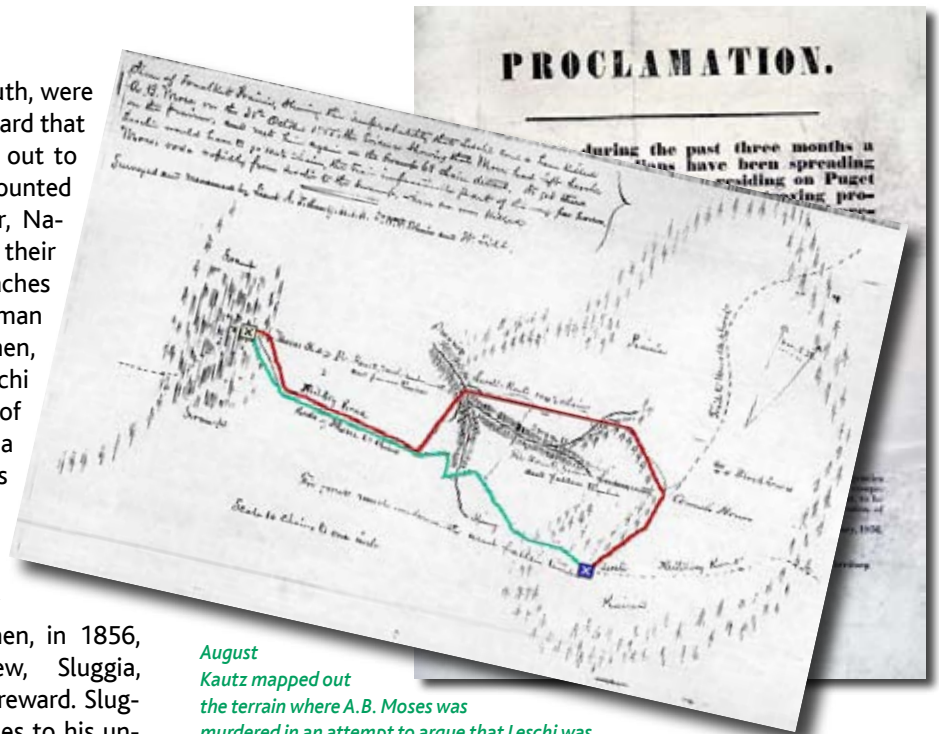
A number of non-Native people defended Leschi when he was brought to trial. The first trial, held in Steilacoom, failed to convict Leschi. Governor Stevens held a second trial in Olympia.

August Kautz and William Tolmie surveyed the scene of Moses' death and, much like investigators do today, they tried to show that Leschi could not

ACT OF WAR

An act of war is a military attack or action taken against one nation by another.

One of the arguments used in Leschi's legal defense was that Leschi was a lawful combatant and therefore could not be charged with murder during a time of war.



August Kautz mapped out the terrain where A.B. Moses was murdered in an attempt to argue that Leschi was innocent. The red line shows the route taken by A.B. Moses and other members of the militia.

have been there at that time. Nonetheless, Leschi was judged to be guilty and sentenced to hang. Leschi continued to insist he was innocent. After the execution, even the hangman said: I felt then that I was hanging an innocent man and I believe it yet."

Leschi Today

Even today, Leschi continues to be an important name in Washington State. There are dozens of public places in Washington that bear his name. Also, the largest of the seven tribal schools in Washington, located on the Puyallup Indian Reservation, proudly bears his name. Many Native American youth look to Leschi as a role model, a leader who fought to protect his people and a way of life.

In December of 2004, a Washington Historical Court of Inquiry and Justice met to discuss the issue of Leschi's innocence. Witnesses gave testimony based on historical **evidence** in front of Washington State Supreme Court Justice. In the end, this court **exonerated** Leschi for the murder of A.B. Moses.

Cynthia Iyall, a descendant of Chief Leschi and member of the Nisqually tribe, explains why the exoneration of Leschi is important:

EXONERATION

An exoneration is a freeing or clearing of accusation or guilt.

"...Not only is Chief Leschi noted in history as a murderer but also the first convicted murderer in Washington. He was known for his intelligence, for being a good father and husband and for being a man of great leadership. A man who maintained that Squally-absch (Nisqually) people retain their heritage deserves to have the truth be told... it is important to have Leschi portrayed correctly so that the future, our children, have a true sense of where they come from. They should inherit and feel the strength, pride, tenacity and intelligence that Leschi left us."



This picture shows the reburial of Leschi in July of 1895. The men featured are: (left to right) Bill Quiemuth, Luke, Opatamy, George Leschi and Wa-He-Lut.

by Patricia Pierce Erikson, Head of Education,
in collaboration with the
Chief Leschi curriculum work group

Washington State History Museum, 2006



The picture above shows the trees where the Medicine Creek treaty was signed in 1854. It was taken in 1920 by photographer Warren E. Wood.

Below is a photograph of Melissa Parr (left), Washington State Historical Society curator and Cynthia Iyall (right), descendant of Chief Leschi. They are standing in the Nisqually Wildlife Refuge to look at the site shown above. This photograph was taken on September 15, 2003 for an article about his exoneration.



Jim Bryant/Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

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