

THE LAST OF HIS TRIBE — QUINABY

Henry Brown

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ED. STATESMAN—A few days since I noticed a short paragraph in reference to the death of Quinaby, who was well known about Salem for the last thirty-five years. Quinaby's father was a Chemeketa Indian, and his mother a Chemawa Indian; consequently, Quinaby really represented both of those clans of the Calapooia tribe. The Chemeketas lived in Salem prairie and on Mill creek, but there (sic.) rendezvous in the winter was on Chemeketa prairie, where Salem now stands.

The Chemawa's lived about ten miles below Chemeketa prairie, at the old Methodist Mission, and circulated from the Willamette to the Cascade mountains, but not going further north than the Mollalla river. It was the custom of these inland tribes, (so I was informed in an early day) to purchase all of the dried salmon that they consumed of the Indians who resided at the Willamette Falls, now Oregon City, paying for the same in camas, dried meats and pelts. It is well known to all settlers of the Willamette valley that but very few salmon succeed in surmounting the falls at Oregon City, therefore the Indians living at that place had a monopoly of that highly necessary species of food for the Indians, and at certain seasons a brisk trade was carried on among them.

Quinaby, as near as it can be ascertained, was between 70 and 80 years of age, and told the writer once that he distinctly remembered the first white man who settled in the Willamette valley, and that was on what is now known as French Prairie. It was most probably Mr. Gervais who was one of the first, if not the first, white man who settled there. When the missionaries moved the Indian School to Chemeketa prairie, they found Quinaby among the Indian residents, and that he was then married as he stated to the missionaries, and that was nearly 40 years ago, and when writer came to Salem thirty-one years ago he was called "Old Quinaby" then. He has resided about Salem ever since, except a short time that

he was compelled to reside on the reservation at Grande Ronde, in Polk county, but he managed always to obtain long leaves of absence, and then he would hie to Salem, his old home.

In the winter of 1847 all of the Chemeketa and Chemawa Indians formed their winter camp in Salem. The camp commenced at the northern edge of Marion Square and extended down to North Mill creek, where Babcock's furniture shop now stands, and back to the river and mouth of the creek. There were about 400 all told and they suffered a great deal during the winter. The measles broke out among them which was very fatal from their mode of doctoring the malady. It was simply sweat houses and a plunge in the ice cold water of the creek. There was at least one half of the encampment died. The burying ground was in the flat above the Capitol Lumbering Mill where the unoccupied warehouse now stands. The Indians suffered greatly from the want of food and Dr. W. H. Willson, J.L. Parrish, L.B. Judson, James Davidson and my grandfather, Thomas Cox and others contributed and gave them some beeves, also Dr. Willson made a speech to them, trying to persuade them to abandon the suicidal mode of doctoring. The Cayuse war was being carried on at that time, but these Indians not for a moment demonstrated any hostility whatever to the whites.

These clans of Indians now rapidly faded away, and Quinaby who in youth looked with wonder upon the first white man and his nation quite numerous lived to see his own people disappear as the morning fog, while the whites settled the valley by thousands, chase away the wild game, plow the earth, erect houses, build "fire boats," (steamboats) that would run against the current faster than he could paddle his little canoe; saw railroads that went faster than his pony could run. All of these great changes transpired in his one short life, and he was left alone as the last of his tribe. At times he would sit for hours studying

over these great changes, but not with the bitterness of most of the aborigines of our country. His lot was cast in more pleasant times; no devastating war was waged upon him and his people. These great changes were worked almost imperceptibly, but certain. The white people treated him kindly, and he naturally felt a kindred feeling as was possible for his nature, as one of his sisters had married a white man. He saw her children grow up under the influence of civilization and they acquired knowledge of things that to him were as a sealed book, as past beyond his finding out.

One by one his people passed away and for several years he wandered about Salem with none of his blood left to console his declining years. As lonely as he must have been, he always had a cheerful word to any of his acquaintances, and there were scores. To greet him with, "good morning, Mr. Quinaby," always was replied to heartily, and a warm and hearty shake of the hand was the immediate result. It pleased him greatly to call him "Mr." as he had his vanities as well as other people.

Quinaby did not take to civilization, as many would have supposed. He preferred to live in a camp instead of a house, and when his larder was replenished he would not perform any manual labor, and as he told the writer, it made him "tired to work, and Indian no like to get tired." Well, there is the secret of many white men's procrastinations in that remark, and a great principal of truth.

On last Christmas Quinaby went out calling as white folks do, and at every place he went he, as in duty bound, ate heartily, and the consequence was that by the time he reached home he had such a load on his stomach that Nature was unable to relieve him and he died about 9 o'clock A.M. on the morning of the 26th of December 1878.

As an old acquaintance of over thirty years standing, I can say that I have never known of him doing a dishonest act, but he always exerted his influence among the Indians to induce them to obey the white man's laws.

Quinaby, close clihiam, mika close tillicum.



CHIEF QUINABY AS HE LOOKED IN HIS LATTER DAYS. (courtesy of Ladd & Bush Quarterly)