

Letter addendum: Memorial to the Hon. Frank Oliver

By **Editor** - February 12, 2013

Dear Sir and Chief, We, the undersigned Chiefs of the Shuswap, Couteau or Thompson, Okanagan, Lillooet, Stalo or Lower Fraser, Chilcotin, Carrier and Tahltan tribes in the Interior of British Columbia, assembled at Spences Bridge, B.C., this tenth day of May, 1911, hereby greet you, and make known to you as follows:"

That in this letter we desire to speak to you heart to heart, and as man to man about those things which concern us most. We do not come to you with lies in our hearts, nor in any scheming way, but simply with plain statements of facts, and ask you to listen to us patiently. We do not wish to get the best of anybody, but just to obtain our rights, and the justice we believe we are entitled to. We ask for the same treatment that has been accorded to other Canadian Indians in the settlement of our land question, and in other matters. We know your government is strong, and has the power to treat us who are weak as it suits them; but we expect good and not evil from them. We regard you as a father appointed to look after our interests, that we may not be oppressed and imposed upon by others. We believe the settlement of our grievances will result in benefit to the whites of this country, as well as to us.

You already know most of those grievances we complain of, and the position we take regarding them. Some of our chiefs have written you from time to time, and several have visited the government in Ottawa within the last ten years. Your government has received petitions and complaints from the chiefs of the Thompson tribe in 1903 and 1909. The Declaration of the Shuswap, Thompson, and Okanagan tribes, July, 1910. The memorial of the same tribes presented to Sir Wilfred Laurier at Kamloops, August, 1910. Then Mr. McDougal, Special Commissioner, visited us twice, and no doubt sent in a report to your government as to our condition. Consequently we need not reiterate everything here.

You know how the B.C. government has laid claim to all our tribal territories, and has practically taken possession of same without treaty and without payment. You know how they also claim the reservations, nominally set apart for us. We want to know if we own any land at all in this country. As a last chance of settling our land question with the B.C. government, we visited them in Victoria on the third of March last, and presented them with a petition (*a copy of which we believe has been sent your government*), asking for a speedy settlement. Forty of us from the Interior waited on the government along with the Coast Indians. In this letter we wish to answer some of the statements made to us by the B.C. government at this interview.

Premier McBride, speaking for the B.C. government, said "We Indians had no right or title to the unsurrendered lands of the province." We can not possibly have rights in any surrendered lands, because in the first place they would not be ours if we surrendered them, and secondly, we have never surrendered any lands. This means that the B.C. government asserts that we have no claim or title to the lands of this country. Our tribal territories which we have held from time immemorial, often at cost of blood, are ours no longer if Premier McBride is correct. We are all beggars, and landless in our own country. We told him through one of our chiefs we were of the opposite opinion from him, and claimed our countries as hitherto. We asked that the question between us be submitted for settlement to the highest courts, for how otherwise can it now be settled? His answer was: "There was no question to settle or submit to the courts." Now how can this be. That there is a question is self evident, for Premier McBride takes one side of it, and we take the other. If there was no question, there would have been nothing to talk about; and nothing to take sides on. We wish to tell you, Chief, this question is very real to us. It is a live issue. The soreness in our hearts over this matter has been accumulating these many years, and will not die until either we are all dead, or we obtain what we consider a just settlement. If a person takes possession of something belonging to you, surely you know it, and he knows it, and land is a thing which cannot be taken away, and hidden. We see it constantly, and everything done with it must be more or less in view. If we had had nothing, or the British Columbia Government had taken nothing from us, then there would be nothing to settle, but we had lands, and the British Columbia Government has taken them and we want a settlement for them. Surely then, it is clear there is a question to be settled, and how is it to be settled except in the courts?

Mr. McBride made the statement, "We Indians were well satisfied with our position, and that the present agitation among us was fomented by certain whites." We deny this statement completely "it is not true. The fact of our visiting the Victoria Government "many of us from long distances, and at great expense" shows that we are not satisfied. As we have stated before, we never had at any time been entirely satisfied with our position, and now that the country is being more and more settled up, and we becoming more restricted in our liberties year by year, we are very far from satisfied. Why should we be satisfied? What promises made to us when the first whites came to this country have been broken. Many of us were driven off our places where we had lived and camped because these spots were desirable for agriculture, and

the Government wanted them for white settlers. This was done without agreement with us, and we received no compensation. It was also in direct opposition to the promises made to us by the first whites, and Government officials, that no white men would be allowed to locate on any place where Indians were settled or which were camping stations and gardens. Thus were we robbed by the Government, and driven off many of our places by white settlers (*backed by the Government*) or coaxed off them with false promises. Then we were promised full freedom to hunt, fish and travel over our country unrestricted by the regulations of the whites, until such time as our lands were purchased or at least until treaties were made with us. Another promise broken, and so on with all. We can tell you all of them if you want to know, and prove them through witnesses still living. What of Governor Seymour's promises made to the Lower Fraser Indians who convened at his request purposely to hear his message to them concerning the proposed policy of the whites towards the Indians of this country? They rank with the other early promises all broken. This is enough to show that there is a sufficient reason for our dissatisfaction and also that it required no white men to point out these things to us, and urge us to be dissatisfied. Even if it be true that certain white men help us at the present day in our agitation to obtain our rights by doing writing for us, etc., why should Mr. McBride find fault with them? Did not Governor Seymour and other great men of the Province in early days state to us that the whites had come here to help us and be brothers to us? Why should he denounce these men for doing what his predecessors, and we believe, also the Queen, said was the right thing to do? We have learned that the whites do not keep their word (*especially when it is not written word*). Only those very few whites who help us appear to be trying to keep the white man's promises made to use by the white chiefs of this country in early days. They alone appear to uphold the honor of their race. We assure you, Chief, the present agitation among us over these matters is simply the culmination of our dissatisfaction which has been growing with the years. With changing conditions, greater pressure and increasing restrictions placed on us, we had at last to organize, and agitate. Either this, or go down and out, for our position has been gradually becoming unbearable. We have not been hasty. It has never been our policy to jump at conclusions. We have never believed in acting without full knowledge, nor making charges without full proof. Although we have known, yet we have waited a long time for the hand of the British Columbia Government to be shown so we could read it without any doubt. Some of our chiefs, distrustful and impatient, many times during these long years, one way and another, through the Indian office, through Victoria, through Ottawa and in other ways, have attempted to get matters concerning us straightened, but they have always been baffled in their efforts. Others, hopeless and disgusted, would not try. Then we were ignorant and groping in the dark; now we are more enlightened and can see things clearer. Like conditions drove us of the Interior, and the Indians of the Coast, to organize and agitate independently and unknown to each other. It is only lately we have joined forces to try and obtain a settlement of all questions concerning us.

Mr. McBride gave a partial explanation of how the Reserve System of British Columbia originated. This does not concern us. What we know and are concerned with is the fact that the British Columbia Government has already taken part of our lands without treaty with us, or payment of any compensation, and had disposed of them to settlers and others. The remaining lands of the country, the Government lays claim to as their property, and ignores our title. Out of our lands they reserved small pieces here and there, called Indian Reserves, and allowed us the occupancy of them. These even they claim as their property, and threaten in some places to take away from us, although we have been in continuous occupancy and possession. No proper understanding was arrived at, nor proper agreements made between ourselves and the British Columbia Government, when the reserves were laid off. Not one of us understood this matter clearly nor in the same light the British Columbia Government seems to have done. Things were not explained to us fully, and the Government's motives appear to have been concealed, for they were understood differently by the various chiefs. We never asked for part of our country to be parceled out in pieces and reserved for us. It was entirely a government scheme originating with them. We always trusted the Government, as representing the Queen, to do the right thing by us, therefore we never have opposed any proposition of the Government hastily and without due consideration. We thought, although things appeared crooked, still in the end, or before long, they might become straight. To-day were the like to occur, or any proposition be made to us by the Government, we would not trust them; we would demand a full understanding of everything, and that all be made subjects of regular treaty between us and them.

Mr. McBride claimed many reserves are larger than the Indians need, and much of the land remains unoccupied. We of the Interior claim this is not so. We think we at least should have as much land of our own country to farm as is allowed to white settlers (*viz.: 160 acres*), or as much as our Indian friends of Eastern Washington, Idaho, and Montana retain on the opening of their reserves (*viz.: from 80 to 160 acres of the best agricultural land available, chosen by themselves, for each man, woman and child. At the time the Indian Reserves of British Columbia were set apart, and for long afterwards, the British Columbia Government allowed 320 acres of land to each white person pre-empting land from them. As at this time our population was much greater than now, the amount of reservation land per capita would be smaller in proportion, and the farce of the Reserves being adequate when set apart all the more apparent.*) We ask Mr. McBride to state the amount of good land in the Reserves which can be successfully cultivated by us under present conditions. Why should we be expected to make a good living on four or five acres of land, whilst in 1881 and later 320 acres was deemed none too much for a white man? Pasture need not be taken into consideration at that date, as then the unfenced range country formed a sufficient pasturage, and was used equally as much by whites as by Indians. A few of the reserves may appear large on paper, but what amount of good land is in them? Most of them consist chiefly of more or less barren side hills, rock slides, timbered bottoms hard to clear, and arid flats devoid of water for irrigation. In very few places do we have any chance to have good farms, and they must of necessity be small in area. Either the land or the water is lacking. In many places even the total acreage of the reserves is exceedingly small. All parts of all reserves known to us are used by us one

way and another as fully as possible, considering our present disadvantageous position, and the nature of the lands. If by occupancy Mr. McBride means actual living on or cultivating of each part of reserve, then we plead guilty to our inability to occupy the greater part of them, for we cannot live on and cultivate rocks, side hills and places where we can get no water. Even in many places that we do occupy fully, and cultivate continually, we lose our crops altogether, or in part, every year, owing to whites taking the irrigation water, and stopping us from using it when we most require it under the claim of prior rights to the water. In this they are sustained by the British Columbia Government who recognize their water records as superior to ours.

Mr. McBride also said the Indians share in enjoying the advantages arising from building of railroads, wagon roads, trails and other Government utilities. Perhaps we do, but have we not assisted in building them and have they not been built up from the direct robbery of ourselves, and our country? We claim these are rightfully ours, and yet we are made to pay for using them. Had we never assisted in the making of these railways and roads; had his Government paid us for all our timber that was used, and all our fifty millions of gold taken out of this country, and all our salmon that has been caught, and destroyed, and many other things which might be mentioned that went into the making of these roads; had we been paid only a small share of all this wealth derived from the destruction (*in most cases*), not the improvement of our country; or had the country been bought from us, so it were actually the property of the whites to destroy or do with as they pleased, then the British Columbia Government might speak of our sharing in the benefits of roads to which they infer we are no way entitled. Good trails we had in plenty before the whites came. The whites are indebted to us for having them ready made when they came, and allowing them to use them without charge. The wagon roads benefit us but little, for most of them do not go to our reserves, and besides, we have no chance to have much produce to haul over them. Railroads have not helped us much. They cut up our little farms, and give us no adequate compensation. They have killed many of us, and also many of our horses and cattle since their advent. Besides they act as highways for robber whites, and all kinds of broken men who frequently break into our houses and steal from us.

We never asked that any of these things be built so we could share in them, and we well know they were not built for our benefit. Government utilities such as the police, for instance, we see no benefit in, for they are used to force laws on us we never agreed to and some of which we consider injurious and unjust.

This, then, appears to be all the British Columbia Government can claim to have done for us, viz.: they let us use a few inferior spots of our own country to live on, and say we ought to be grateful to them for giving us such large places. They made some roads of various kinds for themselves, and say we ought to be grateful for being allowed to share in the use of them. We ask is this the brotherly help that was promised us in early days, or is it their compensation to us for the spoliation of our country, stealing of our lands, water, timber, pastures, our game, fish, roots, fruits, etc., and the introduction of diseases, poverty, hard labor, jails, unsuitable laws, whisky, and ever so many other things injurious to us?

Now you have the British Columbia Government's statements re these questions, and you have our statements. We leave it to you to decide who has done wrong. We or they. We desire a complete settlement of our whole land question, and the making of treaties which will cover everything of moment to us in our relations between the whites of this country as represented by their Governments, and we as Indian tribes. As the British Columbia Government through Mr. McBride has refused to consider any means of settling these matters legally, we call on the Dominion Government at Ottawa—the central and supreme Government of Canada to have the question of title to our lands of this country brought into court and settled. We appeal to you for what we consider justice, and what we think you would yourself consider justice if you were in our position. Who has the power to help us in this matter? Only the Federal Government, and we look to them. As the building of railways, and settlement in this country is proceeding at a rapid pace, we wish to press on you the desirability (*for the good of all concerned*) of having these matters adjusted at as early a date as possible. In the hope that you will listen to our earnest appeal, we, the underwritten chiefs, subscribe our names in behalf of our people.

- JOHN CHILAHITSA, Chief Douglas Lake Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- BAPTISTE CHIANUT, Chief Nkamip Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- JOHN LEOKONAGHEN, Chief Ashnola Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- CHARLES ALLISON, Chief Hedley Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- FRANCOIS PAKELPITSA, Representative Penticton Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- BAPTISTE LOGAN, Chief Vernon Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- JOHN INHAMCHIN, Chief Chopaca Band, Okanagan Tribe.
- ALEXANDER CHILAHITSA, Hereditary Head Chief Okanagan Tribe.
- LOUIS GHLEGHLEGHKEN, Chief Kamloops Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- BASIL DAVID, Bonaparte Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- FRANCOIS SELPAGHEN, Chief Shuswap Lake Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- BAPTISTE WILLIAM, Chief Williams's Lake Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- SAMSON SOGHOMIGH, Chief Alkali Lake Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- JAMES CAPEL, Chief Clinton Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- THOMAS PETLAMITSA, Chief Deadman's Creek Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- MAJOR CHESCHETSELST, Chief Leon Creek Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- ANTOINE CHELAHAUTKEN, for Chief Etienne, Chase Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- JOSEPH ISTCHUKWAKST, Chief High Bar Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- FRANK TAIMESKET, for Chief Samuel, Canim Lake Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- LOGSHOM, Chief Soda Creek Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- AUGUST JAMES, for Chief Maximin, Halowt Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- ANDRE, Chief North Thompson Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- LOUIS CHUIESKA, Captain Spallumcheen Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- JOHN INROIESKET, Acting Chief Canoe Creek Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- JOSEPH TSEOPIKEN, Chief Dog Creek Band, Shuswap Tribe.
- ADOLPHE THOMAS, for Chief Dennis Skelepautken, Fountain Band.
- ROBERT KUSTASELKWA, Chief Pavillion Band.
- JOHN NELSON, Chief Quesnel Band, Carrier Tribe.
- JAMES INRAITESKET, Chief Lillooet Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- JAMES JAMES, Chief Seton Lake Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- JOHN KOIUSTGHEN, Chief Pasulko Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- DAVID EKSIEPALUS, Chief Zezil No. 2, Lillooet Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- JAMES STAGER, Chief Pemberton Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- CHARLES NEKAULA, Chief Nkempts Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- JAMES SMITH, Chief Tenas Lake Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- HARRY INKASUSA, Chief Samakwa Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- PAUL ROITELAMUGH, Chief Skookum Chuck Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- AUGUST AKSTONKAIL, Chief Port Douglas Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- JEAN BAPTISTE, Chief No. 1, Cayuse Creek Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- DAVID SKWINSTWAUGH, Chief Bridge River Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- PETER CHALAL, Chief Mission Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- THOMAS BULL, Chief Slahoos Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- THOMAS JACK, Chief Anderson Lake Band, Lillooet Tribe.
- SIMO NIZDE, Representative Anahem Band, Chilcotin Tribe.
- DICK ANAHM, Representative Risky Creek Band, Chilcotin Tribe.
- NANOK, Head Chief Tahltan Tribe.
- PIERRE KENPESKET, Chief of the Kinbaskets, Kootenay, Shuswap Tribe.
- WILLIAM MAKELTSE, Chief Thompson Band, Couteau or Thompson Tribe.
- ANTONE YAAPSKINT, Chief Coldwater Band, Thompson Tribe.
- MICHEL SHAKOA, Chief Quilchena Creek Band, Thompson Tribe.
- WILLIAM LUKLUKPAHGHEN, Chief Petit Creek Band, Thompson Tribe.
- GEORGE EDWARD INKWOITUNEL, Chief Potatoe Garden Band, Thompson Tribe.
- CHARLES KOWETELLST, Chief Kanaka Bar Band, Thompson Tribe.
- BENEDICT INGHULETS, Chief Keefer's Band, Thompson Tribe.
- SHOOTER SUTPAHGHEN, Chief Nicola Lake Band, Thompson Tribe.
- PAUL HEHENA, Chief Spuzzum Band, Thompson Tribe.

- *GEORGE SROI (?) Chief North Bend Band, Thompson Tribe.*
 - *JONAH KOLAGHAMT, Representative Coutlee Band, Thompson Tribe.*
 - *JOHN WHISTAMNITSA, Chief Spence's Bridge Band, Thompson Tribe.*
 - *SIMON WAUESKS, Chief Ashcroft Band, Thompson Tribe.*
 - *JOHN TEDLENITSA, Chief Pekaist Band, Thompson Tribe.*
 - *MICHEL INHUTPESKET, Chief Marin Island, Stalo or Lower Fraser Tribe.*
 - *PIERRE AY(?)SSUK, Chief Cat's Landing and Hope Band, Lower Fraser Tribe.*
 - *JAMES KWIMTGHEL, Chief Yale Band, Lower Fraser Tribe.*
 - *HARRY YELEMITSA, Chief Agassiz Band, Lower Fraser Tribe.*
 - *HARRY STEWART, Chief Chilliwack Band, Lower Fraser Tribe.*
 - *JOE KWOKWAPEL, Chief Quoquapol Band, Lower Fraser Tribe.*
 - *CHARLES JACOB, Chief Matsqui Band, Lower Fraser Tribe.*
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