

## Background and History of the

# Cowlitz Tribe

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Cowlitz is the name for the Indian nation and the river drainage which is the aboriginal home of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe located in the interior southwest of what is now the State of Washington. The Cowlitz are a Salish language speaking people. The tribe of 2000 members incorporates four historical divisions which contribute to the rich cultural heritage of the people:

- The **Upper Cowlitz** located in the north-eastern part of Cowlitz territory call themselves Teitnapum.
- The **Lower Cowlitz** located in the central and southern part call themselves "Stlpulimuhkl" (pronounced Sht-poo-lum).
- The **Lewis River Cowlitz** located in the east, and
- The **Mountain Cowlitz** located in the west.

Cowlitz aboriginal territory encompasses 2.4 million acres. The towns of Kelso (Tiahanakshih), Olequa (Kamatsih), and Toledo (Tawamiluhawihl), Washington are built on original Cowlitz village sites.

The Cowlitz Indian Tribe has a long and vigorous political history. An important part of that history is the evolution from a strong system of chiefs, to an elective presidential system in the early 20th century; and a constitutional elective Tribal Council system after 1950. Chief How-How (Circa 1815), Chief Kiscox (Circa 1850), Chief Umtux (Circa 1850), Chief Scanewa (Circa 1855), Chief Richard Scanewa (Circa 1860) and Chief Antoine Stockum [Atwin Stokum] (1878) led the Cowlitz in the 19th century. Twentieth century figures include Chief Baptiste Kiona (1912), President Dan Plamondon (1921), President John Ike Kinswa (1922), Chairman John B. Sareault (Circa 1925), Chairman Jas. E. Sareault (Circa 1930), Chairman Manual L. Forrest (1950), Chairman Joseph Cloquet (1959), Chairman Clifford Wilson (1961) and Chairman Roy Wilson (1974).

The Cowlitz Tribe remained more tightly and cohesively organized than other tribes located in what is now western Washington State well into the 20th century. Though geographical isolation reinforced

cultural cohesion, Cowlitz maintained active economic, trade and political relations with neighboring Indian tribes, European traders and eventually with Washington State and the United States governments. For a decade in the middle 19th century relations grew sporadically violent as treaty negotiations with the United States failed and Americans began to settle in Cowlitz territory.

The year 1906 marked the beginning of renewed Cowlitz efforts to establish formal political relations with the United States. The main emphasis of Cowlitz leaders was to establish a permanent territory for the benefit and use of members and to establish mutual recognition between the United States and the Cowlitz. Despite the negotiation of two separate treaties in the middle 1800's, the United States Congress failed to ratify the first treaty and the second was unacceptable to the Cowlitz. The collapse of treaties resulted in the United States government taking territory and resources without the benefit of Cowlitz agreement. Though it had extensive relations with all parts of Cowlitz, by the 1970s the United States government did not officially recognize the Cowlitz Indian Tribe.

Cowlitz Chief Atwin Stockum led his nation into what became generations of legal and political disputes with the United States when in 1906 he sued the United States government for the return of several parcels of land. Since the laws of the United States require that an Indian tribe obtain the consent of the Congress to sue the United States government for land claims it was necessary for the Cowlitz to get a Congressman to draft and introduce legislation. Between 1915 and 1927, the Cowlitz were successful getting bills introduced recognizing the Cowlitz Indian Tribe's claims and dropping the U.S. government's sovereign immunity to law suit. None of the twelve separate pieces of legislation introduced was enacted by the Congress.

Throughout the twentieth century the Cowlitz Tribe defended its territorial and resource interests on its own. Though the Bureau of Indian Affairs superintendent claimed responsibility for protecting the Cowlitz, and gave assistance from time-to-time, on land, jurisdiction and resource matters, the United States government joined the opponents to Cowlitz interests.

In 1920, the State of Washington began to enforce its salmon fishing and other wildlife regulations against Indians. The Cowlitz became ensnared in confrontations with Washington State enforcement officials over the right of Cowlitz tribal members to take fish from the Cowlitz River and to hunt deer and other wildlife. After years of Cowlitz members being arrested by state

enforcement officials, the Frank Wannassay initiated a Cowlitz Tribal petition on October 15, 1934 calling on the State of Washington to stop meddling with Cowlitz members gathering food for their families. His petition also proposed a permit system which would help the State of Washington to identify Cowlitz tribal members. The petition resulted in the Washington State Department of Game issuing "Indian Identification Cards" to Cowlitz Indians - bringing a long term conflict between the State of Washington and the Cowlitz Tribe to an end.

In the 1950s, the Cowlitz acted to prevent the City of Tacoma from constructing a hydroelectric dam on the Cowlitz River above the current town of Mossyrock and near the site of the ancient Cowlitz village of Taoup. Construction of the dam threatened inundation of tribal cemeteries and the property of several members of the tribe. The law suit filed against the City of Tacoma initially succeeded in preventing construction of the dam, but failed after the suit was appealed by the city. Dams were constructed and the back-waters flooded tribal cemeteries and the individual properties.

After the United States set up the Indian Claims Commission in 1946, the Cowlitz land-claims efforts shifted from the Congress to the new commission. On August 8, 1951 the Cowlitz leaders entered a petition (Docket No. 218) for claims against the United States government. On April 12 1973, the Commission issued its findings in favor of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe. It decided that the United States government had indeed deprived the Cowlitz Tribe *"of its aboriginal Indian title as of March 20, 1863, without payment of any compensation therefore."* (25 Indian Claims Commission at 451-452). The total area of Cowlitz territory recognized by the Commission was 1.66 million acres - about two-thirds of the actual aboriginal territory. The settlement offered by the U.S. was fifty cents for each acre taken.

Throughout the last two decades of the century, the Cowlitz continued efforts to establish formal political relations with the United States government.

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