In the mid 19th century, settlers in the Far West had an ambivalent relationship with the United States government. While they strove vigorously for independence and local governance, they also sought federal funding and assistance in support of their efforts to subdue local Indian groups and develop the region. For its part, the federal government, through its efforts to regulate settlement and establish centralized control over territory and populations, tried to shape its Pacific Coast territories into the vanguard of its national future, and in so doing, redefined its own national identity.

In order to incorporate the Pacific Slope, however, the United States had to establish governance methods for this far distant region. Rapid population growth, immigration from around the globe, and a highly mobile population made the process of federal governance along the Pacific more challenging. As home to the first attempts to set up US governance on the Pacific Coast, Oregon became important test case for the establishment of a new form of transcontinental empire and called into question the role of the federal government within the territory.

In the first decades of the United States' presence in the Pacific Northwest, federal governance was put to the test in two major ways: 1) through Oregon Territory citizens' objections to territorial rule and their attempts to reform the territorial system, and 2) disagreement over the conduct and funding of Indian wars in both Oregon and Washington Territories. Throughout both debates, political leaders emphasized the independence as well as the virtue of the territory's settlers and the need for the federal government to support the efforts of its Pacific Coast pioneers through funding and public works.

Although Oregon settlers saw themselves as Jeffersonian agrarian pioneers, it was only the technological developments of the mid 19th century that made their integration into the United States a possibility. New advances in transportation and communications technology made it possible in 1846 for Oregon Territory to be considered an eventual candidate for statehood. Only a few decades earlier many had believed that the territory would ultimately become a separate republic because its distance from the bulk of United States settlement precluded incorporation.

Despite the modern nature of this transcontinental empire, the ideal of the extension of United States' power to Oregon Territory as a tranquil and natural expansion has been enshrined by the reminiscences of Oregon pioneers. One of the region's most prominent citizens, LaFayette Grover, wrote in his memoirs for historian Hubert Howe Bancroft that the “Northwest country was acquired for the United States by the people and not by the government.” Grover was not the only one who separated the concept of “the people” from the concept of government. Oregon political leader and former federal judge Matthew Deady declared in a toast at a banquet in 1886:

The Oregon colony was emphatically a popular political movement, conducted by private persons without any recognized head or concerted plan. It was really one of those singular movements of the human race in which numbers of people, without any apparent preconcert of purpose, are moved by some common, controlling impulse, to transport themselves to some unknown and remote region; and having done so proceed at once, as by political habit or instinct, to unite together in civil society and found a state.

Such rhetoric distanced Oregonians from their origins, as United States residents, although many of them came from states that had been part of the Old Northwest and already had experience as frontier settlers. It also distanced them from federal government resources on which they depended, including public works and military support.

Finally, it distanced them from their place at the vanguard of a new 19th-century form of transcontinental empire being built by the United States. This fledgling empire, which rested on the foundations of older British and Spanish empires along the Pacific, was made possible by new transoceanic ships and the telegraph and driven at least as much by the desire for quick profits and precious metals as by the desire for agrarian expansion.

Oregon Territory had always been the goal of the United States' expansion to the Pacific, long before expansion to what was then the obscure Mexican province of California seemed desirable or possible. Even so, individualistic, agrarian rhetoric dominated discussions of the relationship between the Oregon territorial government and the federal government and was thus crucial in shaping the governing structures of the new transcontinental empire.

The Lewis and Clark expedition explored the region at the beginning of the 19th century and strengthened the United States' claim, and as early as the 1820s public attention focused on the possibilities of American expansion to this far-off region. In the same decade, repeated bills were submitted to Congress calling on the government to establish a military presence on the Columbia River, extinguish Indian title to land in the region, and encourage settlement. By the 1840s, as immigrants began to trickle into Oregon, the popular press in the East began to pick up on the possibilities of Oregon expansion. In 1845 an editorial in the New York Morning News argued:

Oregon can never be (in England) or for her, anything but a mere hunting ground for furs and peltries. But can she ever colonize it with any sort of transplanted population of her own. It is far too remote and too unequal for any such purpose. In our hands... it must fast fill in with a population destined to establish within the life of the existing generation, a noble young empire of the Pacific, vying in all the elements of greatness with that of the already overspreading the Atlantic and the great Mississippi valley.

In the presidential election of that year, the acquisition of Oregon Territory became a major campaign issue, with James K. Polk famously employing the slogan “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight.”

BY KATHRYN EIGEN

**Oregon Territory’s Struggle for Sovereignty**


WASHINGTON, D.C., 2005

BY KATHRYN EIGEN

COLUMBIA 2 WINTER 2016–17

COLUMBIA 3 WINTER 2016–17
The rhetoric surrounding the expansion of the United States to Oregon proclaimed it to be the inevitable destiny of the United States, but the early years of settlement were filled with unrest and intergovernmental strife. Most notable were the Indian wars that raged throughout Oregon and Washington Territories during the 1840s and 1850s. The course of these battles was a major source of conflict between the settlers and the federal government. Furthermore, despite dependence on the federal government to fund the Indian wars, the southern region of Oregon Territory objected to territorial rule, especially after Washington Territory was split off from it in 1853. Oregon agitated for more local control over the territorial system, a campaign that was only quenched with statehood in 1859.

Although the establishment of this government explicitly anticipated the expansion of US rule into the region, the proponents of territorial government emphasized the ability and right of early Oregon settlers to self-government. William Green T’Vault, a prominent early settler, in a speech given before 1846, when division along the 49th parallel allowed the US to extend its governance to the region, told the citizens of Oregon that “[b]y you were created to govern, not to be governed.”

The arrival of territorial government did not lead to a dramatic change in the political structure of Oregon, especially since Congress allowed the continuation of all provisional government laws that were not contrary to the United States Constitution. The rhetoric of discussion about territorial governance greatly exaggerated these changes, however. Historian Robert Johannsen has argued that “some in the territory soon became convinced that the territorial government also meant a loss of political rights and a reduction to a ‘colonial’ status.”

Oregonians felt that territorial government had deprived them of the right to choose their own leaders and began a movement for territorial self-government. They strove to change the territorial system and argued that the imposition of officials from outside Oregon violated their right to self-government. An April 1851 editorial by Samuel Thurston in the Oregon Statesman declared, “I sincerely wish the people of Oregon, without distinction of party, would unite in memorizing the President to appoint no man to office in Oregon, except he be an Oregon man—one among us.” The next edition of the Statesman reported that a public meeting in Portland protested against the conduct of the territorial judiciary and memorialized President Millard Fillmore “that there are many respectable individuals in Oregon, capable of discharging the duties devolving upon the Judges, as well as of filling any other office under the Territorial Government.”

Oregonians also argued against the legitimacy of the territorial system itself, making the territory’s new and thriving newspapers the forum for these debates. A December 1851 editorial in the Oregon Weekly Times (Portland) argued that “[t]hese Territorial systems of government are repugnant to the true spirit of our Constitution, never was it intended that a system be imposed long on Americans, who have the spirit of freedom established by their fathers.”

Six years later prominent settler Jesse Applegate wrote to the Oregon Statesman:

It is a curious fact that our territories are governed on almost the precise plan of the British Colonial System resided by our ancestors in the war of the Revolution. And the rights of self-government which they so nobly asserted to the world and defended against the whole force of the British Empire have been withdrawn from the people of their own territories.

Many of the national political efforts of Oregon’s territorial leaders were directed at the reform of the territorial system. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 had significant and lasting effects on the national political development of the United States, but it was also an important political issue in Oregon and Washington Territories. Both had been agitating for greater local control within territorial governments, and the popular sovereignty offered in the Kansas-Nebraska Act seemed to be an important first step in this direction.

The desire for self-government also affected political structures within Oregon Territory. The northern part of the territory agitated for separation from the southern part on the grounds that their interests were opposed. As an editorial in northern Oregon’s first newspaper, the Columbian, proclaimed in October 1852, “We must become our own masters, and control the affairs pertaining to our own destiny.” The support of leading political figures in southern Oregon helped the northern regions achieve their goals. In 1853 a letter of Joseph Lane published in the Oregon Spectator and reprinted in the Columbian argued that “Oregon is too large for one Territory or State, and without at least two States are formed out of it, can never be represented as the great interests of that portion of country are entitled to be.” The creation of Washington Territory in 1853 separated out the less developed regions and paved the way for the newly-reduced Oregon Territory to become a state.

Although Oregon’s political leaders desired self-government, they were quick to anger when they felt slighted by the federal government. Oregon’s settlers felt that they suffered in comparison to the national attention paid to California in its rapid growing settlements in their Pacific Coast neighbor, California. California had never formed a territorial government; instead, after a brief period of military rule, it transitioned directly to statehood. “California, the favourite ‘golden haired’ sister, has received more from Congress than she expected,” wrote pioneer John A. Anderson to Joseph Lane, Oregon Territory’s first governor, in 1851. Oregon’s settlers believed that the national attention paid to California was hindering their own progress toward statehood. The Oregon Spectator argued in November 1849 that the failure to fill territorial offices in Oregon was delaying the colony’s development: “The value and importance of the American possessions along the Pacific are the subject of general remark throughout the whole of Christendom. And yet many of our most pressing interests are wholly neglected.”
The most heated conflicts between territorial/state governments and the federal government occurred over Indian policy. At the same time that Oregon pioneers were striving to achieve more self-governance, they were also initiating and prosecuting a series of armed conflicts with native tribes and calling for federal aid to support these wars. Despite the image of the region as an agricultural paradise, or perhaps because of it, during the 1850s Oregon was the site of some of the most violent and deadly Indian-white warfare that had occurred on the North American continent in the past two centuries.

**CONFLICTS BETWEEN IMMIGRANTS AND INDIANS IN OREGON WERE FEED BY THE OREGON Donation Land Act of 1850. The act granted land to settlers who arrived in the region by a certain date, nor did it limit white settlement to those areas that were not occupied by Indian tribes. When conflicts erupted, the Oregon settlers treated their relationships with Indians as a matter of frontier self-defense. They organized into militia groups and, largely supported by territorial officials, conducted their own “defense.” Territorial leaders, however, fully expected that the federal government would provide reimbursements for the expenses of these campaigns. Conflicts between the federal government and territorial officials were most heated over wars in southern Oregon. A series of battles that began in 1853–56 along the Rogue River were largely fought by volunteers who then demanded payment from the federal government for their expenses. Many in the federal government, especially the commander of the Pacific Division at the time, General John Wool, responded by blaming the Oregon settlers for provoking the attacks, something even the law had done so for the purpose of “plundering” the United States Treasury. Until well into the 1860s congressional discussion of Oregon centered mainly on debate over funding for the Oregon Indian wars.

In 1852 the annual legislative statement of Oregon’s territorial governor, John P. Coos, summarized the contradictions inherent in the view of Oregon residents about federal governance:

> The pioneer in the settlement of the country cannot be neglected by Congress. Their firmness, their hardships, their virtue in journeying across the wilderness, in subduing the land, in contributing to settle the great boundary dispute, will appeal and not in vain, to the generous sentiments of the nation at large.

Congress would reward such virtues. It will aid us by liberal appropriations in the development of our resources. Policy, if not magnanimity will dictate them. For whilst such provisions will promote the growth, and advance the prosperity of the Territory, they will at the same time, add to the wealth, extend the usefulness, and enlarge the greatness of the Union itself.

Political leaders in the eastern United States saw expansion to Oregon as the beginning of a new stage of American history. While the early political leaders of Oregon Territory agreed, they saw the story of Oregon’s destiny as one they would write for themselves, albeit with federal assistance. During the period of territorial government, when Congress theoretically had the greater control over the direction of affairs in Oregon, its efforts to promote the integration of the territory into rational policy faced more challenges than in any other period. Such conflicts haunted the era of United States expansionism and put the relationship between federal and state governments in the new transcontinental nation to the test. 10

**PROCLAMATION!**

*By Geo. Abernethy, Governor of Oregon Territory.*

> The Legislature now in session having authorized me to call upon the Citizens of this Territory to rally, on the purpose of carrying on operations against the Cayuse Indians, and to permit them for the numbers committed by them on the residents at Wailtaps: I therefore call on the County headquarters named, to furnish the number of men required of them. This enlistment to be for ten months, unless sooner discharged by proclamation; each man to be fully armed and equipped, to furnish his own horse and outfit and to rendezvous at Oregon City on the 28th inst., when the Company will meet its officers and immediately proceed to Wailtaps.

Champoeg County will furnish 40 Men.
Tualatin County will furnish 30 Men.
Yam Hill County will furnish 20 Men.
Polk County will furnish 30 Men.

In witness whereof I have hereunto signed my name and sealed the seal of the Territory at Oregon City this 17th day of December, 1847.

Geo. Abernethy, Governor.

George Abernethy, Oregon’s provis- sional governor (1845–49), issued a call to raise a volunteer militia in response to the murders that took place at the Whitman Mission. This militia went on to participate in the Indian Wars of the 1850s.

Kathryn Eigen holds a doctorate in United States history from the University of California, Berkeley, She currently teaches history to community college students in the San Francisco Bay Area.

By David F. Martin

Tacoma might not immediately come to mind as the likely hometown of nationally and internationally renowned artists. Nonetheless, some of the Northwest’s finest and most innovative artists began their careers or lived for a time in the “City of Destiny.” These include sculptor Allan Clark (1886–1950), painter-illustrator Mac Handainger (1902–1975), printmaker Thomas Hardborth (1897–1948), and photographers Wayne Albee (1882–1917) and Vinita Haffner (1899–1948). The most famous name in glass art alive today, Dale Chihuly (b. 1941) also has his roots in Tacoma. To this illustrious list we must add Peggy Strong, artist and Seattle Times art critic Kenneth Callahan said of her:

> Miss Strong is an unusual artist because she is young and she has been successful in pleasing both the public and art juries—no slight accomplishment itself. Her present success has been reached because, throughout her painting, Miss Strong displays a high degree of skill . . . she can handle any subject with equal ease, painting it with mastery and directness in fluid, swinging brushwork . . . and she works very hard and paints a great deal.

From the time she was born, Strong (1912–1956) faced a number of physical challenges that countered the promising life of a young woman born into a cultured and educated Tacoma family.
Peggy Strong in her Tacoma studio, c. 1939. In the background is a portrait-in-progress of Wayne Brown, who later married Strong’s sister, Bibbts.

When Strong attended the University of Washington, the influence of this group had permeated the art department. Two exhibitions sponsored by the study of the work of Alexey Jawlensky (1866–1941), a prominent member of the Blue Four. However, the strongest influence appears to have been the work of Franz Marc (1880–1916), an original member of Der Blaue Reiter who had been killed in action during World War I. Strong’s love of horses and equine subjects were likely what attracted her to Marc’s paintings, and his vibrant use of color and Cubist modeling influenced her work.

To further her education, Strong set out at age 20 to study in Paris, the acknowledged center of the art world at that time. She left home to drive across the country to New York, where she planned to depart for France. In August 1913 she began the journey with her boyfriend, Harry Laming, a promi- nent Detroit physician and friend of the family. A tire blow-out between Laramie and Medicine Bow, Wyoming, resulted in a crash that left Laming unhurt but severed Strong’s spine. She was taken to Denver’s Children’s Hospital for immediate medical attention, but the outlook was grim. Surgery saved her life but left her paralyzed from the waist down. While recuperating in her hospital bed, she was unable to draw or paint, but she began carving diminutive sculptures from bars of Ivory Soap held above her head, the soup shavings falling into her eyes. Proctor and Gamble had begun sponsoring national soap-carving competitions beginning in the 1920s, and it is likely she was inspired to participate despite and possibly because of her physical limitations.

Strong’s family and friends immediately rallied around her and presented some of her paintings to various art organizations for exhibitions, especially through the Junior League of which she was a very active member. Although confined to a wheelchair, she forged ahead in her painting career, optimistic that she would someday walk again. She was known to drive to Seattle, travel to Denver, and return to Tacoma by train. With her indomitable pluck of one whose work is done from a wheelchair.

...c. 1939. In the background is a portrait-in-progress of Wayne Brown, who later married Strong’s sister Bibbts.

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In 1939, Strong was one of 60 women artists whose work was included in the contemporary art show at the Golden Gate International Exhibition in San Francisco. In November of that year, SAM presented 32 works by one of the great figurative painters of the period, Frederic Taubes (1902–1983). Strong's mother had lured the artist to the Northwest that summer and provided him with room and board in exchange for intensive instruction for her daughter. From Taubes, Strong learned how to grind her own pigments, mix them with various oil mediums, and make her own paints. When the Wenatchee mural was completed, SAM exhibited it along with the working sketches in September 1940. Measuring 18 feet wide by 7 feet tall, the large mural made quite an impression within the art community. When the exhibition concluded, the museum maintained the momentum by presenting the artist with a solo exhibition of her paintings.

With the success of her first mural now established, she was commissioned again in 1943 to create a mural for the Naval Officers Club at Dutch Harbor, Alaska. Besides the 12-by-7-foot mural decorating the space above the club bar, Strong created two wooden screens at the entry door, painted on both sides. The mural has since been lost.

The following year, Strong, along with her mother and sister, traveled to Europe for an extended stay in several cities. While visiting some of the finest museums, she apparently was moved by the work of Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664). His influence can be seen in at least one of her paintings. This compelling composition features a bound, gagged, and shackled woman wearing a hood, perhaps intimating a self-portrait of an imposed monastic existence. Several works with disturbing imagery soon followed, and these later paintings are in direct conflict with the earlier figurative subjects. Where she once detailed the nuances of the human figure and elucidated their individual personality traits, her paintings now often depicted humans as primitive stick figures in unnatural primary and secondary colors. The latter paintings frequently convey a feeling of despair and hopelessness.

This change took place when she returned to Tacoma after her trip and began attending services at the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples. This multi-denominational, inclusive church was cofounded by a group of forward-thinking women artists whose work was included in the contemporary art show at the Golden Gate International Exhibition.
where he met Mahatma Gandhi, whose spiritual teachings had a lifelong influence on him. Gandhi implored Thurman to promote a philosophy of nonviolence in the United States as a way of achieving racial and social equality without the threat of physical force. These tenets created a lasting impression on important historical figures ranging from Martin Luther King Jr. to President Barack Obama.

Strong and Thurman became close friends and visited at least once a week. Soon the artist embarked on a serious study of various religions, spiritual, and philosophical writings, making copious notes in several binders that she used for inspiration both in her life and her art. Thurman encouraged the study of all philosophies and quests for spiritual growth. Strong, struggling to deal with her physical limitations, tried whatever she could to overcome her paralysis. This led her to a humiliating interaction with an indignant London faith healer who admonished her publicly for failing to stand at his command, and to a meeting with acclaimed American mystic Edgar Cayce (1877–1945) of Virginia Beach, whose writings became the basis for modern New Age philosophies.

In addition to his religious profession, Thurman had a lifelong interest in the arts. He sometimes played his clarinet in Strong's studio while she painted and even tried his own hand at painting under her guidance. He attempted to integrate visual arts into the activities of his church and gave Strong a solo exhibition in the early 1950s. He included a small chapter on her in his autobiography, stating: “A superbly gifted artist and portrait painter, she was one of the most resourceful human beings I have ever known. One of the fruits of our long and rich friendship is her portrait of me…”

Although she had numerous relationships, Peggy Strong never married and resigned herself to a life without a husband and children. Luckily, her family and close friends supplied her with love and companionship that never wavered. Her health began to decline in the early 1950s, and she developed kidney disease. The portrait of her friend Howard Thurman turned out to be her last. When she could no longer care for herself, she went to live with her brother Charles in Eugene, Oregon, where she died on June 10, 1956.

Four months after her death, the Tacoma Junior League sponsored a memorial exhibition of her work at the Tacoma Art League. Since that time, the majority of Peggy Strong's paintings have remained within the family's collections. They were united for an exhibition at the Cascadia Art Museum in Edmonds, September 9, 2016, through January 8, 2017, titled A Spirit Unbound: The Art of Peggy Strong. In reintroducing her work to a wider public audience, the exhibition has recognized her reputation as one of the Northwest's most talented painters and illuminated her unbridled spirit.

Black Harris
Northwest Mountain Man of Mystery

BY R. GREGORY NOKES

Moses “Black” Harris was known to tell some pretty tall tales. Perhaps the tallest was the one about a petrified forest he knew of in the American West that had petrified so suddenly, and so without warning, that the birds singing in the tree branches were petrified, too. And not just petrified, but petrified with their mouths open in mid-song!

We know a great deal about Harris’s accomplishments but very little about his personal life. He seems to have revealed almost nothing about his background to his friends—not untypical of fur trappers who often spent months at a time with little or no human companionship. As an adult, Harris may have never had a real home until he settled in the Willamette Valley, and once there he remained only a few years. Where did Harris come from? Union County, South Carolina, possibly. Or maybe Kentucky. No record of his birth has been located.

Harris was dark-skinned, and there is evidence he was African American. There are also credible historical references to Harris as white—with his skin color described as an aberration. There is one reference to Harris as Native American. Alfred Jacob Miller, best known for his paintings of early Western scenes, painted Harris and described him as “of wavy form, made up of bone and muscle, with a face American wife and children, but kept them secret until he was near death.

Even his race has been questioned. Harris was dark-skinned, and there is evidence he was African American. There are also credible historical references to Harris as white—with his skin color described as an aberration. There is one reference to Harris as Native American. Alfred Jacob Miller, best known for his paintings of early Western scenes, painted Harris and described him as “of wavy form, made up of bone and muscle, with a face American wife and children, but kept them secret until he was near death.

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Harris’s racial origins cannot be proved, but some of the evidence for him as African American lies in the names “Black Harris” and “Black Square,” by which he was known. Apparently composed of tan leather and whip cord, finished off with a peculiar blue black tint, as if gunpowder had been burnt into his face.” Miller did not make specific mention of Harris’s race.

Absent documentation, Harris’s racial origins cannot be proved, but some of the evidence for him as African American lies in the names “Black Harris” and “Black Square,” by which he was known. He was once quoted as calling himself “a nigger,” although most of the conversation in which that happened was almost certainly contrived.

Durrell Millner, retired professor of black studies at Portland State University, said the nickname of “Black” for Harris was likely a reference to his race, and no one would need the need to add that he was a Negro, colored, or mulatto—the racial descriptions used at the time.

My final personal conclusion was that he was indeed “Black” for a pretty simple reason... . . . In the writings of his mountain man contemporaries, that’s what they call him... . . . Those were the usual “fighting words” if he did not consider himself to be that [black], and goodness knows those mountain men didn’t need much of an excuse to start a fight—in effect, he would have been in constant combat.

Harris would not have been alone among African Americans who went west as fur trappers and guides, lured by a life of independent isolation and the ability to escape much of the racial hostility prevalent elsewhere. Harris sometimes traveled with James Beckwourth, a prominent trapper who was born to a white slave owner and a black slave mother in Virginia. Others included Edward Rose, a well-known trapper and interpreter described as part African American, part Cherokee, and part white; and Potette Labross, also known as Polite Robiseau.

It is possible that Harris may have been born to a slave mother and white father, the same as Beckwourth. If so, it might explain why he said little about his early life. Harris was literate—reflected in occasional letters to newspapers and others—at a time when slaves were generally denied an education.

The trapper’s early life is a mystery. He first appears in records in 1822 as a fur trapper with the famed Rocky Mountain Fur Company, trapping for beaver pelts, which were in high demand for a wide variety of hats in North America and Europe. He trapped both independently and for several fur-trapping companies in a career spanning 20 years.

Harris would have been with William Ashley, one of the owners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, in June 1823 when Ashley suffered what has been described as “the worst disaster in the history of the western fur trade.” Ashley had taken 90 men on two keelboats up the Missouri River from St. Louis. A large force from the Arikara Indian villages attacked the party with rifle fire, while the men were exposed on the riverbank. Casualties among the trappers were 14 dead and 11 injured. During much of his time in the mountains, Harris worked as a so-called free trapper, a category of especially accomplished trappers who worked alone or in small groups. Dale Morgan, biographer of Jedediah Smith, wrote that “the free trapper became the rock on which the [American] fur trade of the West was built.” The best among them might make $1,500 in a good year.

A trapper’s work was arduous, requiring work in snow and ice—beaver pelts were at their prime in the coldest months. The trapper maneuvered iron traps into an icy stream near a beaver’s lodge, anchoring the trap with a chain. Using scabs, the trapper would catch a beaver by his feet to drown it. Each trap might be responsible for five to ten trappers. Harris was offended by the presence and practices of the British.

Several hundred trappers worked the West for competing companies—three of the biggest were the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, its successor, the American Fur Company, and the British Hudson’s Bay Company, with its major outpost at Fort Vancouver.

The first mention of Harris venturing into Oregon was in 1826 when he and Sublette led Ashley’s trapping party through South Pass across the Continental Divide. At the time, everything west of the Rocky Mountains and north of the California border was considered part of the Oregon Country. It was during this period that Harris gained a fondness for Oregon and wanted to see it brought under the American flag. Indeed, he was outraged when, in 1837, the Hudson’s Bay Company acquired Fort Hall—the American-established trading center in present-day Idaho—as part of its strategy to monopolize the fur trade.

The Hudson’s Bay Company had waged a two-front campaign aimed at driving American trappers out of the Oregon Country. First, they attempted to create a “fur desert” south of the Columbia by trapping and killing all the beaver. A directive from the company’s London headquarters in March 1827 ordered employees “to hunt as bare as possible all mountain men.” Harris was offended by the presence and practices of the British.
...outburst of patriotic fervor, he wrote to St. Louis businessman Thornton Grimsley, urging formation of a military force to expel the British, along with Native Americans, from the entire region diplomatically by some tribes.

By the time American missionaries began emigrating to the Northwest to minister to the tribes, trapping activity had passed its peak, as beaver pelts were no longer in great demand. As an experienced mountain man, Harris was already finding other opportunities. Harris guided supply trains from Missouri to fur trappers gathered at the annual rendezvous—usually held in today's Wyoming—bringing them goods for the next year and returning east with the fur gathered in the previous year.

The rendezvous attracted crowds of trappers and hundreds of usually friendly Native Americans. These were typically times of revelry, if not outright mayhem, during which alcohol flowed freely. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company supplied the rendezvous until the company dissolved in 1834, after which the American Fur Company took over until 1840, the last year of the gathering.

In 1836, 1838, and 1839, Harris guided caravans that also escorted missionary parties as far as the rendezvous. Narcissa and Marcus Whitman, who established a mission at Waiilatpu, near Walla Walla, were in the 1836 caravan, along with Eliza and Henry Spalding, who established their mission at Lapoai, near Lewiston.

The 1838 caravan included Myra and Cushing Eells. One early settler wrote that Harris also escorted Marcus Whitman on his initial scouting mission into the Oregon Country in 1835.

While trappers were generally less than pleased to have slower-traveling missionaries tagging along—they bombarded Marcus Whitman with eggs in 1835—Black Harris gained a reputation for being helpful to the missionaries, even charming. Narcissa Whitman wrote that she had invited “Major Harris” and others to tea at an encampment along the Platte River. Bernard DeVoto, in his book Across the Wide Missouri, wrote that Narcissa seemed “delighted” to be in the company of the trappers, and “at a guest[,] in Harris most of all.”

Harris also earned Myra Eells’s praise. She wrote in her journal on April 28, 1838, that while many in the supply caravan seemed hostile, Harris was both welcoming and helpful. “Major Harris comes gives us a large piece of pork.” On July 4, Harris reappeared in Eells’s journal after a long absence to scout the trail ahead. “Major Harris comes to us again; says that 9 days out of 11 it rained and snowed constantly since he left us and the snow was 12 to 14 inches deep in the mountains.”

Narcissa Whitman described the 1836 caravan as “a moving village” of fur trappers, wagons, and cattle. “If you want to see the camp in motion, look way ahead and see first the pilot [Harris] and the captain, Fitzpatrick, just before him, next the pack animals, all mules, loaded with great packs; soon after you will see the wagons, and in the rear, our company,” she wrote in a letter home. “We all cover quite a space.”

Myra Eells was less poetic about the 1838 caravan. “We had much the appearance of a large funeral procession,” she wrote of the 60 men, 200 horses and mules, and 17 carts and wagons.

The missionary women had dramatically different experiences at the rendezvous. Narcissa was charmed by the reception from Native American women, probably including trappers’ wives, at the 1836 rendezvous at Horse Creek along the Green River near Pine Dale, Wyoming.

As soon as I alighted from my horse, I was met by a company of marauding native women one after another shaking hands and saluting me with a most hearty kiss. This was unexpected and affected me very much. They gave Sister Spalding the same salutation. After we had been seated awhile in the midst of the gazing throng, one of the chiefs . . . came with his wife and very politely introduced her to us. They say they all like us very much, and thank God that they have seen us, and that we have come to live with them.

Narcissa had written, following mention of the tea with Harris and others, “I was never so contented and happy before.” Eleven years later, on November 29, 1847, Narcissa and Marcus, with 13 others, were massacred at their mission by members of the Cayuse tribe, who blamed the Whitmans for the diseases that were devastating the tribe.

For Myra Eells, the 1838 rendezvous held at the confluence of the Wind River and the Popo Agie proved an appalling experience. She wrote on July 5 that during the previous night as many as 20 “mountain men and Indians” descended on the missionaries’ tent, dancing, beating drums, firing their weapons, and carrying the scalp of a member of the Blackfeet tribe. “If I might make the comparison, I should say that they looked like the emissaries of the Devil worshipp[ing] their own matter.” The episode was repeated the...
Harris happened to be in The Dalles when several exhausted riders arrived in September 1845 seeking help for the lost wagon train of Stephen Meek.

The following night, "no one could describe the horrible scene they presented. Could not imagine that white men, brought up in a civilized land, can appear to so much imitate the Devil."

Myron Eells, in a biography of his father, Cushing Eells, noted that Harris may have been responsible for circulating the news that white women would be at the rendezvous:

"Some one who was somewhat friendly to the missionaries, either Dr. Robert Newsell, an independent trader, or a half-breed [sic] named Black Harris, who had learned of this rendezvous of the American Fur Company, had with charcoal written on the old warehouse door, "Cowich [sic] on Wind River and you will find plenty trade, whisky, and white women."

In both 1836 and 1838, after escorting the missionaries as far as the rendezvous, Harris appears to have returned to St. Louis, bringing their wagon and oxen back to Illinois the year's catch of beaver pelts. In 1839 he was back on the road with a supply party, helping escort another missionary group toward Oregon.

Harris was hired in 1844 as guide, or "pilot," for a wagon train led by Nathaniel Ford, a prominent central Missouri landholder who had fallen on hard times and was lured west by the promise of free land in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Ford's train was one of the largest of the early wagon trains in the area, settling for a time along the Lacamas River in Yamhill County. By chance, he happened to be in The Dalles when several exhausted riders arrived in the Columbia River town in September 1845, seeking help for what became known as the lost wagon train of Stephen Meek.

About 1,000 settlers in 200 wagons had been lured by trail guide Stephen Meek's promise that he could save them time and distance on a southwest trek from Fort Hall through eastern and southern Oregon, before turning north into the Willamette Valley. Ostensibly, it was a shorter alternative to the established trail, which was perilous and had led to the Columbia. Meek lost his way, however, and the emigrants wandered for weeks in the Oregon high desert, using their wagon beds as a short-term解决了.

Short of food and water, and forage for their cattle, some of the settlers were near collapse when they found themselves stranded near the end of their journey—unable to cross a deep gorge on the Deschutes River about 35 miles south of The Dalles. Meek and some others rode to The Dalles for help. They were first refused—according to several versions—by the Methodist mission there. Meek then found Harris, whom he knew; Harris organized a rescue party with provisions supplied by local tribes.

Joel Palmer, the future governor of Idaho, arrived in The Dalles a day after Meek. Palmer had traveled from Missouri over the established trail. Meek had originally been hired to guide the Palmer wagon train when it departed Independence in May. However, at some point Meek left those wagons behind and rode ahead to Fort Hall to organize the wagon train that followed him on his new trail. No doubt, they included some of the Palmer wagons as well as those of other emigrants.

Palmer told in his journal how the complicated search of the Meek wagons was accomplished.

At this place [The Dalles] they [Meek and the other riders] met an old mountainman, usually called Black Harris, who volunteered his services as a pilot. He in company with several others started in search of the lost company, whom they found reduced to great extremities; their provisions nearly exhausted and the company weakened by exertion, and despair of ever reaching the settlements in the Willamette Valley. They succeeded in finding a place where their [settlers'] cattle could be driven down the river and made to swim across; after crossing[,] the bluff had to be ascended. Great difficulty arose in the attempt to effect a passage with the wagon. The means finally resorted to for the transportation of the families and wagons were novel in the extreme. A large rope was slung across the stream and attached to the rocks on either side; a light wagon bed was suspended from this rope with pulleys, to which ropes were attached; the bed was then winched up to the bank with the families and loading [belonging] in safety across; the wagons were then drawn over the bed of the river by ropes.

Palmer said it took two weeks to get everyone across, the last of the rescued settlers reaching The Dalles in mid-October. Palmer said that about 40 emigrants died during the journey or shortly thereafter. But the Harris-led rescue unquestionably saved lives.

It was a fortunate coincidence for the Meek party that Harris happened to be in The Dalles and not on his way to the East Coast. Harris had been escorting former Indian agent Elijah White on a mission to Washington, DC, with a copy of Oregon's newly voted-on 1845 Organic Act—in effect, a constitution. Oregon's provisional government hoped to convince Congress to make Oregon a territory, Harris, White, and three others departed Oregon City on or about August 16. However, Harris left White's party soon after in get under way.

Newspapers in the east, which closely followed events in Oregon, denounced Harris's actions in leaving White as inexplicable and irresponsible, probably relying on White's account of events. However, there was much more to the story. After White's departure, the provisional government, meeting in Oregon City, withdrew his authority as the official bearer of the Organic Act, making him for manipulating the contents for his own political purposes—he evidently sought to be appointed governor when Oregon became a territory. The provisional government sent the same information to Washington by ship, via the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Harris must have concluded he wanted no part of a cross-continent trip that had lost its purpose. He had gone as far as The Dalles and was still there when Meek arrived a few weeks later seeking help.

Following the rescue, Harris returned to the Willamette Valley, where he became involved in developing a new wagon road for emigrants to Oregon. He is mentioned in a newspaper article about a Nathaniel Ford-led expedition to find a passage into the Willamette Valley from the south. Ford took out an ad in the Oregon Spectator on April 15, 1846, seeking volunteers. Under the headline, "Over the Mountains," the ad read:

"The company to examine for a practicable wagon route from the Willamette valley to Snake river, will rendezvous at the residence of Nat. Ford on the Rednealis[?] so as to be ready to start on the trip on the first day of next May. The contemplated route will be up the Willamette valley, crossing the Cascade mountains south of the three snowy buttes [Three Sisters]. Those agreed to start at the time above mentioned, are Solomon Tetherow, Nathan Ford, Gen. Cornelius Gilliam, Stephen H. L. Meek, and Moses Harris, and many others, it is expected, will be ready by the time above specified.

Even with this considerable exploring talent, however, Ford turned back, apparently concerned that he had too few men to meet threats, perceived or real, from tribes encountered on the route.

That same May a new expedition was organized, again involving Harris and a dozen others, including Levi Scott and the brothers Jesse and Lindsay Applegate. The Applegates had a special motive for finding a new route into Oregon. Each brother had lost a son in the Columbia River during their journey to Oregon in 1843.

This time the explorers met with success, or at least a degree of success. They blazed a rudimentary wagon road south
In his last moments Harris whispered to a bystander that away in the mountain fastnesses... among some unknown tribe of Indians, he had a wife and two children...

from the Willamette Valley over the Calapooia and Umpqua Mountains, south-east across southern Oregon and northern California into Nevada, then east across Nevada's Black Rock Desert to connect with the established California Trail near the Humboldt River. The California Trail extended north to Fort Hall where it intersected the Oregon Trail.

Harris and Jesse Applegate followed the California Trail to Fort Hall to recruit emigrants for the new trail. With Applegate's assurances that the trail was shorter and easier—less dangerous—about 160 emigrant families in nearly 100 wagons signed on. However, the journey did not go well. The emigrants endured thirst in the Black Rock Desert, frequent lack of forage for their cattle, harassment by hostile natives—who shot arrows into their cattle—and unseasonable drenching rains in the Umpqua Mountains. Twelve adults and an unknown number of children died, typhoid fever taking the greatest toll. An unknown number of children died, typhoid fever taking the greatest toll.

Responding to angry criticism from some of the emigrants, Harris wrote a long defense in a letter to the Oregon Spectator, printed on November 26, 1849, in which he included a veiled reference to Nathaniel Ford's earlier failed attempt to cross the Cascades. Lindley Applegate blamed much of the early criticism on the Hudson's Bay Company, which had a commercial interest in the Columbia River route.

The reference to Nathaniel Ford's earlier failed attempt to cross the Cascades. Lindley Applegate blamed much of the early criticism on the Hudson's Bay Company, which had a commercial interest in the Columbia River route.

Whether from disappointment over the criticism, or simply from his restless nature, Harris left Oregon City for Missouri on May 5, 1847. He reached St. Joseph about October 27, after which he evidently resumed trapping for a time—perhaps he had never entirely quit.

Harris continued to work as a trap guide. An article in the St. Louis Republican on April 27, 1849—picked up by newspapers nationwide—reported that the first wagon train of a new "Pioneer Line" to California had "secured the services of the celebrated Moses Harris, known to everybody, who has lived in the mountains, or passed the road to California or Oregon." But the article ended with an ominous reference to the "Pioneer Line" to California had "secured the services of the celebrated Moses Harris, known to everybody, who has lived in the mountains, or passed the road to California or Oregon." But the article ended with an ominous reference to the fact that he may have been African American. It seems unlikely that a white fur trapper on the opposite coast would be so remembered.

Some well-known trappers who worked alongside Harris wrote or told their experiences later in life, among them Beckwourth, Meek, and Clyman. Perhaps if he had lived, Harris, too, would have shared his experiences. However, it seems more likely this mountain man of mystery would have kept his story to himself.

The reference to Harris's advocacy of human rights is one indication that he may have been African American. It seems unlikely that a white fur trapper on the opposite coast would be so remembered.

The photo is of a Native American woman teaching basketry classes at her studio in Sequim. Kathey Ervin's assemblage of 59 individual pieces includes a teapot, sugar bowl, creamer, tiered serving plate, and four place settings—made with Western red cedar, Alaskan yellow cedar, reed canary grass, fern stem, rabbit fur, glass, and metal—as well as cedar bark paper napkin rings, carved cedar knives, fork, and spoon, and woven petrified birds.

Kathey Ervin is a member of the Wyandotte Tribe of Oklahoma but has lived most of her life in the Pacific Northwest. She gathers her materials in the Northwest and Alaska, using primarily Western red cedar and Alaskan yellow cedar in her work. She teaches basketry classes at her studio in Sequim.
Campaign Buttons Reflect Washington’s Political History

BY JOHN C. HUGHES

Hundreds of political buttons are carefully cataloged and stored in inert polyethylene pockets at the Washington State Historical Society’s Research Center in Tacoma. These buttons are part of the material culture of campaigns dating to the 1890s—mayoral hopefuls, would-be governors, and a few favorite sons with dreams of becoming president. One ordinary looking pin is something special. With the slogan “TRUE TO TRUMAN,” this Truman Democratic Club of Washington pin was produced at Grays Harbor Stamp Works in Aberdeen. The family-owned business is now celebrating its 80th anniversary. The Truman Club’s conservative coalition with headquarters in Seattle, ordered 100,000 seven-eighths-inch “Draft Roosevelt For ’40” campaign pins with a Statue of Liberty theme at $15.50 per thousand. Just one of those handsome little pins fetches two or three times that amount today.

Though Democrats have been their most loyal button customers for almost 80 years, Grays Harbor Stamp Works has always solicited work from other parties and welcomed walk-ins of any political persuasion. It produced at least eight of the best-made anti-FDR slogan pins in 1940 when Wendell Willkie was opposing Roosevelt’s bid for a precedent-breaking third term. One Willkie slogan pin declares “100 Million Buttons Can’t Be Wrong.” That “may not have been a gross exaggeration,” according to Roger A. Fischer, author of “Tippecanoe and Trinkets Too,” an excellent book on campaign memorabilia. Supporters cranked out hundreds of thousands of pins, often literally overnight, to fit new events on the campaign trail. When FDR’s son Elliott received a special commission in the Army Air Corps, Willkie knew an array of pins declaring “I Want To Be A Captain Too!”

Over the years the Stamp Works produced thousands of pins for Washington’s formidable Senate duo, Warren G. “Maggie” Magnuson and Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson. Jackson was a legitimate presidential contender in 1972.
Harbor Stamp Works manufactured thousands of “instant” ratepayer buttons. Recent “counter” buttons produced by Grays Harbor Stamp Works include “Dakakis & Lowey, A Winning Team For Working People,” and “Washington Conservationists for Clinton-Gore-Locke.” Party Murray, Washington’s senior United States senator, chose Grays Harbor Stamp Works to produce an iconic two-and-a-quarter-inch pin for her first campaign in 1992. It features a pair of sneakers, symbolic of her being dismissed easily on as just a “mom in tennis shoes.” Her seat mate, Maria Cantwell, has also had her buttons produced in Aberdeen.


State level political pins by other vendors are also highly collectible, with interesting backstories. There is a “Rutte Rosellini Club” pin, c. 1960s, and even an “Impeach Langle” button from the 1950s, but Gardner and his star-crossed predecessor, John Spellman, may be the only two Washington governors to have their images mockingly depicted on political buttons. After Spellman characterized no-new-taxes Republican legislators as “troglodytes,” a three-and-a-half-inch pin from 1982, it became their badge of honor. They distributed three troglodyte pins, one featuring Alley Oop, the comic-strip caveman, crowning Spellman with the state capitol dome. When Gardner faced his own budget crunch four years later, he angered teachers and other state employee unions by offering only a 3% raise. They retaliated with a “Booth Buster” pin.

The “Re-elect Dina” buttons, issued by Rossi supporters when he challenged Governor Chris Gib. A second time, are why political keepakes. Rossi lost to Groat by a hotly contested 129 votes in 2004.

Collectors cover the FDR portrait pin, “The New Deal–Cowell County, Wash.” and three related coattails. The Roosevelt-Wallgren button from 1940 helped boost New Deal congressman Mor “Moe” Wallgren of Everett to the U.S. Senate. (He became a one-term governor four years later.) “Let’s Buck Ike! Carrwell For Congress” was a winner in 1952 for Eisenhower and a loser for Albert F. Canwell of Spokane. Canwell was the controversial former chairman of a legislative “fact-finding” committee on allegedly un-American activities. Another nifty little 1952 pin helped elect Seattle Republican Tom Felly to Congress. Felly depicted pouting to “BE.”


A scarce beauty with a great slogan is a 1920 portrait pin for a presidential hopeful from Spokane, US Senator Miles Poindexter. A crusader against the “Red Menace”—Bolsheviks, Wobblies, and perceived fellow travelers—Poindexter brought up the rear in two GOP primaries, but had one of the best buttons of the election year: “No Red without Roosevelt — Miles Poindexter for President – Government by Law.”

In 1904 Washington State Republicans produced a handsome double-portrait button—a “jugate,” in the parlance of the hobby—featuring President Teddy Roosevelt and their candidate for governor, Albert Mead. Roosevelt carried the state in a landslide. Mead, a former mayor of Blaine, rode the Rough Rider’s coattails to upset US Senator George Turner, the heavily favored Democrat.
Outsiders in a Promised Land
Religious Activists in Pacific Northwest History
By Dale E. Soden Corvallis Oregon State University Press, 2015; 320 pages; $24.95, paper. Reviewed by Emily Suzanne Clark.

When Mark Silk’s “Religion by Region” series published its volume on the Pacific Northwest in 2004, editors Silk and Patricia O’Connell Killian titled it Religion and Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The Zone. For the region with the highest percentage of religiously disaffiliated Americans, it is an accurate nickname, but it can obscure part of the story. That is why Dale Soden’s new work, Outsiders in a Promised Land: Religious Activists in Pacific Northwest History, provides an important narrative.

Outsiders in a Promised Land illuminates the influence and diversity of religious activism in the region from the late 19th century onward. It is a story that follows many national trends in American religious history, but the activists in the Pacific Northwest spoke with a regional accent. The growth of industry, progressivism, and the Social Gospel, the nativism of the early 20th century and World War II, the hardships of the Great Depression, and the culture wars split of the late 20th century—all appear in the text but differently than they did on the national stage. The region seems isolated from the rest of the nation, and traditional religious institutions do not seem to have the powerful bases that they do elsewhere in the country. This is why Soden refers to the activists as “outsiders.” They are religiously affiliated protestant sectarians, socialists, and critics seeking to shape the region in a more just, more godly way. But they did not always agree on what that looked like.

The book is organized chronologically with a focus on cities such as Seattle, Portland, and Spokane. The mid to late 19th century is a story of booming business and sinful male behavior along with education, women, and Victorian society. The influence of the Social Gospel was not too far behind, and this movement sparked cooperation between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who sought to create a more just and moral society. Attempts at reform continued through the Progressive Era, as amm and especially women tried to rid Pacific Northwest streets of vice. The early 20th century also saw the populacy of the Ku Klux Klan and its anti-Catholicism, which revealed an increasing divide over what constituted a proper, just society. While some in the region reflect national trends of xenophobia toward Asian immigrants and racial intolerance, many of the “outsider” activists desired a more just and equitable society. Soden sees a long history of the culture wars, noting conservatives’ growing concerns about American life in the mid 20th century. Some activists wanted to protect their vision of proper American society while others wanted to extend it to fully include African Americans. The civil rights movement, environmentalism, and liberalism, as well as conservatism and concerns regarding the traditional family rallied activists across denominational lines. Soden concludes with important reflections on the possible futures of religious activism in the region.

With his tri-fold focus, Soden’s work reflects the region’s religious diversity, though urban Protestants dominate the work. This is a fascinating story of religious activism in a region typically overlooked in such studies. Written in accessible prose, Outsiders in a Promised Land will appeal to both scholars and interested readers.

Emily Suzanne Clark is assistant professor of religious studies at Gonzaga University, author of A Luminous Brotherhood: Afro-Creole Spirituality in 19th-Century New Orleans (2016), and associate editor for the Journal of Southern Religion.

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Dividing the Reservation
Atchison, 1912, and the Nez Perce Allotment
Diaries and Letters, 1889–1892
By Nicole Tonkovich. Pullman Washington State University Press, 2016; 376 pages; $29.95, paper. Reviewed by Laurie Arnold.

This is a story of George Wright’s ruthless campaign to inflict lasting damage upon the defeated number between 400 and 500 warriors.

Wright and his men, and the Coeur d’Alenes at the behest of Jesuit missionaries. On the Spokane River. In a break from pillaging, he made peace with the Coeur d’Alenes at the helm of Jesus missions. On his way back to Fort Walla Walla, he encountered more tribal delegations requesting peace. Among these, Wright ordered that a group of warriors including the Yakama chieftain Qualchan be hanged without trial in the most grotesque manner.

The native people that Wright intended to subdue and humiliate still survive and maintain their resilient traditions. While other parts of the country deal with Confederate statues, we in the West must confront the naming of areas for soldiers such as Wright. This task forces us to dwell on this American West legacy and the names we hang onto. Carriker drag us back into the fray to remember what happened and ask “why?” In that process, we can perhaps also say “never again.”

Ryan W. Booth is a member of the Humanities Washington Board of Trustees. He has a master’s degree in history from Gonzaga University and his doctoral work is from both Southern Methodist University and Washington State University.

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Hang Them All
George Wright and the Plateau Indian War

Don Carlson’s new book sheds fresh light on an oft-forgotten chapter of United States Army and Native American interactions in the antebellum American West. Cutler carefully describes each encounter in the Plateau Indian Wars from early 1850s transcontinental railroad surveying to George Wright’s brutal death in 1865 to modern-day interpretations of the war by the Plateau tribes. Seen as a larger tale of unratified treaties, settler incursions, petulant governors, and army brass meddling, Wright’s campaign takes on different meanings depending on who is telling the story. Through Wright’s particularly hideous historical actions, the author clearly makes this a moral story about remembrance and legacy.

Opening with a sweeping view of the eastern Washington environmental landscape, the story begins with Wright’s early years at West Point and his rise in the United States Army after distinguished service in the US-Mexican War. Wright’s career then languished in the American West until army colonel Edwin Steptoe suffered a humiliating defeat in May 1858 at Pine Creek. Up to this point, Wright’s strict adherence to army discipline never tainted his genial fairness to all those he came into contact with, including Indians. But the army sent Wright to settle the score for Steptoe’s defeat and bring an end to the conflict. Armed with the best equipment the army could supply, he marched his 700 soldiers to the Four Lakes and then to the Spokane Plains to beat the assembled native forces that numbered between 420 and 500 warriors.

For Wright, the battle did not end there. He entered into a ruthless campaign to inflict lasting damage upon the defeated tribes, starting with the cruel slaughter of 800 horses. Wright also ordered the destruction of the Indians’ winter food stores along the Spokane River. In a break from pillaging, he made peace with the Coeur d’Alenes at the helm of Jesus missions. On his way back to Fort Walla Walla, he encountered more tribal delegations requesting peace. Among these, Wright ordered that a group of warriors including the Yakama chieftain Qualchan be hanged without trial in the most grotesque manner.

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Outsiders in a Promised Land
Religious Activists in Pacific Northwest History
By Dale E. Soden. Corvallis Oregon State University Press, 2015; 320 pages; $24.95, paper. Reviewed by Emily Suzanne Clark.
No writer understood manual labor in the early industrial North- west better than James Stevens (1892–1971). He spent his youth and ear- liest adulthood as a laborer, and his fiction captures both the grittiness and romance of simple, honest work, testifying to the notion in Robert Frost’s poem “Mowing” that “the fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows.”

Stevens was born in Iowa and reared by his Primitive Baptist grandmother. At age 10 he was sent to live on his uncle’s ranch in Idaho, and by 11 he was working in the kitchen of a logging camp. The next year his family enrolled him in boarding school, where he learned dairy work. In his mid teens, he fled the school and became a mule team hand. For the next decade he drifted about the Northwest working as a teamster on reclamation and railroad projects, with intermittent stints in log- ging camps and sawmills.

These experiences serve as the basis for Stevens’s two quasi-autobiographical novels, Brawnyman (1926) and Big Jim Turner (1948). The main character in each is named Jim Turner. Brawny and Jim are earnest, hardworking young men who spend their off-time drinking, fighting, gambling, and listening to tall tales in the bunkhouse. Despite their similarities, though, they are not the same character. The Jim Turner of Brawnyman is an innocent. At age 15, he longs to join “the tribe of working stiffs” and achieves his goal when he is made a wagon-greaser and ends his military career as a half-breed and half-bury.

In 1922 he went to Portland to study law, but instead of studying, he worked along the waterfront. He went to Seattle in search of work, and there he met up with Joe Hill, the legendary IWW leader, who questioned his motives. From Portland to Spokane, small to cattle ranch, Jim faces a world in turmoil, in which the personal and political are deeply entwined. He is aided in his struggle by poetry, quoting Walt Whitman and referring to himself as “half poet and half bury.”

Stevens eventually published secured his first recognition as a writer. He began publishing them in Stars and Stripes while still in the army, while living in Tacoma, he wrote and published Paul Bunyan (1924), a collection inspired by the tales he first heard in Northwest log- ging camps and later researched in the up- per Midwest and Canada. In the tradition of such tales, he starts with the familiar premise—a giant lumberjack and his blue ox—and embellishes freely from there. The three volumes of Paul Bunyan tales Stevens eventually published secured his popularity during his lifetime.

Today Stevens is remembered in Northwest literary history mainly for the literary manifesto Stana Rerum (1927) that he co-wrote with H. L. Davis, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel The Honey in the Horn (1919). In Stana Rerum, Stevens and Davis condemn Northwest writing as “a vast quantity of bilge” and call for more authentic depictions of the region in the mode of realists such as Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis.

In 1936, Stevens became public relations counsel for the West Coast Lumbermen’s Association, headquartered in Sea- attle, and held this position for more than two decades. Following World War II, he was active in the Keep Washington Green campaign, the Friends of the Seattle Public Library, and Seattle’s Plymouth Congregational Church. Remaining true to his earliest influences: the outdoors, literacy, and religion. He continued to believe in the spirit and fulfillment of work, arguing in a 1959 talk in Portland that the country needed to restore the worker’s “faith in nature, faith in the land, faith in himself as an individual” and faith in traditional American democracy as a way of life.

The Fiction and Folklore of James Stevens
By Peter Donahue

Call for Nominations
The Historical Society invites nominations for its annual awards recognizing excellence in advancing the field of history in Washington. The honors to be presented include: the David Douglas Award, Robert Cross Memel Medal, Governor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching History, and Peace and Friendship Award. Nominations are due May 15, 2017. For details about the awards and the nomination process, visit: www.Washingtonhistory.org/About/Awards or contact Susan Rohrer (360-586-0166, susan.rohrer@wshs.wa.gov).

Sponsorship

The conference is being presented in partnership with Eastern Washington University, Gonzaga University, Whitworth College, and the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture.

Additional Reading
Interested in learning more about the topics covered in this issue? The sources listed here will get you started.

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Washington Territory in Turmoil 1855–1858

By Jo N. Miles


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The Brownfield Family

SPECIAL GIVING (gifts of $1,000–$4,999 as of November 29, 2016)
Musal Al-Mannarri of IWW loggers taking a break from the picket line at the Saginaw

Wobblies in Elma
Ralph Chaplin (1887–1961), a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, often referred to as Wobblies) and author of the labor anthem Solidarity Forever, donated his photograph to Washington State Historical Society’s collection. Besides being a union activist,创办者，和writer—and friends with such labor radicals as Mother Jones and “Big Bill” Haywood—he was a curator at the Washington State Historical Society.

Sustaining Members ($500–$999)

INSTITUTIONAL GIVING (as of November 29, 2016)

Chairman’s Club
Barbara & William Barnett
Kathie & George Balch
John of Sally Barbie

Founder’s Club
The Brownfield Family

Coronado Community
Don & Pat Carlin
Tim Connors
Peter & Kathleen Dorgan
Bill Driskell & Samantha Dean
Stacy O’Malley

Patron Level
 Anonymous
Tim of Elma
John & Karen Arba
Tim Connors
Peter & Kathleen Dorgan
Bill Driskell & Samantha Dean
Stacy O’Malley

MEMBERS (as of November 29, 2016)
Business Members ($250 and below)

Benefactor Members ($250 and below)
Bill of Carol Barnett
Michael of Kristin Barnett
Eric of Marianne Bean
Donald of Greg Campbell
Scott of Mary Chapman
Michael of Fred Cooper
William of Neil Douglas
Prudence of Gabriel Drew
Mark of Edward Mack
John of David Maloney
Mike of Jan Oyler
John of Larry Olson

For all the cruelty and hardship of our world, we are not mere prisoners of fate. Our actions matter and can bend history in the direction of justice.”

—Barack Obama

To donate or request anegus of regional historical interest to the Washington State Historical Society’s photograph collection, please contact Ed Hobbs, special collections curator (253-798-5177 or edhobbs@wsu.edu). To purchase a photo reproduction of an image in the society’s collections, visit Washingtonhistory.org and click on research; then collections.
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