MEMORIAL OF CITIZENS OF OREGON AND WASHINGTON ASKING FOR RELIEF FOR SUNDAY INDIAN TRIBES

January 14, 1861

TO THE COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

TO THE HONORABLE THE CONGRESS
OF THE UNITED STATES:

Your Petitioners, citizens of the State of Oregon and Territory of Washington respectfully report:

THAT in the year 1851 the then superintendent of Indian Affairs assisted by agents and sub-agents by authority and direction of the President of the United States negotiated a treaty on Clatsop Plains in Oregon with the Indians residing on the Lower Columbia and on the coast near the mouth of said river, consisting mainly of Chinook. Clatsop and Tillamooks, whereby the government undertook to pay said Indians large sums of money and property to relinquish their lands to the white settlers which treaty was never ratified. Under the act, Congress donated lands to settlers. All the lands of these Indians capable of being occupied or used by them including the villages, gardens and fishing have been taken and they have been driven away or are liable to be driven away by the white owners and cannot build a hut or draw a net without the white man's permission.

During all the wars and troubles with other tribes which have cost the government many millions of dollars, these Indians have remained peaceable and have not engaged in hostilities or caused alarm to the settlers or expense to the government, but on the contrary have sometimes saved the lives and often contributed to the safety and comfort of persons wrecked upon their shores or otherwise cast upon their hospitality, and this notwithstanding the whites were daily intruding upon and driving them from their homes under the authority of Congress until at last they have not an acre of uninhabited land remaining.

These Indians are reduced in numbers at least half since the said treaty but the survivors have not, and neither have your petitioners, abandoned the hope that the government will yet do them justice and thus avoid the odious imputation of filching from these long-suffering and friendly tribes the right which was purchased so dearly from their warlike and troublesome neighbors. Your petitioners therefore pray that an appropriation may be made to compensate the tribes and remnants of tribes which were included with aforesaid treaty for their lands so taken by Congress and donated to white settlers and as these Indians are not of one tribe and have no organization or acknowledged head, they further pray that some person or persons residing in the district and acquainted with the Indians may be appointed under proper safeguards to distribute among them the goods or moneys so appropriated.

(Among the long and impressive list of signers of this petition were WILLIAM STRONG, ROBERT SHORTESS, JOB LAMLEY, JOHN BROWN and B. F. OLNEY).

Copied from OREGON TERRITORIAL PAPERS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1821 - 1868, on Microfilm [979.7 Un33IT] at the Washington State Library in Olympia.

This letter from concerned citizens in 1861 describes the plight of the Chinook Indian Nation then and now. While the letter is unique, concerned citizens continue to send requests to Washington D.C. with the hope of gaining relief for their Chinook friends and neighbors.