

Letters to the Editor

Central Council
Tlingit & Haida Indians of Alaska
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(907) 272-1322

Dear Editor:

It has been interesting to note the various letters to the editor and articles that have addressed themselves to the presumed recency of Alaska native land rights and the assertion of these rights by the Alaska natives against various forms of encroachment. The following is quoted from the court record in the United States Court of Claims in the case of "The Tlingit and Haida Indians of Alaska v. The United States", Docket No. 47900 (Decided October 7, 1959):

"66. Shortly following the transfer of Alaska to the United States, several councils of certain tribal chiefs were held at which objections were voiced to the transfer. As officially reported in 1869 by a special agent of the Treasury Department, who was ordered to examine into the resources of the territory and the character and habits of its various tribes:

The dissatisfaction among the tribes on account of the sale of the Territory did not arise from any special feeling of hostility, but from the fact that it was sold without their consent, they arguing that their fathers originally owned all the country, but allowed the Russians to occupy it for their mutual benefit, in that articles desired by them could be obtained from the Russians in exchange for furs; but the right of the Russians to sell the Territory, except with the intention of giving them the proceeds, is denied.

Some of the chiefs were in favor of waging war to drive the Americans out. However, the chief of the Chilkats, who were the most hostile of all the Indians, pointed out the weakness of the defense of the Indian villages against attacks of United States war vessels and advised delay to await further developments. This advice prevailed, the special agent reporting:

When the Territory was transferred to the United States, the natives had no knowledge of the people with whom they were to deal; and, having been prejudiced by the parties then residing among them, some of the more warlike chiefs were in favor of driving out the 'Boston men,' as they termed us. They held several councils to discuss the matter, and were mainly dissuaded from the measure by Shawkuthk, chief of the Tchilkat tribe, and one of the best traders and most influential and active chiefs on the coast. His tribe is the most powerful among the Koloshians, and is located beyond the reach of war vessels, the water being shallow for some distance from the village. This chief represented to the dissatisfied tribes that the new people had many gunboats, and would easily drive them out of their villages; and all would soon starve. He advised them to wait and see what the 'Boston men' would do. This course they adopted, and soon learned, in the increase of the value of their furs and the greater variety of products received, that the change was to their advantage; and in coming to Sitka in small parties to trade with the increased privileges enjoyed by that tribe, all saw additional reasons for peace."

I will be pleased to communicate other examples of early assertion of land rights by the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Southeast Alaska.

Sincerely yours,
John Borbridge, Jr.

Dr. Leon Wall

The Honorable Walter J. Hickel
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

Dear Sir:

It is the belief of Juneau ANB Camp Number 2 that it would be to the best interest of all concerned if Dr. Leon Wall, Superintendent of Chilocco Indian School, were appointed to the Office of Assistant Commissioner (Education) of BIA. We strongly urge your endorsement of this appointment.

Dr. Wall has achieved recognition throughout the educational field for his dedication to Indian education. As we are all acutely aware, the state of Indian education is at a critical stage requiring someone who is qualified, as well as personally committed to the progress of the Indian student. We agree in general with his educational philosophy, particularly his proposed continuous and highly motivated program beginning with the very young and also his concern for parental involvement in education.

His preparation and experience for the position is highly recommendable, having worked closely with Indian education in Oklahoma, North Dakota, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico, and with the many Alaska children among the 23 states with around 100 tribes who have attended Chilocco Indian School. He received his Doctorate from Oklahoma State University in Educational Administration.

We feel that you will agree that Dr. Wall is the person best qualified to serve as Assistant Commissioner (Education) of BIA.

Sincerely yours,
Jim Austin
President, Juneau ANB