

EARLY AGGRESSIONS AGAINST THE WIYOT

After the character of the whites as exhibited in their conduct toward Indians in general is noted, it will appear quite remarkable that only two men, Arthur Wigmore and Charles Hicks, are known to have lost their lives at the hands of the Wiyot Indians. The Wiyot are usually considered as possessing much less physical vigor and prowess than the Indians of Athapascan stock living in the mountains, and they offered no resistance to the encroachments of the whites. Whenever the presence of an Indian village was undesirable to the whites the Indians were required to move, so that in a few years the larger part of the Indians on Humboldt bay were concentrated on Gunther island at site 67, at the mouth of Elk river, site 77, and at the harbor entrance, site 112. But as the expulsion of the Indians from a particular place was usually accomplished at the hands of lumbermen and others of the rougher element among the whites, they seem to have showed no ill feeling toward the whites in general. In fact toward most of the whites the Wiyot seem to have had nothing but decidedly amicable relations. Such sentiments as they may have harbored toward the particular aggressors they feared to express.

Eel River Murders in 1852

One of the first clashes with the Eel river Wiyot occurred in the spring of 1852. As we have previously mentioned, the two lower Athapascan villages on Eel river had a few cases of intermarriage with the Wiyot. When a Wiyot, whose son, Charles Shakespere, is now living at Indianola, was killed by an irresponsible white man on the trail near where Loleta now stands, some of the Indian's relatives living near Scotia thought to settle the score by killing McDermitt and Merrill, who lived together in an isolated spot near the mouth of Van Duzen river. As soon as the bodies of the victims were discovered a few weeks later and the report reached Humboldt bay, a party was fitted out with the object of impressing upon the minds of the savages the sacredness of human life when that life happened to belong to a person of a "superior race." The following quotation taken from a letter of the Indian commissioner, Redick McKee,²³⁹ April 5, 1852, to the governor of California, shows what happened:

²³⁹ R. McKee, Correspondence with Governor Bigler, Calif. Sen. Jour., 3 sess., appendix, p. 712, 1852. The same (with a misprint, Eel river instead of Elk river), is also found in reports to 33 Cong., *op. cit.*, p. 310. See footnote 181 of present paper.