The traditional lands of the Nisqually reached north to border the lands of the Puyallup people, to the south bordering the Cowlitz and Chehalis people, then on the northwest, they bordered the Squaxin people. To the east, their boundaries extended to the topmost point on Mount Rainier. There were 13 villages throughout this territory. Their name came from the prairie grass on both sides of the Nisqually River. So they are the people of the grass country and the river. The Nisqually River flowed through the heart of our land and was the lifeblood of our people. This river provided a home for the salmon, fresh water and a highway connecting most of the villages.

The British came in 1833 to establish a fur-collecting fort at the mouth of Sequalitchew Creek, just about a half-mile east of the Nisqually River delta. These new people represented the Hudson’s Bay Company. The employees there were mostly single men who married women from our villages. The British and the Americans had an agreement of joint occupation concerning this land area that they called Oregon Country. In 1846, these two nations set their dividing boundary at the 49th degree north latitude, which placed our lands and our people under the jurisdiction of the United States.
Slide 3

The Methodist church sent missionaries to Nisqually, which only lasted for two years. In 1839 the Catholic missionary came to Nisqually. Many years later a Catholic church was built on the east side of the river. Therefore it was later condemned.

Slide 4

Fort Steilacoom, established in 1849, was the first army post on Puget Sound. It was built on Chambers Creek in reaction to settler fears after the Whitman killings in Walla Walla. Many of the Steilacoom people who lived here joined Nisqually. At about this same time, settlers began to arrive requesting land under the Donation Land Act.

Slide 5

When Isaac I. Stevens was sent here to become the first territorial governor, he set about negotiating treaties with the various tribes. He desired to extinguish our claim to our land while allowing us to reserve some of our land for our homes. The Medicine Creek Treaty was the first treaty to be made. It included our tribe, our Puyallup neighbors, and the Indian people at the lower end of the Whulge. Three reservations were to be established. Leschi and Quaymuth were to sign for us, but, upon learning that our reserve was to be
on the high-forested land to the west of the delta, Leschi refused to sign. He wanted our reserved lands to be located on the river where our people could fish.

Eaton rangers came to take Chief Leschi and Quaymuth into protective custody, for refusing to move onto the reservation. Both had fled with their families into the hills. They, and other warriors and their families, crossed the Puyallup River where the Puyallup warriors joined them. The entire group stopped at the White River and stood their ground. The Treaty War of 1855-1856 began in October. The war lasted nine months. Indian agents ordered the men, women, and children (who didn’t participate in the battle) to an internment camp on Fox Island and Squaxin Island. The end of the war came when Stevens agreed to change the locations of both the Nisqually and the Puyallup reservation to good lands on their respective rivers. Stevens requested the two leaders to give themselves up. Quaymuth turned himself in and was murdered the first night. Leschi returned from east of the mountains where he had fled and was arrested and tried on charges of murder for his wartime activities.
and became the first person to be hung in Washington State. Chief Leschi was hung on February 19, 1858 by Lake Steilacoom.

Some families homesteaded in the 1880’s. In 1887, reservation land was divided into separate allotments for individual families. This picture was taken when the old reservation was condemned and Nisqually families lost their homes.

There were at least 13 homes, 6 cemeteries, 2 churches and a tribal headquarters relocated. About 3/4 th’s of the people were relocated to the west side of the Nisqually River. The people were relocated to the west side of the river. The problem was that that portion of our reservation had also been divided and allotted into family units, so only those families who were heirs or related, could establish themselves there. Those families without, could purchase land further away from the reservation. They became known
as the dispossessed Nisquallies.

Slide 9

Frank Iyall, seated at the table, fourth from the left, helped craft the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 that granted citizenship to all Indians.

Slide 10

In 1945, a tribal constitution was accepted. So all those displaced Nisqually people could finally become enrolled members. George Brown and his wife Anne, are described as Puyallup because they resided on the Puyallup Reservation. But most reservations were home to differing tribes. Indian-ness became a rigid legal category when the federal government requested that tribes prepare lists of enrolled members in the 1930’s.