

A True Northern Paiute Hero: An Analysis of Chief Egan and his Leadership in the Bannock-Paiute War of 1878

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Abstract:

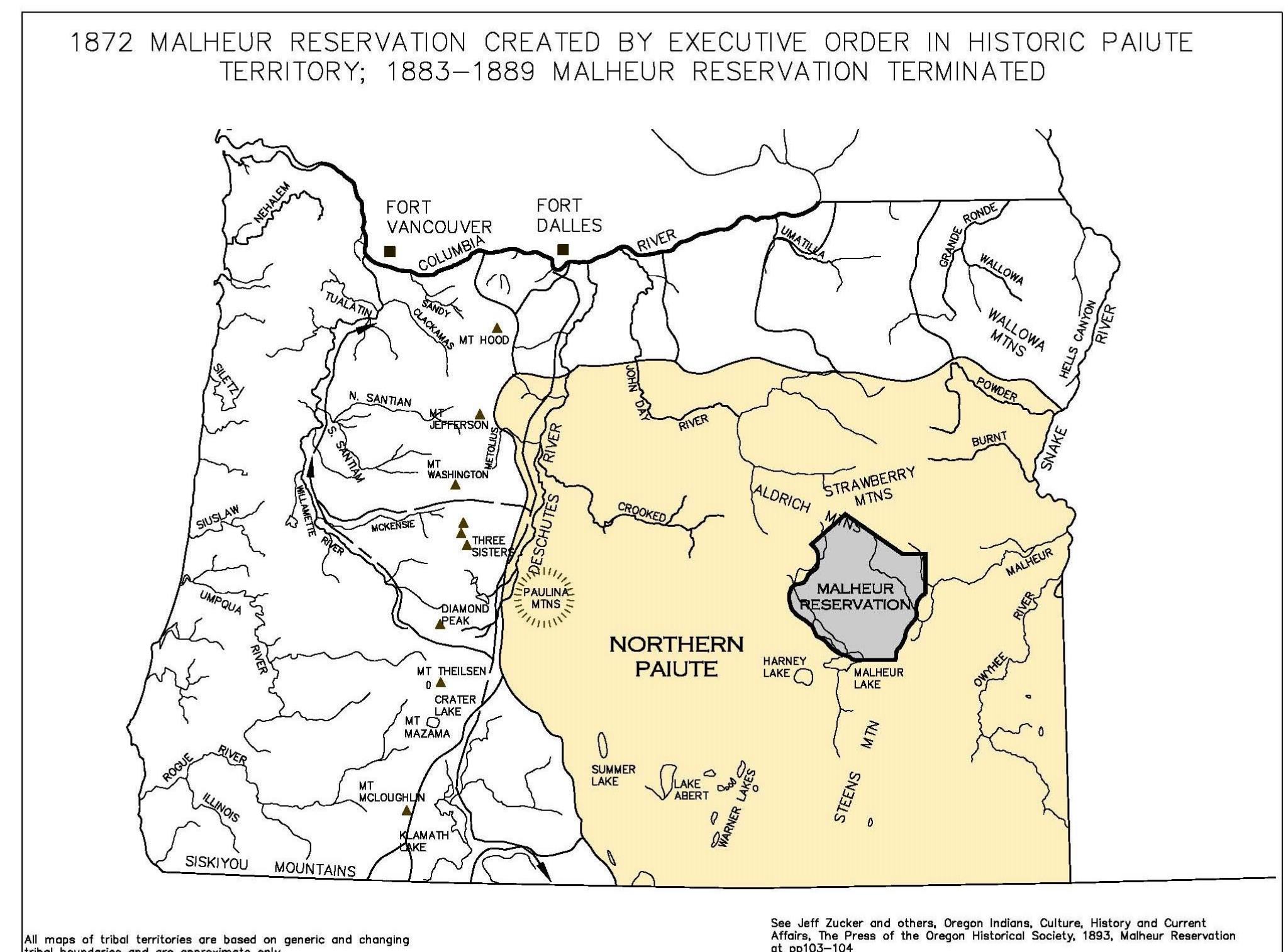
This research examines the circumstances surrounding Northern Paiute Chief Egan's rise to prominence leading up the Bannock-Paiute War of 1878. I argue that despite his Cayuse ancestry, Chief Egan's wisdom, loyalty and bravery made him the prime choice to act as leader over the course of the rebellion against Agent William Rinehart and the U.S. government at the Malheur Reservation. This research helps to redefine what it means to truly be part of a Native American tribe, by blood or acculturation, in addition to contributing original research concerning Northern Paiute cultural identity, loyalty, and responsibility.

Methodology:

- Primary sources materials include letters & reports concerning Malheur Reservation & Egan, battle logs, and oral history from community partners.
- Egan will primarily be analyzed through a comparative lens – that is, how he is depicted from Western accounts, compared to how he is depicted by fellow Native Americans such as Sarah Winnemucca and Oytes the Medicine Man.

“Did the government tell you to come here and drive us off this reservation? Did the Big Father say, go and kill us all off, so you can have our land? Did he tell you to pull our children’s ears off, and put handcuffs on them, and carry a pistol to shoot us with? We want to know how the government came by this land. Is the government mightier than our Spirit-Father, or is he our Spirit-Father? Oh, what have we done that he is to take all from us that he has given us? “

Figure 2. A quote from Chief Egan to Agent Rinehart of Malheur Reservation. From Sarah Winnemucca's *Life Among the Paiutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* (1883).



All maps of tribal territories are based on generic and changing tribal boundaries and are approximate only. See Jeff Zucker and others, *Oregon Indians, Culture, History and Current Affairs*, The Press of the Oregon Historical Society, 1993, Malheur Reservation at pp103-104

Figure 1. A map of Oregon indicating the locations of the Northern Paiute people and Malheur Reservation. Developed by Jim Gardner in *Oregon Apocalypse: The Hidden History of the Northern Paiutes* (Manuscript, 2014).

Egan and the Native Americans:

- Although Cayuse by blood, Egan was taken in after a raid and raised by the Paiutes as if he was one of their own. He shortly proved himself to be an extremely capable hunter and brave war-chief by the tribe.
- Oytes the Medicine Man was one of the major catalysts behind Egan's decision to leave Malheur Reservation and join the Bannocks. If not for his aggressive behavior nor Egan's trust in the capability to work together with Oytes, he may not have left the reservation.
- Sarah Winnemucca was an active translator, and viewed Egan as a wise individual.

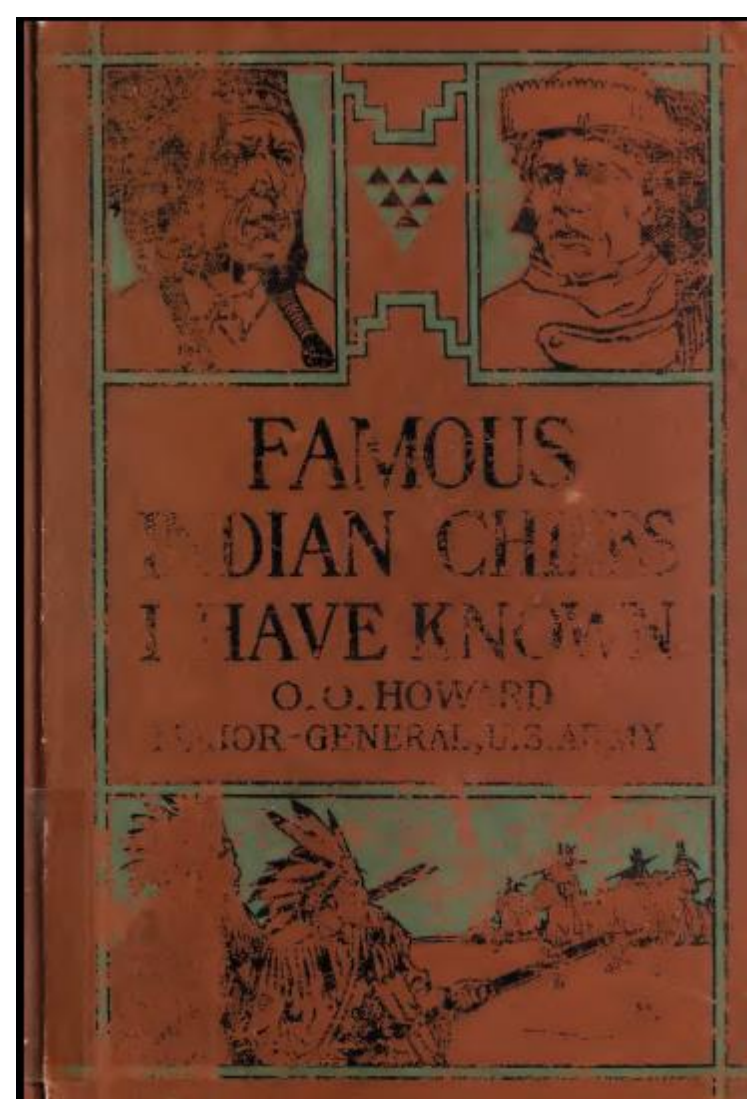


Figure 3. The cover of *Famous Indian Chiefs I Have Known* (1908) By General O.O. Howard.

Egan and the Westerners:

- Egan garnered respect even from members of the Army. During General O. O. Howard's visit to Malheur Reservation, he noticed "how superior Egan was to the others" in terms of stature and charisma.
- The first agent of Malheur Reservation, Samuel B. Parrish, had a mutual respect for Egan and the other Northern Paiutes residing there. They had multiple collaborations to help deal with issues, such as Oytes' unruliness.
- However, the arrival of Agent W. V. Rinehart caused a major point of contention. Increasing amounts of stinginess with supplies was met with stronger protests from Egan.

Conclusions:

- The Northern Paiutes are strong advocates of independent achievement: although Egan was Cayuse, outstanding individual traits were what truly propelled him to prominence as chief during the Bannock-Paiute War.
- Although Egan knew such a battle against the Americans would surely end in defeat, he decided to take such a gamble solely to give his people another chance at survival, proof of his devotion to the Northern Paiute lifestyle.

References:

- Gardner, James. *Oregon Apocalypse: The Hidden History of the Northern Paiutes*. Unpublished, 2014.
- Hopkins, Sarah Winnemucca. *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883.
- Howard, O.O. (Major General). *Famous Indian Chiefs That I Have Known*. New York, New York: The Century Company, 1908.
- Oral History & Interviews from Wilson Wewa, Myra Johnson Orange, Randall Lewis, Ruth Lewis, Beverly Beers, Shayleen Macy and James Gardner.

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Figure 4. Students with the tribal elders and visiting scholar at Kah-Nee-Ta, Warm Springs Reservation, 2014. Photo taken by Kevin Hatfield.