

MsSC 120

John Flett Papers

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Winnipeg, Canada on August 5, 1815 to George and Margaret Whilford Flett, John Flett resided during much of his youth at the Red River Settlement in Manitoba, where his father worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. Aside from a year spent in the U.S. in Chicago and Minnesota, Flett lived continuously at the Red River Settlement from 1822 until 1841 working as a blacksmith, hunter, and trapper. In 1841, John Flett, his wife Charlotte Bird Flett, and two daughters Eliza and Arilla, were among one of 23 families who accepted an offer by the Hudson's Bay Company to settle the Puget Sound area near Fort Nisqually. Seeking in part to strengthen the British claim on the country, the Hudson's Bay Company offered to provide each family ten pounds in advance and supplies for the journey. Accompanying John Flett on the journey west were three of his brothers, David, William George, and James, and their families. Arriving in the Nisqually region in November 1841, the Red River colonists found that the promises of company support had evaporated leaving the immigrants, most of whom subsequently left for the Willamette Valley, on their own. Although John Flett and his brothers tried to settle on the Nisqually Basin without assistance, the inability to secure livestock forced them to leave the region as well. Flett subsequently filed and received a donation land claim of 640 acres of land near Forest Grove, Oregon, where he resided for 17 years from 1842 to 1859.

In 1854, Flett's long involvement in Indian/ Government relations began with his appointment as interpreter for General Joel Palmer, Superintendent of Indian Affairs of Oregon. In this capacity, Flett was instrumental in the negotiation of a number of treaties with Indian tribes following a number of conflicts in the Pacific Northwest known collectively as the Indian Wars of 1855-57. Among his noted accomplishments as interpreter and negotiator was the resettlement of the Rogue River and Umpqua tribes onto reservations. As translator, Flett accompanied Palmer on several important diplomatic missions with Native American tribes, including the legendary Walla Walla Council of June 1855. Flett's work for the Oregon Superintendency of Indian Affairs under Joel Palmer continued until 1858.

In 1859, Flett filed a claim in the South Prairie area of Pierce county near the town of Orting, becoming one of the first European-American settlers in the region. In the Washington Territory, Flett continued his work as a government Indian agent, securing a post on the Puyallup Reservation as interpreter, teacher of "industry" at the Indian Boarding School, and farmer. Flett worked on the reservation in these capacities for 18 years, from 1862 to 1880. Residing on the reservation at least four of his 18 years there, (1864-1868), Flett also worked for the Puyallup Reservation's Police Force in his last year employed as an Indian Agent.

Flett spent his remaining years on a 320-acre farm five miles east of Steilacoom, where he cultivated the land and managed a blacksmith shop until his death on December 13, 1892.

With regard to Pierce County, John Flett is notable for being the only Red River emigrant colonist to settle in the region and for his son being the first European-American child born on South Prairie in 1862.

(For biographical information, see *Washington State Genealogical and Historical Review*, Vol. 2, #2, Spring 1984)

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The papers of John Flett include correspondence, legal documents, newspaper clippings, publications, and personal notes and recollections that cover the years 1850 to 1896 and offer insight into the government's interaction with and treatment of Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest during the Nineteenth century.

The correspondence constitutes about half of the collection and dates from 1850 to 1892, covering the years of Flett's residence in the Washington Territory and State. Primarily focused on the years 1875 to 1892, the correspondence addresses a wide range of subjects that include family matters (Red River land claims, parents' estate), interaction with Native Americans and other Indian Agents (a police bribery case on the reservation, election of Chief head for Puyallup Reservation), Flett's involvement in education (Steilacoom Academy, Puyallup Indian Boarding School), daily economic affairs (sale of a cow), and interest in Flett's personal historical accounts of the Indian Wars (Eva Dye).

Especially interesting is the correspondence between Flett and General R.H. Milroy, which reveal undercurrents of tense relations between Flett and his supervisor on the Puyallup Reservation. Other letters pertaining to the Puyallup Reservation offer sobering glimpses of everyday life for the Native Americans there, as well as daily economic concerns and issues on the reservation.

Family correspondents include: Margaret Flett (Mother), William George Flett (Brother), Robert Flett (Brother), Reverend George Atkinson (Cousin), William Atkinson (Nephew), George Brown (Grandson), William Harvey (Son), Mary (Sister), and E. Gale (Daughter-in Law).

Other correspondents: General Joel Palmer, Thomas Condon, General R.H. Milroy, Seattle Police Chief Fred Minnick, A.L. Lindsley, John Meeker, J.B. Hewitt, Augustus Kautz, Sam Black, Portland writer Eva Dye, Indian Agent W.P. Gibson, Pierce County Auditor W.B. Kelley, and John Banfield.

INCLUSIVE DATES: 1850-1896

RESTRICTIONS: None

VOLUME: .75 Linear Feet

ACCESSION NO.: 1996.28

BOX 1: Correspondence, Historical Notes and Recollections

1. Correspondence: 1850, March 8, Brother William George Flett. (family matters)
2. Correspondence: 1851, August 3, Mother Margaret and Brother William George. (family matters, Sioux Indian attack)
3. Correspondence: 1852, June 30, Brother Robert at the Red River Settlement. (family matters)
4. Correspondence: 1854, April 10, Brother Robert. (family matters, Robert's anticipated departure from the Red River Settlement)
5. Correspondence: 1855, March 29, Joel Palmer. (Treaty with warring Indian tribes, Palmer's appointment)
6. Correspondence: 1869, February 13, Daughter-in-law E. Gale. (Signing over part of the family's land to husband, John Gale)
7. Correspondence: 1870, September 23, John Flett to Uncle. (family matters)
8. Correspondence: 1871, July 27, M. McCarver. (payment for land deed)
9. Correspondence: 1875, September 7, Brother Robert. (family matters)
1875, December 20, A.L. Lindsley. (notice of an arrival of items for the Puyallup Sunday (boarding?) School)
1875, December 21, A.L. Lindsley. (Shipment of books to Flett for family and Sunday School)
1875, December 21, W.H. Wadhams. (Regarding a request for books and papers for the Puyallup Sunday School, sent to a Portland merchant)
10. Correspondence: 1876, February 19, James Tyler. (Request for renewal of membership in the church)
1876, February 19, J.V. Meeker. (Informed John Flett of statements written at the request of James Tyler)
1876, March 6, J.B. Hewitt. (donation of books to the Sunday School)
1876, March 19, W.P. Gibson. (Complications arising from the non-payment of a worker on the reservation. Will?)
1876, March 20, R.H. Milroy. (U.S. Indian Agent on the Puyallup Reservation, appointment of Flett as a farmer for the Puyallup Reservation)
11. Correspondence: 1877, May 28, R.H. Milroy to Chief Joshua Sitwell. (La Hobits

- separation and reconciliation with wife)
 1877, June 22, R.H. Milroy. (The death of oxen owned by the government by a train, photocopy)
 1877, June 24, Sister Mary. (family matters)
 1877, August 23, R.H. Milroy. (Request for repairs on a boat)
 1877, September 15, R.H. Milroy. (Compensation for work on a boat)
 1877, September 28, Augustus Kautz to Mrs. Gave. (Employment in the hop fields, gamblers from Seattle tempting Indians near Steilacoom into gambling. Kaut worked for a Mr. Mitchell in Olympia)
12. Correspondence: 1878, August 24, R.H. Milroy to Ellen Flett. (Mrs. Flett's appointment as the matron of the Puyallup Indian Boarding School, photocopy)
 1878, September 11, R.H. Milroy. (Flett's resignation as laborer on the reservation and his salary as a teacher there)
 1878, September 17, R.H. Milroy. (Flett's status as teacher of "industry" at the boarding school, and his other duties on the reservation, photocopy)
 1878, October 30, Sam Black. (A payment from the Northern Pacific Railroad Company for an undescribed expense)
 1878, November 30, John Flett to R.H. Milroy. (the reservation's boarding school)
13. Correspondence, 1879, January 19, Flett, as Police Chief for the Reservation, to interested parties. (Request for the apprehension of an Indian woman, Jane Samson, on the charge of adultery)
 1879, February 3, Flett to Seattle Chief of Police Fred Minnick. (The bribery of a reservation police officer, incomplete letter)
 1879, February 6, Fred Minnick to John Flett. (Reply from Seattle Chief of Police about the bribery situation on the reservation)
 1879, October 1, Flett to R.H. Milroy. (Complaints about treatment on the reservation and policy)
 1879, Flett to R.H. Milroy. (A quarterly report of the Indian Police force on the Puyallup Reservation, including names and numbers of births and deaths as well as expenses incurred by the force)
14. Correspondence: 1880, April 14, R.H. Milroy. (Referral to Mr. Littlejohn for a possible leave of absence request)
 1880, June 22, John Henry Van Woert and Willie. (Family matters)
15. Correspondence: 1881, March 16, A.L. Lindsley. (Flett's absence at the dedication of the Puyallup Church, estrangement from Milroy)
 1881, November 2, Unidentified writer (Kautz?) to Mrs. Gave. (Writer describes a school vacation and commencement from a training school for Indian youth in Forest Grove, Oregon. A lot of

- interest in this school from various parties is noted in the letter)
16. Correspondence: 1882, January 28, John Banfield. (Land near Lakeview for the establishment of a Christian school)
 1882, March 2, M. Mann, a member of the Presbyterian Missionary for the Puyallup Reservation, to R.H. Milroy. (Mann appealing on behalf of Mrs. John Swan and Mr. and Mrs. Skinshirt for better treatment on the reservation. One of the issues involves the death and cremation of a John Gamble, whose relatives were not allowed to see his body after death)
 1882, August 22, G.H. Atkinson. (An appointment of unidentified nature set up by Flett for John Banfield)
17. Correspondence: 1883, February 6, Unidentified brother. (Family matters, Mother's will and estate, incomplete letter)
 1883, February 15, G.H. Atkinson. (Church subscriptions)
 1883, March 24, W.G. Atkinson. (Family estate and matters)
 1883, October 31, A.T. Burnell to Trustees of the Steilacoom Academy. (Expense and enrollment concerns with the academy)
 1883, December 2, Mrs. A.N. Compton. (Family property and estate)
 1883, December 10, Unidentified correspondent from Roseburg, Oregon, Compton? (Family matters, mother's inheritance, incomplete letter)
 1883, A.T. Burnell to John Flett. (Burnell's resignation from teaching)
18. Correspondence: 1884, January 6, William Atkinson. (Family estate)
 1884, January 10, Brother-in-law James Taylor. (Family matters)
 1884, January 14, Sarah Johnstone, Flett's Niece. (Family estate)
 1884, June 4, Edward M. Atkinson. (The unavailability of Reverend G. Atkinson in Portland during the month of June)
19. Correspondence: 1886, March 13, Thomas Condon. (Spaulding's expectation to return to the Nez Perce Mission in 1855)
 1886, September 1, W. B. Kelley, Pierce County Auditor. (Flett's appointment as inspector)
 1886, December 8, Edwin Eells, U.S. Indian Agent. (The Origin of the word "Tacoma", photocopied in pamphlet form)
20. Correspondence: 1887, August 24, J.F. Ellis. (Special meeting of the Western Washington Educational Society, Steilacoom Academy)
 1887, August 26, Reverend G. H. Atkinson. (Trustee Meeting of the Western Wash. Ed. Society, Steilacoom Academy)
21. Correspondence: 1888, January 5, Mr. Nord from the Fire Council, Washington D.C. (Land title)
 1888, June 20, John Banfield. (Banfield's orchard business)

- 1888, December 29, Son William Harvey. (Recovery of a family land claim in Red River given up earlier by John)
22. Correspondence: 1889, June 10, Son William Harvey. (Family matters)
 1889, June 14, Son William Harvey. (Family matters)
 1889, June 31, Son William Harvey. (Family matters)
 1889, July 3, Samuel Greene. (An Association Meeting)
 1889, July 9, C.H. Spinning, land abstract firm in Pierce county. (Land deal)
 1889, September 14, A.C. Allen, Snohomish Nursery. (Terms for acting as an agent for the nursery)
 1889, December 18, W.N. Spinning. (Misplaced promissory note)
23. Correspondence: 1890, January 8, Samuel Greene. (The sale of a missionary horse)
24. Correspondence: 1891, March 1, Grandson George Brown. (Family matters)
 1891, April 3, Mrs. K.A. Arrington. (A response to Flett's request for historical information on a nearby site where a massacre was thought to have occurred in 1856. Two copies of the first page are in the folder.
 1891, December 19, J.G. Murray. (Flett's interest in buying a farm)
25. Correspondence: 1892, January 17, Eva Dye. (Request for historical information for a story)
 1892, February 12, Eva Dye. (A story from newspaper clippings sent by Flett)
 1892, May 5, Lucian Cook. (Sale of cows)
 1892, June 1, 1892, Eva Dye. (Newspaper clippings sent by Flett)
 1892, July 15, Flett to E.E. Elles. (A letter to a neighbor demanding compensation for a calf killed by Elles' horse team)
26. Correspondence: Undated. Statement by John Flett to Mr. Plumer clarifying some historical of Flett's life.
 Undated. Incomplete letter most likely from John's Mother Margaret, as it refers to two of his brothers, Willie and James as children. Family matters are the main subjects.
 Undated. Incomplete letter from Brother William George Flett. Flett's land claim.
 Undated. Incomplete letter from Nephew William Atkinson. Chief Big Bear, a rebellion involving Indians and French "half-breeds" in 69, 70'.
 Undated. From Brother William George. Family matters.
 Undated. Two incomplete letters from Flett to Niece Mary and a woman interested in publishing some letters about the religious attitudes of the Indians. The other letter addresses family matters.
 Undated. From Nephew William Atkinson. Family matters, family land claims.
 Undated. Incomplete letter from W.J. Bowmen . Land deal.

Undated. Incomplete letter from William George Flett to John.
Family matters, land titles.

Undated. Incomplete letter from A.R. Compton. Family lands,
Brother-in-law James Taylor is mentioned.

Undated. Incomplete letter from R.H. Milroy to unidentified
recipient, although not Flett, since he is a subject discussed in the
letter. An election for head chief on the reservation, procedures.

27. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian/Government Relations in
Pacific Northwest.

Primarily consisting of undated narrative accounts and writings pertaining to Flett's experiences in the Indian Wars and encounters with prominent Indians, these notes and recollections are very fragmentary in nature despite numbers on some of the notes that may indicate the presence of a series. Very little in the way of original order was evident when this collection was accessioned. Some of the notes could also be segments of letters that were separated and mixed in with the notes over the years. What appears to be page numbers on some of the papers indicates that Flett did secondary research on the Indian Wars, possibly in preparation for his response in the Tacoma Ledger to Ezra Meeker's contention that Chief Leschi was wrongfully executed.

Some of these notes reveal an undercurrent of sympathy for the plight of Native Americans in the Northwest, with Flett often bemoaning the fact that many "friendly Indians" were killed by "rowdes" and of the inadequacy of government policy in meeting the basic needs of Indians on the reservations.

28. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian/Government Relations in
Pacific Northwest, Futility of Government Policy
Toward Indians.

29. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian/Government Relations in
Pacific Northwest, Treaties and Local
Superintendency.

30. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian Tribes and Culture,
Biographical Sketches of Prominent Indians,
Including Information on Cause of Death and
Relations with the "Whits."

31. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian Tribes and Culture,
Chief Leschi.

32. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian Tribes and Culture,
Indian Parent-Child Relations, Puyallup School.

33. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian Tribes and Culture,
Puyallup Indian Election.

34. Historical Notes and Recollections: General Notes on Indian Tribes and Culture,

Rogue River Indians.

35. Historical Notes and Recollections: Indian Wars of 1855-57.
36. Historical Notes and Recollections: Indian Wars of 1855-57.
37. Historical Notes and Recollections: A narrative on a legal issue concerning some land (owned or managed by Flett) on the reservation.
38. Historical Notes and Recollections: Selkirk and the Red River Settlements.

BOX 2: Ledgers, Legal Documents, Misc., Newspaper Clippings, Publications, Receipts, a Speech

1. Ledgers: Accounting Ledger. 1880
2. Ledgers: Workman's Time Book. (Jobs performed for Flett) 1892
3. Legal Documents: Lease of the Puyallup School Farm to John Flett, Signed by R.H. Milroy. March 1, 1877
4. Legal Documents: Oath of Office For School Director of District No. 38, Pierce County. June 19, 1886
5. Legal Documents: Property Deed, in John Flett's Name, From the Trustees of Steilacoom Academy. January 29, 1883
6. Legal Documents: Will of Charles Forrest and William Tolmie's Bond as Executor to the Will. January 22, 1852
7. Legal Documents: Will of John's Brother, James. April 1857
8. Misc.

9. Newspaper Clippings: Accounts and Stories from Early Oregon and Washington Pioneers.

Newspaper articles and stories clipped from regional newspapers including the Tacoma Weekly Globe, Tacoma Daily and Weekly Ledger, Portland Oregonian, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, the Roseburg Review, and the Catholic Sentinel. Covering the years 1884 to 1892, the clippings primarily address historical topics that include first-hand narratives of early settlers to the Pacific Northwest and personal accounts of the Indian Wars of 1855-57. An article written by Flett himself, basically a response to an article by Ezra Meeker asserting Chief Leschi's innocence of the murder of some settlers (Flett argues otherwise), also appears in these files.

10. Newspaper Clippings: Flett's Article on Chief Leschi and the Indian Wars. Tacoma Weekly Ledger, June 24, 1892.
11. Newspaper Clippings: General John Logan
12. Newspaper Clippings: Indian Culture and Politics Outside of Pacific Northwest
13. Newspaper Clippings: Indian Wars of 1855-57, General
14. Newspaper Clippings: Indian Wars of 1855-57, James Elgin's Account
15. Newspaper Clippings: Indian Wars of 1855-57, James Longmire's Account
16. Newspaper Clippings: Lewis and Clark Exploration Account.
17. Newspaper Clippings: Marcus Whitman and the Whitman Mission.

18. Newspaper Clippings: Misc.
19. Newspaper Clippings: Misc.
20. Newspaper Clippings: Misc.
21. Newspaper Clippings: Pacific University (G.H. Atkinson, a Trustee, mentioned)
22. Newspaper Clippings: Puyallup Reservation
23. Newspaper Clippings: Reverend Talmage
24. Newspaper Clippings: Timber Culture

25. Publications: Carmina Sanctorum, Descriptive Pamphlet and Specimen Pages of the
New Church Hymn Book. Undated
26. Publications: Extracts from the Code of Washington Territory. Undated
27. Publications: The Home Missionary. August and November 1892
28. Publications: In Memoriam, Rev. George H. Atkinson. 1889
29. Publications: Marcus Whitman, M.D., Proofs of His Work in Saving Oregon To the
United States, and in Promoting the Immigration of 1843. Rev. M. Eells.
1883
30. Publications: Many Voices. Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, D.D. Undated
31. Publications: Pentecostal Hymns No.1, A Winnowed Collection. 1896
32. Publications: State of Washington General Election Laws. 1891
33. Publications: Washington State Board of Horticulture. 1892
34. Publications: Washington State Historical Society, A Statement of Its Organization;
Its Constitution, By-Laws, Officers, and "A Word To the Reader."
1891
35. Receipts: 1879-1892.
36. Speech: Address Delivered by Elwood Evans on the Puyallup Indian Reservation.
1892