

Sepass Poems~Ancient Songs of Y-Ail-Mihth

Chief William K'HHalserten Sepass; Commemorative edition; \$175 with case sleeve cloth (200 limited edition); \$79 with dust jacket cloth (1000 books) 978-09686046-4-9, 156 pp., 6.5x10, Longhouse Publishing, December 2009.

Chief William K'HHalserten Sepass (1841-1943) was the last of the great orators; a storyteller, a philosopher and a spiritual person, carefully selected and trained as a young boy to carry the traditional teachings of his culture, the knowledge of his lands, and the stories and songs of the beginning of the world and how the lands were shaped by the emotions and adventures of mankind upon the earth.

Surviving the devastating effects of western diseases, witnessing the influx of European settlers, two world wars, the automobile, the iron lung, telephone, running water and the Indian residential schools, Chief Sepass witnessed the demise of his culture and language. He knew that these teachings would not survive in their original oral tradition.

He saw the different priests of the newly formed churches come and go, but they always read from the same book. He noticed these stories from the Bible being given great respect and ceremony. It was this method (a written form) that Chief Sepass saw as the only way to save these priceless poems for his people; that knowing them, Indians would remember their greatness for all time.

These stories, widely heard at the annual summer sun ceremonies and gatherings, were always told in the Coast Salish language. Over four years (1911-1915), they were meticulously translated, recited and recorded and transcribed in English, with the assistance of Sophia Jane White, the daughter of a Wesleyan Methodist missionary. Sophia had been raised with Halq'emeylem nannies, becoming fluent in the everyday language of these women. She understood the importance of adhering to the original rhythm and cadence of the 16 ancient songs.

This Commemorative edition, due for release December 2009, has been published in honour of this great man. It is a fitting tribute to the importance and value of these poems among aboriginal people. As described by His Honour, Grand Chief Steven Point, Lieutenant Governor of BC, in his foreword to the book, "... like the Homeric legends of Western thought, the *Sepass Poems* are a profound legacy to future Xwelmexw generations as they continue to seek meaning and stability in an ever-changing modern world."

The uncluttered design of 156 pages of text with 18 pieces of original artwork creates a treasured keepsake. These poems, Chief Sepass' legacy, will capture and change the reader forever.