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MEMALOOSE ISLAND    STORY OF INTEREST

Few Klickitat county residents are familiar with the history of Memaloose Island, or "City of the Dead," which contains 5 or 6 acres of unsurveyed land and is located in the Columbia river not a great distance below Lyle. On this island is a monument marking the last resting place of a white man, who chose to be laid to rest on the Indian burial ground. The monument always excites curiosity, and is of great interest to the general public.

The following interesting historical sketch of the island and the monument, written by Mrs. Lulu D. Crandall of The Dalles, and published in The Dalles Optimist, is of interest:

Memaloose Island was set apart by the general land office for the use of the Warm Spring Indians as a burial ground. This "Memaloose Island," or "Island of the Dead," contains about 5 or 6 acres, which has never been surveyed and has been used by the Columbia River Indians as a burial ground for no one knows how long.

Years ago there were large "dead houses" on the island, built of cedar. On shelves in these houses were the remains of Indians that dated back to ages long before any white man had visited the "Oregon Country."

The older "Memalooses" had sinew-wrapped bows and stone pointed arrows deposited with them, while guns and knives of modern times indicated later dates for other remains.

Thousands of Indians from all parts of the Rocky mountain region visited The Dalles and the "tum-water" of the Columbia for the salmon fishing and for the purpose of trading with each other and spent the winter here, where the winters were usually mild and fire-wood plenty. Many tribes brought their dead long distances to place them where there was no intrusion from animals, as the island was almost in mid-stream. The main channel of the river, at certain times of the year, runs between the island and the Oregon shore.

The reason for the reservation of the island was by request of the Warm Springs Indians themselves. They had heard of a move on the part of some men to take it over for fishing purposes. Those Indians wished to preserve the place from such destruction and asked the agent at the reservation, James L. Cowan, to see the Indian commissioner

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and get an order to reserve the island for the purposes of a "Memaloose Illahee," and in the course of a short time, Surveyor-General Habersham issued the order or requested.

The island was the largest and best preserved of all the "Memaloose Illahees" of the Northwest until the building of the railroad. There was very heavy rock work opposite the island and a construction camp of Contractor Hallet's forces, where there were hundreds of men employed for many months.

These men visited Memaloose Island every Sunday and the dead-houses were stripped of everything worth carrying away as a relic or a curio.

A story is well remembered of one, who had not the respect for the last resting place of generation's of aborigines long gone before, sacked up in gunny sacks the whitened bones and skulls lying on the ground, hailed a passing river steamer for shipment to The Dalles. The purser, being told of the contents, billed the sacks of bones as "Klickitats, Knocked Down."

The government has long fingers, and the desecrator of the ancient "Memalooses" had preemptory orders to return his "Knocked Down Klickitats" to their old resting place on the island, "P. D. Qu.," which was done.

The first Indian relic ever taken from Memaloose Island by a white man, was a skull which was to be used in the diagnosis of an accident said to have occurred at Fort Dalles in 1832. The story is recalled that Lieutenant Cabanos, stationed at Fort Dalles, was thrown from his horse and sustained a fracture of the skull. The army surgeons considered the case hopeless, but Dr. C. B. Brooks, a civilian physician at The Dalles, tried to persuade the army surgeons to trephine Lieutenant Cabanos' skull which, he insisted, would save his life. Dr. Brooks said if he only had a skull he could explain his idea of the case to the army surgeons and persuade them to try the operation.

Dr. Brooks knew an old steamboat man, who took him in his boat to Memaloose Island, where there were any number of fine skulls, glittering white, grinning on the sand. Dr. Brooks wanted to take away an entire skeleton, but the steamboat man would not permit anything but the skull.

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Dr. Brooks demonstrated to the army surgeons the correctness of his idea with the stolen skull and they trephined Lieutenant Cabanos' skull and saved his life.

The high water of 1894 covered the island so much that the bones bleaching on the rocks and sands and the dead-houses were washed off and nothing now remains but Vic Trevitt's monument.

Trevitt was a pioneer of Wasco county and came to Fort Dalles about the time of the gold excitement. He was an eccentric individual and often expressed himself to his intimate friends that he did not know what the future state was, but that he would take a chance on going on with the Indians and that he wanted to be laid on Memaloose Island.

Trevitt died in San Francisco in January, 1883. His remains were sent here to be disposed of on Memaloose Island as he had desired.

The river was closed at the time with ice and heavy snow had fallen; and the body was placed in a snow bank, until the river should open and steamboat traffic be resumed.

It was not until late in February that his friend, Frank T. Dodge, who was at that time agent for the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, could secure a boat for the purpose of carrying out Trevitt's request.

The passenger steamer, "Hassalo," was offered by the company for this purpose, and one Sunday morning the boat was loaded with friends of Trevitt and the local Masons, of which organization he had long been a member, and steamed down the river to the "Island of the Dead," 13 miles down the river.

Here the burial services of Masonry was read by the Master, W. S. Myers.

The casket was placed in a vault of laid stone 8 feet square, upon which a chaste granite monument 13 feet high, set in steps of three, resting on the rock house or vault.

The granite was brought from Granite Point on the Snake river, and it was the gift of his friends to honor his memory.

The writer was present.