



NIPO T. STRONGHEART  
TACH NUM CHTU-TUM-NAH

Compiled and Photographed by  
Robert E. Pace

YAKAMA NATION LIBRARY ITEM



109848

NIPO T. STRONGHEART  
TACH NUM CHTU-TUM-NAH

Compiled and Photographed by  
Robert E. Pace

The following text was compiled from  
issues of the Yakima Herald-Republic dated:

April 30, 1966

January 1, 1967

September 28, 1967

December 24, 1970

December 30, 1970

February 17, 1971

NIPO T. STRONGHEART  
TACH NUM CHTU-TUM-NAH

Nipo T. Strongheart, 76, a descendant of the original Yakima Indian Tribe, died Friday, December 30, 1966, in Canoga Park, California, where he was residing in a movie actor's retirement home.

Strongheart was born in White Swan and for more than forty years was a Hollywood adviser on motion pictures involving Indians.

Survivors included three nephews, Lenord Tomaskin, Joe Meninick and Woodrow Bill, and a niece, Annie Kitsap Sampson.

Although he had lived in Southern California so long that he possessed one of the original box numbers at the downtown Hollywood Post Office, Nipo T. Strongheart continued to return to his home in the Yakima Valley at least once a year for over thirty years. The purpose of these trips was to attend the general council meetings of the tribe, tour the reservation and visit with friends and relatives.

Mr. Strongheart, though denied his rights as a tribal member because written proof of his lineage was not available when the Enrollment Act became effective, was considered an honorary member of the Yakimas.

He was born at White Swan in 1890 of Yakima Indian descent and for nearly forty years was a Hollywood advisor on motion pictures involving Indians.

Strongheart began his work as an adviser on Indian documented productions as early as 1912 when he was employed by David Belasco to help with "The Heart of Wetona." He later helped with such films as "Broken Lance", "Ten Who Dared", as well as "Across The Wide Missouri". He was also a consultant for youth groups interested in Indians as was a Lyceum and Chatauqua lecturer.

Besides first-hand knowledge from the old days in the lower Yakima Valley, Strongheart used material gained from his famous library of some 12,000 books and manuscripts compiled over a 50-year period of research dealing with the American Indian. The collection also includes more than a hundred trunks of costumes and artifacts from practically every tribe in the country.

The array of artifacts is endless, from a few peyote buttons to baskets, rugs, deer skin bags, jewelry and vases. There are also beaded blankets and naturally-colored buckskin outfits with porcupine-quill designs and a wide variety of items that otherwise exist only in the memories of the oldest Indians.

The value of the collection has been estimated at \$200,000 or more.

The complete collection of Indian books and artifacts of American Indian actor Nipo T. Strongheart was left, along with \$15,000 from his estate, to create the Yakima National Memorial Library and Museum, to be administered by the Yakima Indian Nation Tribal Council at Toppenish Washington.

The will also designated a bequest of \$10,000 to the Tribal Council to establish a scholarship fund.

Strongheart's attempt to leave the collection to the Yakimas was challenged in a California court by his son and a three-year court struggle followed. Eventually, the Yakima Nation settled out of court and paid the son \$45,000 for his claim, according to Robert B. Jim, Tribal Council Chairman.

The collection was crated and shipped aboard two trucking vans to the valley in April, 1970. Tribal officials opened and inspected several trunks before the collection was placed in storage.

Strongheart had, for 20 years, advocated the establishment of a Yakima Indian Nation cultural center and museum for the benefit of the Yakimas and the entire valley. He contributed his collection to that end with the stipulation that it be given "proper display and proper utilization by the people".

The Tribal Council appointed a special committee to decide how that might be best accomplished. Members of the committee are Moses Dick, Chairman, Louis Cloud, Baptist Lumley and William Northover.

One of the first goals of the committee is to catalogue the items in the collection. The committee must also decide where financing can be obtained for building the museum and cultural center to comply with the wishes of Nipo T. Strongheart.



Toppenish Review-Mirror

November 8, 1972

By Mary Schlick

The Yakima Tribe took another step toward fulfilling a promise to a "relative" on Oct. 28 at Satus Long House.

Nipo Tach-num Strongheart's name was heard again and his pictures passed among those seated along the walls of the long house. The memorial dinner was served and the monument ordered.

The memorial, ancient custom marking the end to mourning, was the tribe's gift to the actor, ethnologist and lecturer who all his life had claimed the YAKIMA AS HIS FAMILY. Although written record of his tribal membership was lacking, Strongheart proudly carried a signed card showing his honorary membership.

Strongheart died on Dec. 30, 1966, in California, and after funeral services in Hollywood was buried at his request with the solemn ceremonies of the Washat religion at Satus Point, or Smohalla, Cemetery, just above Plank Road overlooking the Satus. He was 75 years old.

According to a newspaper article of the time, he was buried near his foster mother, Kate Williams.

Nipo (Nee=Hah-pouw, meaning messenger of light)

Strongheart was listed as Hollywood's "formost authority on American History and ethnology." He was born on the Yakima Indian Reservation May 15, 1891, a son of George and Leonora (Williams) Mitchell, and a grandson of Robert Mitchell, a Canadian Factor for the Hudson Bay Company, according to History of Hollywood, published in 1937. His mother was daughter of the great Yakima-chieftain, Ta che num, the history said.

Strongheart was born at White Swan and started school there. His career as an actor began early, however. At the age of 11, accompanied by his father he joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West shows as a trick and fancy horseback rider, according to history.

"Later Major Lillie's Pawnee Bill Shows in a like capacity took him over both Americas, also many foreign countries, and from which he drifted into motion pictures, then in their infancy.

He first appeared in pictures in 1905 and continued as actor and later technical advisor on many films depicting American Indians including "Accross the Wide Missouri", and "Westward the Women"

One picture, "Braveheart," was reportedly based on his legal fight for the rights of his people, the high point being passage of the law declaring Indians to be citizens of the United States in 1924.

Through the years of traveling, speaking and studying about American Indians, Strongheart gathered

artifacts, documents, books and costumes for a collection which at his death was valued at more than \$200,000. This he left to the Yakima Tribe to create a museum and library on the Yakima Reservation.

A \$15,000 cash bequest for the museum and another \$10,000 bequest for a scholarship fund were given up by the tribe in settlement for a claim to the valuable collection made by his son Daniel F. Strongheart, according to Robert Jim, chairman of the Yakima Tribal council.

During his lifetime, strongheart was a frequent visitor to the Yakima Reservation. He had dreamed of a Yakima Indian Nation cultural center and museum for the benefit of tribal members and the entire Valley. His bequest carried the stipulation that the collection be given "proper display and proper utilization by the people,"

"We are definitely planning to build the museum," Chairman Jim said. "I know a lot of people both Indian and white, who will contribute artifacts to a tribal museum," he said.

Strongheart's memorial dinner on Oct. 28 was followed by several other traditional ceremonies carried on by the family of Leonard Tomaskin, chairman of the Yakima General Council, whom the actor claimed as a nephew. Other relatives were Joe Meninick, Woodrow Bill and Annie Kitsap Sampson,

a Kittitas Indian.

The day marked the memorial for the Tomaskins' daughter, Karen, who lost her life last year in an automobile accident.

A 1959 clipping from a California newspaper shows baby Karen on her cradle board looking at her "grandfather" Nipo. The Tomaskin family was visiting Strongherart when the picture was taken.

The following photographs are a representation of the Strongheart collection.

A very basic inventory, as well as a photographic outline of the collection, is the only purpose for which this book was compiled.

The Author