

Life Among the Piutes

Review

Tom Schulte

2018

a review of

Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims by Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883; Kindle edition, 2017. Also, free online

This is an amazing autobiography and first-hand account from Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (born Thocmentony, meaning "Shell Flower;" c. 1844—1891) the grand-daughter of Chief Truckee (d. 1860), medicine chief of the Northern Paiute.

The first part of the narrative touches on Winnemucca recalling the tribe's first forty years of contact with European Americans during a time when her early childhood recollections give a dreamlike quality to the first interactions.

As the author recalls, "I was a very small child when the first white people came into our country. They came like a lion, yes, like a roaring lion, and have continued so ever since, and I have never forgotten their first coming."

Equally powerful in the opening section is her grandfather's "talking rag" letter treated with reverence as a powerful amulet in dealing with these mysterious, unpredictable, dangerous, and powerful creatures. (This potent "rag" was a letter of introduction from U.S. General John C. Fremont commending Truckee for his support during the Mexican—American War.)

Later in life, Winnemucca became an interpreter and Paiute representative to the U.S. Indian Bureau. In 1883, she gave nearly three hundred lectures in major Northeast and Mid-Atlantic cities to heighten awareness of an all-too-typical tragedy of broken treaties, violence, and concentration camp-like reservations.

Her book appeared the same year.

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