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The Museum Support Services staff includes full-time and part-time security officers, in-house and contracted custodial staff, special event coordinators, and our iconic volunteer groundskeeper, Jack Falk. The team has the pleasure of interacting with and helping people on a daily basis. The level of our customer service is quantified with top marks in a survey of cultural venues across the country for customer satisfaction, friendliness, and building cleanliness. Customer service doesn’t end with our visitors, either.

Museum Support Services staff members work closely with every department in the organization to offer additional sets of eyes, ears, and hands as needed. We assist with civic engagement programs, internal meetings, exhibition installations and take-downs, educational and group tours, building maintenance tasks, safety inspections, deliveries, and much more. One or more of us is always first to arrive in the morning and the last to leave at day’s end.

The work we perform is rewarded by the smiles of our visiting students, a heartfelt thank-you from a bride and groom after a rental event, and the occasional hug from a person who appreciated the extra effort. Some visitors new to museums have asked our staff, “Isn’t working at a museum boring and monotonous?” “Not here,” we tell them. Each year we experience thousands of children on school tour explorations, hundreds of after-hours private events ranging from small corporate meetings to large weddings and receptions with dinner, dancing, and drinks. And after all the fun is through, we make sure the building is turned back into a museum for the next day.

Intermingled with school tours and private events are our own civic and annual events. We coordinate the access and logistics for the annual Model Train and Native Arts festivals. In 2006 the History Museum celebrated its 10-year anniversary. The Museum Support Services staff was vital to the event’s success, working behind the scenes to ensure that everything was in place for the young and not-so-young to have an engaging, entertaining, and fun experience. Even though we are often challenged with difficult situations, the quality and consistency of our response is its own reward.

As manager of Museum Support Services, I meet interesting and occasionally famous people, find creative solutions to problems, and have the pleasure of supervising a capable and dedicated staff.

—Mark Sylvester, Head of Museum Support Services
The Gender Gap: Looking Beyond the Sound Bite

By Stephanie Coontz

The late historian Alan Dawley once remarked that when Americans say “That’s history,” they usually mean “you can forget about it.” This lack of historical perspective is a huge source of both personal and political confusion in the United States. We live today in a sound-bite society that creates what media critic Jeffrey Scheuer calls “the politics of soundbites.” Americans are constantly barraged by out-of-context factoids and breathless reports about short-term fluctuations that supposedly reveal new trends—or abrupt reversals of old trends.

You can get whiplash just trying to stay on top of the pronouncements. “Crime’s up,” “now it’s down,” “now it’s up” — all in comparison to one or two years ago, with no attention to how the figures of two years ago compare with, say, the previous 20. One day the issue dominating the airwaves is the fear that feminism has gone too far: “Women are taking over the ranks of higher education. What is the future of men?” The next day, it’s that feminism is dead: “No, wait, it’s okay, because educated women are opting out as soon as they get those big careers to go back to full-time motherhood.”

Even respectable academics can’t always resist making ahistorical claims in the endless competition to be heard over the dueling sound bites. And this is one of the perils of taking history and social science research public. A feminist researcher claimed in 1988 that the feminization of poverty was proceeding so rapidly that all the poor in America would be women and children by the end of the century. It was such a successful sound bite that the feminization of poverty is now an article of faith for many people, when in fact the most striking historical trend of the 1980s was the relative increase in male poverty. The ratio of women’s poverty rates to men’s increased between 1950 and 1960, but since 1980 poverty has been feminized, at least for women of working age, as women have gained more ability to support themselves and men have lost access to “family wage” jobs.

Or take the call I received from a women’s foundation about their new campaign to fight the “epidemic of domestic violence.”

Now of course I believe domestic violence is a serious and widespread social problem—much more so than is recognized by people who want to promote marriage as a solution to problems of America’s children—but if we’re going to call it an epidemic, when did it start, and during what periods were women comparatively safer from such violence?

It’s hard to call people to account for making such claims in a society where so many political leaders, professional pundits, and media producers live from moment to moment. In fact, the preoccupation with immediacy has become so great that hardly anyone says “that’s history” any more. Now the catch phrase is “that’s SO last month.” What does a poor historian have to offer, when our data deals with decades and even centuries? Quite a lot. I have come to believe as I have worked with the Council on Contemporary Families (CCF) to bring historical and sociological perspective to current debates over family change.

Historians are now almost the sole keepers of the institutional memory that allows people to evaluate the claims of pundits and ideologues that something is new or unprecedented—or alternatively, that some institution or behavior has existed unchanged through the ages and therefore can’t be tampered with. We perform a vital public service when we help Americans discard the ahistorical assumptions that deform many contemporary debates. And far from compromising our integrity as researchers by engaging in these discussions, I believe that it actually makes us better historians, more effective teachers, and more complex thinkers.

So I want to talk about how applying historical perspective helps us better understand the current role and status of women, and how in turn engaging with such contemporary issues can change some of the ways we think and write about history.

I do not subscribe to the old saw that “those who don’t understand history are doomed to repeat it”—in fact, I think that’s an absolutely incoherent, ahistorical idea. But I do believe that people who don’t understand history are doomed to believe they can repeat it. So they are unlikely to be able to identify the places where we have the best possibility of moving forward.

Historical perspective is a key component of what Daniel Goleman has called “emotional intelligence”: the ability to read people and events correctly, to handle relationships smoothly, and to fend off “emotional hijacking” by our own inner impulses.
Even though on average modern-day working dads spend more time with their kids than dads of half a century ago, they often experience nostalgia for a time when life moved at a less hectic pace.

Historical perspective enables us to read social change more accurately so that we are not thrown either into blind panic or false hope by the short-term fluctuations and variations we encounter. And it is a powerful defense against ideological hijacking by people who try to use our fears, hopes, and impulses to divert us from reasoned discussion of our options. Let me start with an example of how historical perspective can help people at the personal level. I have come to believe that history can be as useful as therapy in helping people get beyond the paralyzing guilt, blame, self-pity, and self-righteousness that deform so many discussions of both interpersonal and social issues today. I find that I am a better parent and partner when I apply my understanding of the evolution of age and gender tensions to my relationship with my spouse or my son. And that's not just because I'm a history geek. It works for other people as well.

Psychologist John Snarey has compared men who became effective fathers to those who did not. He found—contrary to the “damaged child” school of thought—that many men were able to overcome the legacy of very poor paternal role models and painful childhoods. What separated the men who became effective child-rearing fathers from those who did not is that the successful fathers "placed their own fathers' shortcomings in context and thus were able to take extenuating circumstances into account." By “transforming their anger with their own fathers into a sense of sadness for and understanding of the conditions under which their own fathers had functioned,” these men were able to use the kind of parenting they wished they had had as a model for the parenting they offered their own children. That’s doing history.

But often people aren’t able to clearly identify how to get where they wish to go from where they are. And when that happens, they often experience their discontent with what they have as a sense of loss. The more I have gotten involved in interacting with the public about discussions of family life, the more I’ve learned to treat people’s nostalgia, however misplaced, with respect. Gunnar Myrdal once wrote that “ignorance is never random.” I have come to think that nostalgia is never random either.

I’ve spent a lot of my career trying to puncture people’s myths about a Golden Age of family life in the past, and I still think that’s important. But what I once saw as mindless illusions about the past now strike me, more sympathetically, as poorly articulated hopes for the future. People use nostalgia for the past as a way of expressing discontent or anxiety about their current lives and communicating their desire to live a different way in the future. Nostalgia for the past is a form of wishful thinking about the future. When we understand that, we can explain history much more effectively, with less risk of sounding like know-it-all academics who are out of touch with real people’s hopes and fears.

Recently, for instance, I have gotten a lot of press calls about the instant best seller, The Dangerous Book for Boys, which harkens back to an era when dads spent a lot of time with their kids, teaching them useful things to know. Ten years ago, I probably would have snorted, pointing out that this might have been an appropriate nostalgia among men in, say, the 1870s, when fathers actually were losing their ability to pass on useful skills to their sons. But it rings a little hollow when we realize that modern dads, far from being more disconnected from their kids than 50 years ago, are doing more things with them.

In fact, according to a study by Suzanne Bianchi, John Robinson, and Melissa Milkie, fathers more than doubled the time
they spent with children between 1965 and 2000, with each generation of dads doing more than the last. And these dads aren’t just making up for moms’ increased time away at work: Married mothers increased their time in child care and interaction with kids by 21 percent in the same period, even though they increased their work hours even more. So what’s this nostalgia about? I believe it’s a measure of what parents WANT, not what they used to have. As parenting expectations have risen—as they’ve had to squeeze more hours into the day and more tasks into each hour—parents are feeling stressed. Their nostalgia is a legitimate critique of the kinds of burdens we place on working families, and a plea for respite. They want to have time to spend with their families without multi-tasking. We should not humiliate them for romanticizing the past but gently lead them to that understanding.

Once I began to think less judgmentally about these issues, I could explain history more effectively to the public and to my students, and I found myself thinking about history in a different, more compassionate way. We know, for example, that there are still important gender inequities in American society and that men have some real advantages compared to women of the same class. But when you actually talk with men and women struggling with work-family issues in an economy where family wage jobs are disappearing for the bottom half of workers; when you look at the harsh demands placed on boys, who have no socially acceptable equivalent of the female label “tomboy” when they think or act outside the masculine box; when you see the men who are not bumping into a glass ceiling because they are stuck doing the dirty, dangerous jobs in the basement and boiler room—you get a different take on notions like “male privilege,” or what R. W. Connell calls “the patriarchal dividend.”

I don’t know many men who look forward each month to receiving their patriarchal dividend and anticipating how they’ll spend it. For a lot of working-class men, the promised dividend is only on paper, because the stock is now worthless. And very few working-class men experience their lives as privileged. In discarding those kinds of labels, I have found that I usually can convince a white man that he DOES HAVE a historically constructed leverage against women and racial/ethnic minorities.

The other side of romanticizing the past, of course, is underestimating how far we have come. So while I’ll come back to how my work in the public arena has changed the way I think about history, first I want to give you an example of how the Council on Contemporary Families has been able to mobilize the historical perspective and sociological insights of its members to begin redirecting the discussion of current trends in women’s roles and reframing the issue of whether the women’s movement has failed or the gender revolution is over.

You’ve probably heard the stories about how a “post-feminist” generation of wives and mothers has “opted out” of the workforce. These stories are based on a few kernels of real data. Between 1993 and 2000, labor force participation did fall slightly for highly-educated wives. Between 1998 and 2000, the labor force participation of women with babies under one year of age dropped for the first time in more than 30 years, falling from 59 percent to 55 percent. Then, between 2000 and 2004, the labor force participation of mothers with preschoolers also fell, from 65 to 64 percent. The Instant Conventional Wisdom was that educated women were turning their backs on the feminist goals of their mothers or grandmothers and opting out of careers in order to spend more time being moms.

This is a place where a lot of people without historical perspective were hijacked by their hopes or fears. Anti-feminists jumped on the news accounts with glee, happily announcing the arrival of a “post-feminist” generation that had rejected the “excesses” of the women’s movement. On the flip side, many feminists were totally dismayed. The Feminine Mistake, by Leslie Bennetts, came out in 2007—to massive publicity—warning that women were jeopardizing the gains of the 1960s and 1970s by opting out of paid employment. Get to Work was the title and injunction of another book by feminist economist Linda Hirshman, published in 2006.

But a little historical perspective could have nipped much of the glee and angst in the bud. For one thing, those three different developments were the result of DIFFERENT forces acting on different sectors of the population. For another, they all look totally different in long-range perspective. And that is what

The 2008 Curtiss Hill Lecture

This essay by Stephanie Coontz was last year’s Curtiss Hill Lecture. The Washington State Historical Society’s next annual membership meeting features the 12th annual Curtiss Hill lecture, presented this year by historian Doris Pieroth. The meeting starts with a noon luncheon on Saturday, June 21, 2008, at the Washington State History Museum. Pieroth’s talk, entitled, “A Diamond in the Rough Meets Lady Bountiful,” is the story of Mary Arkwright Hutton, the Ladies’ Benevolent Society, and the creation of Hutton Settlement in Spokane.

Pieroth has had two successful careers. She taught physical education at the University of Washington until the department was abolished in 1980. By then she had earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington and embarked on her second career. Pieroth works as an independent historian—writing, lecturing, and acting as a consultant for museum exhibits and publications. She served on the Historical Society’s board of directors from 1989 to 1998 and is author of Seattle’s Women Teachers of the Interwar Years: Shapers of a Livable City and Their Day in the Sun: Women of the 1932 Olympics.

To make reservations for the annual meeting, please call 253/798-5894.
we sought to show with a series of briefing papers prepared by researchers associated with the CCF.

Six years, point out researchers David Cotter, Paula England, and Joan Hermes, is far too short a time period to tell us anything about the big picture. In 1960 only 19 percent of married mothers with preschool children were in the labor force. As late as 1970, only 30 percent of such mothers had been employed in the last year. But then there were huge increases. The figure rose from 30 percent in 1970 to 46 percent in 1980, and to 60 percent by 1990. In other words, the employment of mothers of preschoolers tripled in just 30 years. Any historian—or mathematically literate person, for that matter—could have predicted that such a rapid pace of change would have to go on longer than it did. But then there were huge increases. The percentage was back up to 65 percent by the last year. But then there were huge increases. The percentage was back up to 65 percent by the last year.

Labor force participation for highly-educated women did drop from 1993 to 2000. Economist Heather Boushey suggests that this was largely because of the hike in income: gains for highly-educated workers in this period. (The top 5 percent of households saw their after-tax income rise by 52 percent during the 1990s). Those gains made it unnecessary, or impossible, for both partners to work the long hours that are now standard in high-powered careers. Indeed, other research suggests that for wives, husbands’ work hours are a stronger predictor of dropping out of work than either their income or the fact of having a child.

As for the dip in the labor force participation of mothers with children under one year of age between 1998 and 2000, this could have been the same phenomena, or it might have been a result of the fact that women have made enough gains in the workforce that some of them can individually negotiate the kind of sensible parental leaves that are routinely given to ALL working moms in other advanced industrial societies.

Between 2000 and 2004, the labor force participation of all mothers with children under 5 did drop slightly, from 65 to 64 percent. But this time there was a recession going on, and one where, for the first time in 20 years, women were hit harder than men. All women, mothers and non-mothers, regardless of their educational level saw a drop in their labor force participation. But the percentage was back up to 65 percent by 2006. In our present political and social environment, we may have near our upper limit of just how much moms can work. America's refusal to regulate work hours and our inadequate family-leave policies may be shutting many mothers out or pushing them out of the workforce. But that's a very different from women "opting" out.

Here's another interesting difference between the "traditional" breadwinner families we imagine and today's breadwinner families: the women most likely to become stay-at-home moms today are the ones whose husbands can least afford to support a family. Women whose husbands' earnings are in the bottom 25 percent are the only sector of the population where full-time mothers outnumber those who combine paid work with parenting. A whopping 52 percent of these wives are out of the paid labor force, compared with only 20 percent of wives whose husbands' earnings are in the middle range. Historical changes have transformed the cost-benefit dynamics of stay-at-home parenting. Most of these low-income women stay out of the labor force not because they can afford to stay home but because they can't afford to go to work.

Even in families where the husbands are in the top 5 percent—men who earn more than $120,000 a year—60 percent of moms work outside the homes. And despite the slight dip in the late 1990s, highly educated women are more likely to combine work with motherhood than less-educated women. This is even truer today than it was in 1980, at the height of the feminist movement. Yes, women at all income and education levels are still more likely than men to drop out of work for motherhood. But in historical perspective, the important thing is that they are LESS likely to do so than in the past. The real story is that the likelihood that a woman will leave her job because of her children is half what it was in 1984.

Contrary to the myth that this has produced a "stalled revolution" in housework, with more women doing a "second shift," what really seems to have been going on is a process that sociologists call "lagged adaptation." Yes, it took men a while to begin to step up to the plate in housework and childcare (which is probably partly of the reason divorce rates soared in the late 1970s and early 1980s). And no, they still don't do as much as women. But the longer a man's wife works, the more housework he does, and each cohort is doing more than the last, researchers Molly Lang and Barbara Risman point out in another briefing paper for the CCF.

When the Work & Families Institute compared the workday hours that Gen-X and Boomer fathers spend caring for and doing things with their children in 2002, they found that Gen-X fathers were spending significantly more time with their children, an average of 3.4 hours per workday versus an average of 2.2 hours for Boomers—four times more than the last. Researchers Molly Lang and Barbara Risman point out in another briefing paper for the CCF.

In housework too, the tendency has been toward convergence, despite some holdovers from the past. Research by Robinson and Godbey shows that by 1985 men were spending more than four hours per week doing housework and child care than in 1965. Between 1985 and 2000 fathers continued to increase their time doing housework and childcare, while mothers' time doing housework continued to decrease. And when you take into account the fact that on average wives still work fewer paid hours than husbands do, there is actual parity in the amount of hours men and women work, and there has been for some time.

Now I am acutely aware that there have been trade-offs and contradictory trends associated with the gradual equalization of gender roles in marriage. But again, historical perspective can help us explain to people that this is the way social change always occurs: It's not the "fault" or the "failure" of the women's movement. Gains in one area are often accompanied by losses in another, especially in revolutions that democratize political, legal,
and social processes without equalizing economic differentials. So one way that middle-class couples are spending more time with their kids and organizing their chores more fairly is by hiring the labor of low-income women; and unfortunately, the ability of many dual-earner families to flourish rests on the availability of such low-wage workers. Similarly, one reason marriages are more egalitarian is that increasingly, marriage is, in sociologist Frank Furstenberg's words, a "luxury good" for educated and stable workers.

The legal and cultural democratization of family life, like all democratic revolutions, has been messy. The right to divorce has been a boon for many women. In every state that adopted no-fault divorce, according to economists Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, the next five years saw a 20 percent decline in the suicide rate of wives, and an even bigger drop in the rate at which women murdered their husbands. Many women and children have escaped destructive marriages. In other cases, the ability of a wife to seek a divorce has increased her leverage inside marriage. But easy divorce decreases the bargaining power of the person who wants or needs the marriage most, which has led to bad outcomes for many female homemakers.

Similarly, the abolition of illegitimacy laws has been a world-historic gain, ending centuries of incredibly harsh injustice. But it has also eroded the pressure on a man to marry a girlfriend if she gets pregnant, and may have encouraged some deprived young women to underestimate the challenges and over-estimate the rewards of going it alone.

The more I look at the contradictions, ambivalences, and ambiguities of contemporary families, the more conscious I am of looking at the trade-offs of societal change in history as well—the losses that come in one area with the gains in another, and the future potential for change that sometimes lies in seeming setbacks. What Hegel and Marx pointed out about ideas and social formations is also true of families: the same processes that are essential to maintain a particular relationship or institution simultaneously create oppositions that eventually transform, undermine, or even destroy it. For better and for worse.

Applying my studies of family history to contemporary family issues has helped me think in a different way than I used to about the continuing inequities that women face and how to conceptualize them in relation to the past—the old question of the continuity of women's subordination. For example, wage discrimination against women still exists, but it operates through different mechanisms than it did in the past. It seems to be triggered more by parenthood than by gender per se. Childless women earn 97 percent of what men make. The big wage gap today is between mothers and other workers.

In part, of course, this is a heritage of separate and unequal conceptions of gender, making mothers more likely to quit or downgrade their work than fathers, who tend to increase their work hours after the birth of a child. So I suppose we could file this under continuity. But the mechanism through which such inequality is reproduced is different from when women worked alongside men doing equal work but had no control over the property they helped accumulate; and it's also different from when women were hired for segregated jobs with clearly fixed pay differentials, or could be fired once they married or had kids.

Or take the example of the second shift and the pretty convincing evidence that men and women have parity in terms of total work hours. You're not going to convince many people that it's unfair for a man who works 42 hours on the job each week to do the same amount of household labor as a wife who works only 30 hours outside the home. (And in passing, by the way, here is one place where full-time homemakers have benefited even more than working women from the changes in gender roles: their husbands are doing more housework even though the women aren't doing more paid work.) What many people fail to notice when they simply celebrate this fact is that what is equitable inside a happy marriage doesn't translate into equal opportunity to go it alone in the case of divorce. But again, the disadvantages women face today are reproduced and experienced in a qualitatively different way than they were in the past, and I think it has deepened my understanding of men's and women's history to see in practice how processes that disadvantage women in the larger economic arena can be experienced as equity—or even as male altruism and self-sacrifice—within the individual family.

So the more I study the history of marriage and gender relations, the more convinced I am that we need to be wary of overarching generalizations about gender inequalities that don't take these complexities and qualitative changes into account.
Many women's historians have faulted studies such as Laslett's massive "history" of illegitimacy, which treated out-of-wedlock births as though they were a single "thing" that could be studied independently of their historical context and cultural meanings. But we sometimes fall into the same trap when we talk about the subordination of women or the privileges of men, as if these are unitary single things that can be measured and compared from one society to the next or even seen as comparable from one social group to the next.

I have long been bothered by the overuse of the word patriarchy—or even worse, The Patriarchy. I think this term conceals important variations in the form, content, and consequences of male dominance, as well as the possibilities for resistance. I would reserve the term patriarchy to describe a family system in which male control over property intersects with the household head's control over the labor of women and children, a situation that historically produced much closer congruence in forms of political, economic, and interpersonal domination than prevails in today's complex and fluid tangle of power relations and gender norms. The situation is much more complicated today, and I have become increasingly dissatisfied with the tools at my disposal for thinking about gender inequities and power differentials.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that racial hierarchies, once imposed primarily through coercion, now rest on "a complex system of compromises, legitimating ideologies..., political rules, and bureaucratic regulations." The result, they say, is a "messy racial hegemony" marked by contradictory, conflicted, and ambiguous relationships. The concept of a "messy" hegemony might also be taken to apply to changing gender relations, both in society at large and within individual families. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan use the term "scattered hegemonies" in a book by that name.

But I'm not even sure that the notion of hegemony, however we modify it, does justice to the complexity of what's happening today. The legal and political bases for male domination over women are almost completely gone. Some institutions perpetuate historical male advantages and female disadvantages through seemingly neutral mechanisms that simultaneously disadvantage many working-class men and privilege a few women. A sense of male entitlement—or female non-entitlement—still exists among many men (and women), but it sometimes intersects and sometimes works at cross-purposes with many other socially-constructed identities, interests, and desires, producing outcomes very hard to analyze primarily in terms of male privilege or female subordination.

So I've come to think that we may need to make more fine-grained distinctions between types of male-female inequalities and power differentials, such as domestic violence researchers are now making between common couple violence and intimate terrorism. Perhaps we should talk about institutionalized sexism to explain some kinds of processes and structures that reproduce male-female inequality even though they are seemingly gender neutral, and use the term de-institutionalized sexism to describe the misogyny of some lower-class men whose historic routes to male identity and power have been blocked.

There are more questions than answers here, but I do think we need to make more of an effort to unpack and disaggregate types of gender inequality—for example, making distinctions between structures and beliefs that penalize caregivers, ones that penalize women, and ones that actually aid in the exploitation of men, such as the internalized notion of being the primary breadwinner and being too macho to protest unsafe working conditions. I'd also like to see us pay more attention to the sources of male pain and male altruism instead of letting those topics be claimed by those in the Fathers' Rights movement who try to hijack men's understandable sense of confusion or loss and channel it into rage.

And my final question is even more tentative, which is probably good because it is bound to be much more controversial. I wonder if it is time to back off from routinely foregrounding gender in our historical work, even when we are studying women. It is one thing if we use the gender lens as a corrective to historical accounts that focus on class, race, religion, ethnicity, or family types and don't consider how the experience and identity in all these groups varies by gender. But as gender recedes in importance as a direct legal and political mechanism for organizing social inequality, I worry that we may have moved too far away from class dynamics, or at least adopted a gender lens that filters out some experiences and social forces even as it brings others into focus.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham warns that race language tends to cloak other organizing principles such as gender and class while it also "blur[s] and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay" with these other social relations. I worry that gender language is now blurring other organizing principles, most notably that of class, in the same way.

Of course we can never go back to a mechanistic approach to class that ignores the way that race, gender, national identity, and sexuality create modes of cooperation and coercion that structure the development and dynamics of class. But we do need to think about multiple, overlapping, competing, and sometimes offsetting forms of inequality, and I am not sure that the gender lens always does that. However, looking at history through the lens of gender is extremely useful in countering one-sided generalizations about historical change. And this is where the work being done by the Washington State Historical Society and the Women's History Consortium comes into play. Their focus on women's history will help the public appreciate the past without romanticizing it and recognize how far women have come without allowing anyone to pretend there isn't more to do.

Stephanie Coontz teaches History and Family Studies at The Evergreen State College in Olympia and is director of Research and Public Education for the Chicago-based Council on Contemporary Families. Her most recent books are Marriage, A History: How Love Conquered Marriage and American Families: A Multicultural Reader.
Seattle’s Paramount Theatre

“SHOW DIVINE AT NINTH & PINE”

Despite a close encounter with a wrecking ball, the Paramount Theatre received a new lease on life. Built 80 years ago, it was restored to its former splendor in the 1990s and is now one of Seattle’s most beloved entertainment venues.
FOR 80 YEARS WASHINGTON residents and visitors have been entertained at Seattle's magnificent Paramount Theatre. Millions have delighted in the theater's architectural majesty, viewed countless films, and enjoyed performers from all corners of the globe. Yet the story of the Paramount itself offers drama as compelling as any presented on its stage or screen.

During the “Roaring Twenties,” particularly before the first “talkies” were invented in 1927, vaudeville and silent movies were the dominant form of national and local entertainment. Seattle alone had over 50 movie palaces, the finest grouped together on Second Avenue. To achieve the broadest possible distribution of its films, Hollywood-based Paramount Pictures constructed a grand movie palace in practically every major city in the country. Many of these, including the one in Seattle, were erected between 1926 and 1928.

Led by its president, Hungarian-born movie magnate Adolph Zukor, Paramount Pictures invested the nearly $3 million required for the Seattle theater’s construction. Paramount hired Cornelius W. and George L. Rapp, brothers who owned a Chicago-based architectural firm that built theaters around the country, to design the building. Scottish-born Seattle resident Benjamin Marcus “Uncle Benny” Priteca, America’s most celebrated architect of movie palaces in the 1920s, designed the building’s adjacent apartments and office suites.

The Rapp brothers began with a substantial handicap: the land for the new theater was situated on Ninth Avenue, half a mile from the center of Seattle’s theater district, and the land was no more than a ravine with a creek flowing toward Lake Union. After filling in the gulch, Paramount Pictures compensated for its new theater’s then-remote location by building the largest, most spectacular, most opulent movie palace Seattle had ever seen. The Seattle Times enthusiastically heralded the Seattle Theatre’s opening day on March 1, 1928:

ALL SEATTLE WILL BE THERE! Show divine at 9th and Pine... an acre of seats in a palace of splendor. It’s yours... you’ll love it.... Everybody’s welcome, everybody’s wanted.... Every Washingtonian will be proud of its stately magnificence, its gorgeous decorations, its spacious foyers, its wide aisles, its commodious seats, its symphony of lights. See the Mammoth Show! In all the World no place like this!

Eager customers responded on opening night, lining up eight abreast outside. After paying the 50-cent admission fee, they entered the grand lobby. There patrons encountered a lavish interior decorated in the Beaux Arts style. They were awed by the four-tiered lobby, French baroque plaster moldings, gold leaf-encrusted wall medallions, rich colors, beaded chandeliers, and lacy ironwork. Their feet sank into hand-loomed French carpeting as they walked past walls adorned with delicate tapestries and original paintings in gilded frames. Heavy, expensive draperies hung at the windows, and hand-carved furniture upholstered in the finest fabrics lined the first-floor lobby. Before entering the auditorium, visitors were entertained by the rare gold and ivory Knabe Ampico grand player piano in the lounge area just above the foyer.

Patrons were escorted to their places in the nearly 4,000-seat auditorium by what the program booklet praised as an “alert, tactful, well-trained” corps of ushers who provided “courteous, unostentatious service.” The booklet also lauded the theater itself with unrestrained hyperbole:

Down through the ages it has come—man’s most divine heritage, the spirit of artistry. Ever inspiring, breaking the ties that bind, it has plotted the course of the centuries, marking the years with monuments of faith and beauty. Born in the heart of the earth, tempered by the travail of time—out from the clay of the beginning, it burst from today in splendor and grandeur—a symbol of the world’s newest art—the Seattle Theatre....

The house lights dimmed, and the Seattle Grand Concert Orchestra began to play selections from Faust. Then the audience watched Memories, a silent

Fanfare and excitement greeted the new Seattle Theatre when it opened March 1, 1928. Two years later it became the Paramount Theatre.
This 1928 photo shows Ron Baggott and Don Moore, the new theater’s popular organ duo. They played the huge, custom-built, “thousand throttled” Wurlitzer.

film the program touted as a “technicolor novelty.” They viewed a newscast, then listened to Renaldo Baggott and Don Moore—“Ron and Don, The Organ Duo”—perform “brilliant organ interludes” from the giant “thousand throttled,” custom-built Wurlitzer, “an instrument of enchantment” that could simulate many orchestral instruments, “now reverberating in harmonious similitude many orchestral instruments, now reverberating in harmonious melody.” The Wurlitzer performance was followed by A Merry Widow Review, a nationally acclaimed stage show from the Paramount Theatre in New York City, accompanied by Jules Buffano and the Seattle Theatre Stage Band. The show featured “catchy songs, tantalizing melody, [and] snappy and graceful dance steps by a bevy of girls.”

Finally, the audience watched Feel My Pulse, a silent comedy about Prohibition rumrunners, accompanied by organ music. The movie featured the lovely and versatile Bebe Daniels playing opposite Richard Arlen and William Powell.

The program booklet explained that the stage show was made possible by an elaborate backstage area, which was equipped with “electric elevators, ample windows, and telephones,” and the “last word” in lighting and “advanced stage inventions and appliances” to produce “startling and beautiful stage effects, almost without limitation.” These effects could include clouds, stars, rainbows, and snow.

The booklet also assured customers, who typically invested four hours into a theater outing, that they could look forward each week to new entertainment: in a similar format, including stage shows and movies. The first few motion pictures would feature Lon Chaney, Joan Crawford, and Clara Bow.

The Seattle Theatre offered its first “talkie,” Varsity, in early December 1928, and patrons responded to the innovation with the same enthusiasm as the rest of the country. The movie industry produced almost no silent films after that time.

On March 14, 1930, the Seattle Theatre changed its name to the Paramount Theatre, reflecting its connection to the nationwide Paramount Theatre chain. Vaudeville acts seen at Seattle’s Paramount originated in New York and appeared at Paramount Theatres in many other cities.

Performances at the Paramount followed the format of opening night, offering several shows and movies daily. As the Depression deepened, however, a shrinking number of patrons could afford the ticket price. Beset with financial woes, the Paramount temporarily closed in June 1931.

Upon reopening October 29, 1932, the Paramount hired Gaylord B. Carter as its chief organist. Carter’s performances brought him national acclaim, aided in large part by the Paramount’s outstanding organ. It was the biggest and most impressive orchestra-unit organ built in 1928 and included an entire grand piano and drum set built into the side panels of the auditorium, together with hundreds of pipes, bells, chimes, whistles, and horns. It cost over $100,000 to install (it would cost over $1 million today)—a good investment considering that it was used daily for decades.

Those who could afford to attend performances at the Paramount in the 1930s reveled in the experience. One patron attended shows with her grandparents every New Year’s Eve, then went to a cafe on Capitol Hill for hot cocoa. The family dressed up for their annual outing, which she describes as a good cure for the bleakness of those days. “[I have] such warm and loving memories of the theater with my grandparents, who have been gone for a long time.”

Another customer tells of a Saturday in May 1935:

I was eleven, residing at our farm in Bellingham. My sister, Evelyn, 16, was a graduate from high school in June. In celebration, my parents, my sister, and I came to Seattle in our new 1935 Dodge to shop for her outfit. After a successful shopping spree at Frederick & Nelson and dinner at Ben Paris, a classy downtown...restaurant with saltwater tanks for fresh fish, we...
climaxed our celebration with a movie at the Paramount Theatre.

Sometime between 1935 and 1937, the Fox Evergreen Corporation purchased the Paramount and continued to present first-run, full-length films. Theatergoer Rosanne Nelson also recalls seeing serial stories that required her to return every Saturday morning for eight weeks. She paid only ten cents for admission, which entitled her to see full-length movies, cartoons, newreels, and vaudeville shows.

Live performances included singing groups with such charming names as "1,000 Pounds of Harmony," "The Three Musketeers," "The Eight Sirens of Syncopation," and "The High Hatters of Rhythm." Small bands, choruses, magicians, tumblers, jugglers, and comedians also appeared. More unusual acts involved Swedish bell ringers, an illusionist "burning a woman alive," horseshoe pitching, a lecture on the Gold Rush Days, one-legged bicyclists, a "Three Little Pigs" animal act, 30 trained cockatoos, "a big game archer explaining his picture," radio personality mimics, singers famous from radio performances, ventriloquists, clairvoyants, a burlesque mind reader, and contortionists. Dancers performed "eccentric" pieces, tap, soft shoe, and "acrobatic waltzes." The theater presented children and adult roller skaters, "Girls in Cellophane" (from Atlanta), aerialists, whistling choruses, clowns, and one-man circuses.

During one memorable week in April 1935, the Marx Brothers performed their stage version of A Night at the Opera, testing jokes on Seattle's audiences for possible use in the movie, which was released later that year. Tickets for the Marx Brothers show, presented three times a day, cost 25 to 55 cents. "It was the most delightful thing I ever saw," recalls Seattle resident Ben Emerson.

The Paramount presented vaudeville shows less frequently as the decade progressed. Patron Mary Bassetti reports that by 1937, customers did not know whether a live show would contribute to an "afternoon of glorious make-believe." She tells of a Saturday visit to the Paramount:

"The movies finished, the light came up, and [my pal Leona and I] started to gather our things for the long trolley ride back to West Seattle. Suddenly, the lights dimmed, a spotlight exploded center stage, and a flamboyant master of ceremonies announced a vaudeville show! Oh, delicious surprise! [We experienced] a moment of unmitigated joy to realize we didn't have to face reality quite yet. With jokes and giggles, we settled back into the plush seats to be transported by lively tap-dancing, glitzy satins, sappy songs, and high-flying Indian clubs—all dessert to our adolescent sensibilities.

Although the number of vaudeville performances diminished, the Paramount remained a popular destination for first-run movies. Among them was Spawn of the North, which won an Oscar for special effects in 1938. When the theater hosted the film's world premiere, John Barrymore, one of its stars, and his sister Ethel attended, making a live presentation from the stage.

Seattle resident Gordon Moody fondly reminisces about times spent with friends at the movies late in the Depression and during World War II:

"The favorite hangout of "The Three Musketeers" was the front row of the Paramount.... [On Saturdays] Hugo, Bobby, and I would sit all day with our feet up on the railings, watching movies continuously, our pockets full of five-cent candy bars. Those were wonderful times! Hugo Searsheim was later killed in his Navy fighter plane on Christmas Eve during the Korean War. He was 23. Bobby (Robert Joffrey, who established the renowned Joffrey Ballet) died [in 1988] in New York. He was 58. Me? Whenever I drive by the Paramount, I see us paying our ten cents and entering the theatre of dreams and wish, "Oh God, if only we could do it again...just for a day."

Another Seattleite tells of her grandparents' first date in 1943:

Walt Strawn, a young man from a small town in Oklahoma, was an MP stationed at Fort Lawton. Irene Lewis, from Brockton, Montana, was working for the Navy. After a chance meeting, he asked her on a date to see A Star is Born. She watched the movie, but paid more attention to the soldier next to her. Once the movie had ended, they went to the bus stop outside to wait for their respective rides home. Engrossed in conversation, bus after bus came and went, and they continued to talk. After a while, she looked at her watch and realized that they had missed all the buses, talking far past midnight. Instead of panicking, she sat in the shadow of the Paramount and talked with this soldier until the wee hours of the morning, when the buses started running again. She describes that evening as one of the best times in her life.

Patricia Scott recalls going to the theater to see Humphrey Bogart in To Have and Have Not on August 14, 1945. When the Japanese surrendered, the house manager stopped the movie to announce that World War II had ended. He distributed passes for everyone to see the show another time, and Scott
joined downtown workers and shoppers as they rejoiced in the streets outside.

By 1950 live performances at the Paramount were "something of a white elephant," according to Seattle actress and former child vaudeville performer Zoanne Leroy. However, she danced with the Barclay Girls there in 1951 as part of the celebration marking the launch of Seattle's KING-TV.

Seattle resident Kay Bartlett also recalls a live performance at the theater around 1950. She attended a piano concert along with many other local high school students. The performer was the brilliant young pianist William Kapell. Annoyed by teenagers who were talking amongst themselves, Kapell suddenly stood up, walked to the apron of the stage, and stared the students down. When the theater was silent, he told them, without the aid of a microphone, that he had spent a long time preparing for this concert and deserved a respectful audience. He remained there for a moment to let his words sink in, then returned to the piano and "played his heart out." The applause at the end of the concert was deafening. Bartlett has long forgotten what Kapell played that day, but she remembers his courage in confronting an audience that was not prepared to listen.


Couples flocked to the Paramount on dates during the 1950s. Nancy Dobrin, then a seventh grader, saw Picnic, starring Kim Novak and William Holden, at the Paramount on March 16, 1956. Dobrin had been asked out by a much older gentleman of 14. They held hands all during the movie and became childhood sweethearts, eventually marrying and raising a family.

In contrast, a young patron keenly remembers her adolescent angst in the Paramount ladies' room, where she discovered during a nervous first date that her slip had been showing all evening. That date, also the couple's last, ended with a handshake.

Another theatergoer spent hours getting ready for her date at the Paramount, realizing only as she took her seat that she still wore her house slippers. If her escort noticed, he never let on.

Unfortunately for the Paramount, the trend toward building suburban movie houses accelerated during the 1950s, and the theater's financial standing slipped. In an effort to attract more customers, Fox Evergreen leased the theater to the Stanley Warner Cinerama Corporation, which began showing "Cinerama" films on September 1, 1956. To accommodate three projection booths at the rear of the main floor, the Paramount removed 1,600 seats and installed a curved, extra-wide screen to show a 1950s version of an IMAX production. By January 1958 the theater had discarded the Cinerama format, perhaps because the wide screen tended to cut the movie into thirds, separated by shadows.

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The Paramount resumed showing traditional full-length films, although by 1960 they were mostly second-run. Nevertheless, the theater tried to retain its dignity, continuing to hire ushers (including 20-year-old Bruce Lee, who later became a martial arts motion picture star) and showing new releases whenever it could—notably Psycho and James Bond adventures. The Paramount closed for long periods in the 1960s, including a time in 1965 during which nine magnificent paintings, still in their original gilded frames, were stolen from the lobby. One Friday night in 1967 only 13 people came to see Gone with the Wind—a poignant demonstration of the theater's decline. However, the Paramount limped along as a movie house until 1971.

The Clise Corporation purchased the Paramount in 1971 and began working with Pine Street, Inc., a production company. Pine Street believed that the theater's acoustics would be perfect for rock, soul, and jazz concerts and
brought live music back to the venue, renaming it Paramount Northwest.

A Seattle resident remembers that point in the Paramount's history. "The first time I visited the Paramount was also the night of my first rock concert! I saw The Guess Who there in 1972. Later I bought the record album, The Guess Who Live at the Paramount, and I could see myself in the crowd shot!"

Prices for rock concerts were reasonable—Nina Brave paid $5.00 for her ticket to see Alice Cooper in 1970. Margaret Salvino paid only $3.50 for open seating to see Kiss on January 12, 1975, and still has her ticket stub.

The Paramount was a favorite destination for touring bands and rock fans, but they were hard on the theater. The balconies remained in surprisingly good condition, for they were rarely open. Carpets, chandeliers, draperies, and wall hangings sustained significant damage, as did the main floor seats.

“Our seats were in the last row on the main floor,” one patron recalls. “By the end of the show we were...dancing on the armrests. Imagine our thrill when no one made us get down.”

Paramount Northwest's owners failed to maintain the building, although employees loved their workplace and wanted to protect it. Fran Wiesien, who was employed at the Paramount in the 1970s, remembers tripping over a coworker one morning as she crossed the dark stage on an errand. He had slept there to guard the theater from burglars.

"He didn't get paid for this; it was just how we felt about the place. It was 'home'; it was what held us together as an integrated group [that] felt like family."

Although Paramount Northwest retained little of the theater's original luster, the National Park Service and the United States Department of the Interior recognized the building's architectural and historical significance, placing it on the National Register of Historic Places on October 9, 1974. A plaque attesting to this honor still hangs at the northwest corner of the façade.

In 1976 West Coast Theatres, Inc., began managing the Paramount and continued to offer live music, primarily geared toward Seattle's young people. The ongoing concert boom in Seattle benefited the theater's owners, but the building remained in disrepair. As Bruce Brown wrote in Argus Magazine in November 1977, "Electric guitars thunder while The Paramount fades."

In mid-1981 the Volotin Investment Company bought the Paramount for $1.4 million. The theater had become so shabby that Seattle Times reporter Don Duncan compared it to "a good woman forced to do menial labor for survival."

That first season featured eight acts, including Mitzi Gaynor, Tom Jones, Dionne Warwick, and Juliet Prowse. The theater received additional publicity later that month when producers of the Jessica Lange film "Frances" used the Paramount to re-create the 1936 premiere of "Come and Get It," starring Seattle native Frances Farmer. Farmer had worked at the Paramount in the early 1930s as an usherette before moving to Hollywood.

Gradually the Volotin Investment Company broadened the scope of the acts booked at the Paramount, offering many different kinds of music. The Beach Boys, the Grateful Dead, the Grand Ole Opry, Duke Ellington, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Frank Sinatra, Fleetwood Mac, Raffi, and Bette Midler all performed there. Comics included Bob Hope, Joan Rivers, George Carlin, Lily Tomlin, and Robin Williams. Patrons enjoyed such musicals as "South Pacific," "Singin' in the Rain," "Jesus Christ Superstar," "Les Miserables," and "Evita." The Krasnayarsh Siberian Dancers and The Rockettes performed, a poetry jam took place, Oprah Winfrey spoke, and Mr. Rogers made an appearance for his youthful fans. The Paramount even hosted a Star Trek Convention and had the distinction of being the initial stop on Madonna's first world tour in 1985, aptly named "The Virgin Tour."

A patron who attended that first concert reports: When Zappa played the Paramount in 1984, the theater was experiencing serious financial difficulties.

With visions of offering Las Vegas-type entertainment, the new owners, Norman Volotin and Eulysse Lewis, decided to brighten the Paramount's dreary appearance. They closed the theater in September 1981, repainting about 20 percent of the facility, cleaning the public areas, and installing bright red carpeting and a sound system.

When this work was completed, the community was invited to a free concert on October 11 sponsored by the theater's owners in partnership with the Seattle Arts Commission and the Music Performance Trust Fund. An organist played the Wurlitzer, and the Seattle Concert Band performed.

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A patron who attended that first concert reports:
My friend and I were aspiring dancers, and we went to the concert dressed as total Madonna wannabes. However, we discovered when we arrived that we were the only ones in costume. We were awarded backstage passes to all three shows. We got to meet the dancers and watch rehearsals. Two months later, Madonna broke all records—her show sold out at Radio City Music Hall and Madison Square Garden. The streets were literally clogged with thousands of Madonna impersonators, but we were the first and the only at the best theatre, the Paramount!

The Paramount was busy, but touring companies found its facilities inadequate. Despite the 1981 updates, the sound system and lighting remained deficient, and the dressing rooms were dingy. The theater lacked such simple amenities as an adequate number of restrooms, a functioning air-conditioning system, and access for disabled patrons. The dilapidated backstage area was too small for storage and had no elevator for transporting equipment to the stage. Maneuvering props and equipment to the stage was dangerous. Crews had to use the steep "kamikaze" ramp; heavy loads occasionally careened out of control, forcing crews to scatter. The tiny box office seated only two employees—far from adequate to handle throngs of theatergoers.

The theater slid into debt during the 1980s, making repairs impossible. The Volotin Company began selling off the Paramount’s assets. At one auction, for example, the company sold a significant amount of the theater’s furniture and equipment, as well as the Knabe Ampico player piano. Dick Schrum, an accomplished musician who had played the Wurlitzer organ for the Paramount in the 1960s, bought the piano. These fund-raising efforts did not solve the theater’s financial problems.

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Volotin therefore initiated a search for someone to buy the Paramount. When no buyer materialized, Volotin filed for bankruptcy protection in late 1987.

In early October 1990, a number of investors stepped forward, leaving Volotin with only a small interest in the Paramount. Despite the influx of cash, the theater continued to lose money. Nevertheless, performances at the theater continued. Edie Bean will never forget one night in 1991 when a performance of Bye Bye Birdie, starring Tommy Tune, was interrupted so that he could receive a Tony Award on the Paramount’s stage for his work as best musical director and choreographer for The Will Rogers Follies. Tune’s acceptance was televised live in New York via satellite.

Ida Cole, then a Microsoft vice-president, heard of the Paramount’s financial difficulties from her friend Chip Wilson. Deeply appreciative of the theater’s grandeur and concerned about its future, Cole established the nonprofit Seattle Landmark Association in 1992 to save, restore, and operate local historical theaters. In February 1993 she bought the Paramount for $9.6 million. The Landmark Association also arranged to lease the Moore Theatre, built in 1906.

Once Cole owned the Paramount, she and Wilson, a former promoter and producer, began planning a major overhaul of the facility. By July 1993 Cole had hired the international architectural firm of NBBJ to design the project and Sellen Construction of Seattle to implement it. She applied for the necessary
city permits and acquired adjoining property to accommodate an expansion of the stage and backstage areas.

Cole obtained $13 million in bank loans to help finance the restoration and asked local community leaders to become partners in the Paramount Defined Limited Partnership. Together the partners contributed another $15 million. The City of Seattle provided an additional $1.8 million as part of its Landmark Preservation Program.

The Paramount reopened on March 11, 1995, launching the new touring production of Miss Saigon. Customers were welcomed by the new facility in all its rehabilitated glory and celebrated the return of Broadway to the theater. In the autumn of 1997, after all the restoration was finished, the Paramount completed a $5 million installation of a fully convertible seating system. This unusual system allows the main floor's sloped seating to be tucked under a flat ballroom floor, providing space for a broader spectrum of performances and creating a suitable venue for large private parties and corporate events.

As a fitting tribute to the Paramount’s restored grandeur, the family of Dick Schrum agreed in 2001 to display the Knabe Ampico player piano in its original location in the lounge area just above the foyer. The family still owns the piano, but Ida Cole refurbished it and agreed to maintain it so long as it remains in the theater.

On Friday, December 20, 2002, Ida Cole transferred ownership of the Paramount Theatre to Seattle Theatre Group (STG), the new name for the Seattle Landmark Association. Cole told the Seattle Times that she had enjoyed restoring the building but wished to divest herself of the enormous responsibility of its ownership. As a parting gift, she personally reduced the mortgage on the building from $14.5 million to a more manageable $8.5 million, bringing the total amount of money she had invested in the Paramount to $30 million. In recognition of her outstanding contribution, the auditorium was officially named after her at the theater’s 75th anniversary celebration on March 1, 2003.

Today the Paramount Theatre is thriving. It hosts six performance series, focusing on Broadway, jazz, silent films, dance, family, and comedy, and continues to present concerts that appeal to every appetite. In appreciation of its splendor and diverse offerings, Seattle Weekly readers voted the Paramount “Best Mainstage Theatre” in both 2001 and 2002.

Since the Paramount reopened in March 1995, over 3 million people have attended some 1,600 “shows” divine at Ninth and Pine.” They continue to be uplifted by the majesty of the venue and awed by what they see onstage. As patron Betsy Gutting says, the marquee should read, “THE PARAMOUNT THEATRE: Where Dreams Sprout Wings… and Joy Takes Flight!”

Nena Pelton is a Seattle writer interested in American history and historic preservation. She chronicles stories of Seattle corporations, cultural institutions, and quirky landmarks.
Alvin Jewett Johnson, like his American counterparts, sought to bring geography into the home of the average American. Johnson was one of the three major American commercial atlas makers who published just after the Civil War. A latecomer to the map publishing business, he produced atlases from 1858 until his death in 1884, his son continuing the successful firm into the 1890s. Johnson's obituary noted that he had amassed a fortune of $1 million by the time he died.

Like his main rivals, Samuel Augustus Mitchell and Joseph W. Colton, Johnson also competed in the well-established European cartographic marketplace. Unlike world atlases produced by European mapmakers, however, those published by Americans highlighted maps of the United States. Often overlooked as major cartographic achievements today, the post-Civil War atlases merit due consideration. They give important clues about what the public considered to be most significant developments in western America at that time.

These mapmakers were attempting to document a rapidly changing landscape—lightly charted lands that were evolving first into territories and then into states. The new information revealed optimism, so much so that the changes they incorporated in their maps were sometimes real and sometimes merely envisioned. Johnson is the least well-known of the three American commercial cartographers. His surviving atlases (and some individual maps that have been cut from other atlases) must suffice to demonstrate his understanding of westward expan-

ABOVE: Figure 1. The 1862 edition of Johnson's New Military Map of the United States.
sion. Johnson's maps well illustrate his intention of bringing the American public the most up-to-date geographical information about the expanding United States.

Examination of Johnson's maps shows clearly that they grew out of an evolving American mapmaking tradition spawned by the printing of William Clark's map of the Lewis and Clark expedition. In 1814 vast quantities of new geographic information became available to the nation when Congress authorized the printing of Clark's monumental map. Literate, ordinary citizens of the day would not have owned a copy. Rather, it was thanks to the efforts of commercial mapmakers that this information seeped into the American consciousness.

Walter Ristow, the eminent Library of Congress cartographer, identified seven American publishers successful in the atlas business before the Civil War; all were based in Philadelphia or New York. They were Mathew Carey, John Melish, Henry Tanner, Fielding Lucas, Anthony Finley, S. Augustus Mitchell, and Joseph H. Colton and Sons. Interestingly, these men were not all cartographers; most came out of a tradition of engravers. They published American maps mainly as part of world atlases; consciously or unconsciously, they contributed to the establishment of an American mapmaking tradition.

Two of these early publishers—Johnson's eventual rivals—Mitchell and Colton, opened their doors in the 1830s. Another, Henry Tanner, claimed in 1819 that his New American Atlas was important in establishing the American cartographic tradition. In his words, "Our geography is so rapidly progressive, that no European publication can keep pace with our improvement and the extension of our settlements."

Tanner's atlas, however, was so expensive ($30) and printed in such an unwieldy format that it did not reach many people. Both Mitchell and Colton sold their atlases in Europe, but increasingly they sought to reach the American market by offering atlases at a reasonable price. Their efforts were successful because population growth was accompanied by increased interest in American geography. The Civil War itself also stimulated interest in maps. Maps of battle locations were printed in newspapers and available to the public at that time. On every hand there was a great demand for maps and related knowledge. As historian David Buisseret put it, "By the middle of the century, a substantial proportion of the population was able and willing to acquire books containing descriptions and topographic views of their country."

Public land surveys were undertaken, but the General Land Office (GLO) was only just ahead of—and often just behind—settlers pushing into the Midwest and the Far West. Roads, canals, and railroads were constructed and a transcontinental route already envisioned. Gold discoveries lured people to California even as large numbers of immigrants arrived from Europe seeking new opportunities in the West. Towns and then counties sprang up. The economy was growing.

Johnson, starting out in map publishing just before the Civil War, was part of the growing group of American atlas makers seeking to accommodate this new thirst for information. He went to New York from the Midwest in 1856 and started his own publishing business two years later. Not much is known about Johnson's life, but he had been an atlas canvasser or salesman for his future rival, the J. H. Colton Company, also of New York; so he knew how to sell atlases door-to-door. Nevertheless, he must have recognized that he was entering a business where Mitchell and Colton were already well-established; if he were going to compete successfully, his atlases would have to be somehow better or different.

It is curious—and the relationship is far from clear—that Johnson's first published atlas in 1859 was in fact an edition of Colton's General Atlas. It was published both in New York and Richmond, Virginia, where Johnson's first business partner, Ross Browning, lived. Later editions of the atlas were published only in New York, indicating that Johnson determined that the Union was a better place for his business.

In 1860 the first atlas under Johnson's own name was published as Johnson's New Illustrated (Steel Plate) Family Atlas with Descriptions Geographical, Statistical, and Historical. It actually incorporated many of Colton's maps. The title page of this world atlas stated that it was produced "under the supervision of J. H. Colton and A. J. Johnson" and he was "Successor to J. H. Colton." As Johnson researcher and collector Ira Lourie points out, this was not exactly the case since Colton continued to produce his own atlases until the 1890s. They were, in fact competitors. The reference to Colton, however, remained on Johnson's Family Atlas until 1866. After that time, all the maps were Johnson's own, and no longer Colton's.

Figure 2. Examples of borders used on Johnson's maps from 1862 to 1887, as researched by Ira Lourie.
“Steel plate” refers to an engraving process invented in 1804 by which the engraver could maintain the detail of design but produce many more copies than with the soft copper plates previously in wide use in America and Europe. Another process, lithography, which involved a reverse transfer to a lithographic stone, was also employed in mapmaking at that time. Both Mitchell and Colton adopted the new steel plate technology in the 1840s, unlike the others on Ristow’s list, enabling them to move ahead of their competitors. It was logical that Johnson, as “successor” to Colton, followed in his footsteps and used the same printing process. Interestingly, all three failed to take advantage of a new printing process that became popular in the 1870s, known as wax engraving. This process greatly reduced the cost of maps without sacrificing detail and, as a history of map publisher Rand McNally notes, “The introduction of this single technique was responsible for the Company’s instantaneous success in mapmaking.”

During the Civil War, Johnson updated his atlases annually. The source of his information was the government’s General Land Office surveys and their accompanying field notes. This can be confirmed, even though Johnson’s business records have apparently not survived, by comparing his maps with similar GLO maps and by noting also that several of his maps reference government sources. For example, a map of North America produced by Johnson in 1861 states, “Compiled, drawn, and engraved from U. States Land and Coast Surveys...” Johnson also produced U.S. military maps, included in atlases from 1861 to at least 1865, and indicated there that his information was obtained from the War Department in Washington (figure 1, page 17).

Although Johnson’s source of information did not differ from Mitchell or Colton, the number of editions of Johnson’s maps produced in a year with only slight corrective changes suggests that Johnson may have found continual updating a means of obtaining a competitive edge against his more established competitors. Not only were the maps updated but the typeface and borders often changed as well. Ira Lourie has meticulously charted these changes by style and year (figure 2).

All the maps were hand-colored with bright, appealing colors. The colors changed from map to map, suggesting a sales technique, but the consequence of this for us today is that it is extremely difficult to know which edition some of the now loose maps came from. Lourie has concluded that there were new editions produced every year from 1860 to 1887, except for four years in the 1870s and one in 1882. Some years had more than one edition, as will be noted.

Johnson’s recognition of both the public’s need to know timely details of the Civil War and his need to distinguish himself from the Mitchell and Colton atlases is demonstrated by his early atlases. For example, the military map included in his 1861 atlas contains far more detail than Mitchell’s map of...
the same subject. Johnson's map shows the country divided into military districts (but not states) and includes insets of major southern harbors. The 1862 edition of his military map (figure 1) instead shows the outlines of all the states and territories, a united country dotted with forts. "A Chronological History of the Civil War" was included in the 1864 atlas, providing supplemental information for the atlas buyer. This was noted on the frontispiece of the 1864 atlas (figure 3).

The continual updating of these maps, to say nothing of the production details, such as hand coloring of the maps, suggests that Johnson had large numbers of employees. Veterans, of course, were a likely pool of workers. It is therefore unusual that relatively few atlases remain today after being such a popular item at a point in our history only just over 100 years ago. There are only 16 Johnson atlases preserved in the Library of Congress, not even one for each year of production.

Johnson's maps present a remarkably correct recording of the changes in territorial and state boundaries. It is significant that Johnson was aware of these rapidly changing descriptions; in actuality, some of this information might have been lost to us in

the present day were it not for the 19th-century atlas makers who brought it to the attention of the American public. For example, the 1860 Johnson's Family Atlas includes 23 United States maps, 7 of which are of the West, including 1 of Washington and Oregon (figure 4, page 19).

Washington Territory is shown split off from the Oregon Territory, an event that occurred in 1859 when Oregon achieved
statehood; Washington includes land that later become part of Montana and Idaho. Nebraska Territory, which was gradually reduced in size as new territories were created in the 1860s, is shown lying to the east. Washington Territory's surveyed counties hug the coast, painted in blue, pink and yellow. The line of the proposed Pacific railroad, from Isaac Stevens's 1855 survey, is marked, indicating a future route to these new counties. The exact location of forts such as Colville and Owen suggests protection from the Indian tribes whose lands are only broadly noted. The map highlights topographic features, including rivers and rapids; mountains are indicated by hachures, marks then popular for showing elevation.

Nebraska is correctly shown on this map, extending from the 40th parallel to the Canadian border. Rivers and mountains are recognized but there are no counties, as these have not yet been delineated. Towns, however, soon appear in eastern Kansas, as shown on the 1862 atlas version of the Nebraska/Kansas map. Interestingly, on that map the south fork of the Platte River includes the notation that it is "630 miles to Aurora," a burgeoning mining area in what was to become Nevada.

By 1862 Johnson's atlas map of the region shows a much different Nebraska Territory (figure 5). Inexplicably, Nebraska is depicted as sharing its western border with Oregon when, in fact, its neighbor to the west had been Washington Territory since 1859. The territorial configuration soon changed again. Johnson's 1863 atlas depicts a Washington and Oregon more recognizable to modern-day viewers. Idaho Territory was born in 1863, carved out of Washington, Dakota, and Nebraska. Missoula County in Idaho Territory is indicated, as is one other unnamed county. Indian tribes like the Spokane are given specifically delineated locations. Individual mine sites highlight the discovery of gold and silver. However, this map shows both Idaho Territory and a portion of Dakota Territory as occupying the same area. A later edition was made to correct mistakes, removing the erroneous reference to Dakota and labeling it all Idaho.

Figure 7 (top). Map of Nebraska, Dakota, Idaho, and Montana from the 1865 Johnson's Family Atlas.
Figure 8 (bottom). Map of a portion of Montana from the General Land Office's 1864 Map of the Public Lands. The "Dakota Sliver" is circled on both maps.
A Word About Distribution

Rather than selling through bookstores, which were not available to rural America, map publishers, like book publishers, hired canvassers to scour the countryside selling their atlases door-to-door by subscription. Johnson’s sales technique has been described as aggressive: certainly he was able to stay competitive against the more established Mitchell and Colton. Johnson himself had been a canvasser, and his second partner, Benjamin Ward, was in charge of Johnson’s atlas subscriptions in Cleveland and Chicago.

Selling atlases could be a lucrative business. Although operating in a slightly different market than world atlases, some county atlas firms in Chicago were said to gross as much as $1 million a year. Canvassing was, however, hard work. An atlas canvasser had to appeal to a farmer’s wish to be educated—or at least his wish to appear so. A subscription list with the names of his neighbors displayed boldly on it was a useful sales tool. A surviving diary of a canvasser for the J. H. Colton firm in 1857 bemoans the fact that he was only guaranteed $6.50 for every $15 atlas he sold. Sales apparently were slim in his assigned territory (small towns along the Mississippi), and he was barely able to secure food and lodging for himself and his horse while paying the freight on the books he ordered from Colton. And, alas, the Mitchell salesman had preceded him! Johnson’s canvassers undoubtedly faced similar obstacles.

Finally, not every potential client was enamored with book canvassers. A classic response was Bates Harrington’s 194-page diatribe against atlas canvassers published in 1879, which stated: “Atlas men work upon the vanity of the public; book men hold up the attractive bait of pictorial contents and set forth the fact that the world is going crazy over the particular work that they are selling and finally bear down with incessant palaver until there is no getting rid of them except by a subscription.”

And, no doubt, potential sales were thwarted by farmyard greetings like this one: “My shotgun is loaded with dry peas that I will shoot into any agent that comes to my place.”

The 1864 map of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho shows the establishment of Montana Territory, with Idaho reduced to its present size. Dakota Territory still lies south of Montana but with no real border defined between them. Johnson’s 1864 atlas map of Nebraska, Dakota, Colorado, Montana, and Kansas shows all of Dakota—what remained of it after Montana Territory was carved out of it earlier that year (figure 6).

In the 1865 atlas map of Nebraska, Dakota, Idaho, and Montana, a new territory has been mapped and identified, although it would not officially exist until 1869 (figure 7). This was Wyoming, and it seems to have a strange boundary that corresponds to the Dakota boundary in the previous map. Inquiry into the unusual shape of Wyoming brought the answer from experts and novices alike: Johnson must have made a mistake. A similar map by Mitchell showed that he had the same shape on his map. Did they both err, or were they correct?

The confusion was a result of the constantly shifting territorial boundaries: before Montana Territory was created, Idaho Territory east of the Continental Divide was moved temporarily back into what had been Dakota Territory. Then Montana was given its boundaries as shown in figure 6. A portion of Dakota Territory—the “Dakota sliver”—was accidentally excluded. This omission was not discovered until Wyoming was surveyed in 1868-69. A separate act of Congress was considered necessary in 1873 to bring the slivered portion of land into Montana. So Johnson had not made a mistake, and if the GLO map of 1864 is examined, the source of Johnson’s information is evident (figure 8).

As time went on, the geographic features and Indian tribes that had filled earlier maps gave way to counties and towns. Johnson wrote in 1879, in the introduction to his New Universal Cyclopedia of Useful Knowledge: “It has been the aim...to include every town in the United States and Canada having a population 1,000 and over, as well as every place of historic interest, though its population falls short of that figure.”

His detailed maps of each state show hundreds of towns and cities across America. Through Johnson’s incessant search for survey information and his quest for accuracy—whether for competitive ends or otherwise—he succeeded in bringing the new optimistic view of the nation’s western lands to those who bought his atlases. Boundaries, railroads (real and proposed), mines, and forts were the new definers of space, and he included them. It is clear that Johnson followed and reinforced the mapmaking tradition that Henry Tanner defined in 1819—a tradition emphasizing America’s westward progress across the continent.

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Photographer T.G. Smith captured this private moment in the life of Washington historian Edmond Meany in 1915. The location is unknown, but given Meany's age in the stereograph and his interest in the Mountaineers, he was probably on an outing with the group.

The stereograph or stereo view, the dominant form of photography in the 19th century, is a double photograph, or printed image, paired in such a manner that when viewed with a stereoscope it appears three-dimensional. The popularity of this 3-D effect made it a popular medium in many households until the early 1930s. Photographers traveled the world collecting "views" of foreign cities, famous people and important events for an ever-growing consumer market.

This stereograph was donated to the Washington State Historical Society by Lillian Streeter Vollin.
IT WAS NOT a particularly attractive bridge, and unlike the Brooklyn Bridge or Golden Gate Bridge it never became a popular icon. Structurally, it did not test the limits of engineering knowledge in the mid 1850s and thus serve as a landmark along the road to more impressive technological feats. But neither was it an ordinary bridge.

Its five wooden spans carried the first railroad tracks across the broad Mississippi River, and this feat alone made it a potent symbol of a fast-approaching revolution in transportation—a truly magnificent symbol to believers in the power of railroads to transform the American West, and a frightening one to observers comfortable with older and simpler technologies that had served well the transportation needs of the region for more than 30 years.

All revolutions have winners and losers. Veteran boatmen worried about losing valuable business to Chicago and the Rock Island Rail Road Company after it completed its bridge across the Mississippi River in April 1856. For some time the steamboatmen and the ports they served had feared that rails would divert river commerce to Chicago, the upstart city on Lake Michigan, instead of allowing it to follow its accustomed channel downriver to the time-honored cities of St. Louis and New Orleans. The St. Louis Republican fumed in April 1854: “Chicago will soon stretch her iron arms across Illinois and Iowa, down to the Illinois River, and to the upper Mississippi, controlling the travel and business of a vast territory, naturally tributary to St. Louis.”

The simmering anger of boatmen apparently boiled over a few weeks later, on the night of May 6, when the Effie Afton, one of the swiftest boats on the Mississippi River, crashed into a support of the new bridge. Fire from an upended cook stove aboard the steamboat consumed the Effie Afton and one of the bridge’s wooden spans. To some
observers the crash had been a deliberate attempt by boatmen to topple the object of their anxiety. Deliberate or not, they were overjoyed to learn that the hated hazard to navigation, as boatmen viewed the bridge, had been reduced to ashes that floated lazily toward the Gulf of Mexico. Up and down the Mississippi, jubilant captains repeatedly sounded their deep-voiced steam whistles to celebrate the news.

John Hurd, owner of the Effie Afton, sued the bridge’s owner for $50,000 in damages. The Rock Island Railroad defended itself by hiring a 47-year-old Illinois trial lawyer named Abraham Lincoln. Meanwhile, the railroad hastily repaired and reopened its long bridge only four months after the incident. No steamboat whistles celebrated the occasion.

Like all commercially minded Americans in the 1850s, veteran steamboatmen understood clearly that trade flowed like water—that is, it invariably followed paths of least resistance. Human ingenuity could divert trade into innovative channels that offered speedier, safer, and more convenient access to markets. Only a quarter century earlier, New York City visionaries had successfully used this argument to enlist state support for an “artificial river” that linked the Hudson Valley with rich farmland in the Ohio Country beyond the Appalachian Mountains. After completion in 1825, the Erie Canal’s fast-growing and lucrative stream of trade brought unprecedented prosperity to New York and bolstered the trade-as-water analogy. Merchants in Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and other rival East Coast cities envisioned constructing canals of their own to tap Ohio’s agricultural cornucopia, and if not canals, they would employ the new technology of railroads to fashion the innovative channels of commerce needed to protect and extend their home city’s imperial reach.

This detail from a 1933 Great Northern brochure depicts the West as framed by the window of a passenger car.
In the Midwest of the 1850s, steamboatmen opposed all bridges across the Mississippi, not just as hazards to navigation but because they reasoned (correctly) that the lucrative commerce of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa would flow by train through Chicago instead of continuing by boat to the well-known wharves and warehouses in St. Louis. After this there would be no end of trouble for boatmen familiar with the great river corridors that radiated out from the Missouri metropolis. Together, the Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, and their tributary rivers formed a lengthy and time-tested water highway of incalculable commercial importance.

St. Louis in 1855, just before Rock Island rails first bridged the Mississippi, recorded nearly 7,000 arrivals and departures of steamboats. "Scarcely an hour during that period," boasted a respected local newspaper, the Missouri Republican, "but some gallant steamer ploughed the waves of the Mississippi, bringing the products of the richest and most extensively improved country in the world. The levee was stored from day to day with the staples of each section. Perhaps in no other part of the Union are the genius, enterprise, and diversified interests of the nation better represented."

As exciting and comforting as such claims were to smug St. Louisians, the historical geographer D. W. Meinig noted 150 years later (with the considerable advantage hindsight confers) that railroads, not steamboats, emerged "as a space-conquering instrument of revolutionary possibilities."

That business is of long-standing and very considerable amount. During the 1850s, in fact, the nation's midsection had witnessed a fundamental realignment of the flow of commerce, from the north-south orientation of steamboat traffic linking Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, and New Orleans, to an east-west orientation of rail traffic that benefited Chicago, Indianapolis, Columbus, and other upstart cities. For this reason, rail commerce spanning the Father of Waters in 1856 would assuredly not originate or terminate on the Mississippi's western bank. Rock Island tracks could easily extend the reach of Chicago well beyond the borders of Illinois and far across the fertile farmland of Iowa. "Chicago is an argus-eyed competitor for the carrying trade from East to West," the Missouri Republican warned in early 1859.

Just how far west Chicago's reach might extend, no one knew; probably to San Francisco Bay, and perhaps even to the distant Pacific Northwest. Significantly, in mid 1866 the railroad changed its name from the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific. It aspired, in other words, to link Lake Michigan and the Mississippi Valley with the distant Pacific Coast. For more than two decades, dreamers from many different backgrounds had promoted a railroad to the Pacific shore of the United States. At first most Americans thought they were crazy because seemingly insurmountable financial, geographical, and technological obstacles blocked the tracks. With the passage of time and improvements in technology, the Pacific railroad idea won increased respectability and a growing legion of supporters. Initially this seemed like good news for St. Louis, long acclaimed as the primary gateway to the West.

The American West was imperial space. St. Louis merchants had long claimed for themselves by using specially constructed "mountain steamboats" and economical water highways to extend their reach across Missouri and the High Plains. Beginning in 1819, two generations of steamboatmen had bucked muddy currents and forced shallow-draft vessels around deadly snags and across sandbars to probe ever farther up the Missouri River until in the early 1860s they reached the fur-trade outpost of Fort Benton, Montana Territory, beyond which steamboat travel was impractical. In this way the steamboatmen functioned as the advance guard of an expanding commercial empire based in St. Louis.
As for the first serious fight between steamboatinmen and railroaders, the case of Hurd vs. Rock Island Railroad Company ended in a deadlocked jury. When a federal judge in Chicago dismissed the case, it was nonetheless clear which side had prevailed: John Hurd and the steamboatinmen he represented were the past; the Rock Island and all other railroads were the future. The real winner in the informal race to control and dominate western space was Chicago, the fast-growing city on Lake Michigan. During the 1850s Chicago entrepreneurs and their Boston financiers wove a network of iron and steel across the Midwest that fundamentally reoriented the flow of commerce. However, when tracks hurdled the Mississippi River at Rock Island in the mid-1850s and bounded across Iowa toward the sunset side of the continent, Chicago’s commercial aspirations collided with those of St. Louis, a city much older than Chicago and dependent on steamboats, overland trails, freight wagons, stagecoaches, and telegraph lines to extend and maintain its commercial dominance of the West. Its mercantilistic interest in the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains dated back at least to 1804, when the Lewis and Clark expedition proceeded up the Missouri River bound for the Pacific Coast, or even to an earlier generation of fur traders based in St. Louis.

Even before Lewis and Clark, the first families of St. Louis had profited from the fur trade of the West. Building on geographical knowledge amassed by fur traders and explorers, missionaries from various denominations crossed the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains to convert Indians of the far Northwest to Christianity. In the vanguard were Marcus Whitman and Samuel Parker, who in 1835 headed west from St. Louis by steamboat. Parker continued overland from Council Bluffs to the Columbia River.

When Parker later published a book about his six-month overland ordeal—and it was truly an ordeal to surmount range after range of high mountains across the future state of Idaho on his way west—his popular 1838 recounting contained a short but prophetic passage about how easy it would be to extend a Pacific railroad over the Rocky Mountain divide in central Wyoming. At the time a Pacific boundary of the United States had not yet been determined, but at best it seemed likely to extend only along the shores of future Oregon Territory (which included Washington). California remained part of the new Republic of Mexico, and no one imagined the gold bonanza waiting to be unearthed in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in the late 1840s.

Parker was not the first prophet to envision a rail line to the Pacific, but he was probably the first to do so after surveying the mountainous terrain with his own eyes. The missionary was no armchair theorist. He was a dreamer nonetheless because railroad technology of the mid-1830s was so primitive that even the finest locomotives imported from Great Britain proved inadequate to pull the trains.

UPSTART CITIES REAP BENEFITS FROM RAIL CONNECTIONS

A familiar story was repeated in the late 1880s and 1890s. Just as Rock Island tracks in 1856 reached across the Mississippi to benefit rail-oriented Chicago at the expense of river-oriented St. Louis, so too the rail bridge over the Columbia River at Pasco favored upstarts Tacoma and Seattle over river-oriented Portland. Like St. Louis, Portland had grown smug and prosperous as a result of river commerce and the steamboat fleet that since the early 1860s had funneled gold, grain, and other valuable commerce through the city. But rail lines that extended east over the Cascade Mountains from Seattle and Tacoma in the 1880s threatened Portland’s hegemony.

This is not to say that St. Louis and Portland lacked rail lines of their own. During the expansive decade of the 1880s, Southern Pacific tracks linked Portland with San Francisco and Los Angeles, and Union Pacific tracks linked it to Denver, Kansas City, Omaha, Chicago, and St. Louis. From St. Louis a number of railroads headed west: the Missouri Pacific (successor to the Pacific Railroad of Missouri) ultimately reached Pueblo, Colorado, but not the Pacific Ocean, and the St. Louis-San Francisco Line reached western Oklahoma before it ran out of financial steam. Its tracks never reached San Francisco—or even the base of the Rocky Mountains. In extending the commercial reach of Portland and St. Louis, in short, their respective railroads tended to offer too little, too late. To be sure, each city prospered, but neither dominated their respective regions the way Chicago and Seattle did after 1900.
woefully underpowered to meet the challenges posed by the complex terrain of the United States. Many observers were skeptical about the pulling power of iron drive wheels on iron rails on all but the gentlest inclines.

Rail advocates at the time conceded they would probably have to use canal locks and incline planes to lift rail cargoes up and down steep grades, such as would be needed to cross the crest of the Appalachian Mountains west of Philadelphia and Baltimore. The high point on the Pennsylvania state-funded rail-and-canal corridor that opened between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in 1834 was slightly more than 2,400 feet. The elevation of South Pass, the Rocky Mountain gateway where Parker foresaw the tracks of a transcontinental railroad, was 7,546 feet, or more than three times as high. Ten incline planes powered by 10 stationary steam engines used rope and wire cables to hoist rail cars and canal boats over Pennsylvania's Appalachian Mountains. Could Americans at that time even imagine the kind of technological marvels required to haul trains over the high passes of the Rocky Mountains?

Perhaps even more remarkable, in the mid-1830s when Parker first dared to dream of a railroad to the Pacific, the future cities of Portland, Tacoma, and Seattle did not exist. Nor did the future states of Oregon, Washington, and California. In fact, not a single state lay west of Missouri. At the time the population centers of the far Northwest consisted of a handful of fur-trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, a London-based enterprise, and numerous but scattered Indian villages. The non-Indian population of the entire region numbered far less than that of the city of St. Louis, which in 1840 counted 16,469 residents.

Compared to the spirited rivalry between St. Louis and Chicago to serve as the nation's rail gateway to the American West, events moved far more slowly in the Pacific Northwest during the 1850s. That region's first railroad had no grand aspiration to reach east to Lake Superior, Chicago, or St. Louis. It dated from 1850 or 1851 and consisted of a six-mile-long wooden tram that employed a mule and a flat car to portage passengers and freight around the Cascades, a turbulent stretch of the Columbia River that blocked through steamboat travel between Portland and its upriver hinterland. Periodic flooding required rebuilding the portage line several times during the 1850s. By the early 1860s this pioneer carrier was physically the equal of East Coast railroads of the 1830s, which used wooden rails topped with a bearing surface of iron—though by this time all but the most impoverished eastern railroads had switched to the familiar T-shaped rails fashioned from iron (and later steel).

The Pacific Northwest's earliest rail line (built near the site of present-day Bonneville Dam) may have been primitive by technological standards of the day but it served well the needs of a transportation frontier that had little spare capital to invest in expensive projects. The first steam locomotive in the Pacific Northwest was the "Oregon Pony," which the Vulcan Iron Works of San Francisco finished in 1861 for the Oregon Portage Railway. The diminutive engine shuttled freight and passengers between steamboats on the lower and middle stretches of the Columbia River for several years.

It is noteworthy that the first railroad in the Pacific Northwest was intended to improve steamboat service on the region's great waterways and thus benefit the fortunes of Portland, where investors in the Oregon Steam Navigation Company became some of the city's first millionaires. Indeed, until the late 1880s it appeared that the region's rail lines were destined to serve mainly as handmaidens of waterways, notably the Columbia and Willamette rivers and majestic Puget Sound in western Washington. All early rail lines threaded their way along river valleys, or linked inland centers to waterways. Walla Walla, for example—the former mine supply outpost—became capital of a grain-rich agricultural hinterland and the most populous settlement in Washington Territory during the 1870s (boasting 2,394 residents). The town was connected by rail to a busy steamboat landing on the Columbia River, 32 miles away.

The Walla Walla and Columbia River Railroad was a bootstrap operation, a "rawhide railroad" in the derisive lingo of the day because its track and cars had been constructed largely from homespun materials. Though an object of general "ridicule and contempt" at the time of its construction in the early 1870s, only fools were still laughing when W. Milnor Roberts, chief engineer for the Northern Pacific Railroad, visited Walla Walla in 1878. As Roberts observed, "It
is a perfect gold mine now.” He learned from Dorsey Baker, the local entrepreneur who spearheaded the project, that the railroad had paid off all its debts and was earning “not less than $1,000 per day clear profit—perhaps considerably more.”

No wonder the Oregon Steam Navigation Company eagerly added Baker’s lucrative port to its expanding transportation holdings in the late 1870s. Further, in recognition of the growing railroad contribution to the corporation’s bottom line, the Oregon Steam Navigation Company changed its name to the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company in 1879, though by whatever name the carrier remained a financial powerhouse.

During the dark days of the Civil War in 1864, Congress authorized federal support for a transcontinental railroad to be built along the corridor Washington Territorial Governor Isaac I. Stevens originally surveyed from Minnesota to Puget Sound in the mid-1850s. The Northern Pacific line was not completed until 1883 because it proved exceedingly difficult to raise the investment dollars needed to build a railroad across what was popularly, if mistakenly, regarded as some of the least desirable land in the United States. Significantly, the first two segments of the Northern Pacific to be completed were overland links between waterways. Tracks at the western end joined Puget Sound with the lower Columbia River and formed a 100-mile-long rail portage between Portland and Tacoma and Seattle. Tracks at the eastern end joined Lake Superior near Duluth with the Missouri River at Bismarck, 450 miles distant.

The onset of hard times in 1873 dried up capital, halted construction, and left a gap of more than a 1,000 miles between the two segments of the Northern Pacific. Work did not commence again until almost the end of the 1870s. When it did, one achievement of great practical as well as symbolic importance was completion of an impressive rail bridge over the Missouri River at Bismarck. Lewis and Clark had passed that way almost 80 years earlier, and the Northern Pacific later liked to brag in advertisements that it had completed what Lewis and Clark began.

Significantly, when the Northern Pacific reached the Columbia Valley near Pasco, Washington Territory, its trains switched to the tracks of the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company to reach Portland before returning to its own tracks from there to Puget Sound, the Northern Pacific’s intended terminus. The roundabout course benefited Portland and continued to utilize the banks of the Columbia River for a railroad right-of-way.

However, 32 years after Rock Island tracks bridged the Mississippi River to the lasting benefit of Chicago and the consternation of steamboatmen, Northern Pacific tracks bridged the Columbia River at Pasco in 1888. From there they threaded their way along the fertile Yakima Valley and through a newly bored tunnel nearly two miles long beneath Stampede Pass and the crest of the Cascade Mountains to create a major shortcut to Puget Sound. Tacoma residents took time to publicly celebrate the Northern Pacific’s long-awaited but notable accomplishment.

In Washington’s Yakima Valley, as in most parts of the West once devoted almost exclusively to grazing, the railroad totally transformed the agricultural landscape. The fertile valley noted for its nutritious bunchgrass and mild winter climate had long been a cattle and horse ranchers’ paradise. “Of course the railroad disturbed this cattle paradise. The land was too good to be thus given over to cattle and horses for the benefit of the lucky few, and so man has come in to increase and multiply and fill up the garden spots,” observed one publicist in 1887.

Transformation from “wilderness to empire” by the power of railroads was a popular topic during the last third of the 19th century. “A new age has happily dawned for Oregon and Washington Territory, as well as for other States of the grand Northwest. The era of railroads has opened for them, and the serious impediment to their progress will soon be removed.”

Residents need only ponder the many changes they witnessed around them to understand fully the West the railroads made in practical and personal terms—for good or for ill. Because of railroads, “the old channels of commerce are broken up, and the points which depended upon them are left to philosophize upon the mutability of human affairs in forgotten obscurity,” observed Charles and Henry Adams in 1871.

The railroad transformation of the West took many forms. Perhaps most
dramatic was the emergence of substantial communities fashioned from brick and stone instead of logs or rough-hewn lumber, as was the rustic hallmark of frontier outposts across the West. "Tacoma emerged by her own efforts from the condition of a straggling village to that of a large, self-reliant commercial town, with well-built banks, daily newspapers, steamboat lines, manufactories, and the finest hotel on the Pacific Coast north of San Francisco," bragged the Northern Pacific in 1887. The instant cities of the West invariably formed regional centers of commerce and trade. In addition to Tacoma and the original great metropolis of the West, San Francisco, other new cities transformed spatial relationships across the region: Portland, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Denver, and the gangliest and fastest growing adolescent of them all, Los Angeles.

The railroad transformation of the West invariably began as someone's dream. Over time one person's dream might evolve and attract enough popular support to elevate it to the status of seemingly inevitable public policy. When early support for a transcontinental railroad grew powerful enough, Congress legislated the transfer of land resources and loans needed to transform the dream into reality. In other cases, however, seemingly good dreams died from lack of popular support and financial sustenance. And in some cases, one person's dream turned into another's nightmare.

Native Americans, for example, rarely benefited from dramatic transformations that the railroads wrought across the West. "Are the Indians troublesome to settlers?" rhetorically asked a Northern Pacific guide issued in 1873 to promote settlement of Washington and Oregon.

No. There are but few Indians in Washington Territory, and these have been for many years on reservations, living by fishing and agriculture. There are a few, scattered near the settlements, in some parts of the country, but their presence is viewed as an advantage, as they are, in some sections, the main reliance for hired help. They long since abandoned all thought of hostility to the whites, and have mostly adopted civilized customs and habits of industry.

Transcontinental railroads increased Uncle Sam's ability to control Native American populations in the West and prevent conflict, or so claimed another of the Northern Pacific's 1873 brochures: "The Indian question in the Northwest cannot in any other way be so promptly, so thoroughly, so economically and so humanely settled as by the construction of the Northern Pacific Railroad." The company further claimed that the amount of money thus to be saved to the Government by the completion of the Road—in the early reduction of the military force on the frontiers, the avoidance of costly Indian wars, the cheapening of government transportation throughout the Northwest, and the permanent pacification of the Indians—may reasonably be estimated, as it is by officers of the Government, at several million dollars each year.

Perhaps of even greater significance to Indians of the West was the impact of railroads on reservation lands. "Uncle Sam will give you a home in the Flathead Indian Reservation" in fertile western Montana, proclaimed one Northern Pacific broadside. If anything, the swelling stream of newcomers who traveled by train from the East Coast in the 1880s and 1890s only increased popular pressure to break up reservation lands held by Indians. Numerous large and colorful rail posters promoted settlement of former Indian lands by homesteaders.
“Opening of Three Indian Reservations,” proclaimed the bold red type of a railroad broadside advertising land on the Flathead, Coeur d’Alene, and Spokane reservations to non-Indian settlers in 1909. “It costs nothing to register and you may get a farm cheap,” proclaimed the Great Northern Railway. “These reservations contain some very choice agricultural, fruit, and timber land.”

When in 1913 the Northern Pacific issued a brochure to promote summer vacations on the Pacific Coast, enough time had elapsed for Indians to be transformed from wild natives inspiring fear and loathing into stalwart agrarian capitalists—if not also into tourist attractions. The brochure writer jauntily observed that the railroad’s main line runs through the heart of the old Indian and buffalo country made historic by the many encounters between the various Indian tribes and the old fur traders and early miners, and later by the campaigns against the Indians by Generals Hancock, Terry, Howard, Custer, Miles and Gibbon. Now the buffalo and other game are replaced by cattle, sheep, and horses; the Indians and their tepees by white settlers and their comfortable homes. In a word, the country has been transformed by Immigration and Irrigation. Even the Indians now have their farms and irrigation works.

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The nation’s northwest quadrant thus offers a particularly compelling example of the West the railroads and their publicists made. That West encompassed far more than the visible landscape defined by the modern states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and North and South Dakota constructed their futures. That is also true to varying degrees for other states of the West. What gave the Lords of Creation this kind of power was the West’s geographical isolation from the economic and political power centers of the United States and its long-time isolation from the nation’s historical mainstream.

One telling example of how railroads effectively laid an enduring foundation derives from the history of the early airmail flights across the West—from Chicago to San Francisco. The victory that Chicago won over St. Louis during the railroad era was reinforced when federal officials designated the first transcontinental route for airmail pilots in the early 1920s. Official guidebooks instructed them to follow the tracks of the Chicago & Northwestern, Union Pacific, and Southern Pacific railroads between Lake Michigan and the Pacific Coast. In other words, their flights duplicated the route of the nation’s first transcontinental railroad. Pilots referred to the ribbon of rails below their wings as the “iron compass.” The iron compass showed them the way west, just as it had done earlier for entrepreneurs, tourists, and settlers seeking a new fortune, a new adventure, or a new life beyond the Missouri River.

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EDITOR’S NOTE
This article is excerpted from The West the Railroads Made (2008), a companion book to the exhibit by the same name. Both book and exhibit resulted from a curatorial collaboration between Carlos Schwantes and James P. Ronda, who holds the H. G. Barnard Chair in Western American History at the University of Tulsa and has written extensively on the history of exploration in the American West. The exhibit is on view at the Washington State History Museum through January 24, 2009.
Building a Socialist Party in the Northwest, 1901-1905

THE POLITICS of Socialism

BY JEFFREY A. JOHNSON

This is no spontaneous and vague uprising of a large mass of discontented and miserable people. On the contrary, the propaganda is intellectual; the movement is based upon economic necessity and is in line with social evolution. The revolutionist is no starved and diseased slave in the shambles at the bottom of the social pit, but is, in the main, a hearty, well-fed workingman, who sees the shambles waiting for him and his children.


IN THE SUMMER OF 1901 Socialists from around the country converged on Indianapolis, Indiana, for their first national convention. The meeting’s attendees gathered under the auspices of the late 19th century’s first party to advocate socialistic reform, the Social Democratic Party (SOP). They faced the difficult task of overcoming ideological and regional fragmentation. What emerged at that July meeting was a politically harmonious Socialist Party, at least in name and principle. The delegates, who represented factions of both the old SDP and more rigid Marxists of the equally established Socialist Labor Party (SLP), formed the new Socialist Party of America (SPA), the first national party in the United States to advocate abolition of the wage system and the emancipation of America’s working class.

The convention commenced on July 29, 1901, with 124 delegates on hand. Only the strictest Marxists from the old Socialist Labor Party, unwilling to compromise the most revolutionary Marxism, remained outside the meeting and the new SPA. The convention was the culmination of approximately three years of known cooperation between unity advocates within the larger Social Democratic and Socialist Labor parties. For optimistic Socialists in attendance, according to historian David Shannon, “The question was when, not if, the American people—the American working people—would see the logic of industrial history and vote the Socialist Party into office to socialize and democratize the American economy.” The Unity Convention’s participants left the meeting having formally adopted the “Socialist Party” moniker. In the name of political harmony they had, at least temporarily, put aside their differences.

The convention came at a critical time for socialist politics. The party’s new leadership recognized a political opportunity. Writing in the International Socialist Review in 1900, George Herron contended, “Now is the time of socialist salvation, if we are great enough to respond to the greatness of our opportunity.” The Unity Convention appeared to be where “salvation” could occur. A. M. Simons, the International Socialist Review’s editor, agreed. “That the present moment is a critical one in the history of the socialist movement in America is commonplace,” he wrote, “It would seem probable that the Indianapolis convention would mark the turning point.”

News of the convention quickly reached the Northwest. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, running the headline “Socialists Seek Harmony,” closely followed the convention proceedings. “The rational Socialist convention,” it reported with surprise, had “made an effort to harmonize, and was partially successful.” As the paper revealed, however, socialist leaders still recognized their differences. At the convention, the paper observed, “Eugene V. Debs admits his party is composed of factions.” In its infancy, the new Socialist Party nevertheless took important
organizational and political strides. David Shannon noted, "Never before or since in the United States has a political organization grown the way the Socialist Party did for the first ten to fifteen years of its existence." Party members mobilized to organize locally, propagate the masses, and offer candidates.

**Northwest Organizers**, free from an overbearing national party structure, wasted little time. Montana's active Socialists mobilized prior to the convention. State organizers formed their first local, or chapter, in 1899 under the auspices of the SDF. Based in Butte, the local had 12 charter members. But as Montana's Socialists moved into the 20th century, acting under the banner of the SPA and supported by a statewide committee, the state witnessed exponential party growth. The party boasted 100 members by 1900 and 400 by 1904. Montana's state organization was established in January 1900 with six locals. As Helena's John N. Heldt made clear, socialist sympathies extended beyond the working-class stronghold of Butte. Heldt served as the first state secretary. Within two years the Montana Socialists had 25 locals. Like their Montana counterparts, Oregon's Socialists also grew in number after the SPA's creation. Accordingly, in the first years of the 20th century locals sprang up throughout the state. In 1903, F. E. Latimer, editor of Portland's new socialist newspaper, The Liberator, visited his comrades in Woodburn, Salem, Albany, Tangent, Shedd, Harrisburg, Eugene, Roseburg, Grants Pass, Medford, and Ashland.

While the new SPA helped party growth in Montana and Oregon, the new organization did not always dramatically alter member involvement. The new Socialist Party of Washington, in fact, saw few changes under the new SPA. According to historian Jonathan Dembo, "With the formation of the SPA, the SDF renamed itself the Socialist Party of Washington but otherwise remained unchanged." While a new party structure outwardly reorganized the nation's Socialists, it did not necessarily translate into new members. Instead, it was because of independent political action at the grassroots level that Washington became, over time, "one of the movement's strongholds." By late 1902 the Socialist Party of Washington possessed 45 locals and approximately 1,000 members.

Along with party organizing, Northwest Socialists also increased their work in propaganda. One of the most significant means of spreading party doctrine was the socialist press. The SPA's national secretary, William Maillly, observed the growth of socialist newspapers, noting that the party press "is gaining steadily in numbers and influence." The Northwest socialist press was no exception. A number of the region's first distinctively socialist papers appeared during the party's early years, often with the direct involvement of state parties. Although not initially established as a specifically socialist paper, Lewistown's Judith Basin News was arguably Montana's first socialist paper. It was initially published on September 17, 1902, with a politically independent mission. Soon, however, coverage of socialist organizing appeared more regularly. Articles in early 1903, for example, reported the organizing of new locals at Lewistown and Wilder. In April 1904 the paper moved from Lewistown to Helena and changed its name to the Montana News. The weekly paper now focused much of its attention on socialism and class-consciousness. Socialist Party leaders eventually assumed control of the Montana News and

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**A banner advertising a Socialist Party picnic overlooks the bustling intersection of Third and Union in downtown Seattle, 1911.**
by late 1905 its subtitle proudly announced that it was “owned and published by the Socialist Party of Montana.”

Washington's state party also worked with the socialist press. In 1902 the state's party secretary, Joseph Gilbert, established New Time in Spokane. In 1900, on the state's west side, Dr. Iliermon Titus, for almost a decade the leader of Washington's most radical Socialists, established the Seattle Socialist. The Socialist (as the paper was widely known), although unaffiliated with the SDP or SPA, aimed to “Organize the Slaves of Capital to Vote their Own Emancipation.” By 1902 the Socialist's circulation reached 2,500 and its reputation soared. Socialists across the country might have agreed with historian Jonathan Dembo's assessment that the Socialist was “the most important SPA organ in the West.”

New papers also appeared in Oregon. Established in 1903, Portland's Liberator was a short-lived weekly that preached socialist principles. Its founders were T. E. Latimer, a former University of Washington professor, and A. E. Fowler, a Seattle cartoonist. The Liberator announced, “This is the only paper in Oregon that is owned and edited by the working class, for the working class, and will tell the truth in the interest of the working class.” Praise for the paper even came from mainstream publications. The East Oregonian described the Liberator as “a neat, well printed paper, ably edited and earnest in its advocacy of the doctrine of socialism.” The Socialist Party of Oregon's official paper began publication in 1904 at Grants Pass. Called the Real Issue, the paper's motto revealed its revolutionary attitude: “No compromise, no political trading.” In 1905 Real Issue relocated to Portland. The arrival of the Liberator and Real Issue typified an important era in Oregon's labor-minded press. According to historian Carlos Schwantes, 1900 marked the beginning of “the heyday for socialist and labor papers in Oregon. That year, for example, the weekly Portland Labor Press (after 1915 the Oregon Labor Press), the official organ of the AFL, began publication. In 1901, the Pacific Coast Citizen, another short-lived socialist journal, started up.

Northwest Socialists took their propaganda duties seriously. Organizers placed great importance on the role of papers, rallies, and literature in future electoral success. Newspapers like the Liberator urged readers to “see to it that the Socialists in your precinct go to the polls and vote.” As historian Ira Kipnis has argued, almost all Socialists considered propaganda efforts, particularly those aimed at trade unions, their most crucial activity. Accordingly, Northwest Socialists committed considerable time and money to propaganda work. The Liberator summarized Oregon's expenditures on propaganda and the significance of spreading the paper's message: “At a careful estimate, at least $50,000 is being annually spent in Oregon in the cause of socialism. There is a socialist sentiment in Oregon that would scare the old parties to death if it was crystallized into a concrete movement.”

Washington's socialist leadership believed “the main function of the Socialist Party was to organize and get a strong dues-paying organization so that when the crucial moment came they would be able to do the job and take possession of the industries.” Washington Socialists may have placed propaganda ahead of all other work, even electoral achievement. As David Shannon asserted, the state's organizers “had no intention of building a political party. To them the Socialist Party was an educational or propagandist agency, not a political group.”

Without question, newspapers were the most visible and important of party organs, but there were others. Handbills and socialist literature were also useful forms of propaganda. Handbills regularly appeared on Northwest streets. In 1902 flyers in Helena advertised a “Free Lecture On Socialism, and What It Is” by Professor Walter Thomas Mills of Chicago. The flyer urged, “Don't Miss it. It will be interesting.” Careful not to exclude anyone, it even extended a “Special Invitation to the Ladies.” Utopian or broadly socialist literature messages also remained important to the popularization of socialist principles. J. F. Mabie, one of the most active socialist organizers in Montana, explained his conversion to socialism: “In 1902 I read [Edward] Bellamy's Looking Backward[,] I discovered myself and from that time called myself a socialist.”

Industrial workers were the party's core audience, but it also directed attention toward the Northwest's farmers. Socialist Party leaders recognized the sizable voting demographic amongst the region's agriculturalists and wanted farmers to identify with the rest of the working class. The Socialist's Hermon Titus pleaded with farmers “to look beyond their own class, to recognize the supreme class struggle between capital and wage labor and to join hands with that class which alone can bring freedom from all economical bondage.” The region's farmers undoubtedly encountered Socialists during the party's early years. By 1901 the Yakima Herald contained special sections for Socialists. In the middle of 1902, careful not to neglect his fellow laborers, Eugene Debs addressed approximately 2,000 during a visit to the Colfax wheat farmers.

With party machinery, activists, and strategies now in place, socialism's most impressive early showings occurred in smaller municipal elections. The Socialist Party of Washington's (SPW) first political campaigns were encouraging. In 1901 two Seattle Socialists, Hermon Titus and John T. Oldman, ran for King County's school board and together received approximately 25 percent of the vote. By 1904 Socialists were increasingly visible in state politics. In elections that year they ran 55 candidates for a number of state and King County positions. The Socialist Labor ticket ran 27 of its own candidates. The rivalry between the SPW and the remnants of the SLP was not unusual. Many SPA/SPW members at the turn of the 20th century embraced "immediate demands," meaning direct legislation and municipal ownership, as a political tactic, while SLP purists dismissed immediate demands

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as “nonsense” and lacking a revolutionary spirit. The SPW, however, took the political lead in attacking the state’s Republicans and Democrats. It criticized the two mainstream parties in a pre-election gathering at Seattle’s Carpenter’s hall. “Socialists Scold Both Big Parties,” reported the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. The paper described “quite a good many people in attendance” and “some applause in spots.”

Montana’s Socialists also began regularly appearing on ballots. They first surfaced in 1902 when party member George Sproule ran for Congress. His Montana comrades were no doubt pleased when he received over 3,000 votes. While state Socialists first made their mark with Sproule’s candidacy, more success came at the local level. Accordingly, Anaconda became the center of Montana’s early socialist politics. Copper magnate Marcus Daly and his Anaconda Company had built a company town in Deer Lodge Valley. Anaconda, given its predominately working-class population, was union friendly.

By 1902 the city had 27 local unions with 1,050 members. Montana Socialists, with a fair amount of success, courted union support. At its 1902 convention the Montana Federation of Labor almost unanimously supported the recent endorsements of the Socialist Party by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and the American Federation of Labor. In 1903, with support from the Anaconda Central Labor Council and many of the town’s working class, the Anaconda Socialists held their city convention to prepare for local elections. Ninety-two delegates nominated a number of municipal candidates, including cigar maker John Frinke for mayor. Aided by the new Anaconda Labor-Socialist, Frinke won with an impressive 46 percent of the vote.

The new mayor, despite achieving an important electoral victory for Socialism, faced immediate challenges. Non-Socialistic in the city council battled the new administration, and the Anaconda Company rewarded employees sympathetic to Frinke with pink slips. WFM records loosely estimated that these terminations numbered between 50 and 500. Faced with stiff personal and political competition, Frinke and his socialist comrades lost badly in their 1903 bids for reelection. While the embattled Frinke administration was “merely custodial,” as historian Jerry Calvert has asserted, the Frinke election represented the first Socialist party electoral victory in the West.

After the SPA’s formation in 1901, Socialists also saw marked improvement in national elections. Debs’s candidacy in 1900, under the auspices of the old Social Democratic Party (SDP), yielded only 4,181 votes (1.2 percent) in the Northwest and 86,936 (0.62 percent) nationally. Conversely, the new SPA, despite continued competition from the strictly Marxist Socialist Labor Party, proved an increasingly viable political player. In the 1904 elections the
SPA appeared on the ballot in 43 states, 7 more than in 1900. When the first returns from the 1904 election arrived, they seemed to reinforce Eugene Debs's earlier assertions that “the political trend is steadily toward Socialism.” Socialist estimates claimed half a million votes nationally. The final Socialist vote in the Northwest states was 4,949 (6.8 percent) in Idaho, 5,675 (8.9 percent) in Montana, 7,479 (8.3 percent) in Oregon, and 10,023 (6.9 percent) in Washington. Northwest Socialists saw more electoral success than did their comrades elsewhere. In 1904 the average percentage of socialist support in the Northwest was 7.73, much higher than the national average of 2.98.

The SPA’s first national election, coupled with impressive gains from 1900, brought much-needed publicity. The Northwest’s mainstream papers took notice of the Socialists’ marked improvement. The Oregonian declared, “Socialist Vote Increases” and commented on “one of the noteworthy exhibits” of the 1904 election: “the relatively large vote cast for the Socialist ticket.” According to the Oregonian, Debs ran ahead of Democrat Alton Parker in several Oregon counties. The International Socialist Review pointed to the region as being pure in ideology and representative of party growth. Recapping the “Lessons from the Socialist Vote,” the journal boasted, “the socialistic vote has shown the strongest and most persistent growth in those localities where the membership has been most thoroughly trained in the principles of socialism.” The Review now spoke highly of “the growth in...the Pacific states.” By 1904 the region’s Socialists had reason for optimism.

While the Northwest’s Socialists experienced important party growth and electoral strides in its first years, internal divisions and external challenges had already surfaced. To those in the East, Socialists in the West and Northwest nevertheless had a reputation as a fairly cohesive, radical group. In 1902 Eugene Debs accounted for “the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat of the rugged and sparsely settled mountain States.” According to him, “The class conscious union movement of the West is historic in origin and development and every Socialist should recognize its mission and encourage its growth.” Similarly, a correspondent for Philadelphia’s Weekly Socialist wrote of the West: “The socialist movement is seen to most advantage in the state of Washington and British Columbia. The bulk of its members are proletarians, who make it their business to understand the question thoroughly.” Some of the first historical studies of Socialism echoed this radical sentiment. Historian David Shannon characterized the revolutionary character of western socialism in the same way. “In the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Northwest,” he wrote, “the Socialist movement was dominated by revolutionaries.” Here was the stronghold of Bill Haywood and the IWW. Here was clearly the most radical section of the Socialist Party.” While radicalism existed in the Northwest, those outside the region were quick to describe its exceptional radicalism.

From its inception, however, the new Socialist Party of America was not harmonious. As the Unity Convention indicated, serious ideological divisions had previously existed among America’s various “socialists.” The new party included, among others, southern agriculturalists, non-Marxist Christians, “by the book” Marxists, former Populists, and syndicalists. Thus, as Carlos Schwantes explained, the establishment of the SPA “brought only the illusion of unity to the movement.” Nationwide, regional rivalry and distinctiveness still divided Socialists. The Socialist Party, according to Shannon, was “a typically American party in the sense that it extended from coast to coast.” However, he argued, “in almost all regions of the country,” Socialists advocated a “variety of social philosophies.”

Despite their radical reputation, the region’s Socialists did not always fit their undivided, extremist label. Instead, many were restrained advocates of “immediate demands” and municipal socialism. Also, these “other Socialists,” according to Schwantes, “derived their anti-capitalism more from the New Testament or Looking Backward than Das Kapital.” Accordingly, Northwest Socialists faced infighting similar to the national squabbling between radicals and moderates, mainly stemming from doctrinal interpretations.

In the Northwest, Washington’s Socialists provided the best example of early internal divisions. Since its inception,
These "commonsense socialists" within the SPW, also called the Reds, and Titus tried to keep the SPW on a radical, class conscious, Marxist, revolutionary course. Titus stood in open defiance of moderate party members, the so-called "gas and water" Socialists. These "commonsense socialists" within the SPW, also called Yellows, advocated gradual public ownership campaigns and union-friendly positions. From the establishment of the SPA to about 1909, Titus led the Reds.

From 1901 to 1905 the socialist relationship to unionism—the so-called "fusion" issue—surfaced as an important challenge to the party. In an essay on the "Economic Versus Political Power of Labor," F. G. R. Gordon articulated the different perspectives. Socialists, he claimed, "declare that the only way to emancipate the wage workers is through political revolution." Simultaneously, "The pure and simple trade unionist just as stoutly maintains that the wage class will be emancipated by his economic organization." Northwest Socialists, like their comrades elsewhere, debated the extent and direction of their movement's relationship to "bread and butter" labor unions. The question of the Socialists’ support for organized labor strained the Socialists’ standing with union members, and the debate kept Socialists at odds with one another.

During the party’s first years the blurred lines between socialism and unionism complicated the relationship. Intermitting between Socialists and unions, particularly the AFL, continued to occur from both sides. In 1902 Eugene Debs said openly: "I am the friend, not the enemy of the American Federation of Labor." Debs welcomed this relationship, particularly because the AFL subsidiary in the West, the Western Federation of Miners, had recently "adopted the platform of the Socialist Party and pledged the support of their organizations to the International Socialist movement." But as others voiced their concern, the Socialist-AFL relationship proved increasingly contentious. The "fusion" issue became a great source of conflict within the SPA’s ranks. "One of the issues which kept the factions of the Socialist party at odds," David Shannon explained, "was the question of what attitude they should take toward the American Federation of Labor." The views of various party members fueled the debate. Because a number of moderate Socialists still supported trade unionism, radicals grew increasingly uneasy. According to Shannon, "the conservatives, putting their faith in the power of the ballot, held that the party had to gain the support of the AFL rank and file." It became clear that these differing perspectives could make unionism the SPA’s most divisive issue. According to Carlos Schwantes, "The continuing controversy... threatened to tear the new party asunder."

The Northwest, and particularly the SPW, witnessed its share of the fusion debate. Amidst the infighting between "Reds" and "Yellows" in Washington, the fusion issue fueled their disagreements. Not surprisingly, Yellows advocated cooperation with business and labor leaders in the name of electoral success. Meanwhile, the SPW’s Red faction rejected cooperation because these alliances, it claimed, diluted socialist convictions. Editor Titus, on behalf of the SPW’s radical wing, aired his criticisms of unionism’s political ineptitude in the International Socialist Review:

The growing power of concentrated capital renders even the best organized labor unions more and more impotent and must make it evident that only by unified action on the political field can labor achieve any permanent benefit for itself. Nothing short of the Socialist program, abolishing the wage system itself, will be of any use as a political demand.

The AFL’s dedication to limited political involvement complicated Socialist Party campaigns. Northwest Socialists still failed, as Republicans and Democrats did, to court important union endorsements. Northwest unions such as the Pacific Coast Lumber Manufacturers’ Association, for example, denied "the slightest intention of taking any part in partisan politics." Unsupportive organizations that represented large elements of the working class hindered Socialist Party success. Many union members openly resisted socialist politics. The pages of the AFL’s American Federationist announced, "The great trade union leaders of this nation, with hardly an exception, are opposed to socialist parties." For Socialists, anti-union sentiment within the party coupled with unions determined to stay out of politics made union members, and their votes, difficult to secure.

Still, despite infighting over ideological interpretation, tactical maneuvering, and trade unionism, Socialists in the Northwest built state organizations that achieved electoral successes. From 1901 to 1905 party memberships rose and anti-union sentiment within the party coupled with unions determined to stay out of politics made union members, and their votes, difficult to secure.

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Still, despite infighting over ideological interpretation, tactical maneuvering, and trade unionism, Socialists in the Northwest built state organizations that achieved electoral successes. From 1901 to 1905 party memberships rose and Socialist Party candidates captured increasingly more votes. The SPA seemed united over fundamental political and ideological positions. An aversion to capitalism and a commitment to electoral strategies stood as unifying forces. But already a number of challenges to party cohesiveness and future political achievement were apparent. Despite the first hints of plaguing party problems, Northwest Socialists moved their cause forward, ultimately emerging as a permanent fixture on the Northwest political landscape.

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The town of Wenatchee sits in the cradle of the Columbia River's Big Bend. Since the turn of the 20th century Wenatchee's economy had depended on its apple boom, but by the end of the 1920s the land was quickly drying up. At that time the town's political controversies revolved around moral issues such as Prohibition, and Rufus Woods, editor of the town's leading newspaper, the Wenatchee Daily World, remained at the forefront of every local project. Through private letters, numerous organizations and, most importantly, the Daily World, Rufus Woods began to advocate the building of Grand Coulee Dam. His efforts eventually brought the people of Wenatchee, and ultimately the federal government, to understand his convictions about the project's importance, resulting in the completion of one of history's greatest feats of reclamation.

An ecstatic creativity had always characterized Rufus Woods's life, from childhood pranks with his twin brother to his self-admitted obsession with north central Washington's development. Woods was enthusiastic and determined. These qualities helped make him a trusted community leader with extensive influence in promoting Grand Coulee Dam.

Born on a Nebraska homestead May 17, 1878, Woods moved with his family to Wenatchee in 1904, following what he called "The Westward Urges." After working as editor of two local newspapers, he quit when his co-manager sold one of them to the rather unsuccessful Wenatchee Daily World. He dabbled in real estate before returning to the news business and assuming full management of the Daily World in 1907.

The World faced immediate problems as it struggled to survive financial hardships and attacks from competing newspapers. Woods persevered, however, expanding the World's coverage area and influence. As editor, he endeavored "to evaluate and see the great drama of life as it exists." His writing reflected his public speaking style and included frequent exclamations in capital letters. In his own words, Woods "played it big."

Through the Daily World, Woods promoted economic freedom from the Great Northern Railroad, better transportation via the Stevens Pass Highway, and several local irrigation and improvement projects. A local lawyer, Sam R. Summer, attested that Woods's "reputation for honesty and good citizenship was of the very highest." This growing leadership turned the Daily World into a great success, with Woods's editorials published in over 200 weeklies throughout Washington. He became a well-known figure statewide, which would prove key in helping the community understand the Grand Coulee Dam project.

In 1918 Ephrata lawyer William "Billy" Clapp read studies by Professor Henry Landes propounding that a great "ice dam" once diverted the course of the Columbia River. Clapp's reasoning was simple: if nature could do it, why couldn't we? After all, the United States Bureau of Reclamation was already exploring irrigation projects in the Western states. With little engineering knowledge, he proposed a huge dam on
the Columbia River at Grand Coulee, a 30-mile gorge carved near the ancient river. The main difficulties, he deemed, would involve gathering funds for such a massive project.

Woods heard of Clapp's proposal on a routine search for news. His reaction was simple: "Billy's got it!" He published the first article on the dam in the Daily World on July 18, 1918, under the headline "Formulate Brand New Idea for Irrigation Grant, Adams, Franklin Counties, Covering Million Acres or More." This short article, pushed to page seven by World War I updates, announced Clapp's idea as "the latest, the newest, the most ambitious idea in the way of reclamation and development of water power ever formulated...now in process of development." It promised a 700-foot-tall dam that would provide "practically unlimited" irrigation water. Rufus Woods thus entered into what he frequently called "the Battle for the Grand Coulee Dam," his greatest feat of communication.

Shortly after this first article on the dam, Elbert F. Blaine, Washington State Public Service Commission chairman, proposed a different reclamation project—a canal over 130 miles long that would carry water from the Pend Oreille River in Idaho to the barren scablands of the Columbia Basin without using a dam. Because the idea relied on the land's slope to deliver water, it became known as the "Gravity Plan." Clapp's idea used pumps to carry water from the dam to a reservoir nearby and was therefore dubbed the Pumping Plan. The Gravity Plan enraged Woods. He later called it "a Gigantic Hoax."

What further exasperated Woods was that several wealthy power companies backed the Gravity Plan, afraid of losing business to a dam's inexpensive electricity. "It's a great idea, boys," cautioned contractor F. A. Keasal, "but you will find you are up against all the money in the world." However, Frank T. Post, president of the Washington Water Power Company in Spokane, denied in a letter to Woods that his company was trying to stop the Grand Coulee project. "Our company and the other companies out here are not doing a damn thing in relation to the Grand Coulee dam," he wrote. In October 1934, James D. Ross, superintendent of Seattle City Light, also wrote Woods saying Woods's claim that City Light had "attacked" the dam surprised him. Woods countered by saying, "The $5 million which you got from the New York bankers tied you up to fight Grand Coulee Dam."

Woods was likely right: Gravity Plan proponents had extensive political and monetary influence. The Washington Water Power Company funded an early study on the two plans—and hired its own engineers. Not surprisingly, the study recommended the Gravity Plan. Next, Gravity Plan backers helped hire George Goethals, chief engineer of the Panama Canal. Though Goethals's name carried great influence, he knew nothing about irrigation. After six days of "work," he copied most of his report from information the Water Power Company provided and declared the Gravity Plan superior. Exasperated, Woods dismissed the report.

Woods published frequent articles about the dam in the Daily World. In them, he defied every criticism that arose. "First the story was that there was no bedrock for a dam... This was proven false very easily." Next, newspapers like the Yakima Republic and Bellingham Herald questioned the need for power. "There has been a growing demand for power throughout the Northwest," countered Woods. From 1929 through the 1930s the Northwest, especially Seattle, faced acute power shortages. When opposition turned to questioning the need for agricultural land, their queries were literally blown away by massive dust storms in 1931. "The big dust storm of the last few days... calls attention in a graphic manner to the necessity of conserving this immense body of rich fertile soil," stated the World.

The opposition also made attempts to stop promotional meetings and even take over the Columbia Basin Commission, an organization in favor of the dam. Woods argued against all contradicting claims before the public in his trademark capital letters, describing opposition to the dam as "Politics - Intrigue - Misinformation - Threats - Deceit - Big Money - Ridicule - Intimidation." His head-on style held the public's attention.

Many interests, other than those of power companies, were at stake in the Grand Coulee Dam proposal. The dam

OPPOSITE PAGE: Rufus Woods posed before the Grand Coulee spillway.

RIGHT: The Columbia Basin and Grand Coulee Dam.
would affect neighboring Indian tribes as well as area farmers and landowners, and even anthropologists. Rufus Woods addressed some of them in one Daily World article. He maintained, "Water users are virtually 100% for the Pumping Plan." He pointed out that with Blaine’s Gravity plan, farmers would have to pay $200 an acre to build the main canal of over 130 miles on their land. At a 1931 landowners’ meeting in Ephrata, all but one person "favored [a] small district to be under [the] pumping plan." Most people who attended the meeting were local farmers.

Woods did not, however, publicize that the dam would flood traditional Indian ceremonial, burial, and fishing grounds as well as significantly deplete the salmon population. Many Colville Indians made a living off Columbia River salmon until Grand Coulee Dam forced them into poverty. Several towns were relocated and 21,000 acres were cleared and then flooded by the dam’s reservoir. Besides this, anthropologists lost an important archaeological dig to the dam’s flooding. Perhaps Woods misunderstood this, but neither he nor the dam’s builders fully addressed its negative impacts. In fact, they thought the salmon population could be fully replaced with a fishery in Leavenworth. Woods, along with the majority of Washingtonians, believed that the dam’s benefits outweighed its drawbacks.

In 1929 the Great Depression struck, and Wenatchee was swept into the crisis when apple prices hit all-time lows. By 1932 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt promised to turn the economy around with a “New Deal.” One of his most prominent strategies was the construction of public buildings and landmarks. In this way, the New Deal created an opportunity for Woods and the proposed Grand Coulee Dam. In 1931 the Army Corps of Engineers had recommended Grand Coulee Dam over Blaine’s Gravity Plan, but Woods still had to pull every string he could to take advantage of FDR’s program and gain funding for the dam.

Besides using the World as a mouthpiece for the dam, Woods also worked through letters and organizations to push Grand Coulee. He became an active leader in the Columbia Basin Irrigation League (CBIL), which put out a pamphlet for dam supporters in 1931. CBIL outlined an effort to gain the government’s attention “through their own constituents,” referring to local manufacturers and wholesalers. It encouraged consumers to write local businesses, arguing that irrigation with a dam at Grand Coulee was the only way to improve the economy. The dam, they promised, would generate $600 million in taxable wealth and a $180 million market for manufacturers per year. Woods was also president of the Columbia River Development League, which held numerous public meetings, including one that drew 5,000 people, 18 congressmen, and prompted the temporary closure of local schools.

Rufus Wood’s determination finally paid off when, in 1933, President Roosevelt included Grand Coulee Dam
in his Public Works Administration (PWA) construction plan. The dam would provide jobs for the unemployed, allow barges to navigate the Columbia, and generate electricity to “operate railroads, factories, mines, irrigation pumps, [and] furnish heat and light.” However, the result was bittersweet. Woods and his fellow dam supporters had wanted government funding for a locally run project. Instead, the Bureau of Reclamation, under the PWA, would oversee the dam’s construction. Because of this, much of Grand Coulee’s electric wealth was distributed to Portland and Seattle, ending Woods’s dream of turning Wenatchee into the center of the “Inland Empire.” Nevertheless, Woods sent no mixed messages. He continued to support the dam as enthusiastically as ever, writing articles on its progress and traveling to Washington, D.C., to discuss its construction.

Grand Coulee Dam took eight years to complete. During that time the Roosevelt Administration and Congress created the Bonneville Power Administration to sell the electricity produced by the dam. In addition, local communities thrived as thousands of workers moved into new boomtowns. Grand Coulee Dam became a national obsession. “Every one in America has heard of Grand Coulee,” proclaimed the New York Times.

On December 12, 1941, workers poured the last concrete on the dam. “HOLD THAT RIVER!” wrote Woods. “HERE IT STANDS, AN ENDURING MONUMENT.”

Throughout Rufus Woods’s "23 Years’ Battle for Grand Coulee Dam" it was his diverse yet singularly consistent communication that enabled the public and ultimately the federal government to understand how important the dam would be. In the end, he succeeded. “I sincerely doubt whether we would have

The story of Grand Coulee Dam is the largest concrete structure in North America, generating power used throughout the western United States and irrigating over 1 million acres. Wenatchee and all of the Inland Empire have comparatively inexpensive electricity and irrigation. During World War II, Grand Coulee demonstrated global significance by producing power for the Hanford Project as well as for production of the aluminum that constructed one-third of the American fighter planes. The dam also generated thousands of jobs, counteracting unemployment during the Great Depression. Had not Rufus Woods so vividly communicated his dream, it is possible that none of this would have come about. “Rufus Woods was a very important part of Wenatchee’s history,” stated former Wenatchee World employee Larry Chapman. “Anyone who has been in Wenatchee a long time will see his contributions.”

Rufus Woods’s position as the highly influential editor of the Wenatchee Daily World and his public reputation enabled him to effectively promote Grand Coulee Dam. Had he been unable to reach such a widespread audience, the “Pumping Plan” might not have garnered so much regional support. His articles set in motion the countless meetings, organizations, and publicity efforts that led to success for the dam’s supporters. Though he made no money from the dam, Rufus Woods poured himself into Wenatchee’s reclamation. His ardent communications improved eastern Washington, turning Wenatchee from a “rag-tag and bobtailed” town into a prosperous community. As Woods proclaimed in his dedication address, standing before the completed Grand Coulee Dam in 1942: “The magic spirit of willing men accomplishes more than the might of money or the marvels of machinery.”

Rebecca Smith is currently a junior at Bothell High School. She wrote this winning essay for the History Day competition when she was in eighth grade. She continues to participate in History Day. Her essays for 2006 and 2007 placed first at the regional and state levels, the latter also placing first at the national competition.

EDITOR'S NOTE
History Day started as a small contest in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1974. Members of the history department at Case Western Reserve University developed the initial idea for a history contest to make teaching and learning history a fun and exciting experience. Now students all over the country participate each year, including more than 4,000 Washington students. The Historical Society coordinates Washington History Day. For more information, visit WashingtonHistoryDay.org or contact Lauren Danner at 360/586-0165.
THE COASTAL NOVELS OF NARD JONES

By Peter Donahue

Nard Jones never let his pen point grow dull. In high school in Weston, Oregon, he contributed columns to the Weston Leader. At Whitman College he founded and wrote for Blue Moon, the school's literary magazine. And half a century later, with 18 books and countless short stories and articles to his credit, he was chief editorial writer for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Indeed, no writer ever worked harder to advance Northwest writing than did Nard Jones (1904-1972).

Jones's most enduring literary contribution lies in his fiction, which includes a dozen novels and hundreds of short stories. One need only step into Seattle’s Elliott Bay Book Company today to note the proliferation of novels set in what Jones called “Puget Country.” Like the dot-com boom and coffee craze, however, this is a recent phenomenon. Jones wrote the first Seattle novel: The Petlands (1931). “There have been others which touched upon [Seattle] lightly, or veiled it as a composite Western city,” Jones acknowledged. “But I believe The Petlands is the first to use it actually in a character role.” And he was right.

The novel depicts three generations of Petlands, including Norton, who follows his parents west during the 1898 gold rush and discovers that Seattle is “a coming town.” Jones is an exacting urban topologist who understands the relation between history and place. He refers routinely to specific sites, from the Alaska Building and Smith Tower to Frederick & Nelson’s Department Store and the New Washington Hotel (now the Josephinum). In documenting Seattle’s turn-of-the-century rise, Jones also charts how the city shapes each character’s destiny.

Of course, no one knows a city—from its elite institutions to its festering alleys—better than a good gumshoe, and in Jones’s next Seattle novel, The Case of the Hanging Lady (1938), he drew on his experience as editor of Pacific Motor Boat, a Miller Freeman publication, to give us Martin Jones, the sleuth who solves the mysterious death of an attractive socialite at the Seattle Yacht Club. In fact, with The Case of the Hanging Lady, he might well have penned the first Seattle mystery novel, blaming the way for the likes of J. A. Jance, Earl Emerson, and G. M. Ford.

In 1941 Jones published his second historical novel, The Scarlet Petticoat, about a white woman venturing into the Oregon Country during the fur trading days at Fort George (Astoria) near the mouth of the Columbia. As a Seattle Times reviewer said, “The real Nard Jones is Pioneer Jones!” He faithfully depicts historical figures such as Donald McTavish, the Fort George commander, and Comcomly, the Chinook chief, and gives readers such details as the fact that early pioneers liked to smoke kinnikinnick.

With the start of World War II, Jones enlisted in the Naval Reserves, serving as a public relations officer at the 13th Naval District Headquarters in Seattle. It was his experiences as Lieutenant Commander Nard Jones on which he based his next Seattle/Puget Sound novel in 1948. The novel’s title, The Island, refers to Bainbridge Island, where the wartime troubles begin for narrator Lou Benedict, a newspaperman, and his former buddies from Warwick (i.e., Whitman) College.

The novel is a thorough and forthright depiction of Seattle during World War II. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Lou Benedict observes, “We blacked out our windows, or sat in darkness at night behind soundless radios. We covered the lenses of our flashlights with blue cellophane and fixed our automobile headlights so that only slits of light shown [sic] through.” He continues, “It was a strange new world, a strange new way of living, in a city that had changed its shape and coloring, between a quiet morning and a bleak and fearful evening.” In its understanding of the Seattle home front, The Island remains an important World War II novel.

In the 1950s Jones published two original paperbacks—both with vintage pulp fiction cover art—under Fawcett’s Gold Medal Books imprint. Priced at a quarter apiece, I'll Take What’s Mine (1954) and Ride the Dark Storm (1955) are fast, mass-market reads...
that nevertheless retain a good measure of literary merit, especially in their treatment of the coastal Northwest. Both are logging novels that know their way around haywire and yawning logs, peavey poles and calked boots, timber beasts and Forest Service leases.

I’ll Take What’s Mine, set in a town reminiscent of Forks, offers one of the most vivid depictions of the Olympic Peninsula ever written. It portrays the peninsula’s interior as a strange, almost mythical land. When Carl Hansen and Nadine Ward trek to the Enchanted Valley, buffeted by williwaws and haunted by the wild man of the Hoh River, they behold wonders never imagined. Carl has a strong conservationist ethic that serves rather than hinders his business ambitions. He explains how “every damned thing here, even the wood mice and the insects, the cougars as well as the elk—those dead, rotting trees as well as the living ones—they all affect each other, they’re all part of the whole shebang. Destroy one thing and you hurt all the rest some way.” To which Nadine responds, “That’s queer talk for a logger.”

While I’ll Take What’s Mine portrays the harvesting aspect of the industry, Ride the Dark Storm tackles the big business end, showing timber barons who ruthlessly cut deals against the best interest of the communities they purport to serve.

Jones did not publish another novel after Ride the Dark Storm. In the 1960s he did a series of radio broadcasts called “Puget Sound Profiles,” about the people and places of Puget Country. In 1972 his final work, titled simply Seattle—an informed history of, and lively commentary on, his hometown—appeared posthumously. As columnist Emmett Watson said following his friend’s death, Nard Jones “left a legacy of splendid, often inspired literature on the Northwest…and as a character on this tortured green footsloo he will not be soon forgotten.”


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

The Gender Gap


Seattle’s Paramount Theatre


The Story of Seattle’s Early Theaters, by Howard Franklin Grant. Seattle: University Bookstore, 1934.

Mapping America’s Progress


The West the Railroads Made


Rufus Woods


The Politics of Socialism


Emerald City
An Environmental History of Seattle
Reviewed by Jonathan B. Isaoff.

Emerald City is an ambitious and impressive work of history. A methodical account of the environmental history of Seattle alone would be a sufficient accomplishment. But Matthew Klingle seeks to go beyond and develop "an ethics of place," branching out of environmental history and into the distinctive terrain of environmental ethics and philosophy. The final result is an important book that will be of great use to and enjoyed by readers from either perspective.

Playing on the theme of the Emerald City in L. Frank Baum's Wizard of Oz, Klingle demonstrates that Seattle has an ecological, economic, ethnic, and class richness that defies easy characterization. Like the Emerald City, there is from afar the appearance of the sublime: a clean, modern city set in a paradise of green forests and salmon-filled streams. But as with the Emerald City, the reality behind the curtain is at great odds with the external image; Seattle's glowing exterior belies a legacy of industrial waste, manipulation and outright destruction of nature, and a long, sad story of persecution of the Puget Sound region's original inhabitants.

Klingle begins his account with a well-devised prologue that uses the salmon as a metaphor for Seattle's history. In the beginning, before white colonization, the Puget Sound Native Americans created an entire culture and religion based on salmon. With the onset of industrialization, spawning streams and rivers were diverted, straightened, dredged, and in some instances, simply destroyed. By the 1930s the Puget Sound region's five species of Pacific salmon were in deep trouble. By the 1980s and 1990s, modern environmentalists and dot-com billionaires took up the plight of the salmon, restoring the silver fish once again as the symbol of Seattle.

While not explicitly presented as such, there is a strong Marxist current running through the entire text, suggesting that the history of Seattle is a history of the have-nots. During the second half of the 19th century, "Immigrant squatters and Indians alike," writes Klingle, "faced a new world where the political economy of private property circumscribed their lives and in which the state and federal authorities exerted pressures to assimilate or disappear." Assimilation, however, was quite difficult, if not altogether impossible, for to assimilate meant to become private landowners, which was proscribed by laws. Measures such as the Alien Land Law of 1921, for instance, outlawed "residents of Japanese descent from owning or leasing land in the state of Washington." So the first generation of Japanese, the Issei, and their children, the Nisei, "who ran some of the most productive farms in the region, growing fresh berries and vegetables for local markets in Seattle..." were literally pushed off their land, which was "snapped up" by white speculators. Needless to say, Native Americans and other non-white immigrants faced similar realities.

This theme relates to the issue of social justice, which is at the core of Klingle's critique of Aldo Leopold's famous Sand County Almanac; the most important work of 20th-century environmental thought. Leopold's "land ethic" is premised on the notion that to preserve the integrity of the biota is right, to do otherwise is wrong. However, this assumes a stable natural world as well as a unified system of human justice. In reality, however, human systems have wreaked havoc on natural systems. The extent to which humans seek to preserve ecological integrity and the most prized aspects of nature are functions of powerful social interests. Klingle suggests augmenting the land ethic with an "ethic of place," in which competing interests would democratically decide what means most to them and then work toward the best arrangement allowable for the common good of the community. This means that environmental ethics will ultimately require compromise both politically and ecologically.

No work is perfect: the narrative might have benefited from a more fleshed out transition between the early 20th century and its end. Presumably, there had to have been great political changes to bring Seattle, and indeed America, from the robber baron capitalists to the dot-com environmentalists within little more than 50 years. But this is a minor issue in an otherwise meticulously researched and brilliantly conceived work. Emerald City will be essential reading for any student or researcher of Seattle history specifically and the intersection of environmental and urban history more generally.

Jonathan B. Isaoff is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of Environmental Studies at Gonzaga University.

Current & Noteworthy
By Robert C. Carriker, Book Review Editor

In 1853, when Congress created Washington Territory, its boundaries stretched eastward as far as the Continental Divide—about to present-day Butte, Montana. A decade later the creation of Idaho Territory forced Washington Territory to pull back from a Rocky Mountain boundary. Washingtonians have, nevertheless, retained their interest in Montana and its history. The two states entered the union almost hand-in-hand in 1889, Montana achieving her approval on November 8, three days before the Evergreen State. (Actually, Washington would have been the 41st state, rather than Montana, except that our territorial governor forgot to certify as authentic the copy of the state constitution he sent to Washington, D.C. Consequently, President Benjamin Harrison...
refused to sign the proclamation declaring Washington statehood. Officials in Olympia hastily corrected their mistake on November 4 but as his penalty Governor Elisha Ferry had to pay 61 cents for a collect telegram on November 11 to read: "The President signed the proclamation declaring Washington to be a state in the union at five o'clock and twenty seven minutes this afternoon." Two recent books about 20th-century moments in western Montana history may encourage vacationing Washingtonians to visit their territorial roots this summer.

Fire and Brimstone: The North Butte Mining Disaster of 1917, by Michael Punke (New York: Hyperion, 2006; 336 pp, $29.95 hardcover, $15.95 paper) is expertly written by an attorney-turned-author now living in Montana. The June 8, 1917, fire that began in the Granite Mountain shaft some 2,000 feet below ground in Butte would burn and smoke for three days, endangering the lives of more than 400 miners. Sadly, 163 men did not make it out alive. Most of the miners who cheated death did so by sealing themselves in a stope, trusting that rescue crews would find them before poison gas penetrated their self-imposed tomb. Because Punke is also the author of a novel, there is an inclination to think that the dialogue in this book is made up. Not so, Butte at the time supported three daily newspapers, so there are abundant quotes by witnesses. The author also took advantage of records from the coroner's inquest, federal Bureau of Mines reports, accounts written by participants, and personal interviews completed in 2004. So, while the book reads with the excitement of a novel, it is indeed based on fact. Today Butte and neighboring Anaconda are good towns to learn about the mining heritage of the Pacific Northwest. There are many books on the mining history of Butte, and Punke's book is a good one for beginners because it feels authentic when it describes the ethnic character of the people, the radical politics of the period surrounding World War I, and the technology used to release treasure—and trapped miners!—from the so-called richest hill on earth. The book has an index and notes but lacks a bibliography.

A Great Day to Fight Fire: Mann Gulch, 1949, by Mark Matthews (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007; 280 pp, $24.95) is written by a United States Forest Service technician-turned-author now living in Missoula. The lightening-induced fire that swept across Mann Gulch on August 5, 1949, threatened the lives of 16 smoke jumpers who had arrived at the scene from out of the sky; 13 of the men died. After parachuting into rugged terrain 20 miles north of Helena, the smoke jumpers spent valuable time finding each other. Alas, spinning 2,000-degree fire funnels, estimated to be 50 feet high, caught them after they had gone only a few hundred yards up Mann Gulch. The foreman set a back-fire and ordered his men to stay with him in the burned-out area, but they would not—11 of the 13 died within 300 yards of each other. Matthews provides new biographical information on the men involved, but he still relies heavily on both Norman Maclean's award-winning book, Young Men and Fire (1992), and the report of the Forest Service Board of Review. The Douglas C-47 that dropped the smoke jumpers on that fateful day can still be seen at the Missoula airport. For a close look at the scene of the tragedy, visitors can reach the site by joining the early morning commercial boat tour at the Gates of the Mountain, an exit off Interstate 15. From the Meriwether Picnic Area it is a two-mile hike to the 13 memorials. Matthews' book has an index and notes but lacks a bibliography. The single map included is completely inadequate to the material.

For those who prefer to find their history along the open road, Jill Livingston and Kathryn Maloof, the sisters who own Living Gold Press in Klamath River, California, have written That Ribbon of Highway III: Highway 99 through the Pacific Northwest (2007; 246 pp, $15.99). U.S. Highway 99 began in 1912 as a 12-foot-wide slab of concrete that would ultimately span 1,600 miles between the Mexican and Canadian borders. By 1923 the Oregon and Washington segments were completely paved. The first two volumes of this series covered California. The sisters' current effort follows Highway 99 as it moves from Siskiyou Summit on the California-Oregon border to the Peace Arch at Blaine. Basically, if a person wishes to avoid driving north on hectic Interstate 5, and still desires to explore the cities (Grants Pass, Eugene, Portland, Seattle, Bellingham) this book is an excellent guide. Old Highway 99 is not exactly a back road, but it is definitely the road less traveled. In 1928 it was called the "longest improved highway in the country," and there was lots to see. Some of those sites can still be found. Nineteen maps, with commentary, show the way. As the roadway changed from a single paved lane to two and occasionally three lanes, it also changed names: Pacific Highway (1915-1925) became U.S. 99 (1926-1956), and, with the advent of Interstate 5 it became Old Highway 99. Sometimes the road split. In Seattle, for example, there are both pre-1953 and post-1953 segments. The Alaskan Way Viaduct is representative of the post-1953 era.
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