



Mylie Lawyer And Her Collection

Mylie Lawyer has had an interest in her family history since she was a child growing up in Lapwai, Idaho in the 1920s. Her perseverance has resulted in an extensive collection of stories and artifacts related to her family that includes Chief Lawyer and Twisted

Hair, one of the Nez Perce leaders who welcomed Lewis and Clark in 1805. Mylie's collection stands as testimony to her determination to preserve her family's heritage.

Mylie Lawyer Born: March 24, 1912



Mylie Lawyer was born on the Pine Ridge Indian Agency, South Dakota to Corbett and Lillian Allman Lawyer. Corbett worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Lillian was a teacher.

After Mylie was born, the family returned to Lapwai, Idaho where Mylie grew up. After graduating from Lapwai High School in 1929, she attended Oregon State and Willamette University where she earned a degree in Home Economy.

In the 1930s she worked at the Warm Springs Indian Reservation teaching home economics, eventually becoming assistant principle at the Warm Springs School.

Mylie was later assigned to Stewart Indian School, a national boarding school, near Carson City, NV. Her chief task was to reorganize the school's kitchen facilities, where the food service was so poor it was affecting relations among the various tribes at the school. Her performance was stellar and she became known as a problem solver with BIA.

Mylie has always been interested in the history of her family and the Nez Perce. As a young girl she crawled under one of the old buildings at Ft. Lapwai to recover papers she and a friend saw. She kept these papers because she thought they might be important some day. On the Weippe Prairie she recovered two grinding

stones from an area where her family and ancestors had camped.

She also has fond memories of sitting with her dad, Corbett and other Nez Perce men as they spoke in the Nez Perce language, telling stories, plucking whiskers, fishing and remembering the old days. Mylie did not speak Nez Perce so after these sessions, she would always ask her dad to recount the things they had talked about. Even in her college days as she studied home economics she wished she had studied anthropology or history instead. It was natural that she should become the keeper of the family history, collecting papers, photos and artifacts associated with her families, both Sioux and Nez Perce.

Mylie and her mother Lillian were close friends with many of the weavers and bead workers in the area. Her collection reflects some of the finest work from both Lillian's Sioux side and the Nez Perce community. Mylie took special care to protect and preserve these artifacts, learning some of the preservation techniques used in the museum profession. She resisted pressure from collectors and dealers of Indian arts and crafts to sell her family collection, especially in the 1960s and 70s when a brisk trade in Indian artifacts flourished.

At the age of 92, Mylie still lives in Lapwai and is a respected elder in the community.

Corbett Lawyer B: Dec. 13, 1877, Spalding, ID D: Aug. 22, 1974 in Lapwai, ID



During a time when Indians were being marginalized and ignored, Corbett Lawyer and his contemporaries such as Starr Maxwell and Archie Phinney worked to create institutions that allowed the Nez Perce on the reservation to speak in one voice.

Educated by his aunt and his grandmother Tillie, the widow of Chief Lawyer, he stayed with them until the age of 11 when he was orphaned. Corbett was taken in by a Chinese family who worked as cooks at the school in Lapwai. While living with them he learned to speak some Chinese and celebrate their holidays. In 1892, he

went east to the Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. After graduating, he taught at an Indian school in Santa Fe, New Mexico before returning to Lapwai in 1902 to farm.

In 1907 Corbett went to work for the North Idaho Agency, part of the BIA. Corbett's career with the BIA gave him the opportunity to work with various tribes including the Nez Perce and Umatilla.

In 1909, Corbett married Lillian Allman, an Oglala Sioux, who had been teaching at Lapwai. The couple moved to the Pine
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Corbett Lawyer

Ridge Reservation where Mylie and her brother Archie were born.

When Corbett retired in 1944 his list of accomplishments was impressive. He helped write the first constitution for the Nez Perce tribal government and created an accounting system that became a model for other agencies.

In retirement he moved back to Lapwai and worked on various projects, including a Nez Perce grammar book. He passed away in 1974 at the age of 97.

Archie Lawyer

B: 1843

D: June 2, 1893



Archie Lawyer, one of Chief Lawyer's five children and Mylie Lawyer's grandfather, came of age during a time of transition for the Nez Perce. Born around 1843, he attended Kate McBeth's church school in Lapwai, influencing his choice to become a Presbyterian minister in 1880.

In 1878, in the aftermath of the Nez Perce War, Archie went to northeast Oklahoma to tend to the sick of the Joseph band in exile. When he returned home, some of the survivors of the war followed.

In the late 19th century, the Presbyterian missionaries were intent on assimilating the Nez Perce completely, discouraging the use of the Nez Perce language and cultural practices. Archie was less strict and openly encouraged a mixing of Presbyterian and Nez Perce practices.

Archie was pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Kamiah, Idaho from the church's founding in 1890 to his death in 1893.

Hallalhotshoot - Chief Lawyer

B: Between 1793 and 1800

D: January 3, 1876, Lapwai, ID



The Lawyer family namesake is Chief Lawyer or Hallalhotshot. Fur traders, impressed by his bearing and ability to communicate, gave him the name Lawyer. Lawyer's ability to get along with the newcomers, combined with a stalwart concern over the survival of the Nez Perce, thrust him into prominence from the 1830s until his death in 1876.

The son of Twisted Hair, Lawyer had been exposed to Euro-Americans from the time he was a little boy. As a young man, he went east to Buffalo country (Montana) and was often in the company of fur traders. In 1832, while traveling with some fur traders, Lawyer was wounded in the hip at the Battle of Pierre's Hole. His wound was such that Lawyer required the use of a cane for the rest of his life.

His associations with fur traders brought him into contact with the first Protestant missionaries coming to Nez Perce country. He assisted Henry H. Spalding from

time to time and in 1839, when Asa Smith settled near Lawyer's home in Kamiah, he assisted Smith in assembling a Nez Perce grammar text and learned English.

In 1855, the United States government negotiated a treaty with the Nez Perce and other tribes living on the Columbia River Plateau. Lawyer, who had assumed the position of head man of his band after the death of Twisted Hair's brother, attended the negotiations along with many other Nez Perce chiefs. He was deeply involved in the negotiations and was one of the signatories of the treaty.

Perhaps because of Lawyer's prominence among the fur traders, missionaries, and politicians, as well as his role in the negotiations, Lawyer assumed the position of Chief of the Nez Perce, a position created by the Treaty. Thrust into this difficult role, Lawyer did his best to preserve Nez Perce interests. These decisions made Lawyer a controversial figure.

Twisted Hair

Tsap tso kalips kin, known as Twisted Hair, figures prominently in the story of the Lewis and Clark expedition's time in Nez Perce country in 1805-06.

Three boys, including Twisted Hair's son who would later become known as Lawyer, were the first to see William Clark and his small party come onto the Weippe Prairie on September 20th, 1805.

Twisted Hair and his band provided food, shelter and guidance to the "Corps

of Discovery" members. His band provided a description of the water route to the Pacific Ocean and helped find a suitable canoe making site on the Clearwater River.

Prior to leaving for the Pacific, the expedition left their horses in Twisted Hair's care. Upon Lewis and Clark's return to Nez Perce country, they met Twisted Hair again and retrieved their horses for the return journey in 1806.