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History 391 Needs Columbia

In History 391, a correspondence course on the Pacific Northwest that I teach at Western Washington University, two assignments involve the use of libraries and historical journals. One lesson requires that students find and analyze three articles that I have published in the Pacific Northwest Quarterly, plus one in Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History. The second exercise requests more reading in both journals, followed by an essay comparing the two publications.

As teachers know, 391 is required for certification at certain levels in the state. This means the course enrolls an unusual number of hard-working, capable, college educated and disciplined instructors. A few of these students-by-mail live in Bellingham, but most are scattered around the state in places like Shelton, Port Angeles, Olympia, Ellensburg, Arlington, Port Townsend, Mount Vernon, Anacortes, Vancouver, Wenatchee, Spokane, Moses Lake, Granite Falls, Concrete, Longview, Blaine and Omak.

The magazine assignments in 391 have several purposes: to introduce the students to me and to two excellent historical sources about our region, to lead them to a library, to discover fascinating stories previously unknown to them, and to ask them to reflect on the nature of historical knowledge with the hope that they will realize that "history" comes in many different guises, forms and packages.

All this works fine, except for one problem: often students cannot find the magazines. At first I blamed this on their inability to use a library, but as the problem repeated itself over and over with capable students it became evident that library skills were not the main issue. Actually, the students could not begin my assignments because their local school, public or community library did not subscribe to the journals.

This unhappy condition seems pervasive. Many public libraries, even in fairly large towns, apparently do not offer our two best historical magazines. A little research yielded the following sad statistics: Of approximately 300 Washington school districts with 560 high schools, junior highs and middle schools, some of which are quite small or may share a library, only about 12.5 percent carry a subscription to Columbia. Of the 1,060 Washington elementary schools, most of which have a library, hardly any showed up on Columbia's list of school library subscribers. According to Washington Libraries' public library statistics for June 1990, there are about 250 public libraries and branches. Of these, 23 percent receive Columbia.

Budgets are low and under pressure, certainly, but for a library not to carry the most important magazines about the history of Washington is most surprising. Columbia, above all, is written for and dedicated to the general reader. It is well edited, lively, historically sound, inexpensive, free of academic jargon, uses extensive artwork and photos, and is an excellent resource for teachers at the primary and secondary level—which is exactly the conclusion most of my students reach once they finally set their hands on a few copies. Before the 391 assignment, 90 percent of the students did not realize that this journal existed.

If a local library truly cannot afford the cost of the Pacific Northwest Quarterly and Columbia, every community has local history buffs who, I suspect, might be glad to contribute to the annual subscription. Librarians, or we teachers, need to locate these people and make the request.

As with any curriculum, it is only when educators supplement conventional textbooks with unusual new ideas that they begin to teach in exciting, innovative ways. Columbia and the Pacific Northwest Quarterly can provide these ideas for teaching our regional history.

—Robert H. Keller

Robert H. Keller is a member of the faculty at Fairhaven College, Western Washington University, in Bellingham.
Bellingham's citizens have never been neutral about the old city hall on Prospect Street. Over its 100-year history, it has inspired acts of love, insult, greed—even a profound indifference, which nearly led to its destruction.

It started as a dream, built to symbolize progressive thinking, a virtue many hoped would attract James J. Hill, then looking for a terminus for his Great Northern Railroad. With Hill and his line would come other investors eager to mine the riches of a growing community.

But that dream died hard and quickly. Even before the building was finished, Hill opted for Seattle, and the Bellingham Bay region plunged into depression along with the rest of the nation. Only 40 years later the building was declared outdated and city employees eagerly anticipated their new accommodations along Whatcom Creek. Few could be counted on to say a kind word about the hall. Most thought it should be torn down.

Today, as the Whatcom Museum building, the old city hall is again a source of pride as the centerpiece of a lively cultural center. Twice it has been saved from the wrecking ball by citizens who recognized its potential where others saw decay.

Consolidation Brings a Hall

THE OLD CITY hall would never have been built if New Whatcom (once called Sehome) and Whatcom, the “Twin Cities,” had not consolidated in December 1890. By then it had become obvious that the two cities shared not only a common infrastructure—electricity, streets, water and sewer lines—but a heated rivalry with Fairhaven, booming on the south end of the bay. Only by uniting could the cities hope to compete.

An initial consolidation vote was taken in August 1890. It passed almost unanimously.
in Whatcom, but was narrowly defeated in New Whatcom. Fairhaven immediately jumped in, proposing consolidation with New Whatcom, but before steam could build on that front, a 21-person, tri-city commission was formed to investigate uniting all three communities. In September they voted 14-7 to unite under the compromise name “Bellingham.” The Fairhaven contingent neither went for the name nor the proposed sites of the city hall and post office and promptly pulled out, after which the two Whatcoms opted to be called “New Whatcom.”

All that remained to be settled before the election of December 1890 was the selection of city hall and post office sites. The predictable squabbling ensued, but it was mostly academic because P. B. Cornwall had already donated land for a city hall on high, rocky ground near Whatcom Creek between Dock (Cornwall Avenue) and Champion streets. The parcel was politically correct, being nearly dead-on the former boundary of Old and New Whatcom.

The San Francisco-based president of the Black Diamond Coal Company had taken up community building after ordering the 1878 shut-down of the subsidiary Bellingham Coal Company, whose hazardous tunnels had meandered under New Whatcom since the late 1850s. Hoping to make Black Diamond’s land holdings pay off, Cornwall in 1883 launched the British Columbia and Bellingham Bay Railroad to coax traffic down from Canada’s transcontinental line. It took more than eight years to complete, but Cornwall was hardly idle. He had been the one who built most of the infrastructure of both cities—then hustled his Black Diamond holdings through his Bellingham Bay Improvement Company.

As a result, Cornwall’s boom city was still high with optimism when the railroad opened, James J. Hill visited and the newly consolidated New Whatcom City Council first met in January 1891.

The council had moved from the 1858-vintage county courthouse—reputed to be the oldest brick building in the state (still standing in 1992)—to the Oakland Block, a spanking new triangular building, also on the former boundary line, a block up from the tide flats (and also still standing). However, sharing quarters with a clothing emporium, music dealer and hotel wouldn’t do for the government of the “fourth largest city in the state.”

Architects were asked to submit plans posthaste for a “grand city hall,” a building properly appointed for a city of New Whatcom’s station. In November 1891 the council accepted a design from Alfred Lee. A 49-year-old former wagon maker from Forest Grove, Oregon, Lee had arrived in Bellingham the year before. Before he retired he designed, in addition to the city hall, the administration building of the Bellingham Normal School (future Western Washington University), the Carnegie Library, Columbia and Washington schools and the opulent Victor Roeder and R. I. Morse homes. Four of these buildings are today on the National Register of Historic Places.

The city council called for construction bids during its November 7, 1891, meeting, with strong reservations expressed by Councilman N. F. Blomquist. A bootmaker with an eye for detail, Blomquist did not like the smell of the agreement drawn up by Cornwall’s lawyers for the Dock and Champion site. The lease specified that any structure built on the land had to be worth more than $25,000, and that if the city ever moved its quarters elsewhere, the property and everything on it reverted to the original owner. None of that mattered to Councilman J. L. Quackenbush, a commercial real estate agent with more than one pelt to skin.

“It was understood at consolidation that the (city hall) would be at Dock and Champion,” Quackenbush said. Blomquist responded that if the city council had been patient Whatcom pioneer Henry
Roeder would have sold them—for a bargain price—a spectacular site overlooking the bay on Prospect Street within spitting distance of the Oakland Block. And not only that, the city would hold “absolute title” to the property.

Another councilman, former Reveille publisher T. G. Nicklin, who listed his profession as “capitalist” in the 1891 business directory, also did not like Cornwall’s site, believing the building would be obscured and then blackened by soot from the power station on Whatcom Creek. He also pointed out that tons of rock would have to be excavated before building could start.

In response to these protests, partisans for the Cornwall property among the council voted to readjust the building site to “elevated ground” on the same Cornwall lots, almost precisely where Lee’s Carnegie Library would be built in 1908. (The site today serves as a parking lot.) Meanwhile, Lee’s plans were placed on file for public review in the city clerk’s office.

On December 10, 1891, the construction job was awarded to Long & Merritt, a Bellingham contractor whose bid of $39,719, though not the lowest, was deemed the more realistic. The company’s estimate of $300 to excavate the site, however, fell far short of the $2,246.75 the city eventually paid. Work by “only a small force of [Long & Merritt] men” began the next day.

The December 12 Reveille was hardly in the mood to celebrate, reporting:

> The proposed building will be a very fine structure were it located on a site suited to its conditions. The property is a rocky ridge, and when excavated its beauty will be in a great measure destroyed.

Most of this rocky ridge was eventually excavated during a major regrade in the downtown area shortly after 1900. The remainder of it was blasted away in the 1920s and following the demolition of the library in the mid-1950s. A small portion of the rock still exists in an alley in central Bellingham.

In a more effusive vein, the newspaper went on to report that the building would be two stories high, topped by a tower and a flagstaff reaching 146 feet from ground level. The basement would hold the fire and police departments, street commissioner’s office, a boiler room and three cells, each of which would be large enough to hold about a dozen prisoners. The first story would accommodate other city offices and a large semi-circular auditorium/council chamber able to hold “about 1,200 people.” Each councilman would be furnished with his own desk. The second floor would
function as a balcony gallery surrounded by offices, with the council chamber extending through to the ceiling. A stairway would lead to the tower, which would offer a spectacular view of the bay and the San Juan Islands beyond.

Changing Horses

A LANDSLIDE DECEMBER election for the Labor ticket instantly changed the face and political thrust of the New Whatcom City Council when it first met in January. Despite the fact that work was well under­way—a basement was slowly materializing at the Cornwall site—a committee was immediately appointed to investigate the siting of the new city hall. To the surprise of no one, the committee included a re-elected N. F. Blomquist. It took the group under two weeks to file their report, which was read into the minutes of the January 15, 1892, council meeting.

Most of Blomquist's and Nicklin's previous arguments were aired, supplemented by evidence from Henry Roeder. According to the old pioneer, the current site was directly above an old Bellingham Coal Company tunnel where the "coal was ruined." The land might cave in to the depth of 150 feet as it had 20 years earlier—not two blocks away. The city center of New Whatcom was riddled with potential sinkholes, Roeder pointed out. In fact, the report went on, teams of horses passing over the surface near the site "cause a hollow, rumbling noise, proving that it is undermined."

Added to all this was poor drainage, soot from the power house along Whatcom Creek, no view and the mass of remaining rock, the future excavation of which would "greatly endanger and perhaps seriously damage" the building.

A motion was quickly made by Nicklin to adopt the report, at which time Councilman George Cooper, owner of a sash and door factory, dug in his heels. He did not want to be rushed into an action based on proceedings he believed were "illegal." Blomquist retorted that if anything were illegal, it had to be erecting a fine building "on property owned by someone else."

With Blomquist's political ducks in order, the report passed with two "no" votes registered. The city clerk was instructed to pay to Roeder $5,000 out of the city hall fund. As if to further cement the decision, the Reveille took a "survey" on the street the next day. Sentiment for the new deal ran 50-1, according to the newspaper. The single opinion opposing the plan came from none other than J. L. Quackenbush.

However, the last word in the controversy came in the form of a January 20 wire from P. B. Cornwall himself, who felt compelled to clear up the doubts so effectively sown about his donation. He then turned his attention to one of the new site's strongest proponents—Councilman Nicklin, the "capitalist":

The new location is not very objectionable, being convenient to Mr. Nicklin's property and it will increase his rent roll, though at the expense of other citizens of probably ten or twelve thousand dollars; but he is a clever patriot and I like to see him get on.

Overjoyed at leaving rock breaking behind, the Long & Merritt construction crews wasted little time moving equipment and materials from the Cornwall site to the Prospect Street bluff. The city engineer helped matters along by issuing a new building permit almost immediately following the council vote. Basement excavation and foundation work thus went quickly as a new hole was gouged and the soil dumped over the bluff as fill.

Chuckanut sandstone was blasted from a quarry, owned by Roeder and his son-in-law, and hauled into town to form the foundation. The solidity of the bluff, as opposed to the hollow, boggy Cornwall site, moved Lee to alter his plans, which lowered the building's elevation about a foot. This caused heartburn at pay-off time when the architect indicated that less height meant less money to the contractor.
BELLINGHAM'S OLD CITY HALL

T. G. Nicklin Changes His Mind

CONSTRUCTION AT THE new site had been underway about three months when, Nicklin—who, as a capitalist, had invested in the project as a private bondholder—wished to withdraw his money and support, and charged the council building committee with malfeasance. Although Nicklin claimed during the April 12, 1892, council meeting that he was “not out to investigate the acts of any one man,” the target clearly was building committee chairman George Cooper.

Nicklin claimed Cooper had awarded the bid to a company that was not the lowest bidder; overpaid the contractors without filing proper receipts; and, in collusion with the contractor, vastly inflated the cost of moving the city hall. Nicklin said that the city hall business was a fraud from beginning to end, and had been so “all along the slimy trail.” Councilman M. C. Latta, a local builder, angrily retorted that Nicklin was “getting off a lot of buncombe.”

Nicklin’s charges were given some credence by architect Alfred Lee, whose working relationship with Long & Merritt had proven fractious from the start. But it didn’t matter. With the possible exception of N. F. Blomquist, the council was beginning to view the “capitalist” as a sorehead. Nicklin had been on a rampage, resigning from two different committees, not to mention demanding the dissolution of another. On one occasion he claimed he was being “gagged” and was gavelled out of order by the mayor.

City hall boosters in 1890 rightly predicted that from the Whatcom Beach bluff site the hall would be “a beacon to all vessels coming into the harbor.” This view was taken c. 1915.

The charges resulted in the appointment of an investigative committee and a special hearing was convened on April 15. Cooper arrived with his attorney, who promptly demanded that Nicklin put it in writing, adding that Nicklin’s charges were “nothing but the ravings of a street brawler.” Nicklin refused and began to backpeddle, claiming he was only on hand as a “witness.” The session was concluded with nothing resolved and no action taken.

Thereafter, Nicklin stormed through council meetings like a punch-drunk fighter, hurling one malfeasance charge after another at his colleagues, complaining about everything from dirt piles in the street to sloppy sewer management. The climax came during the June 14, 1892, council meeting when Nicklin contended that his old enemy Latta had mismanaged the sewer committee. Nicklin launched into a windy diatribe, playing to the gallery, ignoring the mayor who was frantically rapping him out of order. Finally, the mayor ordered him removed from the chamber. Nicklin threatened approaching officers with an inkwell, but was quickly overcome and dragged kicking and screaming from the room.

The council promptly passed a measure endorsing the mayor’s action and proceeded with the evening’s business. Nicklin—the champion of the new city hall, the outspoken proponent of the Prospect Street site—was not on the council the next year and soon disappeared as a major player in Bellingham history.

The Building

DESPITE GROWING UNREST over an economy that was stumbling toward depression, construction continued without
delays. The brick walls were up by late summer and the roof with cupolas in place by late fall. A tongue-in-cheek Reveille article noted the cupolas and impending clock tower:

The city hall is completed as far as the Greek renaissance style is concerned, and the top will be Byzantine. Some of the minarets already show against the sky. A policeman ought to be deputized to stay in the steeple like a muezzin and instead of crying the people to prayer, tell them when there is to be a council meeting, or a dog fight.

The building officially opened with the first council meeting on May 9, 1893. No formal dedication ceremonies were recorded in the minutes or the newspapers. Who could celebrate with banks and businesses failing everywhere around the bay?

The Panic of 1893 gripped the bay communities and nation in earnest, bringing an economic collapse close to the magnitude of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Fairhaven boom had fizzled more than a year earlier shortly after Hill declared for Seattle. In another month, the First National Bank would fail, followed quickly by several others, including the locally owned Bellingham Bay National. Full recovery would not come until 1898.

Consequently, no money existed to finish the city hall. Boom mentality opulence that included tile floors, maple paneling, a turned oak grand staircase, elegant light fixtures and handsome desks for each of the councilmen, began and ended on the ground floor. Still, the May 6 Reveille seemed satisfied:

The first floor . . . contains ten times the room now occupied by the council and city officers, and will furnish sufficient room for some time. There is a splendid council chamber, a roomy treasurers office, a clerks office, a police court room, and rooms for all officers—light, airy, with closets, vaults, steam heat, and electric lights.

And the building was solid. Incredibly solid. As former newspaperman and printer J. M. Edson was to write more than 50 years later: "... the joists and rafters, the massive struts, posts and beams that support the roof and towers have never sagged or weakened."

The exterior, meanwhile, was complete in every way, its red brick complemented by the red clock tower and mansard roof, highlighted with gray cornice trim and an off-white "1892," front and back. The almost identical front and rear facades were a legacy to the mid-town, mid-block Cornwall site, where visitors would enter the "front" no matter which side was approached.

Clock faces were installed in the tower, but no money existed to purchase works, so the clock hands on all four faces were set to perenniually read seven o'clock. The faces eventually blew out, victims of high winds and sketchy maintenance, leaving gaping holes.

One object in the tower that did work was the three-foot diameter bronze bell. The bell was rung, via a hinged, iron sledge, to alert the volunteer fire departments. Old-timers in the early 1940s recalled the bell booming through the night during the great fire of 1894 when flames consumed surrounding forest lands and almost swept through the city.

The First Meetings: Bills and Cows

The NEW WHATCOM City Council addressed a variety of issues in that first meeting in what is today Gallery 5 on the museum’s ground floor. These included payment of several outstanding construction bills and the withholding of money to brick suppliers who had been tardy in filling orders and had at one point provided the wrong color brick.

The next two council meetings were spent settling these and other accounts—financial and otherwise. Clearly sympathizing with then "former" Councilman Nicklin, the Reveille equated the "city hall issue" to the infamous Crédit Mobilier scandal that rocked the Grant administration. Architect Lee and Long & Merritt were apart by nearly $600 in the final estimate over a score of issues ranging from the height of the building to area walls to a lighter grade window glass.

The building committee, headed by J. R. Taylor, eventually sided with Lee. The bill, including charges for changing the site, came to $42,669.81. Architect’s fees and furnishings and other expenses brought the final total to about $50,000.

One disputed line item is still in evidence today in the form of the alternating red- and black-ended bricks on the exterior corners of the building. The brick subcontractor and supplier each claimed the $554 worth of extra work was approved by Long & Merritt. Lee maintained he never gave his blessing to the change. The supplier was paid, the contractor ate the bill and the bricks have remained.

However, the most documented and long-remembered issue addressed in those first weeks in the new building pertained to livestock. In the 1890s it was still common to keep milk cows in the city. Under an ordinance passed one evening, notably over Mayor Thomas Slade’s veto, citizens were forbidden to let their cows roam the streets between half past seven in the evening and six o’clock in the morning. Offending animals were to be impounded in a pen constructed on the south side of the city hall.

Soon after, Slade’s pal, former Mayor W. L. Miller, was arrested on suspicion of breaking his cow out of the pen. Following a speedy trial the jury let Miller off, accepting his story that the cow had spotted him walking down the street, jumped the fence and followed him home.

Former newspaper reporter/editor Michael Vouri is public affairs officer and occasional history exhibit curator for the Whatcom Museum of History and Art in Bellingham.
Eighteen fifty was a year of change for the Columbia River, yet the change went by virtually unnoticed ashore. The United States Coast Survey opened its West Coast office in San Francisco that year and began a regular and methodical survey of the waters of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Because a complete survey would take many years, the office dispatched its ships and surveyors to reconnoiter the coast and provide preliminary sketches of areas of special concern. As a result of that initial reconnaissance, the survey made its 1850 “sketch” of the Columbia. That same year Congress appropriated $53,140 to construct three lighthouses in the Pacific Northwest, including one at Cape Disappointment on the northern headland at the Columbia’s mouth.

By Richard Wilson

COLUMBIA 9 FALL 1992
Soon the survey team developed a triangulation grid of
the river’s lower reaches with which to control subsequent
surveys. Thereafter, the Coast Survey produced accurate
charts of the river at regular intervals, thus providing the
mariner with an up-to-date description of the Columbia’s
entrance.

With the increase in commerce resulting from Oregon’s
population growth, mariners experienced with the river’s
mouth began to sell their services as pilots, assisting incom­
ing and outgoing vessels to navigate the bar. The Pacific
Coast Pilot, published in 1862, contained the following warn­
ing with regard to the Columbia River: “The best advice we
can offer is, when up with the bar, wait for a pilot.”

With accurate charts, aids to navigation and a coast pilot,
Columbia navigation entered the modern era. The Coast
Survey, however, did not produce the first chart of the river.

In 1775 two small Spanish ships arrived in the Pacific
Northwest to assert Spain’s claim to the region. The
frigate Santiago, with Bruno de Hezeta in command,
and the small schooner Sonora, captained by Juan
Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, first touched near Point
Grenville on the Washington coast to replenish supplies and
claim the new territory.

Thereafter, the squadron put to sea, standing so far off the
lee shore that it missed the Strait of Juan de Fuca and much
of Vancouver Island. On August 11, as they neared the north
end of Vancouver Island, fog and heavy weather, so typical of
the entire voyage, separated the two ships. Bodega y Quadra’s
Sonora struggled north, reaching 58 degrees north latitude.
The ship came in sight of a snow-capped mountain that
Bodega y Quadra named San Jacinto but which was later
renamed Mount Edgecumbe. After separation from the
Sonora, Hezeta and the Santiago turned again toward land to
replenish supplies and thereafter proceeded south along the
coast. On August 17, 1775, Hezeta recorded:

In the afternoon of this day I discovered a large bay that I
named Assumption Bay, the shape of which is shown on the
map that is going to be inserted in this diary. Its latitude and
extent are subject to the most exact determinations that theory
and practice offer in this career. . . . These currents and the
setting of the waters have led me to believe that it may be the
mouth of some great river or some passage to another
sea. . . .”

Hezeta had discovered the Columbia. Consistent with its
long-term policy, Spain withheld information on these dis­
covers from widespread publications. It was nearly 20 years
before the world learned of the Spanish achievements on the
Pacific Northwest Coast, and then only from an Englishman
who was a mere lieutenant on the next voyage of note.

In 1776 the English captain James Cook made his third
and last voyage to the Pacific. The British Admiralty di­
ergates, and so Cook played little direct part in the charting
of the Columbia River. His indirect influence was profound,
however. First, Cook trained his successor in Northwest ex­
ploration—George Vancouver. Second, the posthumous
publication of his journals spurred private interest in the
Pacific Northwest. Before long, ships flying British, Ameri­
can, Spanish and Portuguese flags sailed for those foggy wa­
ters in search of furs.

The first known trading vessel appeared on the Pacific
Northwest Coast in 1785. In 1786 there were eight British
ships on the coast, most sailing from the Far East. The earliest
traders were British, but that soon changed. In 1788 the first
wave of “Boston” ships plied the coast, starting a flood that
supplanted the “King George” ships in later years. It was in
1788 that the American ships Columbia, captained by John
Kendrick, and Lady Washington, captained by Robert Gray,
first touched at Nootka Sound.

John Meares, an English fur trader, also appeared on the
coast that year. Sailing south from Nootka Sound, Meares
was the next European to sight the Columbia River. Meares

The first known chart of the Columbia River,
drawn in May 1792 by Captain Robert Gray in the Columbia Rediviva.
apparently knew of Hezeta’s Bay of the Assumption. Meares’ journal does not indicate whether he had a copy of Hezeta’s chart, but he did know of the river’s landmarks. Meares recorded, “We now discovered distant land beyond this promontory, and we pleased ourselves with the expectation of this being Cape Saint Roe of the Spaniards, near which they are said to have found a good port.”

Drawing closer but unable to enter because of the surf, he found what he described as a bay: “The name of Cape Disappointment was given to the promontory, and the bay obtained the title of Deception Bay.” Meares had incorrectly concluded that this was not the Spanish Bay. Further, he did not observe, as had Hezeta, that the bay was either the opening of a large river or some unseen larger inland bay. It would be four years before the river was again sighted by explorers.

The year of greatest fruition in the exploration of the Northwest Coast was 1792. The combined efforts of the Spanish, English and Americans brought about a sudden and giant leap forward in the cartography of the Pacific Northwest. Both Vancouver and Bodega y Quadra were dispatched to the coast to settle the Nootka Controversy (see Spring 1990 Columbia, “Bodega y Quadra and Vancouver”) and to further explore the region. Their principal lieutenants, Broughton, Puget, Baker, Mudge, Alcalá Galiano and Valdés, were all astute explorers and cartographers. And the inquisitive American trader Robert Gray, having replaced Kendrick as captain of the Columbia, was poking his ship into various uncharted and often unknown bays and harbors. Though not a cartographer, Gray had developed an intimacy with the coast. He seems to have been enthusiastic about exploration and willingly passed along what knowledge he gained in the fur trade. The Columbia’s log records his entrance to the river named after his ship:

May 11th. At half past seven, we were out clear of the bars, and directed our course to the southward, along shore. At eight, p.m., the entrance to Bulfinch’s harbor bore north, distance four miles; the southern extremity of land bore south-south-east half east and the northern north-north-west; sent up the main-top-gallant yard and set all sail. At four a.m., saw the entrance of our desired port bearing east-south-east, distance six leagues; in steering sails, and hauled our wind in shore. At eight a.m., being a little to windward of the entrance to the Harbor, bore away, and run in east-north-east between the breakers, having from five to seven fathoms of water. When over the bar, we found this to be a large river of fresh water, up which we steered.

Seventeen years before, Hezeta had theorized that the Bay of the Assumption was either a river or the outlet for a large inland sea. Now, apparently without knowledge of the previous discovery, Gray had solved the question. It was a freshwater river. Nowhere in any of the logs written on the Columbia that day is mention made of cartography or of the previous Spanish discovery. However, Gray did create a chart of the Columbia’s mouth that he soon gave to Bodega y Quadra at Nootka Sound. In October Bodega y Quadra passed the chart to the English. Vancouver recorded in his journal for October 13, 1792:

[After so long a continuance of unsettled weather, the present apparent re-established serenity encourages me to hope I might be enabled in our route to the southward to re-examine the coast of new Albion, and particularly a river and a harbour discovered by Mr. Gray in the Columbia between the 46th and 47th degrees north latitude, of which Sr. Quadra had favoured me with a sketch.

Several days later Vancouver’s ships, the Discovery and the Chatham, reached the mouth of the river. Expecting an easy crossing in such good weather, the captain was surprised. Vancouver recorded:

[October 19, 1792] As we followed the Chatham the depth of water decreased to four fathoms, in which we sailed some little...
time without being able to distinguish the entrance into the river, the sea breaking in a greater or less degree from shore to shore, but as the Chatham continued to pursue her course, I concluded she was in a fair channel. We however soon arrived in three fathoms, and as the water was becoming less deep, and breaking in all directions around us, I hauled to the westward in order to escape the threatening danger.

Lieutenant William Broughton brought the Chatham to anchor about five miles upstream from the river’s entrance, at what he named Village Point. Nearby he found anchored the British schooner Jenny, a fur-trading ship homeward bound from Nootka to Bristol, captained by James Baker. In his journal Broughton recognized the river’s initial discoverer: “The discovery of this river we are given to understand is claimed by the Spaniards, who call it Entrada de Ceta [Hezeta], after the commander of the vessel, who is said to be its first discoverer, but who never entered it.” Broughton and the Chatham spent the next few weeks charting the river as far upstream as present-day Portland. He named the river not for its original discoverer but followed Gray’s lead and referred to it as Columbia.

Ambitious in extent, Broughton’s chart lacked the detail that a mariner might desire. For the most part the chart had only a single track of soundings. It did not indicate details such as leading marks that a sailor might use to find range or direction. Still, the chart was a giant step forward and was published by Adam Arrowsmith and others. For more than 35 years sailors of all nations carried Broughton’s chart with them when visiting the coast.

With wars raging in Europe exploration ground to a halt. Voyages made to the Pacific Northwest Coast for nearly three decades were made solely by commercial vessels. Although most of those vessels would have done limited charting for their own purposes, none of those charts had wide circulation, and chances are slim that many of them exist today. First, it was not the fur trader’s business to chart; second, in publishing his charts of profitable trading areas the trader might encourage competition; and third, the fur trade industry was not especially stable from a business standpoint and therefore the survival of any charts as part of a business archive is unlikely.

That changed in 1821 when, as a result of their merger with the Northwest Company, the Hudson’s Bay Company expanded to the Pacific Coast. Until 1827 the company was so involved in reorganizing the land operations of its newly-acquired holdings in the Pacific Northwest that it was not fully able to exploit the riches of the ocean.

The small HBC schooner Cadboro arrived at Fort Vancouver in 1827 and thereafter started a regular coastal trade. Establishing and carrying cargo to remote coastal ports and trading at Indian villages along the coast required that the Cadboro cross the Columbia River bar nearly once a month. Problems with the bar were hammered home to the company in 1829 when its brig William and Ann wrecked on the river’s south spit. Something had to be done to prevent further disasters. Luckily, both the master and first mate of the Cadboro were reasonably accomplished cartographers. Captain Aemelius Simpson had received his training in the Royal Navy. The first mate, Thomas Sinclair, was less formally trained. Company records note that he signed on in the Orkney Islands in 1824 as a 32-year-old “Schooner Master.”

It seems likely that Simpson would have charted the Columbia’s entrance, but no chart bearing his name survives. He charted the Fraser River in 1827, and that chart found its way to the British Admiralty’s Hydrographic Office. Simpson, however, was soon placed in charge of the HBC’s expanding coastal operations, and Sinclair took over more responsibilities on the Cadboro. In 1830 he became the vessel’s master, and under Simpson’s tutelage he became the company’s cartographer as well.

Sinclair’s 1831 chart of the Columbia River’s mouth has survived. The chart shows the company’s concerns. Unlike
Broughton's more general chart, Sinclair's is a detailed chart of the river's entrance. The company found that upstream of the entrance a grounding was not necessarily serious. Any ship aground could be reflotted by waiting for tide and current to free it or by using its anchors to pull it off. However, a grounding near the bar could prove disastrous, so Sinclair's chart concentrated there. Considering the resources available to accomplish the task—a small ship with a crew of 12—it is understandable that the soundings were not obtained by rigorous survey. What is surprising is that Sinclair provided no ranges or bearings other than the course across the bar.

Was the chart used by the HBC only, or was it shared freely with all mariners?

Competition was still strong for the coastal fur trade. Although the price obtained for otter pelts in Canton had dropped precipitously since the boom days of the 1790s, ships still made a profit on the Northwest Coast. As late as 1831 there remained a half-dozen American ships on the coast in any season. It makes sense that the HBC would hold Sinclair's chart closely, and not publish it until the company forced the competition from the coast. However, Sinclair's chart seems either to have been given to or fallen into the hands of American William A. Slacum. Although some have portrayed him as a spy, it seems more likely that the United States government sent Slacum to Oregon on a fact-finding mission. Slacum's chart was not published in his report to Congress, but was instead included in an 1838 report by Senator Lewis F. Linn of Missouri. The chart represented no gain in cartography, but it is important in that it seems to show some lineage to Sinclair's 1831 chart. The soundings are different and there are fewer of them than in Sinclair's, but the location, shape and size of the shoals are similar. Slacum, in fact, noted that he compiled his drawing from other charts in his possession, one quite possibly being Sinclair's.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Columbia River chart, 1838, drawn by William A. Slacum.

TOP LEFT: Columbia River chart, 1831, drawn by Thomas Sinclair.

BOTTOM LEFT: British Admiralty chart of the Columbia River's entrance, 1839, as surveyed by Edward Belcher in HMS Sulphur.
Slacum could have acquired Sinclair's chart from any of the chief factors: McLoughlin, Douglas or Finlayson at Fort Vancouver. Finlayson may be a good candidate in that Slacum had previously established a friendship with him in Hawaii. His HBC pilot may have had it in his possession when he descended the river to assist Slacum's ship *Loriot* with its upstream journey. Slacum may have seen a copy on the HBC ships *Neride* or *Llama*, which were waiting to cross the bar outbound when Slacum arrived. If he had obtained it from any of these sources, it would be an indication that the company no longer guarded the chart as proprietary. One other possibility exists, however.

The officious, bustling little James Birnie was so ill-thought-of as a clerk by the company's management that an official described him as "a loose talking fellow who seldom considers it necessary to confine himself to the truth." He was relegated to out-of-the-way Fort George near the mouth of the Columbia. As bumbling an employee as he was, Birnie had a true gift of hospitality. Mariners, wrecked or not, universally praised his friendly and helpful ways. If the company's management did not show Slacum the chart, it seems possible that Birnie could have provided it.

Like the United States, Britain needed firsthand information on the Columbia territory. In 1836 the British Admiralty dispatched Captain Edward Belcher and the HMS *Sulphur* to the coast. Exploring and showing British presence in the Pacific Northwest, the *Sulphur*'s crew made the first rigorous survey of the mouth of the Columbia River. The *Sulphur* chart varies considerably from those of Sinclair and Slacum, probably because the mouth of the great river is always changing and several years had elapsed. The *Sulphur*'s chart was published by the British Admiralty in 1839.

Another Cadboro skipper, James A. Scarborough, charted the lower Columbia for the HBC in 1841. This chart is somewhat similar to that done by the *Sulphur*. Comparing the two, it is evident that the mouth's bars had continued to change. To be fully useful to the sailor, a chart has to be current. Considering this, it seems evident, then, that the several HBC charts on file in the company archives represent only a portion of those done. To be accurate, the company would have to rechart the river at least after every major flood and check the chart for accuracy each summer. Although events would soon overtake the HBC's charting efforts, the necessity of regularly recharting the mouth of the river would not cease.

The United States Exploring Expedition, under the command of Captain Charles Wilkes, charted the Columbia and surrounding area in 1841. The *Columbia* chart, drawn by James A. Scarborough for the Hudson's Bay Company, is an accurate representation of the river and its surrounding lands.

Columbia River chart, 1841, drawn by James A. Scarborough for the Hudson's Bay Company.
mand of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, started on its five-year voyage in 1838. In many ways it was the most successful cartographic expedition ever. For the most part it was not a voyage of discovery. Wilkes' goal was to accurately chart waters already explored. In the spring of 1841 Wilkes' squadron of four ships converged on the Pacific Northwest. Wilkes assigned the Vincennes and the Porpoise to survey Puget Sound and the Peacock and the Flying Fish to the Columbia. When the Peacock attempted to enter the river it ran aground on the north sand spit. The ship was demolished, but its crew and equipment were saved.

Without the Peacock the survey of the Columbia would have to wait until summer and the arrival of the other two ships from Puget Sound. The combined crews aboard the Flying Fish set about doing some preliminary work, which involved setting up a triangulation grid. By accurately measuring and determining through celestial observation the bearing of some baseline and then measuring the angles from each end of the baseline to some other point, the distance and direction to that point can be accurately determined. This is simple geometry in theory, but when applied on the ground and at sea, this triangulation becomes quite difficult. To be most accurately done the triangles should be roughly equilateral; however, water, shoals, hills and trees impede the survey. It was the particular genius of Wilkes and his crewmen to find an efficient way to overcome those obstacles.

After Wilkes' arrival a portion of the squadron progressed upstream, developing the grid, while the remainder used the triangulation points to locate landforms and make soundings. The resulting chart covered most of the Columbia's navigable waters. Examining the small portion of that survey that concerns the mouth of the river, the striking similarity between the Wilkes and Scarborough charts for the same year are obvious. Wilkes' chart shows considerably more detail and many more soundings, and one might expect that the landforms were more accurately located, but that aside, either chart was quite usable. It seems odd that Wilkes did not include notice of the Hudson's Bay Company's aids to navigation. On his arrival on the coast earlier that year he noted:

The mouth of the Columbia River, as surveyed by the United States Exploring Expedition in 1841.
The land near the mouth of the river is well marked, and cannot readily be mistaken, and on the summit of the two capes are several lofty spruce and pine trees, which the officers of the Hudson [sic] Bay Company have caused to be trimmed of branches nearly to their tops. These serve as conspicuous marks, but our pilot was ignorant of their relation to the channel.

Neither of the 1841 charts contains that information. Although the United States Exploring Expedition had surveyed the channel, there was no plan to return every year to resurvey. That task fell to the HBC and its schooner Cadboro.

As late as 1847, a year after Oregon became solely American territory, Captain Scarborough and the Cadboro were producing accurate and current charts of the river's mouth. A comparison of Scarborough's 1847 chart and Wilkes' 1841 chart shows the changes that had taken place after the Wilkes survey. The north sand spit and middle sand bank had changed shape, causing inbound ships to alter course at one point, nearly turning back out to sea. The wreck of the Peacock became a recognizable landmark, an aid to navigation rather like a buoy. Scarborough went one step further in this chart than Wilkes, graphically providing sailing directions by drawing lines on the chart to represent limits of safe water, points at which to alter course and the direction of the channel. This chart was thus much better than either of the 1841 charts.

Scarborough's 1847 chart may have been the last drawn by the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1846 the lands south of the 49th parallel, previously occupied jointly by the United States and Britain, passed to the United States. Although the treaty dividing the Oregon Country contained provisions for the HBC's activity on the Columbia, that presence was less sure than before. Soon the HBC shifted its headquarters to a new fort in Victoria. Like Fort George before, Fort Vancouver became a backwater for the company.

In the new Oregon Territory the agriculture and commerce of a growing territorial population supplanted the traditional industry of the Hudson's Bay Company. With a nearly exponential growth in territorial population, a more systematized method of charting was bound to occur. The catalyst for change was not found in the Northwest, however. It came from California, where gold was discovered.

As a result of the United States' acquisition of California and the subsequent discovery of gold, the United States Coast Survey established an office in San Francisco in 1850 and began the final phase of Pacific Northwest cartography. That year the office conducted a preliminary survey, publishing a "sketch" of the river's entrance. By 1853 the United States Navy steamer Active began its survey of the Columbia, producing a "preliminary" chart. From that point on the surveys continued in a nearly unbroken stream. The cartography of the river had passed from a formative stage to one that could be considered modern. Charts and pilots were regularly published and updated. Soon the United States Lighthouse Establishment installed and maintained navigational aids as well.

Viewed on a modern chart, the river's entrance looks deceptively simple. Even with today's jetties, dredged channels and aids to navigation, the bar is often impassable to ships larger than Hezeta, Meares, Broughton, Slacum, Scarborough or Wilkes could have imagined possible. When historians attempt to portray the opening of the West to Euro-Americans they are often so caught up in the heroics of the continental crossings that they tend to neglect the importance of the sea. Yet, until the advent of the railroads, the sea offered the only practical means of importing and exporting the goods necessary to sustained development. It was the early cartographer who provided the most important means by which to open the Pacific Northwest.

Richard Wilson is a civil engineer and retired United States Coast Guard commander. He is currently a graduate student at the University of Idaho specializing in early Western history.
Push the Lever to Cast Your Vote

CLARA HILL, a Tacoma waitress, demonstrates a new lever type voting machine before a city municipal election in 1926. The State of Washington established a voting machine commission in 1913 to inspect machines and issued its first license in 1916. Use of the voting machine gradually gained popularity for its speed of tabulation and elimination of fraud and error. Only recently have these old machines begun to be replaced by electronic ballot boxes.

The Historical Society gladly accepts donations of prints or negatives of regional historical interest to add to its photograph collection. (Please contact the Society before making donations.) Readers are invited to submit historical photographs for History Album. If a photograph is to be returned, it must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

COLUMBIA 17 FALL 1992
We ate a lot of bread in our family. Mother baked eight loaves and a pan of rolls twice a week. One year she went through 19 sacks of flour, each weighing 49 pounds. This also accounted for the flour she used in her pies, cookies, cakes and special Christmas treats. That was her record: she pulled open the stitching on 19 sacks one year and each time let the flour whoosh into the empty kitchen bin.

Each school day she made lunches of hefty cheese or meat loaf sandwiches for my sisters and me, slicing the bread from those fresh and crusty loaves. She packed my father’s lunch pail with the same, adding cake or cookies, a jar of home-canned fruit, and a thermos of hot Postum. We needed two hands to hold one of her sandwiches. For breakfast I spread homemade raspberry jam on a chunk of bread and ate it with Wheaties, unless she surprised us with French toast. Dessert at supper was bread pudding made of old bread soaked in egg-thickened milk and sprinkled with sugar and raisins, the whole thing baked with a dusting of nutmeg on top. We passed the hot dish and scooped servings for ourselves.

Carrying lunches was as much a part of growing up as work itself, and we were a working family. My father’s carpenter tools and my mother’s bread were like some ancient totems that centered our family’s life on work. I was no different from my older sisters in this regard: our rite de passage was to work at an eight-hour-a-day job and pocket a real paycheck. For them, baby-sitting jobs didn’t count. Likewise, cutting neighbors’ lawns, selling Christmas cards door-to-door and having a paper route were not the same as carrying a lunch pail to a factory and working with grown-ups. My sisters’ real work started at a cannery that had been converted to freezing and packaging local berries and vegetables for shipment to army camps around the country. Despite the crazy schedules mixing my sisters into day, swing and graveyard shifts, sometimes in the same week, I envied their status and actually worked there myself for a month, until the deadline for joining the union required that I reveal my age—15 was too young.

The job I wanted most but was too young to have was at a sawmill. In those days Tacoma had several. The biggest was the St. Paul and Tacoma Lumber Company where my uncle Olaf worked on the green chain stacking freshly cut lumber winter and summer, year after year.

By Harold P. Simonson
year, except when workers' strikes shut things down. My favorite was the Tacoma Harbor Lumber Company, much smaller than St. Paul and accessible to Jack and me on those magical summer evenings when we'd go to the mill with his father, who had a business delivering wood. His Ford truck, dented everywhere, showed no signs of prosperity, yet with it he supported his family on Pine Street across from us. Jack was my closest friend. Whenever one of us wanted to call the other, he'd step outside and whistle through cupped hands. On those summer evenings after we had finished our paper routes and supper I'd come out in response to his whistle and he'd say, "Let's go to the mill," meaning, accompany his father.

Mr. Granberg, a tough Swede with a gravelly voice, would wait his turn to gain a bunker, steer his Ford under it, and wait again while wood dropped from a V-shaped conveyor track constantly supplied with what the saws sent it. The bunker full, he'd stand on top of his cab to release the chain holding the hinged side. The sudden cascade of wood rocked the truck. This was firewood, mostly slabs and edgings of hemlock and fir, the kind people burned in their home furnaces and kitchen stoves. In those days nearly all the working families burned wood. The rich burned oil and had electric ranges. A good evening's work for Mr. Granberg was six loads, delivered mainly to the south side of town. As he yanked the gearshift into reverse Jack and I guided him into a customer's backyard. He'd hand-crank the truck's box far enough up so that when he returned to the cab and tromped on the gas pedal the truck would lurch ahead and leave the load on the ground behind. While we threw stray pieces onto the pile, he collected the money, five dollars or so, twice what the wood cost him at the mill. Then we'd head back in a fresh cloud of Velvet pipe tobacco smoke. It was a pleasant smell, mixed with wood and oily engine heat that the cab's rattling floorboards couldn't keep out.

Jack and I didn't mind the wait at the mill for the next open bunker—time enough to fish for bullheads off the low wooden bridge crossing Hylebos Waterway or to watch old men who lived in shacks along the flats tend their crab nets, nothing more than string netting stretched loosely on an iron hoop. Or time enough to wedge in to greet and on the high catwalk and stare down to the deck where the dripping logs, just up from the pond and still festooned with seaweed, awaited the iron arms of the mechanical log turners. They nudged a log onto the carriage tracked alongside the giant head saw that ripped off great planks the length of the log. The carriage raced back, its two riders muscling levers and lifts to adjust the log for its next horrendous run through the saw that streamed with water and glistened in a blur of light. The scream of it all, the lumber, and the salty night air rushed into me like A Thousand and One Nights, and I wanted more.

Of all the mill jobs, I imagined the green chain the easiest, albeit the heaviest. Inside the mill, back at the head saw and among the circular saws that edged and trimmed and slashed, back where conveyor chains and rollers and overhead belts kept this mysterious place alive—those jobs, for all their magic and danger, seemed too heavy even for my young blood.

That's why I reckoned the very best job was being a boom-man. With pike pole in hand he balanced his way along the floating logs on the millpond, steering and sometimes leaping from one to another, steering them on to the ascending jack-chain conveyor that delivered them up to the deck, the carriage and the terrible saws. Keeping away from the action, Jack and I would walk the logs but not dare take the strides that the boom-men's called logger boots allowed. Sam, lean and leathery, with ruddy suspenders and frayed jeans cut off at boot-top, sometimes invited us into the floating boom shack all snug and papered inside with calendar girls made more sinful in the smoky light of a single bulb. At his urging I gulped my first mouthful of whiskey, his compliments.

After dark, when the fishing wasn't much fun and the shadowed passageways that networked the mill turned a little too scary, we headed for the millpond, past the conical trash burner. It was a blackened bulk towering 50 feet high that sent swarms of sparks into the night wind. Like oven mouths, the openings at the bottom showed bark and jets of flame issued from the chinks and crevices around the sides made of brick and sheathed with pieces of boiler plate. Through the opening near the top a single conveyor chain, high on its trestle from the mill, spilled endless wood trash into the inferno.

This being the swing shift, which meant supper-time for the mill workers at eight o'clock and then the darkness, I'd sometimes stay behind while Jack and his dad hauled a load into town. With time to myself I'd go to the millpond, down the planking and onto the
TOP: Even today the aroma of freshly-cut lumber evokes powerful memories of the Tacoma Harbor Lumber Company mill 50 years ago.

CENTER: Sheets of plywood ready for laminating. In the unremitting grind of the work-a-day world a person had much to live up to.

BOTTOM: In the 1940s Tacoma's Wheeler, Osgood Company was the world's leading fir and hemlock door manufacturer.

permanent boom logs chained to pilings, then out onto the undulating logs, sometimes with Sam and his partner, other times alone. Mill lights squiggled trailings on the black water, and the saws continued their distant scream. Here was the job I could spend a lifetime doing and be happy, balanced on giant logs rising and ebbing with the tide. Here was constant risk of falling but always the security of caked boots and agile footsteps. The risk never brought to mind a sense of fatality, never fear and terror, but instead a gambling aspect, a stimulant, that summoned courage and obligation.

In thinking back it would be easy to stay with the millpond and describe those tranquil summer nights when the moon darted among the watery logs, silvering their bark and in the distance changing Mount Rainier to a white mirage. But here was not where I worked. Jack and I were just boys wanting to be men but having little notion what a real lunch pail signified and what working for one's bread meant. At that age I even wanted to be a ball-turret gunner sending Zeros and Messerschmitts spiraling down in smoke.

Seventeen, however, was old enough to learn about work. The place was the Wheeler, Osgood Company, a factory that made doors, the largest such place in the world, across the road and tracks from the St. Paul mill. This was the
summer of '44 and Saturdays into '45. I had worked but a week when, on a chilly gray morning and with lunch pail under my arm, I strode manfully across the 11th Street bridge, humming to myself:

This time we will all remember
That this time is the last time.

It was the morning of D-Day and that evening all the churches were open.

Wheeler, Osgood's young regulars were over there or at Iwo Jima and Tarawa and Guadalcanal. And I was here filling someone's place, as were other "men" my age and a few women who tightly scarfed their hair. The older regulars had stayed on, operating the head saws down by the waterway or working in the planing mill and drying kilns.

When ready, the lumber soared on a high line stretched across boggy tideland and into the door factory, where the sawyers, amid the steel-edged whirl and whirrl, reduced everything to stiles and rails, the verticals and horizontals of a standard wooden door. In this grown-up world they had to answer to saws that maimed in a careless instant.

All of the workers answered to sovereign whistles commanding when to start and stop; to the time clock ticking off their value; to the foremen reporting them to higher-ups. In this world I sensed there was much to live up to. I respected the workers, especially the sawyers in their leather aprons and gloves, who with one hand guided the lumber along the ghastly benches while the other hand gripped the suspended saw that snarled down and across. In this fury of sawdust and scream they worked their lives away and sometimes their fingers and hands. Lloyd, the elevator-man, had traded his left hand for a steel hook, thanks to the saw that had arranged the meeting. Now, whatever the motive, the company let him operate the elevator. Peter, the Greek, counted three fingers missing in action, but still stood his post at the saw. Workers all around joined him in similar testimony.

My job was trucking stiles to the elevator and the vast storage rooms on the second floor. That's how I got to know Lloyd. The eight-foot stiles first clattered down conveyor belts to what resembled a diminutive green chain, where a master grader marked each piece and women down the line stacked them onto trucks six feet long and three wide, each balanced on a pair of iron wheels. Pitted into sockets along the sides were wooden posts that allowed the women to build the loads higher than the eye could see over. My body strained and my face screwed up as I pushed the loaded trucks down a long steel-plated aisle past the glue machines, the patchers and the sanders. Heaving my shoulder against the load, I maneuvered it not too fast for safety's sake but fast enough to keep momentum, squinting around the corner of the load, all the while clutching the back posts, crouching low and pushing.

While waiting for business Lloyd sat on a padded stool reading his Bible or the foreman, lurked close by. I knew my job and did it, even at night in my sleep when Cliff said he'd fire me if I didn't keep up. Sometimes he appeared from nowhere to get me with his cat eyes.

Lunch was a feast because I had earned it. The break was too short but time enough, before the whistle sent us back inside, to play catch with the stiffs out behind the factory and show them how to throw a curve and a knuckle ball. Some days I spent the lunch break with Lloyd. He talked about Roosevelt and Jesus and gave me tracts. Never married, he lived with his widowed mother and was doing everything required to make her final months (he said) happy. He cooked and cleaned and took her to church mid-week and twice on Sundays. He paid the bills from diminished wages that the company told him to take or leave after the saw had left him worthless. He promised that his proletarian heroes (FDR and JC) would think me stronger for each load I had to push. What encouragement they gave him I never knew. Perhaps it was that all was well despite his mutilation. I thought him happy. He spoke of strange lucidity, this simple man, pale and thin, wearing scuffed black shoes, white socks, and overalls that incongruously bore no marks of grime.

I think back to that summer when real work started. I see Lloyd riding his dreary elevator and the sawyers holding steady at their stations. I grow conscious of the whistles and time clocks and foremen, and of the workers whose two hands were their security. I feel the loads I pushed and wonder what fidelity they gave me, what sense of measurement their punishment instilled. I realize that back then, for the first time, I had reached my height not at the millpond but in earning my daily bread.
Empty Harvest

The Mission Life of Narcissa Whitman

The American missionary movement has often been considered irrelevant or embarrassing. Recently, though, historians and others have been reexamining the significance of mission work both within and outside the United States. New studies point out that missionary impulses to do good and to refashion other peoples and cultures have been central themes in American history since the 17th century. As their efforts expanded outside the continental United States in the early 19th century, missionaries became important agents of modernization.

While missionaries can be considered successful proponents of modernization, it is striking to modern observers how many of these efforts at transformation failed. Perhaps contemporary uncertainties about the ability of the United States to deal with problems at home and abroad encourage an emphasis on the limits of American influence and a reconsideration of the appeal of American values and ideals.

This reassessment of the American missionary movement suggests the need to reexamine the Protestant missions established in Oregon Territory during the 1830s and '40s. Their history reveals some of the general themes and issues that are central to understanding the American missionary enterprise and provides useful
insights into 19th-century cultural attitudes and practices. New studies have been done on Protestant evangelicalism, middle-class culture and the position of women in pre-Civil War or antebellum America. These studies and the work done in Indian history over the last two decades contribute to an understanding of the complexity of cultural and religious encounters between white missionaries and the Indians they hoped to convert. A look at the lives of individual missionaries like Narcissa Whitman and her husband Marcus reveals the crucial role gender played in mediating and shaping the character of the encounters between two races. It also helps to explain differing strategies that male and female missionaries adopted to help them cope with the stresses of missionary work.

Writing from the Wailatpu mission in Oregon, Narcissa Whitman recalled some of the books that had influenced her when she was growing up in the village of Prattsburg in upstate New York. One book she remembered reading was a popular biography of Harriet Newell, an early 19th-century American missionary in India. The moving account, which included excerpts from Harriet's journal, letters, and a sermon preached after her death, highlighted Harriet's spiritual struggles with her "cold, stupid heart." As a young teenager Harriet was already anguishing over her sinful nature, the time she wasted with "trifles," and her light and gay behavior. When she was 18 she met Mr. Newell, who intended to go into the foreign missionary field. His proposal that she share his calling led to more soul-searching. Was she qualified for the work? Were her motives pure? Was she courageous and persevering enough to take on "the dangers, the crosses, and the manifold trials of such an important undertaking?"

In the end, of course, Harriet sailed for India. She died of consumption within a year—never realizing her ambition to save the souls of those who she believed were doomed to hell because they had not heard of her Christ. The ironic contrast between Harriet Newell's long, anguished preparation for a life of Christian work and her brief career as a missionary was one her biography did not highlight. Instead, the book provided an encouraging message for pious readers like Narcissa.

Prevented from reading novels, which her mother considered "vain trash," Narcissa found excitement and inspiration in such missionary biographies. The depiction of heroic Christian women fueled her own dreams of converting the heathen in some exotic place far from Prattsburg. The likelihood of being able to follow in the footsteps of these women, however, was not great. While the expansion of the American foreign missionary movement in the early decades of the 19th century had made it possible for women to participate, the missionary board was reluctant to commission single women. However, since wives offered "a protection among savages," and "men can not . . . make a tolerable home without them," a handful of American women gained missionary appointments, usually as their husbands' assistants.

No matter how fervent Narcissa's desire was, no matter how much her family and church might encourage her commitment to the glorious cause, as a single woman Narcissa could do little to shape her own future. She spent her early twenties waiting "the leadings of Providence," as she put it; more specifically, she hoped for a marriage proposal from someone who, like Reverend Newell, had a missionary appointment and needed a wife "well selected in respect to health, education, and piety."

Though she could scarcely have...
known him well, Narcissa was quick to accept Marcus Whitman's offer when he approached her in 1835. While middle-class Americans in the 1830s expected a courtship and marriage based on romantic love, would-be missionaries like Narcissa had other values and norms. As one contemporary novel entitled The Wife for a Missionary made clear, missionaries “do not fall in love . . . [or] let fancy run away with . . . judgment.”

LIKE HIS FUTURE wife, Marcus Whitman had also thought about missionary work for many years, though it is less clear than in Narcissa’s case what role reading played in fueling his ambitions. Young men like Marcus who hoped for missionary service usually first prepared for the ministry and then applied for an appointment from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the interdenominational organization directing Congregational and Presbyterian foreign missionary efforts. When at age 18 he broached the subject with his family, however, they opposed his scheme, too proud to have Marcus attend seminary as “a charity scholar.” After spending several years working in his stepfather’s shoe and tannery shop, Marcus escaped from the family business and apprenticed to a local doctor. Eventually he secured his license and began to practice medicine.

Though by all reports Marcus succeeded as a country doctor, he found it impossible to forget his youthful ideals. At 28 he gave up medicine and tried to prepare for the ministry by reading theology on his own. His course of study was ended ostensibly by ill health, although his early “deficient” education and practical mind may well have contributed to the failure. A few years after this frustrating effort, however, he began to think about the possibility of becoming a medical missionary. Another disappointment was in store, for the ABCFM board concluded that his health was not “such as to justify your going on a mission at all.”

Most men would have abandoned their efforts, but Marcus was as stubborn as the Reverend Samuel Parker, who was recruiting in New York state for what he hoped would be a new ABCFM mission among the Oregon Indians. Parker was inspired by the widely published report that Flathead Indians had journeyed to St. Louis in 1831, supposedly seeking knowledge of Christianity. The ABCFM board was much less enthusiastic about a possible Oregon mission than was Parker and only approved his exploratory trip after he had raised much of the money for it from other sources.

When Parker reached central New York to recruit members for the Oregon initiative he talked to Marcus on several occasions. Reporting to the ABCFM board that the doctor was a “choice” candidate, now apparently in good health, Parker pressed for Marcus’s selection as being “beyond any . . . doubt.” The board’s secretary, David Greene, was inclined to look favorably on Marcus’s second application—he was finding that, despite the dramatic appeal to save the western Indians, few future missionaries were much interested in the American West. “They had rather learn a language spoken by tens of millions & live among a dense and settled population,” he concluded, “than to spend their lives in what they apprehend will be almost fruitless toil in reclaiming small tribes of sparsely settled migrants.”

THE BOARD APPOINTED Marcus to accompany Parker on his exploring trip during the spring of 1835. Although the trip resulted in the eventual establishment of an ABCFM mission in Oregon territory, the board shared the misgivings of many of its own missionaries. It never viewed the missionary activities with the western tribes as important or as worthy of financial support as efforts in more populated parts of the world.

The appointment led to Marcus’s marriage proposal to Narcissa and provided the means for both of them to
undertake their long-dreamed-of vocation. But dreams nourished by reading, prayers and inspirational sermons had left much about this vocation ambiguous. While the goal of missionary work was clear, the means for its accomplishment were far less obvious.

The ABCFM's monthly publication, the Missionary Herald, and inspirational books about missionaries suggested some of the activities missionaries usually undertook. Wives taught school and sometimes led prayer meetings with native women; husbands preached, cared for the sick if they were medical missionaries, and often farmed. Somehow these activities, collectively or individually, precipitated far-reaching spiritual and cultural transformations: the acceptance of the Congregational-Presbyterian doctrine of human depravity, a valid spiritual conversion, and ultimately the adoption of the customs and behavior of the missionaries themselves.

If the young missionaries' understanding of the mechanism of conversion had a fanciful quality, their commitment was not tempered by any solid information about the Oregon Indians or their culture. The published story of the Flatheads' trip to St. Louis suggested that the western tribes were interested in learning more about Christianity. It is impossible to know how well Marcus understood the Indians he and Parker met at the fur traders' rendezvous of 1835. He reported, however, that the Indians said that white religion had only "reached their ears; they wish it to affect their most vital parts." He judged them "very much inclined to follow any advice given them by the whites . . . [and] ready to adopt anything that is taught them as religion." His views reaffirmed what he and Narcissa had both read. The Missionary Herald pointed out that "probably no heathen nations entertain less definite prejudice against the gospel, or the arts of civilized life" than American Indians.

The reality of what Narcissa initially called her "pleasing work" could not have departed more radically from the vague missionary scenario suggested by her reading. The story of the Whitman mission at Waiilatpu hardly needs retelling. The varied activities the Whitmans undertook did not lead to conversion. The Cayuse tribe's initial interest in the Christian message faded. As Christianity led to division within the community, opponents became angry and even threatening to the Whitmans themselves. Ultimately some of those who opposed the Whitmans most vociferously killed Narcissa and her husband and several other whites connected with the mission.

The Cayuse Indians bore little resemblance to the literary descriptions of eager western tribes intent on adopting the white man's religion. Their motives for inviting the Whitmans to settle among them are open to conjecture. The quarrel between the Nez Perce and the Cayuse tribes about where the missionaries would locate suggests that the Cayuse may have hoped that the missionary presence would strengthen their position relative to other plateau tribes. Their desire to have the Whitmans act as traders also points to an interest in obtaining white goods, while the effort by some of the men of the tribe to act as religious intermediaries between the missionar-
ies and the tribe highlights the possibility that a few may have hoped to use the missionary presence to enhance their own status in the tribe. It is doubtful that any of the Cayuse, had they known more of the evangelical faith the missionaries wished to impart, would have been so eager to have them settle on the banks of the Walla Walla River.

As the Whitmans eventually discovered, many barriers stood in the way of cultural and religious transformation. By the time the Whitmans arrived the Cayuse had adopted some aspects of white civilization; at least a few wore articles of European clothing and raised cattle as well as horses; many prayed in the morning and evening and on the Sabbath, observances taught to them by Hudson's Bay Company traders or by Iroquois in the company employ.

But their cultural borrowing was selective, and their way of life was vigorous enough to withstand the kind of wholesale change the missionaries sought. During the 11 years of the Whitmans' activities, medicine men, continued to play an important role in Cayuse life; fields were cultivated by slaves and women, not by the men of the tribe as Marcus wished; Indians pressed the missionaries to act like their own tribal elders and to tell them marvelous stories (from the Old Testament) rather than explicate doctrine.

The behavior of Tiloukaikt, who became headman of the band that wittered near the mission, illustrates the uncertain cultural dynamics in Walla Walla. At the beginning Tiloukaikt seemed interested in what the missionaries had to offer. Narcissa identified him as a "friendly Indian"; indeed, it was Tiloukaikt who, in 1837, called their newborn daughter Alice "Cayuse girl." By 1841, however, Tiloukaikt had become disillusioned with the missionary presence. The friendly Indian had become "most insolent"; he demanded the Whitmans pay for mission lands and, in a direct rejection of white notions of boundaries and trespassing, turned his horses onto the mission fields and assaulted Marcus.

Most likely Tiloukaikt was trying to force the Whitmans to give up the mission. When the Whitmans stayed, Tiloukaikt's attitude wavered; he became one of the few candidates for admission to the church. Whatever interest he felt in the church apparently was not strong enough to allow him to resist those in the tribe who wanted the Whitmans killed in 1847. Some accounts of the massacre suggest he may even have delivered one of the fatal blows to Marcus.

Although the evidence about his role in the Whitmans' deaths is inconclusive, Tiloukaikt was one of those convicted and hanged for the crime. He gave his final comment on the Protestant missionary effort by accepting Catholic baptism just before his death.

The Whitmans doubtless read with interest this monthly publication on foreign mission activities.

A historian cannot rely on general behavior patterns as explanatory devices, though. A close investigation of the Whitmans' work among the Cayuse suggests that, however much their missionary experience may resemble efforts in other times and places, specific social, economic and religious circumstances in white antebellum culture contributed to their expectations, frustrations and failures. The role that books and journals, accessible to Americans as never before by the time Narcissa and Marcus were growing up, played in inspiring religious vocations and obscuring realities has already been suggested. Other aspects...
of the Whitmans’ background illuminate the troubled history of the Waiilatpu mission.

The intensity of religious life in rural New York during the Whitmans’ youth and early adulthood left an indelible mark on each of them. Over and over again in letters home Narcissa and Marcus expressed their desire for a “harvest season” at Waiilatpu. Family and friends knew exactly what the missionaries had in mind: the type of revival that produced so many changes of heart in New York state.

Although conversion had once been a private and individual experience, during the wave of revivals that made up the Second Great Awakening of the 1820s and ’30s it became a public and collective event in evangelical churches. To some extent conversion demanded awareness of the Calvinist belief that all who had not experienced conversion were destined for hell. But new strategies, played out in a group setting, appealed to the emotions rather than to the intellect as the means for bringing about spiritual change.

A good example of one of the successful “new measures” was the anxious seat. The anxious seat, a special seating area usually placed between the congregation and the sanctuary, focused group attention on a few selected members of the congregation who were weighed down by the knowledge of their transgressions against God. Separated from family and friends, these sinners expressed their feelings of guilt and dismay while the pastor and members of the congregation prayed and wept over them. Urgent personal appeals to repent mingled with cries to heaven for help.

Many of those on the anxious seat were eventually overcome by the emotion of the moment and swept into the experience of conversion. Even those who were not particularly pious might feel pressures to conform.

**Choral music, which had long played a role in Protestant services, now fostered the emotional moods that facilitated conversion.**

At Waiilatpu Narcissa and Marcus repeatedly looked forward to a “precious season,” when sinners would cry out, “What must I do to be saved?” and where there would be many a “tearful eye” and heartfelt supplication. They were repeatedly disappointed. The emotional techniques just did not work when there was no collective expectation of and desire for change. While a few might be moved, there were never enough to create the highly charged atmosphere that promoted conversions at home. Moreover, the particular behaviors that evangelical congregations in New York found so necessary and compelling—weeping and shaking, for example—did not have the same meaning for the Cayuse who did not readily respond to them.

A source of continuing tension between the Whitmans and the Cayuse, and surely one of the root causes of the mission’s abrupt end, was the particular style of interaction that the Whitmans used with the Indians. Like other evangelical Protestants of the period, the Whitmans believed it was their duty to draw clear and often public distinctions between nonbelievers and believers, and between “sinful” and “Christian” behavior. They felt obliged to chastise rather than to tolerate, to warn rather than keep silent.

As early as 1838 Narcissa noted that some of the Cayuse were blaming the missionaries for pointing out the “eternal realities” of their certain damnation. Despite the “bitter opposition” that emerged to what some of the Cayuse labeled tellingly as “bad talk,” Narcissa and Marcus repeatedly singled out as sinners those who followed tribal customs like polygamy, and the couple warned the Indians that they were on
the road to hell. Some Cayuse became convinced that the Whitmans were condemning their entire way of life. As Narcissa wrote, “One said it was good when they knew nothing but to hunt, eat, drink and sleep; now it was bad.”

The more the Cayuse demanded that the Whitmans keep silent, the more compelled the Whitmans felt to continue. As Marcus explained, “If he did not tell them plainly of their sins the Lord would be displeased with them... It was his duty to tell them that... they had done wrong.” Without greater tolerance, frustrations grew on both sides.

Many of the Whitmans’ ideas about privacy, comfort and style, as well as their understanding of gender roles and acceptable behavior, also contributed to a problematic relationship with the Cayuse. These notions, so familiar even today that it is tempting to think of them as detached from any particular historical context, resulted from the process of middle-class formation. Although most attention has focused on the development of a self-conscious working class in the early decades of the 19th century, an urban middle class was also in the making.

Different from middling workers of the previous century because its members did not work with their hands but with their minds, this new class of clerical and professional men and their wives was increasingly differentiating itself by adopting new norms for behavior, family life, leisure time, consumption and housing. Although Narcissa and Marcus had both grown up in small towns, they shared many of the attitudes, values and tastes of this new middle class.

Narcissa was, as a member of the Methodist mission in Oregon observed, especially fitted for “civilized life... a polished & exalted sphere... [and] for society, refined society.” Appreciative of gentility and the society of ladies, Narcissa esteemed “polish,” “mental culture,” and “tasteful” domestic arrangements. These values not only contributed to her sense of psychological distance from the Cayuse but also led her to judge Cayuse life harshly. She saw Indian culture as the antithesis of her own, and because she did so, she feared it. The Cayuse, she explained, were savage rather than polished; hypocritical, deceitful and cunning rather than sincere; dirty rather than clean; and lazy rather than industrious. Instead of devoting themselves to their children, mothers neglected them; they were their husbands’ slaves, not their companions. Narcissa felt herself in a “dark and savage” place.

Narcissa’s behavior gave the Cayuse many reasons to question her commitment and friendship. During her daughter’s infancy Narcissa kept Alice off the floor because she thought the Indians had made it so dirty. By carrying her child in her arms for months, she must have made her disapproval clear enough. It was no wonder that one of the Methodist missionaries who knew the Whitmans well reported after Narcissa’s death that she had maintained “considerable reserve” towards the Cayuse. “Her carriage towards them was always considered haughty. It was the common remark among them that Mrs. Whitman was ‘very proud.’”

Like other members of the middle class, Narcissa set a high value on family privacy. She was aggravated by the Indians’ curiosity and their inclination to peek in her windows. As soon as she could Narcissa secured not only venetian blinds for the windows but also a fence to make the demarcation between her house and its surroundings clear. She realized that she could not bar the Cayuse from the house altogether, but she was determined to confine them to one room and one door.

Used to free access to one another’s lodges, the Cayuse objected to Narcissa’s effort to carve out a private and exclusive space in the house. While this disagreement over space may seem trivial, neither the Whitmans nor the Cayuse considered it as such. In 1840 the Cayuse pressed the Whitmans to hold services in the new mission house. When the missionaries refused, telling them “they would make it so dirty and fill it so full of fleas that we could not live in it,” the Indians “murmured” and demanded that the Whitmans pay for the mission land.
The following year a much tenser confrontation occurred over the same issue. One Saturday afternoon the Indians rushed through several doors into the house, axing one door to pieces along the way. After threatening Marcus with a gun and hitting him on the mouth, they demanded that the Whitmans “not shut any ... doors against them." When Marcus refused, many stayed away from the Sabbath service the following day. Others broke some of the hated windows in the mission house. Although the crisis passed, due to the intervention of a Hudson’s Bay Company trader at Fort Walla Walla, the anger lingered.

Some historians object to using the term cultural clash to describe the relationship between whites and Indians because it minimizes the peaceable exchanges that routinely occurred—such as the transactions between Narcissa and Indian women for berries, or her fan with Indian decorative motifs, or her little daughter lustily singing hymns in Nez Perce. But the term captures an essential truth about relations at Waiilatpu. Both cultures were assertive, willing to accommodate the other only to a limited extent.

In 1843 Elijah White noted how “brave, active, tempestuous and warlike” the Cayuse were, how “boisterous, saucy and troublesome.” He added that Narcissa’s feelings for them resembled those “of a mother towards ungrateful children.” Narcissa’s comment, “We have come to elevate them and not to suffer ourselves to sink down to their standard,” suggests her energetic commitment to her own culture.
were on the way to extinction. Gender played a role in what coping strategies were available to the Whitmans. A formal structure of support existed for the Oregon mission’s male appointees. As corresponding secretary for the ABCFM, David Greene wrote Marcus several times a year to answer questions and encourage, support, criticize and advise him. He was able to provide Marcus with a perspective that came from his knowledge of ABCFM efforts around the globe and, to some extent, could serve as a safe sounding board for Marcus’s frustrations. But because the ABCFM considered Narcissa only as her husband’s assistant, Greene saw no need to write to her or even address her problems in his letters to Marcus. His infrequent inquiries about her suggested that the women of the mission were not important enough to warrant more than a passing thought.

The organization of the Oregon mission also provided its male members with regular support. At least once a year the men of the mission gathered for their annual meeting, which lasted for several days. While wives often came along, they did not participate in the mission meetings, nor did they have the opportunity to debate or vote on mission policy or decide what news to send to the board in Boston. The men could take official action to change their realities; their wives could not.

Finally, Marcus as a man and a physician had a good deal of physical mobility. Although his appointment as a medical missionary suggested that his primary involvement lay with the Cayuse, in fact, he provided medical treatment to the scattered members of the mission family as well as to Methodist missionaries, Hudson’s Bay Company employees, and other white settlers in Oregon Territory. He could often leave the frustrations at Waiilatpu behind him for weeks at a time.

Mary Richardson Walker, with her husband Elkanah Walker, operated a mission in the Tshimakain valley among the Spokane Indians from 1838 until the Whitman massacre in 1847.

Although his absences caused him some misgivings, he was able to rationalize his choices without much difficulty. As he told David Greene, it was unfortunate that there was “little room for the more important spiritual part of our duty.” He often wished “to give my whole time to the instruction of the people and resolved to do so more than heretofore, but then a call of sickness [comes] . . . which as a Physician I must regard as superior to any other.”

Narcissa’s options were more limited. Without direct access to the official channels of support she had no experienced voice to advise her. Nor could she pour out her frustrations in writing letters to families and friends, knowing as she did that her letters were passed around at home and might even be published without her knowledge or consent. As a result, she was extremely careful about what she revealed in her personal correspondence. Nor did she have the freedom to leave the mission as did her husband. Although in the first few years in Oregon she often accompanied Marcus on his trips to other mission stations, she lacked an official excuse to abandon her missionary duties at Waiilatpu.

Unable to escape the physical reality of missionary life, yet needing to offset the frustrations she experienced at the mission, Narcissa relied on those powers of imagination that had helped to attract her to missionary work in the first place. Her letters suggest a habit of fantasizing that she was back in Prattsburg. They contain vivid pictures of Prentiss family life, perhaps an image of resting in the cool inner room during a hot summer day or sitting and reading aloud to her mother. Writing these descriptions helped to carry Narcissa back to the safe and predictable world of her childhood and adolescence. Her constant pleas for family correspondents to provide her very detailed information (“You cannot be too particular,” she told her sister Mary Ann, while she informed her sister Clarissa, “I want to see how you look and how you live”) suggest how important it was for her to have enough material to continue imagining that world even after years had passed. Her moving and often repeated reminders that “I am still one of your number” make it clear, too, that she sought not only the satisfaction of imagining herself in familiar places with familiar people, but the sense of emotional
sustenance that came from family love and acceptance.

Because letters tied her imaginatively to home and made her life bearable, Narcissa found the first few years at Waiilatpu difficult. "Not a single word has been wafted hence...to afford consolation in a desponding hour," she mourned.

When letters came her feelings were of "inexpressible joy." Her description of receiving a letter from her mother suggests the vital role these communications played for her. "We were in bed and had just got to sleep," Narcissa reported, "when [an Indian]... announced that letters had come. We could not wait until morning, but lighted a candle to read them...It was enough to transport me in imagination to that dear circle I loved so well, and to prevent sleep from returning that night." On another occasion a letter from her sister Jane had her thinking "of nothing else but you [for a whole day] and weeping." When no letters came, Narcissa often "read over old letters and answered them over again" to assuage her disappointment.

As it had in her youth, reading allowed Narcissa to escape to other worlds. Although she felt she was in a dark and heathen land far from every civilized influence, she had access to the kinds of books and journals she had enjoyed at home: the New York Observer, the New York Evangelist, missionary biographies, a book entitled The Pastor's Wife, Mother's Magazine.

While Narcissa's reliance on reading as one means of coping with stress helped her survive at the mission, she paid a great price for those moments of solace. Absorbed in her book one quiet Sabbath afternoon in June 1839, Narcissa never really comprehended her daughter's little speech that she was going down to the river to get water for dinner. There, while her mother read, the two-year-old fell into the water and drowned.

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In Oregon Narcissa freed herself from some of the strictures that shaped behavior at home, but never to the extent that she made friends with native women. They were too different, and Narcissa could not "feel a meeting of hearts" with them. But with women like Laura Brewer at The Dalles' Methodist station, she could. Two passages from her letters to Laura poignantly suggest the quality and meaning of these ties. "I often think and dream of you," Narcissa wrote on one occasion. On another she told her friend, "Be assured, I shall love you and think of you with increasing interest, and if we meet more in this world, it gives me joy to think we may meet in Heaven."

In order to compensate for the frustations of missionary life Narcissa needed to establish an alternative to her—her own sphere of activity, interest and gratification. From the first days at Waiilatpu it was clear that she had determined at the very least to create a reassuringly familiar physical setting. Marcus devoted two sentences to describing the first mission house, thereby suggesting that home did not serve the same psychic function for him as for his wife. Narcissa, on the other hand, filled her early letters with numerous details of her domestic situation, her windows, her furniture, even her washtub and pets. Considering her isolated circumstances, she was amazingly successful at fashioning a cozy haven that shielded her from what she called the "thick darkness of heathendom."

As time passed and the mission station grew, the Whitmans moved into a new mission house. Visitors were surprised at how civilized, even familiar, it was. Whitewashed on the exterior and trimmed in green, the house included a dining room and parlor. The floors were painted yellow and the woodwork was slate colored. There were settees, clothes presses, rocking chairs and a display cabinet for Narcissa's curiosities. Her family ate off
blue and white English china at a table covered by a tablecloth.

This setting testified not only to Narcissa's genteel taste and determination to have comforting physical surroundings but also to her belief that the proper household arrangements were the necessary underpinnings for meaningful family life. This home circle was to be Narcissa's alternative to missionary work. Her efforts to create it were, of course, sanctioned by 19th-century middle-class culture, but her decision to make her family, especially the children, central was her own. Some missionary women felt distracted from their calling by their children, but for Narcissa the children who saved her from many "melancholy hours" became her real work.

Because there was such ambiguity in the role of missionary women—on the one hand they had made a commitment to Christ, but on the other hand all agreed that women had a sacred responsibility to their children—Narcissa could justify her choice to herself and to others. At times, however, Narcissa suspected that her involvement, especially with her daughter, was excessive. To her Methodist missionary friend Mrs. Perkins she wrote, "You like us, are solitary and alone and in almost the dangerous necessity of loving too ardently the precious gift, to the neglect of the giver."

Narcissa was overcome with grief when little Alice drowned. Face to face with the stark reality that, as a childless missionary, her obvious duty now lay with her "savage" charges, she became depressed and subject to a variety of different ailments. Like many other 19th-century women, Narcissa may well have retreated from what she considered an intolerable situation through sickness. Whatever the causes of her ill health, it severely limited her contact with the Indians. But she was too resilient to resolve her problems by keeping to her room. Unable to conceive again, she began to create a new family by adopting first two young mixed-blood girls, then a mixed-blood boy. In 1844 the Sager orphans appeared at the mission and the Whitmans decided to take them all in. Narcissa saw "the hand of the Lord" in their arrival.

Narcissa threw herself into the physical and spiritual care of her large interesting family. Many of her ailments disappeared or ceased to bother her. The tone of her letters became happy and positive. As she told her sister Harriet, "We have as happy a family as the world affords." She added, "I do not wish to be in a better situation than this."

Believing that the children would be corrupted by too close an association with the Indians, she prevented them from learning Nez Perce and supervised their activities carefully. As she explained to Mary Walker, "I can not rest to have them out of my sight for a moment unless I know what they are about—but prefer to have their work as well as their play all done in my presence." By the time of the massacre Narcissa had redefined her mission in a way that excluded most contact with the Cayuse. As she wrote to her mother, "Mother will see that my hands and heart are usefully employed, not so much for the Indians directly, as my own family. When my health failed, I was obliged to withhold my efforts for the natives, but the Lord has since filled my hands with other labors, and I have no reason to complain. If the Cayuse had ever seen her as their friend, few now thought of the woman who held herself aloof as such.

FAMILIAR AND even predictable as parts of the Wailatpu story may be, it still has much to tell us about the racial and cultural dynamics of the 19th-century West. On one level, the history of the ABCFM missionary endeavor makes it clear that two vital cultures were confronting one another. As the abrupt end of the Wailatpu mission suggested, many Cayuse did not undergo the transformations the Whitmans had in mind. Rather, members of the tribe resisted and rejected white middle-class evangelical values and attitudes.

On another level, the mission story points to tensions within white culture. The missionary experience was a gendered one that allotted men and women different responsibilities and resources. Because Narcissa Whitman was only an assistant missionary the ABCFM paid little attention to her. Like many women in the mission field, Narcissa faced her failure with little in the way of institutional support.

While it is easy to criticize her for not being sensitive to another culture, it is important to recognize Narcissa's courage and her success in creating strategies, drawn from the limited number available to women, that allowed her to survive. Women who followed her into the mission field throughout the century selected similar strategies as they confronted similar problems.

Julie Roy Jeffrey is Professor of History at Goucher College, Baltimore, and author of Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880. She gave the 1991 Pettyjohn Lecture at Washington State University, Pullman, from which this article is derived.
The Development of “Physical Culture” in the Pacific Northwest

By David Chapman

Doc Shaughnessy operated a gymnasium near the Skid Road in turn-of-the-century Seattle. It was a tough neighborhood, and the Doc was a no-nonsense kind of guy who didn’t believe in taking guff or mincing words. In the ad for his physical culture studio he promised to “Remove Fat Fast from Fighters and Men under Forty.” But, he added, “For Those Over Forty, I’ll Just Try.”

Northwesterners have been bulking up and slimming down ever since, but Shaughnessy and his athletic crew reflected several unmistakable regional characteristics: stay healthy, do what you promise and leave exaggeration to others. Despite the area’s healthy climate and general prosperity, the Northwest has never been a bodybuilding hotbed. Even so, British Columbia, Washington and Oregon have produced a remarkable number of dedicated muscle men who deserve to be recognized and remembered.

Bodybuilding began its rise as a recognizable sport in the late 19th century, when people like the great strong man Eugene Sandow toured the nation in his vaudeville show. From 1893 to 1896 the golden-haired Hercules thrilled audiences all over the country with his feats of strength and daring. It was his posing, however, that really captured the attention and imagination of the crowds. Never had a man with Sandow’s well-developed musculature exhibited himself before the public. His bulging biceps, swelling pectorals and rippling abdominals were all revelations to the throngs who flocked to see his nightly performances. Suddenly, every red-blooded North American male yearned to emulate the mighty Sandow.

Although the closest Sandow ever got to the Pacific Northwest was a well-publicized tour of San Francisco, his influence was immediately apparent. Doc Shaughnessy’s rough and tumble establishment had been in operation for several years, but his gymnasium catered mainly to boxers and those who made a living from them. If one was not a member of the cauliflower ear set, there were several other places one could go to build one’s body. The oldest and best known of these...
After a few years of building bodies, [T. S.] Lippy caught a bad case of Klondike gold fever.

Resting on the balance beam, clutching a climbing rope, this young lady shows what a real athletic lass looked like. Born a century before Spandex, she was forced to work out in a hot, cumbersome gymnastic costume that covered her from chin to toes.

Alternates has a long and interesting history.

To the Young Men's Christian Association, that venerable beacon of athletic light, falls the honor of having the first gymnasium in the Pacific Northwest. Mr. E. E. Quackenbush of Portland was traveling through San Francisco when he happened to see the local branch of the YMCA. He was inspired to rush back to Oregon and start one there. On March 31, 1868, the region's first YMCA was born. Originally, the "Y" was simply a place where young men could meet for Christian dialogue and Bible study, but gradually other wholesome pleasures were added, most notably gymnastics, athletics and physical culture.

The YMCA devoted itself to that curious combination of sport and devotion called "Muscular Christianity." Athletics had a powerful religious appeal for a number of reasons. First, exercise was a harmless way to work off aggressions; second, despite traditional Christian meekness, it was allowed for the expression of strength and power; and third, hearty exercise generally left the participants too weary to pursue more sinful recreations.

Seattle businessman Dexter Horton was impressed when he visited the "Y" in Portland, and he determined to start one in the Puget Sound area. Thus, on August 7, 1876, the Emerald City had its first YMCA, but not a gymnasium. Horton had no use for athletics; sport was all a lot of useless folderol to him. "If the boys need exercise," he once opined, "let them saw wood, and if they want to swim, let them go into the Bay."

Fortunately for sports in Seattle, Horton did not last long as director. His most famous successor was T. S. Lippy, who started his career as physical director of the YMCA in 1890. According to his colleagues, Lippy's most notable attributes were "physical coordination and niceness." After a few years of building bodies, Lippy caught a bad case of Klondike gold fever. Young Lippy quickly resigned from the "Y," bade his wife farewell and boarded the next boat bound for the far North. When he walked back down the gangplank in Seattle two years later, even the muscular Lippy could hardly carry the valise he returned with, weighed down as it was with over 200 pounds of Yukon gold. His coordination and niceness had been amply rewarded by a benevolent Providence.

Soon he was being courted by his former employer, and in 1901 the now-prosperous Lippy became president of the YMCA. During his 30-year tenure Lippy championed many projects, but one of his favorite causes was the gymnasium. Prior to Lippy's administration, however, not everyone had been convinced that the gymnasium was headed in the right direction.

In 1888 a Puritanical official, Everett Smith, expressed concern about the way the YMCA gym was being used. He particularly disapproved of the flamboyant way the athletes displayed their muscular physiques and acrobatic tricks. "Some of your young men spent weeks in preparation for an advertised gymnasium entertainment," he sniffed. "On the appointed evening we were subjected to nothing short of a genuine circus ring platform with the performers adorned in pink tights, gold and silver tinsel and, alas for the good name of the gymnasium, a full fledged clown with coarse jokes." But the unkindest cut of all came when Smith saw the enjoyment of the crowd and heard the applause "from an appreciative but indiscriminating general public."

Bounding gymnasts, spangly drawers and coarse jokes aside, the YMCAs were a powerful force in the Northwest. Their rapid proliferation in the region is testimony to the niche they filled. Between 1880 and 1900 over 20 "Y"s had been established from British Columbia to the California border. By 1907, when the Seattle YMCA moved to its present location on Fourth and Madison, it had become an integral part of the social and sporting life of Puget Sound.

Although the first athletic organizations in the Pacific Northwest were YMCAs, the association did not maintain its gymnastic monopoly for long. The
German Turnverein had been present in most North American cities—Seattle, Portland and Tacoma among them—since the mid 19th century. The Tumverein (gymnastics organization) was brought to the Northwest principally by German immigrants. The movement had originated in the Fatherland as a way for patriotic Germans to stay healthy and strong enough to shake off the bonds of political tyranny. When they came to this country, however, the Tumvereins were transformed into a combination lodge and athletic club.

In 1886 the Seattle Turners constructed a large hall with an airy gymnasium and filled it with dumbbells, Indian clubs, vaulting horses and other paraphernalia. The busy instructor of gymnastics, Herr Professor Conrad Wiedemann, made sure that members were getting the most from their workouts. At the biweekly meetings the energetic Turners could be assured of plenty of athletics, beer drinking and Teutonic fellowship.

Seattle's Turner Hall had the additional distinction of being one of the few buildings of any size to survive the devastating fire of 1889. A year after the conflagration, George Frye took a lease on the huge barn-like edifice and transformed it into "Frye's Opera House." The Tumverein then moved its headquarters to Eighth Avenue, where it remained well into the 1900s.

As the years rolled by bodybuilding and physical culture began to catch on, and a few private gyms began opening here and there. Seattle was still close to being a raw frontier town when the Seattle Athletic Club first opened its doors in 1870. For much of its long history the club maintained a fine gymnasium for the benefit of its prosperous patrons. Other, more modest, establishments were also opening their doors in Seattle.

In 1912 Lonnie J. Austin, former proprietor of a billiard parlor, and Mark S. Freed, a budding physical culturist, joined forces to create Austin and Freed's Gymnasium. From their business in the Baillargeon Building on Second and Spring the two men advertised their specialties as "Physical Training, Boxing, Wrestling, and Weight Reducing." This partnership lasted for only two years, for in 1914 the name and address of the establishment was changed. Freed was gone and the name of Daniel Salt, a salesman and business entrepreneur, was added to the shingle. Henceforth they were known as "Austin and Salt's Seattle School of Physical Culture, Inc." Their gym moved to First Avenue and remained there until it went under during the Depression.

In the 1920s the two men bowed to the general climate of the bullish times and added the words "the business men's gymnasium" to their advertising. It was also in 1920 that Austin and Salt got some rather tame competition from Swedish masseur Sven Nordin, who opened a gym grandiloquently called "The Chamber of Hygienics" just a few blocks away. Although he promised a wide range of activities at his gym, including "educational, corrective, recreative, and medicinal gymnastics," Nordin was clearly more interested in orthopedic therapy than in bodybuilding and exercise. Apparently, folks in Seattle were too healthy for good business, because in 1923 Nordin's Chamber disappeared forever from the record books.

While the stalwart citizens of turn-of-the-century Seattle were lifting weights and swinging clubs, a set of youthful athletes was working out in their new facilities just across the Montlake Cut. The University of Washington had one of the best gyms in the Northwest, and it had the instructors to go with it.

Much of the early interest in physical culture at the UW can be attributed to Charles Vander Veer, the much-loved "Instructor in Physical Culture and Hygiene" who was first appointed in 1894. Although he was described as "a smallish, nervous person with shiny black hair and a gorgeous branched mustache," his unimpressive stature belied his dynamic training expertise. Though Vander Veer...
Charles Vander Veer was director of the gymnasium and Professor of Physical Culture and Hygiene at the University of Washington from 1895 to 1904, during which time he raised the general fitness level of both men and women students.

Benjamin F. Roller, M.D., was Charles Vander Veer’s successor at the University of Washington. He directed the physical culture department from 1904 to 1906, when he left to pursue other careers, most notably as a professional wrestler.

Vander Veer worked wonders on the young men under his tutelage, and he did not neglect the girls, either. According to a poetic tribute in the school yearbook, it only took a few sessions with the mustachioed trainer before the coeds also began to take on a healthy glow: “She studies and works with a vim / And it all is due to the exercise / She takes at the dear old gym.”

As unique as Vander Veer was, his successor was even more colorful. In June 1905 Dr. Benjamin F. Roller took over as Professor of Physical Culture at the UW. After practicing medicine for two years in the East, Roller arrived in Seattle ready to take up his athletic duties. One of his first innovations was to hold a grand athletic exhibition in the old gym featuring displays of acrobatics, jujitsu, fencing, mass exercises and wrestling. This novel presentation was greeted by the entire university community with great enthusiasm. “To say it was a huge success,” wrote the Tyee for 1906, “would be saying too little for it.” Still, it reminded one writer of a three-ring circus since there was so much happening simultaneously.

Despite his triumphs in the physical culture line, the doctor soon felt the urge to move on to other things. After only one year he moved back East. Using his expertise as a coach, Roller began to train some of the top professional wrestlers of the day in their rough and tumble art. When he discovered that he was just as talented as his pupils, Roller jumped into the ring himself. Thus he began a new career as a professional grappler, calling himself “Doc Roller.” The former UW professor eventually gained quite a name for himself in his peculiar field. In 1922 Doc Roller fought the great Russian athlete George Hackenschmidt. Unfortunately, Roller was quickly twisted into a human pretzel by the mighty Russian. Undaunted by defeat, the doctor joined his opponent’s camp as a valued and trusted trainer. The battling professor must have picked up some useful tips because, between 1914 and 1915, Roller held the world’s championship belt in wrestling twice before he lost it forever to stronger opponents.

Early coaches like Roller and Vander Veer created a dedicated interest in muscle building by providing a well-equipped place for workouts. Both of these coaches would quickly agree that all the fancy equipment in the world cannot in themselves produce a top-notch athlete. It takes focused and dedicated individuals to do that, and in this regard the Northwest was not lacking.

The first news that the outside world had of bodybuilders hailing from this region came mainly through the muscle magazines that proliferated in the early 1900s. Not only did magazines like Physical Culture, Body Builder, and Strength disseminate bodybuilding techniques, they also offered a place for amateur athletes to send in photographs of themselves. Muscle men from Washington, Oregon and British Columbia were as anxious to show off their physiques as anyone else. Northwestern lumberjacks, stevedores, farmers, clerks and salesmen sent in their photos, hoping to see them in print. Most of the pictures are primitive from an artistic perspective, but a few have a certain grace and power. Others would stand as fine works in their own right. Fine art or not, the magazines provided a
national forum for bodybuilding photography.

Two massive athletes from the region gained international reputations in the mid 1930s. One was from Portland, the other from British Columbia. Word began to spread of a massive young Canadian named Maurice Jones who was reputed to have a physique rivaling the best of any age. His 19-inch arms and chest measuring 52 inches earned him the name that was to follow him throughout his life—"The Vancouver Hercules."

Jones was adept at gymnastics as well as weight lifting, but he was forced to give up the former activity when his muscular bulk became too great. He was convinced to forego gymnastics while dramatically swinging around the high bar in giant circles. Unexpectedly, his heavy body weight caused the bar to snap, sending "The Vancouver Hercules" flying across the gym. It was only luck that saved him from a broken neck. He resolved after that to break only records and to leave bar-swinging to others of less hefty proportions.

Simply having a muscular body was, unfortunately, not enough to earn a decent living, so in 1939 Jones resorted to that great staple of physique athletes—professional wrestling. In that year he grappled across Europe in an extensive wrestling tour. While in England Jones impressed just about everyone who saw him as being strong, well-built and adroit. When he returned to British Columbia he took with him the accolades that only an international reputation can bring.

The Canadian strong man brought renown to the entire region, but he was not the only Northwest muscle man to bask in international acclaim. A few hundred miles to the south another world-class bodybuilder was pumping iron with equal determination—Oregon athlete Sam Loprinzi.

Oprinzi's bodybuilding career took him from rags to athletic riches. In 1927 he and two of his brothers went to a vaudeville performance in Portland's Hippodrome Theater, where they saw a strong man perform on stage. It was the sight of all those rippling muscles that reportedly inspired young Loprinzi to become one of the finest bodybuilders in the country. Sam's enthusiasm for exercising far outstripped his ability to purchase adequate equipment, so he was reduced to chinning himself and improvising barbells by attaching pieces of concrete to metal poles.

This makeshift gymnasium was apparently sufficient, for it enabled Loprinzi to win the 1934 Northwestern Weight Lifting Championship. Later he acquired up-
As an art form, physique photography came into its own in the late 1940s and flourished in the 1950s.

Using an ingenious hand-held platform, this amateur strong man from eastern Washington bench presses his 132-pound assistant. Starting from a squatting position, the lifter rises as he presses the weight above his head at arm’s length.

Photography and physical culture have always forged a close link. Unlike other sports with more recognizable and competitive ends, the goal of bodybuilding is simply to look good enough for the camera to record the muscular physique. Whether the poses the subjects assume are careful and classical or unstudied and graceless, it is the camera’s eye that matters most. One of the men who understood the fine balance between the human musculature and recording it photographically was Jon Arnt.

Jon C. Arnt first came to Seattle in 1942. He had been hired to take pictures for Boeing, but he soon struck out on his own as an independent portrait photographer. Starting in the late 1940s, Arnt began to record a few muscular local athletes and send the pictures to Eastern bodybuilding magazines.

As an art form, physique photography came into its own in the late 1940s and flourished in the 1950s. The principal aim of the physique photograph is to display the musculature of the subject in the best light possible. The photos must be skillfully lit and gracefully posed. Judged by these criteria, Jon Arnt’s pictures were clearly among the best of his era.

From his studio in the Arcade building, Seattle’s best physique photographer turned out a surprisingly fine body of work. He was clearly influenced by classical statuary—in many of his pictures the models are posed in imitation of these ancient art works. Although they might seem stilted and artificial by today’s standards, they represented the ultimate in photographic elegance when they were first taken.

In addition to his physique and portrait work, Arnt also photographed sporting events for Seattle University. One of his former models recalled that Arnt would shoot a roll of film at the game and then economize by finishing off the roll with bodybuilding shots. When the pictures were developed, the photographer never could remember what would show up at the end.

Jon Arnt continued to work until his death in 1967, after which Northwesterners seldom appeared in national magazines. By then bodybuilding had changed. The sleek, sinewy ideals had given way to thickly-muscled brawn. Another revolutionary change came about with the introduction of women into the bodybuilding arena.

A quick look at the telephone listings reveals that there are over 150 gymnasiums and health studios in the Seattle area alone, 60 in Portland and close to 75 in Vancouver, British Columbia. Pumping iron is still a popular sport in the Northwest. The movement that was championed here by Arnt, Vander Veer, Lippy and even oily old Doc Shaughnessy continues to flourish.

David Chapman has written extensively on the history of physical culture. His latest project is a history of Washington’s 39 county seats. Chapman is a secondary English teacher for the Kent School District.
The Terrible Turk

Although he may not have conquered the world, the Terrible Turk did conquer Tacoma. The Tacoma Daily Ledger for Sunday, September 10, 1899, headlined "COULD NOT THROW THE TURK." "George Reed, who has some local fame as a pugilist, tried it and earned just one dollar. His shoulders were pressed to the mat by the mountain of flesh the Turk brought to bear, and when he emerged he was half smothered."

Win some, lose some, George.

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Handbill collected by Edward N. Fuller, Washington State Historical Society secretary, in 1899.
The Abercrombie Expedition to Alaska

Soldiers North

By Joan Rawlins Biggar

The first United States flag was raised on the Trans-Alaska Military Road at Construction Camp No. 3 on July 4, 1899. This view shows the bench formation of the mountains along Dutch Flat. They rise abruptly from the flat to a height of about 5,500 feet.

"You'll never make it," shouted the prospectors camped beside the glacial stream. Swollen from summer melt and ten days of steady rain, the roaring river nearly drowned their warnings. Captain William Ralph Abercrombie thanked them for their advice. Nevertheless, he urged his horse into the torrent. The ailing 215-pounder never sent others where he would not go himself. If he and his horse could ford (or swim) the stream, he figured the pack animals with their 150-pound loads should be able to do the same.

That summer of 1898 Abercrombie's scouts had finally found the abandoned fur-trading route between Alaska's Copper River country and Fort Valdez. The 41-year-old explorer intended to blaze trail through Keystone Canyon for the first all-American overland route to the Klondike gold fields. But first he must cross this river.

Midstream he heard boulders rolling along the river bottom and knew he should have listened to the prospectors. Moments later a big rock knocked his mount off its feet. The intrepid captain clung to his horse's mane while they tumbled over and over 150 yards downstream. The horse lodged feet up against a large rock; Abercrombie pinned beneath. Badly bruised, one hand mashed by a flailing hoof, and almost paralyzed by the 35-degree water, the captain grabbed his horse's tail and hung on as the animal scrambled up the bank.

Fortunately for the future of the 49th state, Abercrombie survived. The trail he laid out became a major factor in the settling of Alaska's interior and one of its most important highways.
The Washington Connection

IN 1898 SEATTLE WAS seething with activity focused on the northern gold strikes. Stampers and would-be stampers filled the streets and barrooms, waiting to board the motley assortment of vessels that would get them to the land of easy fortune. Captain Abercrombie and other military explorers passed in and out of Seattle on business connected with their expeditions, but they shipped out of Vancouver Barracks on the Columbia River.

A United States military reservation had been established in 1849 on the hill above old Fort Vancouver. By 1860 all the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company had gone.

In May 1883 Brigadier General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the Department of the Columbia, sent the famous explorer Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka to the upper Yukon River. Captain Abercrombie set out on his first expedition the following year. Then followed a lull in official exploration until the gold rush began in the late 1890s. By that time the garrisons stationed in Washington Territory were depleted of men. The troops were either off fighting in the Spanish-American War or on field duty in Alaska. (See Columbia, Fall 1988, for a look at life at Vancouver Barracks, then called Columbia Barracks, during Ulysses S. Grant's 1852-53 tour of duty there.)

Military Role in Alaska

UNITED STATES MILITARY men have long played an important role in developing the 586,412-square-mile chunk of wilderness the natives called "the Great Land." The army was there to raise the Stars and Stripes when the Russian Double Eagle came down at Sitka in 1867. It served as a quasi-governmental presence until 1877, when a sluggish economy and Indian uprisings at home forced a recall of the main garrisons. Between that time and 1897 the army fielded several important exploring expeditions in Alaska, but not until the discovery of gold in the Klondike did the United States really awaken to the possible riches locked up in "Seward's Icebox." Abercrombie was among many hardy military men sent to the far-off territory to keep order, help destitute miners and natives, and develop a system of trails and roads.

William Ralph Abercrombie was born in Minnesota in 1857. At age 20 he joined the Second Infantry in New York as a second lieutenant. In the spring of 1884 he received orders to command an exploring expedition to supplement Schwatka's pioneering work of the previous year. Schwatka had crossed the Chilkoot Pass at the head of Lynn Canal in Alaska's panhandle, traveled 400 miles through Canadian territory to the Yukon River, then rafted down the Yukon through Alaska to the Bering Sea. Knowing that a non-Canadian route to the interior of Alaska might some day be vital to America, the army asked Abercrombie to search for such a passage.

The Copper River Expedition

ON JUNE 1, 1884, Abercrombie and four assistants left Vancouver Barracks and headed for the Copper River, which flows into Prince William Sound near present-day Cordova. The plan was to have their steamer take them as far up the Copper as it could go. Then they would proceed on foot through the mountains into Alaska's interior.

The expedition first landed at an old Russian fur-trading post on Hinchenbrook Island in Prince William Sound, only to find that the guide who had agreed to take them to the Copper River country did not know the location of the river. The trader in charge of the post told them that they were still 60 miles from the river's mouth. Their ship steamed away, leaving them stranded on the beach. As Abercrombie later wrote, "The situation was not pleasant."

It became more unpleasant yet when, two days later, the old Russian ship's boat they had found to carry them up the Copper ran hard aground on hidden mud flats of the Copper River delta. They were still several miles from shore. The boat drew only 18 inches of water, but they had to wait for the incoming tide to send them on their way toward Alaganik, a small community of Eyak Indians. There they hired some reluctant helpers.
All summer the soldiers and frightened natives struggled to ascend the treacherous river. Once past the shifting delta channels they had to portage around obstacles or line the boat up stretches too rapid for rowing. Often they waded in the icy river when the brush on the banks grew too thick to walk through. They dodged icebergs discharged from two massive glaciers fronting the river. One native boat was crushed in the ice, its owner killed.

The expedition had left the tents behind for lack of space. In order to sleep at night the cold, wet, insect-bitten men were forced to hug heated stones rolled in their wet blankets.

After three months and 90 miles of miserably hard work, Abercrombie concluded that the mouth of the Copper River would never make a practicable year-round route from the coast to the interior. He headed back to Prince William Sound.

Valdez Glacier Side Trip

In the little time remaining that season, Lieutenant Abercrombie looked for an alternate route mentioned by the Indians. He hired Russian-Indian guides to take him to the top of Valdez Glacier, at the end of Valdez Arm. Here they pointed out the general direction from which Copper River Indians once came to trade with the Chugach Eskimos living on Prince William Sound. When a smallpox epidemic wiped out the village at Port Valdez, the trail had been abandoned and forgotten.

This mid-September side trip also had its exciting moments. One of Abercrombie's companions, Lieutenant Brumback, was taken with such severe leg cramps that he had to be left lying in the snow of the glacier while the others made a dash for the summit. Then a guide fell part way down a crevasse, the bottom of which could not be seen, although they heard water rushing far below. With ropes Abercrombie pulled him from certain death. They stumbled back to camp in a blinding snowstorm. Abercrombie suffered from frostbitten feet. And on their return to Hinchenbrook Island a sudden storm nearly claimed their lives.

Abercrombie left Alaska, the elusive all-American route still undiscovered. But his careful, detailed (and good-humored) account of the trip served to make Alaska better known to the rest of the world.

The Gold Rush

Fourteen years later William Abercrombie, now a captain, returned to Port Valdez. When cries of "Gold!" resounded from the Klondike in the late 1890s "a terrifyingly incompetent mass of humanity," as Abercrombie put it, headed north. Most stampeders were pitifully unprepared, relying on guidebooks more imaginative than accurate to get them to the gold fields.

For years a low-keyed boundary dispute simmered in the Klondike. Both the United States and Canada realized the importance of the disputed territory if the gold discoveries proved as rich as reported. With the first discoveries, Canada sent regular troops as well as mounted police to the Klondike, where they kept excellent order. The United States sent troops to occupy Alaska and protect its interests there.

Alaska had only the most limited form of civilian government. This encouraged the rougher elements to cross the Yukon into Alaska to escape Canadian jurisdiction. The army found itself serving as a police force.

American prospectors crossing through Canadian territory balked at
In the late 1890s “a terrifyingly incompetent mass of humanity” headed north.

being charged duty on everything they carried with them. They clamored for an all-American route. Not only prospectors needed a road. If the army was to keep the peace and aid both native Alaskans and newcomers, it needed a means of reaching the interior.

Continuing the Search
ASKED TO LOOK once more for such a route, Abercrombie again left Vancouver Barracks for Prince William Sound in 1898. He commanded one of three army expeditions responding to a United States Senate directive.

Reports filtering back to Washington, D.C., dramatized the plight of prospectors stranded in the far north and the danger of their starvation. Partly to alleviate this possibility and partly to provide transportation for the explorers, the War Department brought more than 500 reindeer from Norway, along with sleds, equipment and 113 Laplanders to care for them.

Abercrombie and his party stopped to take possession of the reindeer at Haines Mission, at the northern end of Lynn Canal, but the rigors of the long journey and the absence of their regular diet made them unfit for use. Pack horses were not available anywhere.

Along with several hundred prospectors, the expedition traveled on to Valdez aboard the steamer Valencia. There Abercrombie quelled the uproar caused by the jumbling together of everyone's goods in the vessel's hold. Six hundred tons of supplies were sorted into smaller boats and beached on the tide flats. Soldiers and prospectors alike fell to, scrambling to back-pack the crates and bundles across the mud to the high water mark, a snow bank seven feet high, before the tide came in.

That first night Abercrombie and his men spread their blankets atop the snow next to their cache of supplies. They were sorely bruised from the pun-ishing loads, their clothing damp from the violent exercise. But Abercrombie heard no grumbling, although the temperature dropped to eight below zero. In the morning the men had to beat their frozen boots against the snow to make them pliable enough to wear.

Abercrombie organized his party into small groups to do as much exploring as possible without the use of pack animals. Then he sailed back to Washington, where he purchased 40 sturdy pack horses from the Yakima Indians.

By the time he got back to Valdez on July 8 the glacial streams around Port Valdez were too wild for pack animals to cross, as Abercrombie's icy dunking proved to his complete satisfaction.

By now Abercrombie knew that the Keystone Canyon was the “keyhole,” the long-sought opening into Alaska's interior. But bridging the glacial streams and cutting trail would take all the exploration time left that season.

Although other members of the expedition reported that Valdez Glacier would be hard-going for men or pack animals so late in the summer, Abercrombie decided to try the crossing. Once over the glacier they could easily reach the Copper River and carry out their explorations.

In its journey down the mountain the ice, 800 feet thick in places, split into a maze of deep crevasses. In winter snow covered the crevasses, making bridges strong enough to support a horse. Later in the season the sun's rays weakened the arches, and they could give way without warning. Another threat came from shifting winds, which could cause travelers to lose their way on the ice cap that cloaked the summits of the range. Aware of the dangers, Abercrombie had sent one of his men to build small stone trail markers across the 5,000-foot-high, 30-mile-long glacier.

Pack Horses on the Glacier
ON AUGUST 5 the four sections of the expedition camped at the glacier's foot. Days of rain and fog chilled the men. Finally the pack train set out in sections of five horses, each horse led by an expedition member. An extra man with an extra rope accompanied each section. Private Bence, who had placed the stone markers, led the way with pickax and alpenstock. Following him
came Captain Abercrombie leading his horse, on which he had tied a five-gallon keg of whiskey for the encouragement of the faint-hearted.

Soon the men were groping through thick fog. Melting ice had carried away some of the stone monuments. Everyone halted while Private Bence felt his way ahead to the next marker. Then the company moved up when he shouted for them to come. Sometimes the horses broke through the snow arches. Sensing their peril, they would lie perfectly still until the men attached ropes and pulled them out.

Darkness prevented them from progressing more than 12 miles. The horses were tied to chunks of ice, their saddles their only protection from the torrents of freezing rain, their grain portioned out on the ice in front of them. The men chewed on hardtack, cheese and tinned meat, and partook of a little of Abercrombie's whiskey.

No one slept that night. They tramped back and forth behind the picket line, pausing only when the glacier cracked and settled beneath them. They peered apprehensively into the darkness as tons of ice from the glaciers fringing the mountainsides crashed with thunderous roars onto the main glacier where they stood. The echoes reverberated down the valley thousands of feet below.

"Towards morning," wrote Abercrombie, "some of my men became so chilled and tired that it was necessary to administer a little stimulant... On this occasion... there were only a few prohibitionists in the party."

Exhausted, men and horses labored on. The final climb, at an angle of 45 degrees, could be taken only a few yards at a time. Near the summit the rock guideposts were useless. The wind blew "a hurricane through the pass into the interior, accompanied by gusts of sleet and snow, which, freezing as fast as they struck, coated men and beasts with an armor of ice." Their only option was to drift with the blizzard. Fortunately, the wind blew directly through the pass and down toward their destination.

After five or six hours of misery the weary explorers staggered one by one around a rocky point and into bright sunshine. Behind them the storm rushed out of the pass "like the water out of a nozzle of a fire hose."

The exhausted men and horses threw themselves on the snow and let the sun peel the coating of ice from their bodies. In 29 hours without rest or shelter they had, exulted Abercrombie, "successfully crossed Valdez Glacier at a season of the year when it was universally conceded to be impassable."

Exploring the Interior

Following down the valley to the Copper River the group split up to explore various possibilities for the future military road. All four sections found prospectors ahead, with, and behind them. Some of these men were fairly well prepared for the hardships of northern travel. Others were as naive as the two young Virginians who carried canvas sacks for the nuggets they expected to find lying on the riverbank.

Because they lacked transportation, the miners could not carry enough food for successful prospecting. Bitterly they blamed the government for not having built them a trail and themselves for not bringing pack animals.

Seattle was the outfitting and jumping-off point for prospectors bound for the Alaska gold fields. This 1897 view shows men and provisions in front of a store at First Avenue and Yesler.

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Once across the Valdez Glacier the gold-seekers still had to cross Klutina Glacier. Then they followed 12 miles of river to 32-mile-long Abercrombie (now Klutina) Lake, paddled down the length of it, then maneuvered their hand-built boats another 30 miles down the dangerous lower Klutina to the Copper River. A long, hazardous journey still lay ahead before they could reach the Klondike. Many gave up. Abercrombie had to deal with them later when they returned destitute to Valdez. Others scattered over the Copper River country looking for prospects.

One immediate effect of the influx of gold-seekers was the disappearance of game in the region. Another was forest fires. In late summer the moss was tinder-dry. Once set to smoldering by prospectors' campfires the roots burned unnoticed until the fire ate its way to a spruce tree. The dead needles beneath then ignited with a whoosh, turning the tree into a torch and showering embers that started more fires. The explorers dodged falling, burning trees on their way to the Copper River. Abercrombie's party explored north
“A hurricane through the pass ... coated men and beasts with an armor of ice.”

to the Fortymile country while the others followed other routes. With only 25 pounds of flour, 5 pounds of bacon and a half pound of tea left, Abercrombie and his packers turned south.

Resupplying at Copper Center, the first white settlement in the interior, they joined with one of the other sections to boat down the Copper River, past the glaciers that had frustrated the 1884 attempt to ascend the river, and eventually circled back by way of Prince William Sound to Valdez. They arrived on October 16, having covered more than 800 miles by foot, horseback, raft and boat in a little more than two months.

During the period of Abercrombie’s absence quartermaster’s agent Charles Brown had supervised the building of a winter camp at Port Valdez. He remained in charge while Abercrombie returned to the States to gear up for the construction to follow next season.

As winter advanced many of the prospectors still remaining in the Copper River valley started succumbing to scurvy. They panicked. Those still able to get about headed toward the government camp in Valdez. Two thirds of those attempting to cross the Valdez Glacier died.

Others went mad, raving about a “glacier demon” who had tormented them in their passage. Of the survivors, Charles Brown housed and treated 80 to 100 men who suffered from frostbite, scurvy and other ailments.

Abercrombie returned in April to find nearly 500 prospectors in Valdez and the Copper River valley in desperate condition. He distributed immediate aid to these people and sent dog teams across the glacier to bring in the sick from the interior. Then he set out for Keystone Canyon, 15 miles out of Valdez, where trail crews began construction of the Trans-Alaska Military Wagon Road.

Untangling a Wilderness

By October 1899 the crews had completed 93 miles of pack trail. This included 26 bridges, the longest of which was 121 feet long. An additional 111 miles of trail were cleared for further work the following season. At last the Copper River country could be reached with relative ease.

In his explorations, Abercrombie claimed, he had traveled over more territory than any other white man in Central Alaska. He enthusiastically urged the development of agriculture in the fertile river valleys and the building of a railroad to tap the rich mineral resources of the Copper River country.

He stated, “If the purchase of Alaska was an epoch in the history of the Pacific Coast, the opening of Central Alaska to the general public by the War Department will be an epoch in the history of the copper-mining industry in the Western Hemisphere.”

The railroad was later built not via the Valdez route he had recommended but up the Copper River from Cordova. It carried many millions of dollars worth of ores out of the mountains.

Between 1898 and 1901, Abercrombie’s trail was extended to gold mining country at Eagle. A branch of the road soon led to Fairbanks.

Though Abercrombie could hardly have foreseen the full importance of Alaska to the United States, he knew that his labors had lasting value. He wrote that the building of the Trans-Alaska Military Highway and the discovery of a railroad route superior to any through Canada were major factors in settling the boundary dispute between the United States and Canada, and concluded, “I take not a little satisfaction in looking back to ... my struggles to untangle a small part of this wilderness.”

In just a few short years William R. Abercrombie of the United States Army had witnessed incredible progress in the taming of a wild new land. His own efforts were in large part responsible for that progress.

Joan R. Biggar, of Marysville, is a teacher and an author of articles and fiction on a variety of topics. Her recent works include a series of adventure novels for young readers.
The Natural History of Puget Sound Country
Reviewed by Lisa Mighetto.

Ask any visitor to Puget Sound what makes this region distinctive and that person is likely to mention its natural wonders, abundant resources and spectacular scenery. The natural environment here is of cultural as well as biological importance. Yet during the last several decades human encroachment on the Puget Sound region has posed an increasingly serious threat, exemplified by the well-publicized plight of the spotted owl and the near extinction of several species of salmon. The impact of humans on the region's ecosystems is a prominent theme in The Natural History of Puget Sound Country.

Arthur R. Kruckeberg, Professor Emeritus of Botany at the University of Washington, begins his book with an explanation of the geology and landforms of the Puget Sound Basin. From there his discussion turns to climate, wildlife, and specific habitats. The “Water and the Quality of Life” chapter is especially noteworthy. The message of this book is that understanding of ecology “is a cultural imperative for each of us.” What is needed, he concludes, is the “enforcement of an elaborate ethic on a global scale.” Kruckeberg's tone, however, is rarely strident; his environmentalism is a subtle undercurrent throughout the book.

Historians will be particularly interested in Kruckeberg's final chapters on Indians and Euro-Americans in the Puget Sound Basin. He argues that prior to their contact with whites, Native Americans did not evolve any ethic of land conservation.” Kruckeberg's analysis of Euro-American attitudes is the most puzzling section of his book. Here he examines the writings of a variety of early observers to search “for a glimmer of individual wonder” and “remorse at what our current reverence for the natural world. Had he considered his sources in the context of their times, Kruckeberg's historical analysis would be of greater value.

Still, Kruckeberg has produced an uncommonly beautiful book. The University of Washington Press did a superb job on the design, including the numerous maps, useful appendices, drawings and photographs that enhance the text. In sum, conservationists, scientists, urban planners, and historians will find this book appealing and worthwhile.

Lisa Mighetto earned her doctorate in history at the University of Washington. She is the author of two books dealing with natural history and is currently a historian with Historical Research Associates in Seattle.

Columbia Reviews
Edited by Robert C. Carriker

Malaspina & Galiano:
Spanish Voyages to the Northwest Coast, 1791 & 1792.

The Voyage of Sutil and Mexicana 1792:
The Last Spanish Exploration of the Northwest Coast of America.
Reviewed by Garry Schalliol.

During the summer of 1792 several fascinating scenes of international exploration were acted out in Pacific North west waters. Just in time for the maritime bicentennial, readers now have two excellent new sources that recount the Spanish element of those activities, one by Donald C. Cutter, an internationally recognized scholar on Spanish exploration in North America, the other by John Kendrick, an engineer turned maritime scholar. Both were published to complement the “Enlightened Voyages” exhibition created by the Vancouver Maritime Museum in British Columbia.

Cutter centers his attention on Alejandro Malaspina and Dionisio Alcalá Galiano. A Spanish navy officer with vision, Malaspina organized and led a grand political and scientific expedition to Span's Pacific empire between 1789 and 1794. In search of the fabled Northwest Passage, Malaspina sailed to Yakutat Bay at 60 degrees north latitude in 1791. The following year, on Malaspina’s order, Galiano, in the Sutil, led a detachment into the Strait of Juan de Fuca and circumnavigated Vancouver Island. Cutter’s lively account of these adventures is rich with detail. The text is enhanced by the inclusion of 51 illustrations.

Kendrick’s book, a translation of a manuscript from the naval archives in Madrid, vividly augments Cutter’s work. Kendrick argues convincingly that this document is a better record of Galiano’s
exploration in the vicinity of Vancouver Island than the official account published in 1802 and translated into English in 1930. The volume includes maps of the voyage plus 13 drawings by José Cardero, an artist assigned to the expedition.

Both of these books contain drawings of Nüüet Gaona (Neah Bay), where for four months in 1792 the Spanish built a settlement in Makah Indian territory, and both offer first-hand observations about Northwest Indian people and their leaders, including the renowned Maquinna. These two works deserve an appreciative modern audience—a far wider one than the small group of contemporaries who recognized the considerable accomplishments of Malaspina and Alcalá Galiano.

Garry Schalliol is the Washington State Historical Society's coordinator of the 1992 International Maritime Bicentennial, a joint program of the governments and people of British Columbia, Oregon, and Washington.

This Emigrating Company:
The 1844 Oregon Trail Journal of Jacob Hammer.

The Wagon Trains of '44:
A Comparative View of the Individual Caravans in the Emigration of 1844 to Oregon.
Reviewed by Carol Hammond.

Jacob Hammer, a Quaker, was a member of the Stephens-Murphy-Townsend party which traveled by wagon to Oregon in 1844. His recently discovered diary provides the only contemporary account of one of the earliest canovans to make the trip and it documents a wagon train that broke new ground in Overland Trail history. It was the first train to depart from Council Bluffs, rather than Independence or St. Joseph, Missouri, and it was the first to take the route along the north side of the Platte River.

Until the Hammer diary came to light the only narrative source about this train was the account of Moses Shellenberger, who was 17 in 1844 and wrote his recollections almost 40 years later. Written for Hammer's family, the diary was apparently sent to them in Indiana some time after Hammer's arrival in Oregon. There is no evidence that it was ever published or read outside the family. Hammer was 28 years old when he and his wife Hannah, 24, left for Oregon on a six-month journey.

The Hammer diary is composed of just 12 sheets of paper. Even though the document itself seems brief, the topics covered are wide-ranging. Readers will find information on plants and animals, landmarks and daily mileage, plus details about Indians and a number of conversations. Some inner feelings are here as well. Jacob recorded his most vivid dreams—he believed they symbolically foretold events. This is a man’s diary and relates those aspects of the trip that were exclusively within the realm of men. One of these is the organization and governance of the train, and another is about making travel decisions. He relates many instances of dissent, dispute, disharmony, and democracy gone awry. What is absent from this account is any mention at all of family life or domestic concerns. Curiously, Hammer writes as if he was traveling as a single man when, in fact, his wife, an infant and two other small children were with him.

Thomas Rumer's other book also focuses on 1844, a significant year in the history of emigration to the Far West. That year saw four separate trains follow the Overland Trail. Some of the pioneers on the 1844 trip were writers who left important records, including those of James Clyman, a fur trapper and mountain man, and 21-year-old John Minto, a coal miner from Newcastle-on-Tyne. Some of the experiences highlighted in this study show additional reasons why the 1844 emigration was distinctive. This was one of the wettest years recorded by any of the overlanders. Developing a workable form of decision-making and governance was also a serious problem for all but one of the trains. Leaders were voted in and later voted out; rules were difficult to establish and enforce, and the travelers acted more as individual entities than cohesive groups.

Rumer has based his study on some 20 testimonials. Surviving narratives include diaries and journals, family letters, recollections and reminiscences, accounts given at the Oregon Pioneer Association reunions and others printed in various publications, as well as oral history interviews conducted by H. H. Bancroft and his assistants in the 1870s. These sources are heavily quoted in the text. Placed in context by Rumer, they tell the story in the actual words of the travelers. He has also brought together accounts by different writers of the same event, compared their reports, and mapped the progress of the groups as they traveled, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Rumer shows an impressive grasp of the various narratives and the places, events and circumstances to which they relate.

Carol Hammond is head of Research and Information Access Services in the library at Arizona State University West and a member of the Oregon-California Trails Association.

Address all review copies and related communications to: Robert C. Carriker, Department of History, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA 99258.
CORRESPONDENCE

More on Scurvy
I thoroughly enjoyed the Spring 1992 issue of COLUMBIA. I especially was interested in the article on scurvy by Jacqueline Williams. I might add one anecdote. In 1791, when the Columbia arrived on the Northwest Coast on her second voyage, ten of the sailors were in “the last stage of scurvy,” according to John Boit, Jr., the fifth officer. “We buried several of our sick, up to the Hips in the earth, & let them remain for hours in that situation... found this method of great service.”

I have one small nit-pick concerning the article: Robert Haswell was second officer of the Lady Washington, not the Columbia, in 1788 in Tillamook Bay when he wrote of the dire condition of the crew. Haswell later rejoined the Columbia under Robert Gray and was Gray’s chief mate on the second voyage.

J. Richard Nokes
Tigard, Oregon

NDE Surprise
I have been interested in Near Death Experience for many years. Imagine my surprise when Donald Wodjenski of the Coupeville Museum and Historical Society gave me a copy of the article in the Spring 1992 issue of COLUMBIA with the story of John Slocum and his experience of nearly a century before the syndrome was even described by doctors.

This is an innovative article. It was a pleasure to read.

Mary Amo
Greenbank

Facts are Facts
Glen Lindemau’s article “Golden Harvest” in your Summer 1992 issue is interesting, but facts are facts, even when written for a non-technical audience. And if the author works for Washington State University Press and lives in the Palouse, he ought to check his facts more carefully: 1) Summer fallow has not been made obsolete by chemicals—it is an important part of crop rotation in the Palouse, both to conserve moisture and to meet government farm program rules; and 2) a “rubber-wheeled” tractor would be amazing to behold—rubber tires are in use these days.

Your frequent coverage of Eastern Washington’s history is much appreciated.

Kay Reiber
Twisp

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

A Century on Prospect Street

Wait for a Pilot

Daily Bread

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