NATIVE HERITAGE

RELATED EXHIBIT AREAS:
- Native Heritage Gallery
- Petroglyph Theater
- Southern Coast Salish Plank House
- Continuity & Change:
  - Selling Reservation Lands
  - People Who Tell the Story
- Epidemic Memorial: “The Big Sick”

PLATEAU AND COASTAL TRIBES

LANGUAGE & PLACE

“From your body, mighty Wishpoosh,” Coyote said, “I will make a new race of people. They will live near the shores of Big River (the Columbia) and along the streams which flow into it.” From the lower part of the animal’s body, Coyote made the people who live along the coast. “You shall live near the mouth of the Big River and shall be traders.

“You shall live along the coast,” he said to others. “You shall live in villages facing the ocean and shall get your food by spearing salmon and digging clams.”

From the legs of the beaver monster he made the Klickitat Indians. “You shall live along the rivers that flow down from the big white mountain north of Big River. You shall be swift of foot and keen of wit. You shall be runners and great horsemen.”

From the arms of the monster he made the Cayuse Indians. “You shall live near the new Yakima River, east of the mountains. You shall be the helpers and the protectors of all the poor people.”

From the head he created the Nez Perce Indians. “You shall live in the valleys of the Kookooshka and Wallowa rivers. You shall be men of brains, great in council and in speechmaking. You shall also be skilful horsemen and brave warriors.”

Then Coyote gathered up the hair and blood and waste. He hurled them far eastward, over the big mountains. “You shall be the Snake River Indians,” said Coyote. “You shall be people of blood and violence. You shall be buffalo hunters and shall wander far and wide.”

—Excerpted from “How Coyote Made the Indian Tribes” as collected and retold from myths of the Nez Perce, Palouse, Spokane, and Coeur d’Alene tribes by Ella Clark

WASHINGTON INDIAN TRIBES CAN BE GROUPED culturally and geographically as Coastal and Plateau. The major differences between these two groups can be attributed to two of Washington’s major geographic features—the Pacific Coast and the Cascade Mountains. The Cascades affect weather, vegetation, and game on both east and west sides, while also posing a barrier to travel. As a result, tribes on the western side of the mountains turned primarily to the Pacific for food, travel, and trade. The life-style of the tribes to the east of the mountains was shaped by the Columbia River and the grasslands of the Plateau. Both Coastal and Plateau tribes developed ways of living which took advantage of the land’s resources, and the connections between native customs, material culture, and the land are illustrated in the exhibit.

NATIVE LANGUAGE GROUPS & DIALECTS

in and around Washington

LANGUAGES WITH NO RECOGNIZED PHYLUM

CHIMAKUAN LANGUAGE FAMILY
- Chimaksun language
- Chemaksun
- Quileute language
- Quileute
- Hoh

SALISHAN LANGUAGE FAMILY
- Coeur d’Alene language
- Coeur d’Alene
- Columbia language
- Chelan
- Columbia
- Entiat
- Methow
- Wenatchee
- Cowitz language
- Cowitz
- Halkomelem language
- Chilliwack
- Cowichan
- Katzie
- Kwantlen
- Musquem
- Namaimo
- Tait
- Kalispel language
- Chewelah
- Kalispel
- Spokane
- Lower Chehalis language
- Chehalis
- Humptulips
- Wynoocchee
- Lushootseed language
- Duwamish
- Kikiall
- Muckleshoot
- Nisqually
- Nisqually
- Puyallup
- Sachelewamish
- Sauk-Suiattle
- Skagit
- Skykomish
- Snohomish
- Snoqualmie
Some of the most important messages the exhibit imparts to students are that each tribe in Washington (as throughout North America) is unique in its language, location, and material culture; that Native American and Euro-American encounters in the Northwest bore mixed results; and in spite of these often destructive encounters, native people still live in Washington.

In general, Plateau tribes traditionally occupied areas east of the Cascades, while Coastal tribes occupied Puget Sound and all areas west of the Cascades. Lewis and Clark were the first explorers to document contact with Plateau people. At the time, inhabitants of the Plateau belonged to two major language groups: the Salishan and the Sahaptian. Northern Plateau tribes such as the Spokane, Colville, Sanpoil, and Coeur d’Alene were Salish speaking people. Tribes to the south, such as the Nez Perce, Palouse, Umatilla, and Yakama, spoke languages belonging to the Sahaptian language family.

The grasslands of the Plateau encouraged a life-style related to the gathering of important plants such as camas, bitterroot, and tule reed, as well as hunting the herds of deer, elk, and bison that ranged there for summer feeding. As a result, traditional housing was composed of mat lodges (or the tipi as adopted later), clothing was constructed of hides, the root bag became a standard among basket makers, and elaborate quill and bead work were the hallmark of the Yakama and Nez Perce tribes. The horse, as a mode of transport and co-worker, became a vital part of Plateau culture after its introduction in the 18th century.

Coastal tribes occupied the western side of the Cascades along the Pacific Ocean, on the shores of Puget Sound, and along the many rivers that flow to the Pacific. Belonging to the Chimacum, Salishan, and Wakashan language families, Coastal tribes such as the Quileute, Nisqually, and Makah depended on the seasonal harvest and preservation of ocean mammals, fish, shellfish, roots, greens, and berries for their survival. The close proximity of seasonal gathering grounds allowed for the establishment of semi-permanent living structures. The surrounding evergreen forests fostered cedar trees, and the cedar’s diverse utility made it a primary resource. Cedar bark and roots were used for clothing and basketry. Cedar wood was used for plank houses, canoes, and carving. For Coastal tribes, fishing on the coast, along the rivers, and in the Sound was a way of life.

Yet the lines of distinction are...
not always so easily drawn between Plateau and Coastal tribes. People from different tribes often intermarried, bringing with them the skills and customs of their people.

Within the Native Heritage sections of the exhibit, your students will discover a wide variety of artifacts created by and hear the voices of many Indian people. Encourage your students to look closely at the artifacts to discern what they are made of, who made them, and why. You may also look to the Expedition Notes as a way to assist your students in developing reading, listening, and observation skills. Once your students understand the major differences between Plateau and Coastal cultures, they will begin to understand that American Indians are not a generic group of indigenous people. Tribal customs, beliefs, and resources vary as much as the land on which we live.

WHAT WE MAKE, WHAT WE USE
AND HOW WE LIVE . . .

"Because we are an oral tradition, all the important information of our people was committed to memory, and oral historians were given that responsibility. . . . They were story-tellers. They were genealogists. They were people who knew the importance of all the landmarks in our land; the rivers, the mountain, every hill. Everything had a name, and the people remembered these things."

—Vi Hilbert, Upper Skagit

STORIES, PASSED FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, relate the creation of the people, the formation of the land, and the coming of light. These stories also relate the importance of skills, not only in hunting, but in basketry, beadwork, woodworking, and related gathering. These were the skills of survival, yet they were and are also artistic skills which contributed to the cultural richness of tribal life.

Helen Petersen, a member of the Makah tribe, relates the importance of these skills in the story, “The Girl Who Lived at Lake Crescent.” Read this story aloud to your students as a pre-visit activity.

I’LL TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT A GIRL WHO LIVED AT LAKE CRESCENT with her step-mother. She lived in a long house. Everybody in the house used to help with the work. The women would get up before sunrise, but not this girl. She would lie by the fire and sleep and sleep and sleep. She wouldn’t get up to wash her hands. Her dress was dirty, her hair was tangled and dirty.

Her step-mother was tired of this. She said, “Get up, get up.” She grew tired of calling the girl to meals so she threw a piece of fish at her and said, “Still asleep? Whik bakah, Whik bakah. Lazy bones!”

The girl was upset because all the other girls had pretty names. She walked to the lake and began to cry. She cried and cried and cried. The waterfalls around Lake Crescent are her tears.

She heard a voice say, “Why are you crying? What is the matter?” She opened her eyes and saw a flock of white swans.

She answered, “Nobody loves me. They say I don’t know how to do anything. My step-mother calls me Whik bakah.”

"Why don’t you come with us and we will show you all you need to know."

The leader told her to get on his back and close her eyes. She closed her eyes. She could feel herself going way up. The swans were singing a song, “Quo-why, quo-why, se-sin-yeh woe tum tum tum . . . .”

Sahaptian Language
Family
Nez Perce language
Nex Perce

Sahaptian language
Kittitas
Klickitat
Methow
Palouse
Taidnapam
Tenino
Umatilla
Wálula
Wanapam
Wauyuksma
Wayampam
Yakama

Na-Dene Languages
Athapaskan Language
Family
Lower Columbia
Athapaskan language
Clatskanic
Kwaihoiko
Nicola language
Nicola

—language list from
A Time of Gathering

UNDERSTANDING THE COLLECTION,
UNDERSTANDING THE EXHIBIT

Since its foundation in 1891, the Washington State Historical Society has collected a number of Native American artifacts—from whaling floats to baskets, masks to gambling pieces. These artifacts comprise 10% of the WSHS collection. By studying these 19th and 20th century artifacts, students will gain a better understanding of life in Washington prior to and after the establishment of reservations and boarding schools.
“Now we are here, you may open your eyes.” She opened her eyes and saw she was way on top of the Olympic Mountains. The leader said, “We will find you your own place to take a bath.”

They gave her Indian perfume to rub on her arms and face and hair. When she was finished bathing they said, “Now we will show you how to make a dress.”

They showed her how to take cedar bark from a tree and how to weave it and make a cape trimmed with mallard feathers in pretty colors. “You should know how to weave a cedar bark hat, how to mash alderberries and rub the hat with the pulp to make it waterproof.

“Now you should know how to make baskets,” they said. They showed her how to make baskets of cedar bark and bear grass. She made big baskets for clothes and she made burden baskets made of spruce root to carry wood. She learned how to make mats with cedar bark and cat tail. She learned what were good things to eat in the woods like salal berries, huckleberries, cranberries, and blueberries.

One day she looked down and saw an old lady. “Oh!” she said. “That was my grandmother. She has cut her hair. My grandmother thinks I am dead!”

The white swans said, “Now that you know all you need to know, you are ready to go home and you may take all of the things you have made.” She climbed on the leader’s back and closed her eyes. The swans sang their song as they flew, “Quo-suh, quo-suh, se-sin-yeh woe tum tum tum.”

When they came back to her home they said, “We are here now,” and left her. She thanked them. Her grandmother didn’t know her at first. When she did recognize her, she hugged her. Her grandmother gave a big party and gave her a good name. The girl gave each guest at the party a present of something she had made herself. She was happy.

Objects to look for

Have your students look through books and other sources to find pictures of objects described in the story. Remind them that the story is about a Makah girl, and the Makah are a Coastal tribe. The objects pictures they find should be specific to the tribes of the Northwest Coast.

Directions:
Find pictures of these objects before you visit, then look for them when you come to the museum:

- Clam basket made of cedar or spruce root
- Basketry hat
- Cattail mat
- Burden basket with a tumpline

Native Heritage Gallery

Within the Native Heritage Gallery (located next to the Petroglyph Theater), artifacts featured relate to cedar, fishing & whaling, gathering, gambling, bead & quill work, and the spiritual world. Contrasts between Coastal and Plateau tribes are evident in the materials used to make objects and the styles by which they are rendered. For example, most elaborately beaded bags can be traced to Plateau tribes, such as the Yakama and Nez Perce, while masks of carved cedar and baskets made of cedar root and cedar bark are unique to Coastal tribes. Similarly, the differences between a spruce root clam basket used by the Clallam people and a twined root bag used by the Nez Perce for gathering roots are apparent when one considers their method of use.

Each artifact presented in this gallery tells its own story, and each story contributes to understanding the complexities and richness of Indian life. What follows is a short review of each subject area, in which the similarities and contrasts of Plateau and Coastal cultures are highlighted.
Cedar
Red cedar. This is the most useful vegetable production of their country. Its wood is used for planks, for houses and burial enclosures, for rails, shingles, shakes, posts and the like; also for canoes, oars, baby boards, buoys, spinning wheels, boxes, torches, arrow shafts, fish traps, tamahoons, stocks, and firewood; the limbs for baskets and ropes; the bark for baskets, mats, sails, infant head protectors, strings and baiders, and when beaten, for women’s skirts, beds for infants, wadding for guns, napkins and head bands, blankets, and for gambling purposes; the gum and leaves for medicine, and the roots for making baskets.

— From the notebooks of Myron Eells, missionary among the Indians of Puget Sound, 1874-1907

The collection of cedar artifacts presented in the exhibit were obtained, for the most part, between 1880 and 1910. Created after the establishment of reservations—land-ceding treaties having been signed in the mid 1850s—and during the initiation of government “re-education” programs, these artifacts were made when many reservation people still used traditional techniques. Government boarding schools forced young people to turn away from their native languages and cultural traditions. As a result, many traditional skills, stories, and lifeways of Washington Indians were virtually lost.

Artifacts that tell the story
Basketry Hat, c. 1900
Hats made from western redcedar (Thuja plicata) were worn by Puget Sound peoples as protection against rain, as well as to lessen the glare off the water on fishing trips.

Towing Rope, c. 1880s, possibly Makah
Examples of cedar withe rope are rare today, but they were once commonly used to tow heavy loads such as whales. Witches are branch-like extensions that protrude from the main branches of the cedar tree.

Bark Basket, Klickitat, c. 1880s
Trips to huckleberry picking grounds in the Cascades often resulted in more berries than baskets so temporary containers were quickly made by pulling a wide strip of cedar bark and folding it. Meant to be discarded, older examples of these baskets are rare.

Woodworking Tools, c. 1880-1900
Carvings such as the mother and child carving by Allabush, a Makah carver, were created with specialized tools. In the exhibit, you will find a photograph of Allabush seated on a bark mat holding a “curfed” or crooked knife with which he would have finished his pieces. This type of knife was found all along the Northwest coast. The D-Adze near his foot would have been used for roughing out the form. Examples of these adzes can also be found in the Native Heritage Electronic Journal.
FISHING & WHALING

Fish were much more than a staple food for Indian people in Washington. The act of fishing, the waters where the fish were caught, and the manner in which the first fish were caught and offered to the community were ruled by strict religious and secular traditions. In 1995 the Makah, who live on the remote western tip of the Olympic Peninsula and have not hunted whales for 80 years, voted to reintiate the hunt in the hope that it would bring a spiritual and cultural renewal to the young people of their community.

The Native Heritage Electronic Journal illustrates the whale hunt and butchering process as documented in 1910 by photographers Asahel Curtis and Shobid Hunter.

Makah whale hunt artifacts

Wrapped Twined Makah Basket. Depicting whaling scene, smaller versions of this basket are still being made on the Makah Reservation today.

Sealskin Float, mid 19th century. The Makah people, formidable whalers prior to 1900, used floats made from the whole skin of a seal turned inside out. The floats were attached by ropes to harpoon heads and, once the head was embedded in the whale’s flesh, would help keep it from diving. The floats also helped insure that the whale would not sink, once it was killed, when it was towed to shore.

Whaling Harpoon Head and Rope. The Makah harpoon head and towing rope were attached to a yew wood pole or shaft from which the harpoon head and rope would detach once it entered the whale. Markings on the two bone valves of the harpoon head that hold the metal blade in place identify it as Makah.

Westcoast Canoe Model. “Westcoast” is a term used to describe the similar material culture of the Makah of Washington and the Nuu-chah-nulth tribe of Vancouver Island. Known by a variety of names, (such as Chinook) this most seaworthy of canoes was a coveted trade item among river tribes in Washington.

Salmon and halibut fishing artifacts

Model Basketry Fish Trap, circa 1900, Puget Sound. Fishermen pulled up the traps at the fish weirs and used their clubs as they pulled the fish into their canoes.

Yew Wood Fish Club. Used to kill fish after they were hooked and pulled in, clubs were often carved to represent animals such as the sea lion.

Fish Hooks. Originally made of bone points and yew wood lashed together with twine made from nettle fiber, fish hooks underwent innovation with the arrival of new materials such as iron or store-bought twine. For the Makah, who relied on halibut the way Indian people on the Columbia River depended on salmon, halibut hooks bore carved figures thought to reflect the spirit helper needed by the fisherman to have a successful catch.
GATHERING
When Sulee and I were children, the family did not remain long in any one place in the summertime. We traveled with other families in search of food to be preserved for winter.
—Mourning Dove, Colville

Walking with a flat woven basket hanging from her waist or riding on horseback with a hard-coiled basket hanging from the saddle, the Plateau woman gathered over half of her family's yearly food supply. Camas, bitterroot, cow's parsnip, chokecherries, and huckleberries are just some of the wild foods Indian women picked, dried, stored, and cooked. Pine nuts and acorns were also gathered as were medicinal herbs such as lovage which was used to heal a child's sore throat in the winter. A Plateau woman had to know where to gather, what to pick, and the best time to set out on her trip. In the company of women, young girls learned to use their digging sticks to uproot a patch of camas and properly give thanks for the food that was gathered.

GATHERING ARTIFACTS
Camas Root Digger, possibly Nez Perce, c. 1920. Camas roots, a potato-like staple of Plateau tribes, were dug with a tool called a digging stick or root digger. A vertical stick about 20 inches long with a horizontal handle attached, a digging stick was often constructed of hardwood—charred by fire to strengthen it—and antler. Today contemporary materials such as steel and rebar are used.

Buckskin Dress, Yakama, c. 1900. The elk and deer hunted by men for meat was skinned and then processed by the women to make beaded clothes, moccasins, and carrying pouches.

Root Bag, Plateau, c. 1900. With her bag tied and hanging from her waist, a woman's hands were free to use her digging stick. This style bag is still in use today.

Coiled Basket, Klickitat, c. 1900. Smaller baskets of berries might be emptied into a larger basket like this one on the gathering grounds. Later it could be tied to a saddle and taken home.

Tumpline or Carrying Strap. The flat, woven decorative section is placed across the forehead, shoulders or waist, depending on the load to be carried. The two loose ends would have been tied to woven openings or leather straps on the basket.

Cradleboard, possibly Nez Perce, c. 1880s. Infants, who spent most of their lives protected in cradleboards, could travel with their mothers to gathering grounds. If long distances were travelled, the cradleboard could be tied to the side of the saddle where the mother could watch her child.

Caparison, c. 1900, or decorative horse saddle cover used by Plateau peoples.

Doll, Yakama/Nez Perce, c. 1930. Complete with bead work similar to that of women's dresses, dolls were made by Plateau mothers for their daughters. With the development of a tourist market, they were also made for sale.
Bead & Quill Work

“The mocceron is formed with one seem on the outer edge of the foot [and] is cut open at the instep to admit the foot and sewed up behind. In this respect they are the same with the Mandans. They sometimes ornament their moccerons with various figures wrought with the quills of the Porcupine, some of the dressey young men ornment the tops of their moccerons with the skins of polecats....”

—from the diary of William Clark, August 21, 1805, along the Salmon River, Idaho

A balone, fish vertebrae, hollowed bird bone, elk teeth, dentalia shells, and porcupine quills, were among the earliest materials used by native peoples to ornament themselves and decorate their clothes. Quillwork, unique to North America, preceded beadwork as a decorative technique. Quills were pulled flat between the quill worker’s teeth and dyed with natural pigments. The flattened quills were then embroidered with sinew onto buckskin. New quillwork was brightly colored and only faded to softer tones with time.

Over the years, brightly colored quills laboriously applied to the yoke of a Plateau buckskin dress were replaced by brilliant bands of glass beads obtained through trade. Beads were easier to use than bone or quill and their colors dazzled. But beads were also more than ornament to the Indian trader who exchanged furs and food for necklaces. Beads were money—a unit of measure, a way to barter for scarce goods, a symbol of one’s status in relation to others.

During the reservation period, Plateau women began making beaded bags to use for dress or ceremonial occasions. Sometimes called “storytelling” bags, horse imagery is quite common, as are floral designs and patriotic motifs. The beadwork of other Indian people, such as the Ojibwas were sources of inspiration, as were the greeting cards and floral patterns of Euro-Americans. Indian women today still carry their beaded bags to pow-wows and other important gatherings.

Gambling

Ceremonial gambling usually took place at large, inter-tribal gatherings held during the summer. Gambling did not require a common spoken language, it could be done through signs and motions. The disk game was played with disks of yew wood hidden under shredded cedar bark. The bone or stick game was played with a pair of “male” and “female” bone cylinders hidden in the hand and a set of 20 tallying sticks. The singing of the people watching the game, the goods wagered to attract the spirit powers, and the smoking of the pipe all made the outcome of importance to the tribe as a whole.

There was also secular gambling such as the women’s gambling game with dice made from beaver teeth. Among Plateau peoples, horse-racing was another event in which people wagered heavily on the outcome. The importance of horses and horse-racing is exemplified in the imagery of many beaded objects.

Gambling Pieces

bone or stick game

disk game
Trade beads

I can't learn whether those Indians trade with white people or Inds. below for the Beads & copper, which they are so fond of—they are nearly neked, preferring beads to anything—Those beads they traffic with Indians Still higher up this river for Skins robes &c. &c.

—William Clark, November 1, 1805, writing from his camp in present-day Skamania County

Although blankets and muskets were the preferred exchange item during the fur trade of the 1840s, beads ranging in size from seed beads to pony beads and originating from such places as Venice, Czechoslovakia, and China were a common exchange commodity. Strung on sinew, or animal tendon, necklaces were made of beads known by such names as “Russian blues,” “white hearts,” and “Cantons.” Along the Columbia River and the Northwest Coast, necklaces of light blue and multicolored beads were very common. White and light blue seed beads—the tiny beads used for bead work—were the least expensive bead colors available during the 1800s. This may be why these two colors were and still are popular backgrounds for bead work designs. Cut metal beads began to appear during the reservation era and are still popular today.

Indians at work

And at war

“From their small population of 400,000, the Indians have sent more than 12,000 men to war. Even greater numbers of Indians have left their reservations to build bombers and tanks, to keep the railroad cars moving, to work in the mines, and to pick beets and cotton and perform other necessary labor in the fields of victory.”

—Commissioner Collier, Indians at Work, a news sheet for Indians and the Indian Service, 1943

The stars and stripes, the eagle, as well as other patriotic symbols of the American explorers and traders were incorporated early on into the design repertoire of Indian artists. The power of these images was, in a sense, possessed by beading them onto a pair of gauntlets, or long-cuffed gloves.

From the reservation period onward, serving in the military was the only way left for some young Indian men to experience the time-honored warrior tradition of their people. Praised as remarkable soldiers, Indian participation in the military continues to be high.

Belts, pouches and vests were often beaded with patriotic symbols and presented to the soldier upon his return. On most reservations today, Veterans Day is a very important time when returning warriors are honored by the entire community.


THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

The spiritual world of Indian people granted the same moral rights and responsibilities and the same humanity shared by men and women to the woods, the river, the weather—to the world around them. This very human world was alive with power and desire and influence. Many winter ceremonies were associated with spirit powers and the act of communicating with this world.

Rattles and masks were and still are used during ceremonies by Northwest Coast tribes such as the Makah.

SPIRITUAL WORLD ARTIFACTS

Grouse Rattle, Makah. Rattles and other musical instruments were often used in winter ceremonies or by a medicine man. Makah artist Spencer McCarty carved this rattle in 1987.

Makah Masks. Dated circa 1850s, the elder mask with movable eyes was once brightly colored and would have had hair attached along the top rim. Makah masks were often made in pairs to be used in nighttime winter dances.

The asymmetrical design on the other mask is typically Makah, as demonstrated through its sharp contrast to the symmetrical, stylized art of British Columbian and Alaskan peoples.

Paint Palette and Brushes. Masks, rattles and other ceremonial objects were often painted with plant or mineral pigments mixed with a binding of saliva or salmon eggs. Fingers, sharpened sticks, or brushes made from the guard hair of such animals as the porcupine were used to spread paint.

PETROGLYPH THEATER

On the immense basalt rock walls bordering the Columbia River, petroglyphs and pictographs created by ancient people can be found. Combinations of hatch marks, faces, geometric designs, hunters, and animals appear carved in and painted on rock at hundreds of locations throughout Washington. While some believe the images are merely “ancient graffiti,” others believe the carved and painted places document specific historic events or mark family rights to certain hunting and fishing sites. Still others believe the sites are sacred and hold mystical powers. No matter what you believe, one fact remains indisputable: petroglyph and pictograph sites in the Northwest are endangered. Submersion, destruction, and vandalism have significantly diminished rock art sites throughout Washington. While some pictograph sites have undergone restoration, other pictograph and petroglyph sites have been submerged indefinitely beneath the backwaters of the Columbia River dams.

One such submerged site is the Rock Island site near Wenatchee. This site, studied and recorded prior to the building of the Rock Island and Wanapum dams by Harold J. Cundy, forms the basis for the Petroglyph Theater. On its faux basalt walls, you and your students will find images of sheep, deer, hunters, sun symbols, and geometric designs as recorded by Cundy. It is largely through his notebooks and journals, held in the WSHS Special Collections, that we have knowledge of these submerged and obliterated sites. Cundy’s description of the Rock Island site as he recorded it in 1939 appears at left.
THIS IS WHERE WE LIVE...

"A house like this was always built facing the water, the saltwater, all the time. It never faces any other way. So that's the way they are built, right in line. And if—if somebody else builds and they want to be close well, they'll build behind. But always the first family comes and builds looking towards the water."

—Helma Swan Ward, Makah

PLANK HOUSES

Indian villages on Puget Sound were composed of cedar plank dwellings, each shared by several families. Built using a permanent pole frame over which removable cedar planks were laid, these houses contrast with plank houses of northern tribes through variations in roof line and plank placement. The plank house in the museum was constructed by Lance Wilkie (Makah) and follows the Southern Coast Salish style, with a gabled roof and vertical planks. Houses of northern coast tribes, such as the Makah, differ in that they generally were constructed with shed roofs and horizontal planks.

Inside the plank house, cartail mats are hung on the walls to discourage drafts, and sleeping benches line the walls. In contrast to the more mobile mat and pole houses of such Plateau tribes as the Yakama, plank houses reflect the somewhat more stationary life-style of the Coastal tribes.

Along with the family homes there was usually a large structure or potlatch house used for tribal and intertribal gatherings. Old Man House, a potlatch house located on Agate Pass, was the spiritual center of the Suquamish for many years. In the 1870s Old Man House was burned by federal agents with the intent of eliminating traditional Indian religious meeting places. Despite the destruction of Old Man House, intertribal gatherings continued on the site.

The Suquamish remember that Old Man House was a village site before the enormous structure was built. In the 1894 painting by Raphael Coombs exhibited in this section, we see a depiction of one of the many intertribal gatherings that took place at the site and continued to occur even after its destruction.

OLD MAN HOUSE

Special Indian Agent Michael T. Simmons described the house in a letter to Isaac Stevens in December of 1855:

... 29th arrived at the Duwamish & Squamish reservations in Port Madison at the entrance to Agate Passage [Agate Pass], here I found a large assemblage of their tribes, here they have a large house said to have been put up by chief Seattle some 40 years ago, it is 525 feet long, 60 feet wide, 18 feet high, on the post are carved imitations of the human figure....

AFTER YOU VISIT

Student Instructions

House Styles
Select a Washington tribe, gather information about the people and their architecture, then build a corresponding house model.

Epidemics of Yesterday and Today
In response to the Epidemic Memorial, research the epidemics that people your age face today, create your own mask, and write an artist's statement. Exhibit the masks and statements in a special place at school.
CONTINUITY & CHANGE

When we were created we were given our ground to live on and from this time these were our rights...

—Chief Minenock, Yakama, 1915

The native people of Washington have not disappeared. Despite the establishment of reservations and boarding schools, the introduction of different ways of living and religious beliefs, and the sale of tribal land, remnants of past ways still remain. Two artifacts in this section which signify loss of Indian identity are the remnant of the house post from Old Man House and the surveyor's chains used to measure reservation land destined to be sold.

The views and voices of people, too, are part of Continuity & Change. Through missionaries and a medicine man, a Native American novelist and an Indian Agent photographer, the times of change are recalled.

You are here: Puyallup Country at the Turn of the 20th Century

“Now look what the white people have done on the hillside on which they are going to build a big camp called Tacoma, after the name of our mountain. Two years ago you could see a house here and there among the trees, now you can only see a tree here and there among the houses.”

—Jonas Stainup, 1880

Since Jonas Stainup, a Puyallup, said those words, the “big camp” that he anticipated has grown from a thousand inhabitants in 1880 to more than 36,000 people a decade later. Further changes are in store for Stainup’s tribe. Forty percent of their 18,000 acre reservation, which extends north of the city, across Commencement Bay, is up for sale.

Any sale or long-term lease of Puyallup lands violates the Treaty of Medicine Creek, which Governor Isaac Stevens pressured tribal representatives to sign in 1854. Nonetheless, Tacoma’s Chamber of Commerce successfully lobbied Washington’s legislature and the U.S. Congress to permit public auctions of Puyallup land.

These auctions occur often without the consent or knowledge of parcel owners. Prominent Tacoma citizens have been empowered to sell allotments for many Puyallups. Each auction is widely advertised far from where it is taking place, but locally, few are informed of the event. Oddly, prices obtained for the land are much lower than their market value. Many of the plots are resold within months for much more money.

People Who Help Tell the Story

Edwin Eells (1871–1895) & Myron Eells (1874–1907)

Edwin was an Indian Agent on the Skokomish Reservation and Myron was a Protestant Missionary who lived among the Puget Sound peoples. Myron left a detailed record and description of contemporary reservation life.

Mourning Dove (1888–1936)

Born Christine Quintasket, Mourning Dove forged a new identity as the first American Indian woman to publish a novel.

Samuel Morse (1859–1921)

Indian Agent at Neah Bay, Samuel Morse was also an amateur photographer who took numerous portraits of Makah families.

Smohalla

A Wanapum prophet, Smohalla inspired the Dreamer religion which enthralled nearly 2,000 Indians of the Columbia Plateau during the mid-19th century.
THE EPIDEMIC MEMORIAL

"I labored hard to save them but my medicine would not work as it used to....."
—Smohalla

THE BIG SICK

Beginning with their earliest encounters, contact between indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest and non-Indians had a devastating effect on the native population. Not the violence of guns as much as the virulence of disease to which they had no immunity made tribal members vulnerable to conquest.

The epidemics were numerous and varied. They struck in waves, generation after generation, in different regions, and they originated in different ways. Sometimes trading between tribes spread disease to peoples who had never seen Euro-Americans. Other epidemics originated with maritime visits, the inland fur trade, pioneer encroachments, and agricultural settlements. Whatever the kind of disease or the circumstances of its introduction, the effects on native people were death and demoralization.

During the decade after the first epidemic broke out in the Pacific Northwest, around 1775, smallpox took the lives of a third of the Indians of the lower and middle Columbia River. Malaria struck in 1830 at Hudson’s Bay Company headquarters in Fort Vancouver, and when the seasonal scourge of “ague and fever” abated in 1833, only one Chinookian speaker in ten remained alive. An outbreak of measles in 1847 shortly after pioneers arrived at the Whitman mission was among the motives for the Cayuse killing of the missionaries. Smallpox returned in 1853. Known as the “Big Sick,” this epidemic originated on a brig that landed in Neah Bay and spread throughout the territory. During World War I Plateau Indians, among others, succumbed to the worldwide pandemic of Spanish influenza.

The devastation has not ended. Demoralization from the loss of their lands and cultural heritage has contributed to a continuing plague of suicide among American Indians. However, in spite of these losses, the indigenous peoples of Washington have persisted in asserting their rights and maintaining their traditions.

A DAILY SUICIDE

The median life-span for Indians is somewhere in the forties. That’s deceptive because our infant mortality rate is four times higher than the national average. We have the magic age of nineteen, the age of drinking, violent deaths, and suicides. Our teenage suicide rate is thirty-four times higher than the national average.

Forty-five is another magic age for the Indian. That’s the age of death from alcoholism.....It’s a daily suicide. “I can’t face my life, lack of future. I can’t face the ugly attitudes toward me. I can’t face the poverty. So I’ll just drink this bottle of Ripple, and I’ll kill myself for a few hours. I’ll kill some brain cells. Tomorrow, when I get sober, maybe things will be different. When I get sober and things are no different, I’ll drink again. I’m not so hopeless that I’ll kill myself.” It’s an optimistic form of suicide.

I once drank very heavily. A little seventeen-year-old girl, who I considered just a child, would just get in my face and give me hell. She would say: “Don’t you care about yourself? Don’t you realize you’re killing an Indian? Why do you want to hurt yourself?” At that point I stopped, and I can’t be around people who drink.

—Ramona Bennett, former Chairwoman, Puyallup Tribal Council