INSIDE
On the Palouse—devastating defeat the price of survival for Plateau Indians
Rite of Passage: A Road to College Paved with Tulip Bulbs

By Janet Grimes

When I was in high school during the 1950s, few students had after-school jobs. However, summer work was plentiful where I grew up. Then as now, Mount Vernon, Washington, was set in an agricultural community, and from grade school through college many of my classmates and I worked in the fields and canneries during summer vacation. Some spent their earnings on school clothes or cars while others, such as myself, saved for more long-term goals. For me—with my heart set on going away to college but unable to afford it without a scholarship and a job—one person seemed to hold all the cards.

He had thick iron-gray hair, blunt-cut and parted in the middle, which stood out on either side like stiff twin brushes. His hair was tufted, his mouth stubbled and disagreeably contorted as if he was constantly trying to extract an elusive slab. “Yup,” he observed, “you gophers have about a couple of weeks more of digging.” After that you can go on vacation or walk to the shed. “By that he meant that after we dug up all the bulbs he would lay off some of us while a chosen few would go on hourly wages (eight-five cents per) to clean, sort, count, and bag the bulbs. I got laid off.

Mid-morning of the first day he barked from some distance behind me, “Hold on there, missy!” I stopped reluctantly, since he paid not by the hour but by the foot—specifically, a penny a foot. After a couple hours of clawing along a plowed-up row of tulips and stuffing bulbs into the gunny sack I dragged behind me, I had progressed about 150 feet, earning a dollar and a half. That first summer I worked in the bulb field.

Slowly Cowell made his way toward me, pausing frequently to pick up something from the ground. When he reached me he held out the evidence: two handfuls of bulbs and slabs. Slabs—we called them “babies”—grew attached to bulbs that had bloomed in spring—the “mothers.” When replanted in the fall they eventually grew large enough to bloom or sell. Because crops were rotated—a given plot growing tulips one year and then fallow or grew a different crop the next—it was important to dig up even the smallest slabs. “Look what I found,” Cowell declared accusingly, fixing me with a rare steady gaze.

“Oh, did I miss those?” I asked meekly.

“Yup!” After pondering the evidence he turned away, indicating with a vague sweep of one hand that I was to follow him back to where I had started. On the way, he stopped several times to nudge something with the toe of his boot, more evidence of my carelessness. As I slowly crawled over the row again, he hovered. A breeze flapped his blue overalls like flags around his toothpick legs as he stared down the long curve of his stomach at my gloved hands nervously fumbling with a clod the consistency of concrete, trying to extract an elusive slab. “Yup,” he observed, “you gophers have about a couple of weeks more of digging. After that you can go on vacation or walk to the shed.” By that he meant that after we dug up all the bulbs we would lay off some of us while a chosen few would go on hourly wages (eight-five cents per) to clean, sort, count, and bag the bulbs. I got laid off.

The second summer, having a bit of experience, I was able to work most of the season, first digging and clawing in the fields, then preparing the bulbs for sale in the shed. Tulip bulbs went into brown paper bags, iris bulbs into mesh bags. Grabbing three bulbs in one hand and two in the other, we counted to ten to fill a bag. My fellow workers and I, having taken various high school foreign language courses, taught each other to count to 10 in Spanish, French, German, and Latin. Thanks to Hank, Cowell’s Dutch assistant, we also learned to count in Dutch. Hank’s heavy accent delighted us when he mentioned a particular variety of iris—White City—because he pronounced the s sound as sh. That summer I earned almost $300.

In the fall I began my senior year determined to get out from under my parents’ collective thumb and escape the town where I was born—in my view, a quagmire of provincialism. So I made an appointment with Vice Principal Cowell to discuss college applications. Since his authoritative signature and personal recommendation went on all college admission and scholarship application forms, it was vital that he be on my side. According to the grapevine, his personal grudge the previous year had prevented a certain highly qualified senior from getting admitted to Stanford.

Cowell opened his office door, glanced at me, lowered his eyes, and silently stood aside as I entered. He had on his usual vice principal attire: an ill-fitting brown suit, the jacket hanging open to reveal wide maroon suspenders attached to pants that began at mid belly—his maximum circumference—and descended to bony mid ankle. A couple of inches of white socks showed above his shoes. Aware of the reason for my visit, he directed a favorite mantra toward a space above my head: “Anyone who really wants a college education can get a college education!” Having offered this nugget, he sat back, folded his hands on the table, and studied his thumbs as they alternated position.

I realized I was supposed to speak. “Well, I really want a college education.” Cowell turned his head toward the door and chewed on the inside of his cheeks. When he said nothing, I addressed his profile: “And I want to get my education somewhere other than at the junior college here, where I’ve lived all my life.”

The one eye that I could see regarded me through a bushy eyebrow, his silence suggesting that anyone who really wanted an education would not be so particular. Stumbling on, I tried to explain why I wanted to leave home, see the world, travel to Europe, have an interesting career, meet people from different places. The more I talked, the more my voice rose, until I concluded in a strained whine, “My parents say that this is a beautiful place to live and that lots of very intelligent, well-educated people live right here. But how do I know that! I’ve never been anywhere else!”

After working his mouth a while longer, juniors moving sideways, he finally responded, “Hrumph!” For the first time since I entered his office he looked directly at me. “Well, where do you want to go to college?”

Encouraged, I explained how I had studied information on various colleges and had chosen the College of Puget Sound in Tacoma. Admission would be no problem, and costs (estimated

...
at $1,350 per year), were within my price range—providing I got a scholarship. Cowell silently scanned my grade reports, which did not apply to jobs in agriculture, and further excused our poor work ethics by citing the shed, taking turns to climb up and watch for the truck. Because "this" was a penny a foot and 85 cents an hour, and it was not the future I envisioned for myself.

At the end of each day, riding through downtown on Cowell's flatbed truck, we were filthy, aching, and exhausted. Clean, comfortable shoppers on sidewalks smiled as we passed, perhaps nostalgically recalling their own summer work years of past. They seemed to have forgotten the drudgery, but I swore never to forget. I pictured Scarlett O'Hara at the end of Part I, vomiting on the red clay of Tara, raising her arms wide and exclaimed, "Lord, this is beautiful!" It was only partly in jest. Why do I want to leave this, wondered. Looking down again at my payroll now, I knew why. Because "this" was a penny a foot and 85 cents an hour, and it was not the future I envisioned for myself.

A week before my planned departure for college Cowell summoned me to receive my paycheck at last. Clutched in my hand, my tally sheet recorded the number of feet crawling in dirt, breathing dust, standing on concrete while digging for a penny a foot. By this time I was fast. My record was 1,500 feet in one day—$15 dollars. By now there was a gang of us seasoned gophers (the Good and Faithful Promise Club). Cowell no longer worked, inventing games to amuse ourselves. Club membership required only that a gopher work fast, tell or laugh at dirty jokes, and keep The Promise to stick together and not to see who could finish a row first. This made it easier to gossip and joke, which made digging endurable.

Petty crimes, such as stealing bulbs for relatives, friends, and neighbors, were a matter of course but committed in moderation—four or five bulbs each week. Later, on our wages (still 85 cents per), we laid down on the job as often as possible, mainly when Cowell and Hank drove a mile or two to the corner store for coffee. As soon as the truck left, we stopped work and lounged in the shade of the cherry tree near the shed, taking turns to climb up and watch for the truck.

We rationalized that our pay was below minimum wage, which did not apply to jobs in agriculture, and further excused our poor work ethics by citing gossip from the teenage rumor mill that Cowell was a millionaire and sometimes times spent kids when he paid up at the end of the season. His accounting system, recording how many feet we dug and the hours we worked, consisted of pencil scrawls in a little spiral notebook filled out of his overalls at irregular intervals. Because we didn’t trust his seemingly haphazard entries, we kept our own records at home, in case of a discrepancy on payday. It would be our record against his, but that was all we had.

Or that last summer in the fields, two impressions stand out. On the one hand, I had to admit that my parents were right and the hours we worked, contrasting our poor work ethics by citing gossip from the teenage rumor mill that Cowell was a millionaire and sometimes times spent kids when he paid up at the end of the season. His accounting system, recording how many feet we dug and the hours we worked, consisted of pencil scrawls in a little spiral notebook filled out of his overalls at irregular intervals. Because we didn’t trust his seemingly haphazard entries, we kept our own records at home, in case of a discrepancy on payday. It would be our record against his, but that was all we had.

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On October 18, 1860, the San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin reported the runaway slave case of Charles Mitchell, a boy who had belonged to James Tilton, Washington Territory’s surveyor general. Mitchell had stowed away on the side-wheeler Eliza Anderson on its regular mail run from Olympia to Victoria on Vancouver Island. According to British law, which then governed the Crown Colony of Victoria, once Mitchell reached British colonial soil he was no longer a slave.

On its surface, the story is about a young boy making a brave and clear choice for freedom, highlighting the difference between British territories, which prohibited slavery, and American territories, which could not. The story is more complicated, however. Mitchell’s relationship to James Tilton has been variously described as slave to master, property to owner, employee to employer, ward to benefactor, and son to father. This range of views reveals much about the political, social, and racial views of Washington Territory residents as the disputed nation tumbled toward civil war.

James Tilton had been surveyor general in Washington Territory since 1854, but the 1860 election of a Republican, Abraham Lincoln, would soon end Tilton’s appointment. As the election divided the nation, Tilton found himself loyal to the Union but not a Lincoln supporter. He viewed both abolitionists and secessionists as extremists who would sacrifice the nation for their causes. Tilton’s Olympia neighbors described him as a “southern gentleman,” but he was not from the South. His views had been shaped by his family history in border states, by the Mexican War, and by his experiences during the Indian conflicts in the Pacific Northwest.

Tilton was a privileged, successful man from a family that owned slaves two generations back. His paternal grandfather, Nehemiah Tilton, had owned a few slaves, and his maternal grandfather, Jacob Gibson, had owned at least 30 slaves who worked the Talbot County, Maryland, plantation of Morengo in its fields and household. After Gibson’s death in 1818, however, his sons proved to be poor farmers, and Morengo gradually fell apart in a depressed Maryland economy, forcing the sale of several slaves.

Tilton’s father, Dr. James Tilton, moved his medical practice and his family to the new state of Indiana in 1827, settling in the port city of Madison on the Ohio River. Dr. Tilton made his money in real estate and left slavery in the family’s past. One of his business deals involved platting a town he named Dupont—after the Delaware Duponts—10 miles north of Madison. The first station of a new railroad line was to be built there, connecting it to the state capital of Indianapolis.

In this bustling frontier city, young James Tilton came of age. The family’s location in a county on the Ohio River put its members right in the middle of the national debate over slavery. The river was the boundary between Kentucky and Indiana, between slavery and freedom for blacks—Eliza, in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, fled across that river. Madison was home to former slave owners, New England abolitionists, free blacks, and people who wanted to avoid the slavery debate.

Although Indiana was a free state, racial attitudes were intense and polarized. Just a few miles southwest of Dupont was Elizabethtown College, which educated children of all races, including the racially mixed sons and daughters of former white slave owners. Just a few miles southeast was a “castle” of the Knights of the Golden Circle, an organization that proposed the expansion of slavery into new territories in the West. Young Tilton’s half-sister Clara married into a family that had defended an underground railroad conductor from a mob. His mother gave land to an anti-slavery church. His father apprenticed a young black boy to work until he reached 21 years of age under a system of indenture fairly common in the state; he also encouraged Irish immigrants, not free blacks, to come work on the railroad in Dupont. Thus James Tilton the younger grew up amidst an array of attitudes toward blacks, his family usually steered a middle course.

At age 14 Tilton began work as a surveyor in Indiana. When funding for that work dried up, he used family connections to gain appointments as a clerk and then as a purser on navy ships. Circumnavigating the globe, he was exposed to people of many backgrounds. Then the expansionist President James K. Polk declared war on Mexico. At the age of 27, Tilton saw the war as both an opportunity and a punishment for his forebears’ lives and that the Constitution forbids interference in the rights of states to govern within their borders, including the right to allow or ban slavery. He thought that black men should not have equal rights with white men and that conflicts over slavery threatened social peace.

In 1857 Tilton campaigned for presidential candidate and fellow Aztecan Frank Pierce, a northerner who placed preservation of the union above the eradication of slavery. Pierce carried Indiana and won the election.
H ow Charles Mitchell be-
came Tilton’s responsibility is uncertain. In 1850, when
Charles was three, his moth-
er died of cholera. His white father, an
oyster fisherman on Chesapeake Bay, was not part of his life. Slave status was
carried in the female line—since his mother was
not part of his life. Slave status was carried
in the female line—since his mother was
married for seven years when he brought
Mitchell west. Tilton may have “rented”
Charles, needing a boy to help with en-
trances to the move to the Washington
frontier. More likely, he felt an obliga-
tion to help his cousin.

Whatever the circumstances, it’s fairly certain that Tilton promised to
raise and educate the boy for a job and
to free him when he turned 18. Tilton was a patriarch who took responsibil-
ity for people. He brought his widowed
husband to Marengo burned down and the
house at Marengo burned down and the
Mitchell’s mother died, her mistress,
tions. According to family tradition, when
Mitchell’s grandparents and other
had served the Gibsons for several genera-
tions. Mitchell’s grandparents and other
relatives lived on the Marengo planta-
tion. According to family tradition, when
Mitchell’s mother died, her mistress,
Rebecca Reynolds Gibson, promised to take
care of the boy. However, the main
house at Marengo burned down and the
property was to be sold out of the fam-
ily. Perhaps when her cousin was appointed to a good government job in what
seemed likely to become a free state,
Rebecca saw a way to keep her promise.

Tilton could own Mitchell in Wash-
ington Territory and declared for
or against slavery at statehood. Despite
its legality, slavery was un-
common in the vast Washington Territ-
ory. The editor of the Olympia Pioneer
and Democrat wrote that slavery was not
an issue “because it has long since
ceased to be a question.” A few settlers and
army officers had freed their slaves when they
arrived, and there were a few free black men
and women. Rebecca and Frank
Howard, a black couple who
owned and managed an Olym-
pia hotel, were respected and
esteemed members of the local
Episcopal Church, the same
teachings of the Tiltons attended.
A more pressing issue than
slavery was the status of the ter-
ritory’s Native American inhab-
itants. Tilton was immediately
drawn into conflicts stemming
from treaty negotiations although
he had not taken part in them. When
Nisqually Chief Leschi resisted
with Yakama opponents of the treaties,
Governor Isaac Stevens appointed Tilton
to the post of adjutant general. Tilton
then organized a volunteer militia
and defenses for Olympia. The events of this
period hardened Tilton’s racial attitudes.
He turned against Native Americans and
professed himself “delighted” when
militiamen massacred some 60 Indians
at Grindale Road in July 1856. Tilton called
the treaty war a “war of races” in which
Indians intended “to extirpate the white man.”

Newspaper reports of Charles Mitchell’s
flight from Olympia varied widely in
their views of the incident. Below, the
Port Townsend North West Claimed
that Mitchell was not a slave while the
September 27, 1860, Victoria Colonist,
right, commented that in freeing Mitchell,
the Victoria Supreme Court chief justice
had made “a righteous decision.”

In a bid for freedom, Charles Mitchell stowed
away on the mail steamer Eliza Anderson,
bound for Victoria, Vancouver Island.

A RUNAWAY SLAVE CASE—On the 30th, Sep-
tember, a negro boy, named Charles Mitchell, of
Olympia, Puget Sound, was lately taken by the
seamen of the steamer Douglas, and conveyed
from Oregon in 1853, slavery was still
legal in 1855. The Oregon Territory had
rubbed at eight years of age, Charles Mitchell accompanied the Tilton
household when it moved across the continent to Olympia.

Wanting to help others attain free-
dom, two free blacks from Victoria
approached Mitchell on the streets of
Olympia and told him he would be free
if he stowed away on the mail steamer,
Eliza Anderson, on which one of them
was a cook. Mitchell made the choice
for freedom but was discovered on return-
to Victoria and detained by the
territorial government, necessitating a writ of habeas corpus
to free him from the steamer. He was
brought before a judge in Victoria who
declared, “No man could be held as a
slave on British soil” and set him free.

Four days after the hearing, Tilton
sent a formal letter to the acting gov-
ernor of Washington Territory, protest-
ing that Mitchell was not a slave while the
Port Townsend North West Claimed
that Mitchell was not a slave while the
September 27, 1860, Victoria Colonist,
right, commented that in freeing Mitchell,
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had made “a righteous decision.”
Tilton did not hold him as a slave, but sought to fit him to make his own living before turning him adrift. Having been relieved of the responsibility by a voluntary action of the boy, he is glad of it.

Just two months after Mitchell died, Tilton’s world changed too. Democrats could not unite behind a single candidate in the 1860 election. Tilton supported the candidacy of John Breckinridge, the pro-southern Democrat, as did Isaac Stevens, who went east to manage Breckinridge’s campaign. When Breckinridge and Stephen Douglas split the Democratic vote, Tilton “did not hold him as a slave, but left behind his son, James Tilton Pickert, whose Native American mother had died shortly after giving him life. Pickert placed young James under the guardianship of his namesake. Tilton did not take the young boy into his household but was the financial agent for his care, once more taking responsibility for family and friends.

As friends left to fight in the war, Tilton stayed put. He had been reappointed to his job in 1857 by President James Buchanan, a northern man with southern sympathies, but he would not have sacrificed anything and will do still to preserve and perpetuate our old form of Government.”
A musical career came naturally to Eugene Linden. It was his family legacy. His father, Harry Linden, had conducted both the Chicago Civic Opera and the Portland Symphony Orchestra, and his mother performed as a violinist. His uncles were flautists; his grandfather, a musician and Prussian military officer; and his great-grandfather, an organ builder in the town of Trier in western Germany. Linden wore a ruby ring—a gift, according to family legend, from Frederick the Great to the Linden ancestor who taught the king to play the flute.

Eugene Linden made his first radio debut on the flute at age 15. As a teenager, he was assistant conductor of the Portland Junior Symphony. In September 1933, at the age of 21, he hitchhiked from Portland to Tacoma with five dollars in his pocket and a plan to start his own orchestra. Tacoma, he later explained, “was the only place on the Pacific Coast that could support an orchestra and didn’t have one.”

Linden did not doubt he would succeed, even in the thick of the Great Depression. Neither was he dissuaded when only three people showed up to audition at his first call for musicians. Seven months later he had his orchestra—40 local musicians and 20 more from Portland and Seattle.

The new philharmonic first performed on a Saturday evening, March 17, 1934. The musicians were amateurs, and the auxiliary stage in the Jason Lee School auditorium was ad hoc, but their rendition of Mendelssohn’s overture to Ruy Blas—a heavy, tragic piece—impressed the Depression audience. The standing ovation lasted 15 minutes and only ended when Linden, in full evening dress, performed the overture a second time. The concert moved on to Beethoven; the Tacoma Philharmonic Orchestra had begun.

The philharmonic continued to perform in the Jason Lee auditorium at a rate of four concerts per year, with Linden commuting—often hitchhiking—from Portland, taking one side trip to Europe for a scholarship at the Mozarteum Academy and to guest-conduct the St. Moritz Symphony Orchestra in Switzerland. When he returned, he had to confront the Depression that dogged the philharmonic’s finances. In 1938 the orchestra succumbed, canceling its 1938–39 season for lack of funds.

Linden took advantage of the break to marry Virginia Carroll, a Los Angeles violinist who performed with motion picture orchestras. Virginia, the always-smiling, “attractive young wife,” had three children with Eugene—Peter, Philip, and Christopher—all trained in music by their parents. When the Tacoma Philharmonic and Eugene Linden returned to work in 1939, it was to perform for a country at war. At times, the war took away—such as when the army mobilized the entire horn section. At times the war gave back—such as when military mobilization brought new musicians to Camp Murray. The philharmonic did what it could in return, providing free tickets...
fter the war Linden began to look beyond Tacoma, relying on relationships with artists around Pagar Sound to turn the Tacoma Philharmonic into a regional orchestra. In 1947 he joined the philharmonic’s orchestra with the Seattle Symphony to form the Pacific Northwest Symphony—which performed in Tacoma, Seattle, and Olympia—and split conducting duties with Carl Bricken. But Linden was dissatisfaction with the new joint symphony orchestra and the arrangement ended after one season. In 1948 he pulled off a coup, leading 75 musicians away from the Seattle Symphony into a new symphony—a collective partnership of musicians that called itself the Seattle Symphony Orchestra. The philharmonic coordinated with the Seattle Orchestra for the presentation of four concerts a year.

Linden’s experiment in the Seattle Orchestra did not last. Within two years, the orchestra returned to the Seattle Symphony with Linden at its head. But the Seattle Orchestra’s short life had transformed the Tacoma Philharmonic. It ceased performances as an amateur ensemble and began a new mission: to bring world-class artists to Tacoma audiences. In the years following, the Tacoma Philharmonic has regularly presented Tacoma with Seattle Symphony performances in addition to appearances by such renowned classical artists as Andrés Segovia on guitar, Itzhak Perlman and Joshua Bell on violin, André Watts on piano, and Aaron Copland, Igor Stravinsky, and Arthur Fiedler as conductors.

In 1950 Linden handed off the baton of the Seattle Symphony to Manuel Rosenthal, whom Linden had first brought to Seattle as a guest conductor, and moved on to his next great project—an opera company. In 1950 and again in 1951, he traveled to Europe to study opera and, as a Fulbright Scholar, to translate The Marriage of Figaro into English. En route—in New York—he met with opera singers and a set designer to engage them for a production in Tacoma. Linden brought back Frances Yeend, a childhood friend; Vancouver, Washington, native; and a mainstay prima donna of New York opera.

The product of Linden’s efforts was the Northwest Grand Opers Association, which he ran with Cecilia Schultz-Augspurger, Seattle socialite and manager of the Moore Theatre. Schultz, whom Time magazine described as “a tall, bosomy woman,” had proved herself when she helped resolve the Seattle musician’s strike in Linden’s favor. Together, they got the new company up and running to perform La Traviata in Tacoma on May 2, 1951. Linden wanted to take the opera company on tour to perform in all the major cities of the Pacific Northwest: Seattle, Everett, Olympia, Tacoma, Bremerton, Yakima, Spokane, Portland, and Victoria and Vancouver, B.C. Between 1951 and 1955 the company performed seven canonical operas, including Carmen, Madama Butterfly, and—courtesy of Linden’s translation—The Marriage of Figaro, reaching a total audience of 75,000.

The Northwest Grand Opera Association lasted five seasons—until the financial stress of performing in multiple cities put an end to it. With the opera company’s collapse, things began to fall apart for Linden. He took to drinking and his marriage, which on the surface had appeared so happy, ended. He made one more brief appearance in the news in 1974 when he was mistakenly reported dead. Restlessness carried Eugene Linden from Portland to Tacoma to Europe and back. He did not work on a project for long before he abandoned it to take up a new one. But each of Linden’s projects managed to survive after his departure, in part because of the talented artists he recruited to work with him.

The Portland Junior Symphony—Linden’s first conducting post—has since toured the world. Now known as the Portland Youth Philharmonic, it remains the oldest youth orchestra in the country and a model that many others have followed. The Tacoma Philharmonic, which Linden created at the age of 21, has changed since its beginnings. Moving out of the Jason Lee Auditorium, it performed in Tacoma’s Temple Theater, the Stadium Bowl, and the Pantages Theater. On February 12, 2012, after 75 seasons of illustrious performances and the finest classical artists, the organization announced that it was merging with the Broadway Center for the Performing Arts, which would manage the Tacoma Philharmonic as an endowment fund to bring world-class musicians to Tacoma in perpetuity.

Linden’s last endeavor, the Pacific Northwest Grand Opera Association, was perhaps the most precarious. However, in 1956, before it collapsed, Linden engaged Glynn Ross—an unknown Arizonan—to stage-direct one of his operas. Some years after Linden had fallen into self-destruction, a few of his opera supporters recalled Ross’s directing skills and in 1963 hired him to start the Seattle Opera Company. In 1972 that company created the Pacific Northwest Company, which broke off to form the Pacific Northwest Ballet. Both the Seattle Opera Company and the Pacific Northwest Ballet continue to fill McCaw Hall with enthusiastic patrons.

In 1983, at the age of 70, Eugene Linden died in obscurity in Lincoln City, Oregon—alone and discontented. Although his great public works of music survive him, his eulogists called him “a promise unfulfilled.”
When Colonel Edward Steptoe rode out of the newly constructed Fort Walla Walla in May 1858, he had two official objectives. The first was to journey 200 miles north to Colville to investigate two murders and quell hostilities between Indians and miners near the Hudson’s Bay Company post. Secondly, he was to apprehend Palouse Indians who had stolen cattle from Fort Walla Walla. An unspoken, unofficial purpose of Steptoe’s sortie was undoubt- edly to show a make of the U.S. Army’s military might. The expedition consisted of five companies—five officers and 152 enlisted men, including an artillery company—plus a few Nez Perce scouts. Steptoe could not possibly imagine that his springtime maneuvers would end in a bloody battle and a desperate retreat.

In the mid 19th century, the goal of the United States government was to confine Native American tribes to reservations and thus clear title to much of their land, paving the way for settlers. To that end, in the mid-1850s Isaac Stevens, governor of Washington Territory, convened a series of treaty councils at which he pressured Indians in the region to relinquish vast tracts of land to the United States while retaining certain areas—reservations—to which they had been accustomed to do so and agreed to pay for the land, teach the Indians how to continue to hunt and fish where they had been accustomed to do so and agreed to pay for the land, teach the Indians how to.

Columbia Plateau Indians and Army Dragoons Skirmish in the Palouse Hills

By Mahlon E. Kriebel

In the mid 19th century, the goal of the United States government was to confine Native American tribes to reservations and thus clear title to much of their land, paving the way for settlers. To that end, in the mid-1850s Isaac Stevens, governor of Washington Territory, convened a series of treaty councils at which he pressured Indians in the region to relinquish vast tracts of land to the United States while retaining certain areas—reservations—to which they had been accustomed to do so and agreed to pay for the land, teach the Indians how to continue to hunt and fish where they had been accustomed to do so and agreed to.

RELUCTANT WARRIORS

...continued to enter the region. Faced with growing reports of murder, depredation, and theft by whites against Indians and Indians against whites, the U.S. Army struggled to keep the peace.

Governor Stevens voiced no protest when local militias made up of white settlers carried out violent attacks on the Indian population. In July 1856 a company of the Washington Territorial Volunteers commanded by Benjamin Shaw, who had worked as an interpreter for Governor Stevens during the 1855 treaty councils, slaughtered more than 50 Cayuse Indians who were peacefully digging camas on the Grande Ronde River. In August, Major General John E. Wool, head of the U.S. Army’s Pacific Division, ordered Colonel George Wright, in charge of the Ninth Infantry stationed in the Pacific Northwest, to keep settlers out of the Columbia Plateau in an effort to limit the violence.

Settlers ignored the military’s restrictions and continued to enter the region. Retaliation and aggression continued to increase on both sides. The Indians found it difficult to differentiate the local militia volunteers who attacked them from the army soldiers who were supposed to be protecting them. In late summer of 1856, Colonel Wright denied a request by Governor Stevens for a military presence at a second Columbia Plateau treaty council. That treaty council fell apart and Stevens’s company was surrounded by hostile Indians near the mouth of the Walla Walla River. Colonel Steptoe had to send a detachment to rescue the group, firing on the Indians with howitzers to force them to retreat.

The Plateau Indians’ distrust of the United States government was plan-
ing to dispossess them of all their land. The Walla Walla area formed a gateway to the Columbia Plateau and routes crossing the Bitterroot Mountains. In 1858 the Coeur d’Alene, Spokane, Colville, Kootenai, and Kalispell tribes formed a treaty council with the military, offering to join forces to keep the military off the Columbia Plateau.

The two cultures were on a collision course on the tranquil Palouse Prairie. Steptoe’s May 1858 expedition set out from Fort Walla Walla and followed the well-used Nez Perce trail leading west to the Bitterroot Mountains. In 1858 the Coeur d’Alene, Spokane, Colville, Kootenai, and Kalispell tribes formed a treaty council with the military, offering to join forces to keep the military off the Columbia Plateau.

Another attempt to confine Indians against whites, the U.S. Army antagonized the warlike tribes. In July 1856 a company of the Washington Territorial Volunteers commanded by Benjamin Shaw, who had worked as an interpreter for Governor Stevens during the 1855 treaty councils, slaughtered more than 50 Cayuse Indians who were peacefully digging camas on the Grande Ronde River. The marching party between Chief Vincent and Colonel Edward Steptoe, with Father Joseph Joset translating, ended in a handshake and an agreement not to fight.

The marching party between Chief Vincent and Colonel Edward Steptoe, with Father Joseph Joset translating, ended in a handshake and an agreement not to fight. Soldiers could see spurs of the Bitterroot Mountains to the east and breaks of the Blue Mountains to the south. Thirty miles north, standing 1,202 feet above the rolling prairie, Pyramid Peak (now Steptoe Butte) was a beacon for prairie travel. Steptoe’s command saw Indians in the breaks of the Snake River and chased but could not catch them. The troops descended Alpowa Canyon to the Snake River and camped. On May 11, Chief Timothy’s Nez Perce wanted ferried the soldiers and swam their horses across the river at Red Wolf Crossing, where they made camp that night. Leaving the crossing on May 11, the expedition proceeded east on the Red Wolf Trail to the north–south Lapwai Trail at Tahanu Hills (now Moscow, Idaho) and bivouacked on the south fork of the Palouse River. The command reached Kennedy Ford on the North Fork of the Palouse River on May 13. The Palouse River, known as the Nez Perce River by the Coeur d’Alene Indians, formed the boundary between the two tribes. At the ford, a warrior warned Lieutenant David McMurtrie Gregg to turn back as the Spokane Indians would resist the army’s advance. Steptoe ignored the warning and sent two dispatches to Lieutenant Grier in Walla Walla Walla noting, “They say that they will fight; I dare say they will, but I hope we shall be able to give them a good drubbing.” The column rode north across the western spurs of the Bitterroot, keeping Pyramid Peak to the west. After a ride of 14 miles they camped the night of May 14 at the headwaters of Ingossomen Creek, known as the Nez Perce River by the Coeur d’Alene Indians, as the Bitterroot Mountains. The following day, the command headed north–south to the trail leading west to the Continental Divide to Fort Benton on the Missouri River and back to Fort Walla Walla. On May 16 the column camped to turn back because the Spokanes were ready to fight; Steptoe wrote, “I followed leisurely on...”


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Steptoe estimated that there were 1,000 mounted Indians on the hilltops and more arriving every minute. That evening, Father Joseph arrived in Seelah after riding 60 miles from his mission on the Cœur d’Alene River. He counseled peace for the long-term survival of the Cœur d’Alene people. During the night, warriors beating drums and shooting into the air from the hills tops overlooking the army camp made it difficult for Father Joseph to sleep. Three miles away at the army camp, revolver was sounded at an inquiring, May 17, and the column was under way by five. The camp was empty when Father Joseph and Chief Vincent arrived for a third peace parley. Riding barely, they caught the column heading toward Ingossum Creek. Father Joseph rode to the front of the column to arrange a parley.

However, Steptoe argued that he could not stop the command because the walk mules were skittish. Warriors appeared on the ranks of the command. Father Joseph suggested that he would translate so they could parley while riding. The priest escorted Chief Vincent and a couple of the other sub-chiefs to the front of the column to join Colonel Steptoe. Father Joseph alleviated fears that both men had harbored, and a truce was reached. Then, without warning, a Nez Perce rode to Chief Vincent and struck him with his riding crop. Father Joseph’s writings base account and Kolecki’s, recorded oral tradition are remarkably similar to Steptoe, Gregg, and Winder’s written accounts of the marching party.

The Nez Perce guide adhered: “Proud man, why you not fire?” Steptoe immediately defined the situation [no record of how].

Victor, a Cœur d’Alene sub-chief noted for his diplomacy, offered the advice: “Let us each return to our home.”

In a later report, Father Joseph wrote that, as the command retired from Ingossum Creek, Palouse Indians opened fire. Joseph was wounded in the saddle, and Goss continued the parley. Although buffeted by the soldier’s behavior, Chief Vincent persisted. While neither warriors nor troops fired, some of the Indians made threatening sounds and gestures. The dragons remained mounted for the three-hour parley. During that time, an express arrived with dispatches from Fort Walla Walla, ordering the column to the east. The colonel returned to Captain Winder and the interpreter, of the day, posted a large guard.

That evening, Joseph Camp was deserted. The Nez Perce had started the battle. He then later hanged only Palouse warriors and permitted Malskape, a Cœur d’Alene suspect, to return to his people.

As the command neared a basalt mesa offering a superior advantage to the Indians, Chief Vincent ordered Steptoe to secure the hills to the east so that the column could leave the trail. The command followed, and Captain Winder fired several cannon rounds. Lieutenant Gregg secured the next hilltop one mile to the south. One soldier was killed and six were wounded.

The Cœur d’Alene Indians watched the battle from the east. Malskape, one of the more belligerent sub-chiefs, argued that they should now join the battle to “cut the head of the snake and its tail.” Victor replied that they had promised safe conduct. Malskape stuck Victor with his riding crop and called him a coward. The diminutive Father Joseph wrested the powerful Mal- skape to the ground to restore order. Malskape mounted his horse, shouted “Let us each return to our home,” and rode with his friends into the ravine separating the two hilltops defended by soldiers.

When Lieutenant Gregg saw the Indians and Lieutenant William Gas ton’s company riding to the ravine, he determined to execute a right-angle saber maneuver by charging down the ravine separating the two hills. Gregg’s dragoons had the advantage with a few Shoshone warriors. They were readily loaded from horseback with a prepackaged round containing powder, wadding, and a minié ball. The Shoshone warriors with Goss and ball angularized the Hudson’s Bay muskets used by the Indians. The warriors for Father Joseph’s sake in Chief Kamiakin’s dragoon rode straight down the hill, firing into the cluster of Indians.
Steptoe proposed to fight on the morrow, but his officers argued that they “would certainly go under…”

The three parleys between Steptoe and Vincent demonstrate that neither wished to fight. The Palouse Indians appear to have started the battle, which was then joined by Spokane and Coeur d’Alenes.

pushed against the basalt walls of the ravine. The dragoons carrying musketons loaded with several balls were deadly effective at point-blank range. Twelve Indians were killed, including Jean Pierre and Zachary. Victor was mortally wounded. There were no dragoon casualties during this skirmish.

Immediately after the dragoon charge, the companies closed ranks along Ingossomen Creek. Steptoe’s command rode left flank (east) to secure the hilltops. Brevet Captain Oliver H. Taylor’s company rode right flank (west) to prevent warriors from crossing Ingossomen Creek. Observing the effectiveness of the army’s tactics, the Indian chiefs directed their warriors to shoot the officers. Captain Taylor was shot through the loin, caused him to fall. When put onto his horse again, the captain was struck by a second, fatal, ball. Lieutenant William Gaston, at the head of his company, was shot through his torso and fell. Indians closed and Gaston’s men fled to the main column, leaving Gaston to die alone.

Gaston’s men fled to the main column, leaving Gaston to die alone. A fresh replacement was then joined by Spokane and Coeur d’Alenes, who appear to have started the battle, which was then joined by Spokane and Coeur d’Alenes. The Coeur d’Alenes found the army and requested a meeting. Steptoe and Vincent demonstrated that neither wished to fight. The Palouse Indians appeared to have started the battle, which was then joined by Spokane and Coeur d’Alenes.
d’Alene warriors. Casualties were about equal on both sides. If the soldiers had remained at the redoubt, they would likely have been annihilated the next day. Steptoe’s decision to retreat saved the lives of 150 soldiers.

The Coeur d’Alene Indians, in possession of the eastern and southeastern positions, simply watched the retreating column. Their inclination to let the soldiers escape may have been strengthened by the fact that Steptoe abandoned his mules and supplies at the redoubt. Only the Coeur d’Alenes appear to have taken possession of these. They were later required by Colonel Wright to make restitution for what the army left behind in its flight. The Kolecki field note maps (see sidebar on page 19) show that Steptoe was stopped on a trail by Chief Vincent two miles from the Indian encampment of Seelah (now Stubblefield Lake, Spokane County). The trail ended at the village, implicating the Nez Perce guides in a conspiracy—
as suggested by both Chief Vincent and Father Joset—to force a battle.

This information was never reported in the local press. Instead, Steptoe’s defeat elicited cries for vengeance in area newspapers, which were answered by the retaliatory Wright campaign.

In September 1858, Colonel George Wright initiated a military expedition to, as Lieutenant John Mullan wrote, “strike a blow that should reach the Indians a never-to-be-forbidden lesson.” Wright’s force included 400 infantry, 200 dragoons, four howitzers manned by 100 artillery soldiers, and 30 Nez Perce warriors and scouts, and was accompanied by 400 mules driven by 200 skinners. With his well-equipped and heavily armed force, Wright went on a burn-and-destroy mission that scattered the Indians and crushed their will to fight. After this resounding defeat, the Nez Perce and other tribes capitulated and signed peace treaties with the U.S. government.

One could say that Colonel Steptoe’s May 1858 expedition had devastating consequences for the Plateau tribes. The overthrow of his mission sparked the Wright campaign, during which the Indians’ warrior ranks were scattered and weakened, their food stores destroyed, and their most prized possessions—their horses—slaughtered. On the other hand, the Plateau Indians would have faced almost certain extermination had they chosen to fight a guerilla war from their mountain retreats. Their defeat was the price of their survival.

Edward Steptoe retired from service in 1861 because of ill health and died of a stroke in 1865. George Wright died that same year in a shipwreck. Isaac Stevens joined the Union Army when the Civil War broke out and died in battle a year later. Chief Vincent lived well into old age on the Coeur d’Alene Reservation.

Mahlon E. Kriebel was born on the Palouse Prairie. He was a professor of physiology at the State University of New York’s Health Science Center in Syracuse for many years. After retiring to the family farm, he turned his focus to the Plateau Indian Wars of 1858. The author thanks Sam Pambrun, Steve Plucker, and Jim Fletcher for their assistance during preparation of this article.

After a running battle on May 17, Steptoe’s troops formed a redoubt near present-day Rosalia, pinned between Coeur d’Alene Indians to the east, Spokane Indians to the north, and Palouse Indians to the west.

ON JUNE 14, 1910, a fire spread through downtown Wilkeson, a mining town situated 26 miles from Tacoma, causing $10,000 in damage. The fire, which started in the kitchen of the Eagle Bar, was aided by strong winds and the town’s use of wood as the predominant building material for homes, sidewalks, and fences. Once the volunteer bucket brigade ran out of water, the fire kept going until it was contained by McCaskey’s Funeral Parlor, a concrete structure. Fires such as this one at Wilkeson were a common occurrence in young western towns.

—Maria Pascualy

Wilkeson Conflagration

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Patterson—decided to swim for shore.

to the mainmast—Erick Sundberg, Charles Carlson, and Peter Patterson
the mizzenmast rigging. At daybreak, three of the five clinging
away. Nine men clung to the foremast while the captain gripped
life vests and lashed themselves to the masts; others were washed
Chepatis Creek (now Copalis River). Some crew members took
side with the breakers crashing over it near what was described as
dered the wheel hard to port, causing the ship to go on its broad
sand around 3:30 in the morning on January 29. The captain or
ficer, Captain Robert Blair, “lost his reckoning” and mistook the
Columbia to the area near the mouth of Grays Harbor and
was taken by the northeast current about 60 miles north of
the Columbia River. A survivor described the ship as hitting
pioneer and successful entrepreneur in Alaska.

Gold Lifesaving Medal Recipient
and Alaska Pioneer

By Shanna Stevenson

One of the few women—and the only Wash-
nington woman—to receive the Gold Life-
saving Medal from the United States govern-
ment, Martha White saved the lives of three
seamen whose ship, the Ferndale, founded near her home
north of Grays Harbor in 1892. She went on to become a
pioneer and successful entrepreneur in Alaska.

The Washington coast near the entrance to Grays Har-
bor has been littered with shipwrecks over the years. In the
few years before the Ferndale went aground, the Abercorn
took over 20 lives in 1888; the Stranuhan struck the beach
at Ocean Park, where seven died in 1891; and, according to
the New York Times, the Aipath went aground late in 1891,
after which a tugboat towed it to safety.

The 240-foot-long Ferndale was launched on April 21,
1891, from the Forde Shipyard in Londonderry, Ireland, by
Charles J. Bigger, shipbuilder. Owned by the British firm of
J. Henry Iredale & Co., the 1,270-ton sailing bark was built
with steel masts and hull. She was bound in January 1892 for
Portland, Oregon, from Newcastle, New South Wales, carry-
ing a cargo of coal and coke consigned to the Oregon Improve-
ment Company. In Portland she was to exchange her cargo for
wheat before returning home to England but never made it
across the Columbia River bar. Caught in a gale, the Ferndale
was taken by the northeast current about 60 miles north of
the Columbia to the area near the mouth of Grays Harbor and
then driven another 15 miles north.

One crew member later reported that the commanding of-
cer, Captain Robert Blair, “lost his reckoning” and mistook the
mouth of Grays Harbor sighted the previous day for the mouth
of the Columbia River. A survivor described the ship as haring
sand around 3:30 in the morning on January 29. The captain or-
dered the wheel hard to port, causing the ship to go on its broad-
side with the breakers crashing over it near what was described as
Chupata Creek (now Copalis River). Some crew members took
life vests and lashed themselves to the masts; others were washed
away. Nine men clung to the foremost while the captain grabbed
the mizzenmast rigging. At daybreak, three of the five clinging
to the mainmast—Erick Sundberg, Charles Carlson, and Peter
Patterson—decided to swim for shore.

Early that morning a neighbor alerted Martha and Ed-
ward White that there was a ship in the breakers several
hundred yards offshore, just opposite their home near Co-
palis Beach. Martha, then 25 years of age, quickly dressed
and grabbed a white flag. She could see the ship and the men
clinging to the masts. The Whites waved the flag and
fired a gun to alert the men on the ship. Edward went up
the beach since the current was running north, while Martha
stayed where she was, continuing to signal with the gun.
Her husband came back and then returned up the beach in
a fruitless search for survivors.

Watching as the foremost went over, Martha continued her
beach patrol, hoping to tow survivors to safety with a rope. At
last she saw one of the sailors who had washed ashore—thrown
there by a huge breaker. She removed his life preserver and
helped him to shore. After he was revived, Martha returned to her
house. Shortly after, a neighbor with a boat tied a line to the
Ferndale, which was remaining afloat but midway to shore.
Seeing her, Martha returned to her house, grabbed a white
cloth, and went to the ferry boat house near her home. There
she was seen by a huge breaker. She removed his life preserver
and hauled him ashore where both of them collapsed, exhausted. Patterson later attested, “Had it not been for her, it is doubtful if we would
have been able to crawl out of the water.”

Edward White and neighbors William Welch and C. B. Horn
carried Patterson to the Whites’ house. Other neigh-

Martha White, c. 1892, wearing the two lifesaving medals she received after saving three sailors from the shipwrecked Ferndale in January 1892. The inscription side of the Gold Lifesaving Medal presented to White by the Life-Saving Service of the U.S. Treasury. The gold medal awarded to White by citizens of Portland and the city’s chamber of commerce. The Archdale, a sister ship of the Ferndale, built in 1891 by Charles J. Bigger and owned by J. Henry Iredale & Co. A Portland newspaper described what Martha White had done as “an act of the noblest heroism on the part of a woman
of inferior physical strength, unaided and alone, on a stormy and uninhabited sea-coast, that for the sake of humanity, for the sake of women-hood, for the sake of our own sex, should not go unnoticed, or, if it were possible, unrewarded.” This
description of White as “a woman of inferior physical strength” turned out to be off the mark.

Through a concerted effort of newspaper editors and politi-
cians, she was presented with a Gold Lifesaving Medal, the high-
est honor given by the Life-Saving Service, an agency within the

Born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1867, Martha Greer
was 14 when she arrived in New York with her fam-
ily. Later moving to New Jersey with a son, Robert,
from a previous marriage, she met and married
Edward White. The family moved first to Texas and then to
the Washington coast near present-day Copalis Beach. They
lived in a home close to the beach and by 1892 had claimed
a 144-acre farm there.
U.S. Department of the Treasury that was later merged with the Revenue Cutter Service to form the U.S. Coast Guard.

Martha White’s actions, documented by local newspaper accounts quoting the surviving sailors, caught the notice of the press, including the Hoquiam Washingtonian, Aberdeen Herald, Portland Oregonian, New York Times, and San Francisco Chronicle. By February 5, 1892, Walter F. Cushing, editor of the Aberdeen Herald, contacted the then United States senator from Washington, B. Allen, sending him newspaper clippings about the event. Allen quickly pursued recognition from the United States secretary of the treasury, who referred the matter to Sumner I. Kimball, superintendent of the Life-Saving Service. Kimball advised Allen of the evidence requirements that must be met for an individual to receive the Gold Lifesaving Medal.

The requirements were detailed in Circular 66, issued by the Treasury in 1899. It noted that the medal could only be awarded to “those who have endangered their lives in saving or endeavoring to save others from the perils of the sea…” and for “those exceptional instances where peculiar bravery or unusual effort has been displayed, or some great personal sacrifice has been made.” Only affidavits signed under oath and officially verified could serve as evidence.

Thomas C. Mendenhall, superintendent of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, also contacted the Treasury to request appropriate recognition for Martha White. The case was strengthened by an affidavit from the British vice-consul at Astoria, verifying White’s Washingtonian governor, Elisha Ferry, soon became involved.

Since the Ferndale was bound for Portland, the chamber of commerce and citizens of Portland expressed their gratitude to White in March 1892 by awarding her a distinctive gold medal and $275. Apparently there was some jealousy of the recognition accorded to White. The Aberdeen Herald noted in that same month that the settlement was formed by the settlers along North Beach over the praise bestowed upon Mrs. Edward White for her services at the Ferndale wreck, and a strong effort made to belittle her bravery.” The paper defended her, stating, “It is beyond question that all the settlers along the beach resided such aid as was in their power and are entitled to great praise for their kindness to survivors and respect for the dead, but envy should not counterbalance their generosity. The survivors of the wreck distinctly told the editor of the Herald that they owed their lives solely to the bravery of Mrs. White.”

Responding to Governor Ferry’s request and fulfilling the requirements in Circular 66, Martha White provided a notarized account of the incident, attested to by two ship’s captains, the subagent representing the harbor master, the skipper of the Hoquiam Tribune, Ferry sent White’s account to Charles Foster, secretary of the treasury, referencing the 1874 act of Congress, and then the prescribed Circular 66. The information was forwarded to Sumner Kimball by late March and then referred in early April to the committee on lifesaving medals for review. The complete file of White’s application is available through the National Archives.

The review committee was made up of Kimball, Felix A. Reese, assistant solicitor for the Treasury; and Leonard G. Sheppard, revenue chief of the Marine Division and the first commander of the U.S. Coast Guard. The committee reviewed the application to the secretary of the treasury on April 18 with a recommendation to award the gold medal to Mrs. Edward White.

A medal was duly ordered. Martha White requested that the inscription read “Martha White” rather than “Mrs. Edward White.” Secretary Foster forwarded the medal to Senator Allen, who sent it to White in July 1892 with the inscription, “To Martha White for heroic daring in rescuing three men from drowning, January 29, 1892.” A Washingtonian article quoted Secretary Foster as saying, “Such achievements as these are usually wrought only by strong men, and are thus justly considered worthy of great praise. Accomplished by a woman, they attain the highest degree of heroism and are entitled to and command extraordinary admiration.” Only one other woman had previously been awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal—Ida Lewis Wilson, a Rhode Island lighthouse keeper. Only 12 women have been awarded the medal since Martha White. It was and still is rare for a civilian to receive this medal.

Senator John Allen and other Grays Harbor residents hoped that the wreck of the Ferndale would spur the federal government to build a lighthouse and lifesaving station at Grays Harbor. The Washingtonian published an editorial lamenting the fact that the only lifesaving station on the coast was at Ilwaco and that there was only a small light at Willapa Bay. The U.S. Lighthouse Board rejected Senator Wilson’s appeal to fast-track the light that had been promised to Washington since 1854. According to the Washingtonian, it was Grays Harbor’s prominence as a lumber port that finally spurred the federal government to act. The Gray County Times reported that the Grays Harbor lighthouse was constructed south of the mouth of Grays Harbor near Westport, it remains the tallest lighthouse in Washington.

After receiving accolades, medals, and financial rewards, Martha White did not remain long in Grays Harbor. By May 1894 the Whites had relocated to Alaska’s Cook Inlet, where they established a fur-trading business in a log cabin store and a roadhouse at Laud’s Landing, and investing in mining property near Hope. Edward White was described as a whaler who traveled to the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean. Martha White expanded her entrepreneurial efforts on the inlet by establishing a fish cannery and saltery.

At Cook Inlet around 1895, White gave birth to a baby girl. She named the baby Martha but usually called her “Babe.” White is documented by the U.S. Army Cook Inlet Expedition in 1899. After leaving the gold rush to Sunshine, she made and lost a considerable amount of money and returned to running hotels at Hope City and Sunshine.

A notice in the San Francisco presse in 1900 listed a divorce action for Edward A. White against Martha White for desertion. By 1903 Martha had married Fred Smith, a miner, whom she later divorced. Meanwhile, the fame of Martha White and the Ferndale wreck endured. A sentimental poem about the wreck made its way into the Des Moines, Iowa, Midland Monthly in 1897, and in 1899 New York’s The Century Magazine gave a complete summary of the incident, as did the San Francisco Overland Monthly in 1907.

White was honored in 1912 as one of six women to receive the “American Cross of Honor,” which Congress authorized in 1896 and presented to persons recognized for rescues and those who had received lifesaving medals. When the Alaska Railroad extended to Anchorage in 1915, Martha’s 20-year-old daughter Babe was called upon to drive the first spike on the Ship Creek section. She was said to be the first “white child” on Cook Inlet, which apparently gained her some celebrity. Her mother was among the first to establish a tent hotel and eatery in the new townsite of Anchorange, then called Ship Creek. With lumber and canvas she had purchased, White erected tents with stacked boxes, changing one dollar a night for lodging. After the town was platted, she built the White House Hotel on Main Street.

When Martha White died in February 1919, she was feted as one of the pioneers of Alaska and called “Mother White” for her charitable and community-building activities, including Red Cross work and ministering to the sick and needy. Her eulogy noted: “For more than twenty-five years Martha White has been intimately associated with the development of this part of Alaska; she has conducted many and varied business enterprises, making mining deals, trading with the natives, grub-staking prospectors.” The eulogy recalled her during lifesaving efforts at Grays Harbor, reflecting that, “In the life of Martha White, tuned as it was to adventures, it was but an incident.” As a sign of the town’s regard, all stores and businesses were closed during her funeral on February 12, 1919. Her son Robert continued to manage the White House Hotel after her death.

Neither of Martha’s children—Robert White nor Babe White Cotter—had any offspring. In 1949 a member of Martha White’s extended family contacted the Philadelphia Inquirer about White and the rescue for a school project. After an Alaska newspaper picked up the story, an Alaska bank manager contacted family members to tell them that the bank had been holding Martha White’s medals in a safe deposit box. The family received the medals and continues to treasure them. Beach-combers in the Ocean Shore area of Washington coast can still find coal from the wreck of the Ferndale washed up on the beach after a storm.

A medal awarded Martha White in 1912 was returned to the family in 1999. The White family received the medals and continues to treasure them. Beach-combers in the Ocean Shore area of Washington coast can still find coal from the wreck of the Ferndale washed up on the beach after a storm.

For more than twenty-five years Martha White has been intimately associated with the development of this part of Alaska; she has conducted many and varied business enterprises, making mining deals, trading with the natives, grub-staking prospectors.” The eulogy recalled her during lifesaving efforts at Grays Harbor, reflecting that, “In the life of Martha White, tuned as it was to adventures, it was but an incident.” As a sign of the town’s regard, all stores and businesses were closed during her funeral on February 12, 1919. Her son Robert continued to manage the White House Hotel after her death.

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Copyright of White Family, courtesy of White Family, courtesy of Photographs, courtesy of White Family, courtesy of White Family. Upper left photograph: Martha White’s medals in a safe deposit box. The family received the medals and continues to treasure them. Beach-combers in the Ocean Shore area of Washington coast can still find coal from the wreck of the Ferndale washed up on the beach after a storm.

Sharna Stevenson is coordinator of the Washington Women’s History Consortium at the Washington State Historical Society and executive editor of Columbia. The author thanks the Rowen family, Gretchen Bernt, and Gene Woodwrick for their research assistance.
Do anything capture the imagination quite like a lighthouse? Given the solitude and adventure we associate with them, lighthouses carry a sense of untold romance. Hence, we love to visit them—from Virginia Woolf’s The Testament of Orpheus to a Patos Island visitor. “Sea gull… theList on the Island by Helen Glidden

By Peter Donahue

According to Michael McCluskey, who wrote the postscript to the 2001 reissue of The Light on the Island, Glidden’s father served at two Oregon lighthouses before moving his growing family, in 1897, to Washington, where he was stationed at the Tillamook Lighthouse on Cape Disappointment. 

Helene Glidden spent eight years growing up in the early part of the 20th century—her family moved to Patos Island in Washington, where her father was stationed at the Neah Bay Lighthouse, at the tip of Dungeness Spit. The shoreline is especially alluring. For young “Angie,” as Glidden calls herself in the book, the 207-acre island provides endless opportunities for adventure. The shoreline is especially alluring. 

And other than the fugitive opium smuggler Spanish John, whom her father has long sought to bring to justice. In the end, however, he saves the family on more than one occasion, including when a gang of pirates besieges the island and when a rampaging bull nearly gorges Angeline’s father.

Life on the island, though, is not always filled with fun and adventure. There are school lessons, household chores, sibling rivalries, and love sickness to endure. There is also tragedy. Four of the children die, three from pneumonia and one from a ruptured appendix. Another loses a leg. When several family members get caught in a storm rowing back from Bellingham, their boat runs aground and Al, the husband of the oldest daughter, drowns trying to save the others.

Patos Island itself is not without its troubled history. Because of its isolation, it is the first stop for smugglers crossing the Canadian border. After the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, smugglers brought Chinese workers across the straits to serve as cheap labor in the United States. If intercepted by customs agents, they threw the workers overboard. As Mr. Blanchard, the reclusive historian who lives near Toe Point on Patos Island, explains to the children, “I found them on the Puget Sound beaches, hands and feet tied… I buried them here, beneath these rocks—sometimes three in a single grave. There are no names, no markers.”

Like many contemporary memoirists, Glidden may have over dramatized certain events, such as the encounter with smugglers. Yet, unlike many contemporary memoirists, she writes in an easy, anget-free manner, demonstrating a light touch toward both the serious and the absurd.

In a Seattle Times interview, Glidden talked about being encouraged to write as a child by Ella Higginson, the poet and writer from Bellingham, who would write from Bellingham, who would visit the island in the summer. After Glidden moved to Portland, Oregon, as an adult, she took a writing class with Alfred Powers, the renowned teacher at Portland State University who edited A History of Oregon Literature. Powers encouraged her to publish her work, but when she showed him her manuscript, she recalled, “Mr. Powers told me I had written too much.” He advised her to cut the section about her father’s work as a customs agent in Port Townsend and instead focus on Patos Island.

In addition to The Light on the Island, Glidden published poems and stories in various magazines. She also published Pacific Coast Seafood Chef (1952), a collection of recipes with anecdotes of how she acquired them—including one for sea gull potpie, which, as a practical joke, her mother once fed to a Patos Island visitor. “Sea gull: honest! Say, this is good,” exclaimed the Seattle restauranteur.

Glidden was born into a lighthouse-keeping family. According to Michael McCluskey, who wrote the 2001 reissue of The Light on the Island, Glidden’s father served at two Oregon lighthouses before moving his growing family, in 1897, to Washington, where he was stationed at the Tillamook Lighthouse on Cape Disappointment, in the San Juan Islands. This lighthouse—like many contemporary memoirists, she writes in an easy, anget-free manner, demonstrating a light touch toward both the serious and the absurd.

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Sid Snyder’s Remarkable Life in Groceries & Government
By Jeff Burlingame

Across the Aisles

Snyder took a position as elevator operator at the Washington State Capitol building during the 1949 legislative session. He served as assistant clerk of the state house of representatives, and his personal story of his life, in and out of politics, shows him to be a tireless worker as well as a shrewd businessman and politician, dedicated to his district in southwestern Washington, his state, and its legislature. Together the two parts provide an account of effective political leadership and personal integrity, successfully told by author and subject.

Susan Hinken is a senior librarian and head of Collection Services at Clark Library, University of Portland. She is an adjunct member of the school’s Department of History.

Becoming Big League

Seattle, the Pilots, and Stadium Politics
By Bill Mullins

I n Becoming Big League, historian Bill Mullins explores the tumultuous one-year life of Seattle’s first major league baseball team, the Pilots. This meticulously researched work accomplishes much more than one would expect in a volume centered around a team that went 64–98, drew the fifth fewest fans, and Red for Milwaukee mere days before its second season was to commence.

At heart (and at its best) Becoming Big League offers a highly detailed history of Seattle’s city governance from the first vote to build a stadium, which failed in 1966, through the successful “Forward Thrust” initiative of 1969 and the unexpected granting of an American League franchise—the Mariners—in 1977. Much of Mullins’s tale is, frankly, a bit of a bummer. In the words of one observer, the Pilots’ debate and the wrangling over stadium projects could be likened to “inheriting a basket of snakes.” Poor and underfunded ownership and a fractious relationship with the city and the league over the temporary home at Sicks’ Stadium—the old American Association’s Rainiers’—eventually doomed Seattle’s first round as a baseball city. The years of lawsuits that followed eventually brought Seattle its second team to fill the long overdue Kingdome.

Mullins takes the long view, describing a Seattle that by the mid-1960s was debating how to—and what it meant to—become “a major league” city. As such, Becoming Big League is much more a story of conflicts in city and county government and the complexities of baseball as a business in the 1960s and 1970s. Mullins describes Seattle as a town that saw itself coming of age as a “big league town” while it remained “adamantly unwilling to spend anything to win, or keep, a baseball team.” Unlike many cities at the time, Seattle did not chase major league status enthusiastically. Although some civic and business leaders believed the conventional wisdom of the era, that a municipally funded multipurpose stadium was the key to enhanced status and revenue for all, Searlettes as a whole remained ambivalent about the costs of wooing “big league” teams.

Becoming Big League will prove a slow read at times for those coming at it primarily as baseball fans. Indeed, rare is the baseball book that talks much about stadiumplumbing problems. Mullins does provide brief, stand-alone sections about the team itself, but on the whole this is less a book about baseball as played than it is about the mismanagement of a team and the relationships between owners, the league, and the city. Moreover, since the same season sits at the heart of former Pilot’s pitcher Jim Bouton’s iconic and controversial Ball Four, some might feel there are better options to get to know the Pilots on the field.

The greatest value in Mullins’s work will be for those interested in mid-century Seattle, particularly in the close workings of city, county, and business interests. Mullins has poured through city records, court proceedings, firsthand reminiscences, and the local and national press to tease out an exceedingly complex story of failure and frustration surrounding the Pilots. At times the litany of organizations, individuals, and politics and political addresses can be dizzying, but on the whole he does well with bewildering and often depressing material. His larger goal of describing a unique city transitioning uncomfortably from regional to national prominence is also well on a tale worth telling.

Matthew Taylor Raffety is an associate professor of history at the University of Florida, where he teaches United States, and public and sports history. He is author of The Republic Above Law: Honor, and Citizenship in Maritime America (2013).

The Crimson Spoon: Plating Regional Cuisine on the Palouse
By Jamie Callison

A nyone who has lived even a short time in the Pacific Northwest knows of the esteem with which Cougar Gold® and Charles Gold® Cheese is held. This premium white cheddar has been produced and sold by students at Washington State University since the 1940’s and is so popular that today the WSU Creamery annually markets 250,000 pounds of it. Not everyone, on the other hand, recognizes that WSU’s College of Business is home to an academic program—the School of Hospitality Business Management—that since 1952 has taught students the fundamentals of Northwest foods, and that certainly includes Cougar Gold. Jamie Callison is the executive chef and culinary instructor at WSU’s J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation Hospitality Teaching Center, and in The Crimson Spoon he offers detailed guidelines for approximately 100 healthy recipes of his own creation.

Callison says his vision for this book is that it be “beautiful enough to live on the coffee table, but tempting enough to never leave your kitchen.” Indeed, this is exactly what his talented team has achieved. Callison prepared the recipes, Linda Burner Arrington styled the food, and freelance food consultant, styled his creations for E. J. Armstrong to photograph, and Alicia Nannemaker designed such an attractive layout for the text and illustrations that this volume is both useful and dazzling. It is also interesting to note that Callison had two additional goals for embarking on this project: to provide students with firsthand experience on how to create a cookbook, and to use proceeds from the sales to provide opportunities for students in the College of Business.

Most of Callison’s recipes are approachable (Cougar Gold Mac’n Cheese, for example) while others (Cheddar Lentil Molten Cake) require more cooking courage. Callison also offers several “sides” in the book, such as “The Secret to a Stress-Free Thanksgiving From a Cook’s Point of View.” Principal sections are Salads and Soups, Seafood, Meat and Poultry, Sides, Desserts, Sauces, Stocks, and Vinaigrettes. What is there not to like in this very informative volume! Nothing?

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Native Washingtonian Robert M. Carrick is a professor of history at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette, and author of Bourbon A Guide to Louisiana’s Extraordinary LIquor (2012).

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