



# **Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: The Change of Worlds for the Native People and Settlers on Puget Sound**

*David M. Buerge*

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## **Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: The Change of Worlds for the Native People and Settlers on Puget Sound** David M. Buerge

This is the first thorough account of Chief Seattle and his times--the story of a half-century of tremendous flux, turmoil, and violence, during which a Native American war leader became an advocate for peace and strove to create a successful hybrid racial community.

When the British, Spanish, and then Americans arrived in the Pacific Northwest, it may have appeared to them as an untamed wilderness. In fact it was a fully settled and populated land. Chief Seattle was a powerful representative from this very ancient world. Historian David M. Buerge has been researching and writing this book about the world of Chief Seattle for the past 20 years. Buerge has threaded together disparate accounts of the time from the 1780s to the 1860s--including native oral histories, Hudson Bay Company records, pioneer diaries, French Catholic church records, and historic newspaper reporting. Chief Seattle had gained power and prominence on Puget Sound as a war leader, but the arrival of American settlers caused him to reconsider his actions. He came to embrace white settlement and, following traditional native practice, encouraged intermarriage between native people and the settlers, offering his own daughter and granddaughters as brides, in the hopes that both peoples would prosper. Included in this account are the treaty signings that would remove the natives from their historic lands, the roles of such figures as Governor Isaac Stevens and Chiefs Leschi and Patkanim, the Battle at Seattle that threatened the existence of the settlement, and the controversial Chief Seattle speech that haunts the city that bears his name to this day.

## **Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: The Change of Worlds for the Native People and Settlers on Puget Sound Details**

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## **From Reader Review Chief Seattle and the Town That Took His Name: The Change of Worlds for the Native People and Settlers on Puget Sound for online ebook**

### **Corrie Beebe says**

A great history of the tribes of my homeland, the Puget Sound. I learned a great deal. Names of places came to life with the story of their name sake, from Priest Point, New Market, Tolmie and more. The author does an astounding job of piecing together the life and times of Chief Seattle, despite so little information available about him. It seems the Chief was a visionary and it is reprehensible that the "Americans" continue to deny the tribe their rights.

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### **Pamela Okano says**

This book is billed as a biography--the first, for adults--of Chief Seattle. It isn't, at least not in the conventional sense, purely because there's not a lot of documentation out there that would allow a real biography to be written so many years after his death. Instead, this is more a book about the very early days of Seattle (the town), with a focus on the Native Americans who lived in Puget Sound, with what little is known about Chief Seattle thrown in. In that sense, it was fascinating, although I found it a somewhat difficult read because of the author's style. By the time the Denny Party arrived in Seattle, Native American society in this area was already in turmoil, since English and American ships had been visiting the area for some time, spreading alien culture as well as disease that wiped out large portions of the population. Although getting enough food was rarely a problem, wars between the tribes often broke out, ranging at least as far as what would become Central Washington and up to British Columbia.. In this backdrop, Chief Seattle eventually came to favor peace with the white settlers, promoting Native American employment in the mills and intermarriage, a tactic that tribes had previously used to bring intertribal peace. Of course, it wasn't until the Boldt decision that Native Americans were able to secure a significant part of what the Treaty of Point Elliott had promised them.

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### **Ken Hunt says**

Read late for church book club. Being a naturalized Seattleite (since 2002) I had always wondered about his story. This book certainly had interesting historical references filling in many of my knowledge gaps on local names, Denny, Bagley, Bell, Snohomish, etc..... The story of Seattle himself was not as interesting as I had hoped. He was a leader for sure, and adaptable. It struck me that Seattle is named for him in large part because he was a force in encouraging his people to live in harmony with the rapidly growing white population. Thus his name adorns the largest city on the planet named after a Native American as his people got screwed out of their land, lives, ability to self sustain for their efforts to get along. The tail end is an interesting bridge to Timothy Egan's book about Edwin Curtis who photographed an impoverished Angeline, Seattle's daughter on the streets of Pioneer Square in Seattle. The book was not written in a way that brought the story to life, but for me personally worth the read.

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## **Michael says**

One of the main joys of a public library is the new book area where one can peruse actual books (rather than thumbnail descriptions online) that may attract one's interest. I was surprised to find this book from a local Seattle publisher at my branch library in Arlington, Virginia, but am glad they chose to acquire it and that I serendipitously found it.

At it happens, I have a strong connection to the city of Seattle - although I grew up in the DC area, my parents were both from Seattle. And before returning to the DC area, I lived in Seattle for 15 years, from 1975 to 1990. When I saw this, I thought I might well enjoy it and was right about that.

The author has done significant research to gather the available descriptions of Chief Seattle's life as well as the tribes of the Seattle area (the Puget Sound and a bit beyond) and Seattle's contemporaries, both native American and settlers. He then lays out detailed information about the different tribes and how native American leaders, including Seattle, managed their evolving relationship with the growing number of settlers over time, from the 1850s onward.

Unfortunately few efforts were made at the time to gather good first hand information from contemporaries so that source material about Seattle is somewhat sparse, but the author makes clear when he is speculating (in effect).

There is extensive discussion of the "Chief Seattle speech" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief\\_Seattle#The\\_speech\\_or\\_%E2%80%98letter%E2%80%99](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Seattle#The_speech_or_%E2%80%98letter%E2%80%99)) that is perhaps the most significant legacy of Chief Seattle (other than that this large city carries his name in honor of him). The earliest version published was from notes by the author, but other versions exist and the ways the words attributed to Seattle have been used by later figures to channel whatever he may have actually said to serve their purposes makes its own statement about the legacy of Chief Seattle.

I felt I learned quite a bit reading this book and was well engaged in it, but I will admit I am not sure how readers who are not familiar with Seattle somewhat would find it. Some of what I learned almost surprised me in that I probably intuitively should have known these things but hadn't made simple connections or given certain place names much thought. I didn't know, for example, that Leschi and Kitsap are the names of people. It also amused me just how many Seattle streets are named after early settlers.

The second to last chapter looks at Seattle's legacy and surviving family members through 1887 and the final chapter rather ambitiously takes his place in history to the present day, although with suggesting that it is a sad commentary that his tribe, the Duwamish, has received reasonable or appropriate federal or other legal recognition.

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## **Josephine Ensign says**

A frustratingly tedious and poorly written book that nevertheless does include fascinating details about Chief Seattle's life.

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### **Julia Donald says**

Totally recommend for some scholarly reading on who Chief Seattle was and how Seattle the city was founded. I didn't learn this history in schools, and spent a lot of my childhood reading books like "little house on the prairie", so obviously this was overdue.

This book taught me so much - about the PNW and native culture before Vancouver explores the coat on his boat, what the initial contact looked like (so much disease, so much death), and Seattle's ability to lead and try to build a hybrid city. So many attempts to preserve tradition, to intermarry and regain stolen rights, to retain rights to land and fishing/hunting. So much "frontier justice" and battles. So much culture pilfered and cast out. This taught me so much, and I wish I had learned it so much sooner. This book was published in 2017 and is the first adult biography of Seattle. It is obvious in parts that the original draft was 700+ pages and it has been edited to 270 (it is DENSE and slow reading) but it is worth it. And some paragraphs (Leschi's death high among them) are so heartbreakingly sad it takes a while to pick the book back up. But it is worth it.

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### **theGraveyard Librarian says**

It was ok, the organization didn't quite flow, and the ending seemed a little off with trying to touch on too many topics of his legacy. However, a great and fascinating story about Chief Seattle adapting to changing times.

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### **Meepspeeps says**

This book interested me in part because it referred to familiar localities, focusing on the twenty years 1846-1866 when whites first started settling on native lands in the Seattle area. The details may be better suited to a textbook than a biography, but I learned quite a bit even though I'd read other Seattle histories. I recommend it to locals who want to understand this part of Seattle's history better.

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### **Lori Johnson says**

I actually haven't finished reading cover to cover. I will be perusing this book for a long time. I am fascinated by Chief SEALTH. My high school was named after him. I prefer to call him Chief Sealth which is arguably closer to his birth name. The author researched and studied the Chief for 20 years. His knowledge is very impressive, but I am not sure I am a huge fan of his writing style. There are several reasons for the 3 stars. It is VERY frustrating and difficult to read because he doesn't give you the pronunciation. He does have a section in the back of the book telling you how it is done but it is SO difficult, you have to keep flipping back and forth and still it is nearly impossible to come up with the proper name. (Let me add this after the fact. After more research I have learned that it would be nearly impossible to put the proper pronunciation in the book. The Lushootseed language has quite a few sounds in it that you don't find in the English language. I have actually heard them on tape and my mouth just won't do them! VERY difficult!) Second, his writing style is that of a text book. I found myself having to read the same thing over several times to understand the point. Often, it is almost as if he is having a written discussion with himself about the subject. Much of the book is a history of the area and people and not of Sealth but that is not the fault of the author.

There is so little known about this great warrior and chief. I am deeply grateful to the author for taking on this monumental task but if you are looking for an enjoyable, historical read, this isn't it. If you want a reference book, then this may be right up your alley. I do recommend the book to those who are interested in the history of the Puget Sound area and of Chief Sealth, in spite of my so so review. I guess it just wasn't what I had hoped it would be. Still...go get it!

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