Connell's Prairie

The Muckleshoot, First People Of Connell's Prairie

For thousands of years prior to the influx of pioneer settlers and government policies that restricted Native Americans to reservations, people travelled freely. Indian families would gather together in cedar long houses for the winter, and then separate into smaller groups to hunt and gather on the prairies and in the mountains, or fish and clam by the Puget Sound during the summer. Muckleshoot families, which descended from several regional villages or bands, would travel by horseback on trails, such as the Naches. Many of these trails became the foundation for the roads we use today. Connell's Prairie was one of several prairies in the northwest that were maintained by controlled burns started by local bands. The prairies were then used as forage for horses and wild game, and to gather berries, camas roots , basketry materials, and other natural resources on the open areas.

Michael Connell, First Pioneer Settler

Michael Connell , born in Ireland in 1828, sought a better life and immigrated to the United States. He declared his intent to become a US citizen, enlisted in the US Army, and was posted to Ft. Steilacoom in Oregon Territory. When he was discharged, he and his friend and fellow soldier, James Williamson from Virginia, filed Donation Land Claims in 1853 at this site along the Naches Trail. The men built a cabin and barn and cultivated the land. Connell became known as a friend of emigrants crossing the Naches Trail, offering those who stopped at his cabin a meal or provisions to help them continue their journey. On October 29, 1855, Michael Connell and Lt. James McAllister of the Washington Volunteer Militia became the first casualties of the Puget Sound Indian War that was waged west of the Cascade Mountains. Connell's cabin, which was approximately 500 feet to the east, was burned during the hostilities.

The First Wagon Train

The first wagon train to cross the Washington Cascades arrived on Connell's Prairie in October 1853. Often referred to as the Longmire train, about 36 wagons carried 150 to 170 emigrants along the Naches Trail, crossed the White River 68 times , and rested at Connell's Prairie before it continued on to Fort Steilacoom. Many of these emigrants, like the Kincaids, Biles, and Longmires, became founding families of towns in Western Washington.

Minnie Lobehan, Muckleshoot, c.1912
(Courtesy of the Muckleshoot Tribe)

Michael Connell was in Company M,
1st US Artillery Regiment at Ft. Steilacoom in 1850.
(Sketch by Alan Archambault.)

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