SOMEDAY, THEY’LL FIND MY SON

The Search for Navy 90586
By Lee Corbin

“THE MAGAZINE OF NORTHWEST HISTORY ■ SPRING 2019

FINDING PEACE ACROSS THE OCEAN:
Daisy Tibbs Dawson and the Rebuilding of Hiroshima

Someday They’ll Find My Son ■ In Defense of Wyam

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ONLINE
COLUMBIA Magazine is a portal to a growing online presence of archival materials and other content from the Washington State Historical Society. Visit washingtonhistory.org for more features, including a searchable database of photos, ephemera and artifacts, and a link to the podcast COLUMBIA Conversations.

ON THE COVER
Daisy Tibbs Dawson was born in Alabama, but spent most of her adult life in Washington. She traveled to Japan aboard the General Gordon to help rebuild Hiroshima with a team of volunteers led by Floyd Schmoe. Photo of Daisy Tibbs Dawson courtesy American Baptist Historical Society; photo of the Schmoe House by Mitch Homma; and photo of General Gordon public domain.
As this issue is going to press, we've just come through one of the snowiest winters in several decades in Western Washington where the COLUMBIA team is based, and snow is falling in the Tri-Cities and Spokane.

During the snow, social media, which has especially revolutionized how history is shared online, was aflutter with a constant stream of photos of snowmen, back decks piled with drifts and unrecognizable heaps of white that hid parked cars. From Bellingham to Centralia, one could scroll through Facebook and Twitter and see variations on snow amounts, along with commonalities in how people were trying to cope with or just plain enjoy the aftermath.

Meanwhile, museums and historical societies around Puget Sound were keeping busy posting current photos of snowy front walks and notices of curtailed hours, and sometimes digging out vintage photos from big storms of the past, including infamous big snows of 1916, 1950 and 1990. And this inspired some regular folks to post images from storms gone-by, too.

This mixing of images from the past and present, and from “official” archives and personal photo collections, is what makes local history and social media such a great melting pot nowadays and such an exciting virtual venue. It’s impossible to predict what social media might look like even a few years from now, but the ability for a museum to post a photo and information, and for a history-minded person to then share her own related images and thoughts on the same thread, is something that wasn’t possible a mere 8–10 years ago.

Sharing history from a variety of viewpoints is also what COLUMBIA does best, and this issue is no exception. Quin’Nita Cobbins-Modica of Gonzaga University brings us the story of how Daisy Tibbs Dawson made a difference for Hiroshima survivors; Portland State University’s Katrine Barber shares an excerpt from her latest book about Celilo Falls; and Lee Corbin, military veteran and retired commercial pilot, revisits the disappearance of a Navy training flight, and a mother’s refusal to give up the search for her son.

As always, please keep sending your comments, ideas and story proposals to editor.columbia@gmail.com

Thanks for supporting COLUMBIA.

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KURT EINAR ARMBRUSTER
Kurt Einar Armbruster is a Seattle native, historian, professional bassist, and singer-songwriter. He has played music of many genres and has written numerous historical articles and several books, including Before Seattle Rocked: A City and Its Music and Orphan Road: The Railroad Comes to Seattle, 1853-1911. He lives in Seattle with his wife, Cedar, and is a proud card-carrying member of the Musicians’ Union of Seattle Local 76-493.

KATRINE BARBER
Katrine Barber teaches American West history, Pacific Northwest history, and public history courses at Portland State University. Her book In Defense of Wyam is excerpted in this issue. Dr. Barber’s public history work includes conducting oral histories for the U.S. Forest Service, Chinook Indian Nation, and Oregon National Guard; historic resource studies for the National Park Service; and consulting with museums. From 2006-2011, she directed the Center for Columbia River History, a public history consortium which included Portland State University, Washington State University-Vancouver and the Washington State Historical Society.

QUIN’NITA COBBINS-MODICA
Quin’Nita Cobbins-Modica is an historian of African American women's history in the American West. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Washington and currently holds a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of History at Gonzaga University in Spokane where she teaches courses in U.S. History and African American history. She is also the Associate Editor/Historian of Blackpast.org.

LEE CORBIN
Lee Corbin has been involved in many aspects of aviation, including maintenance and flying, both military and civilian, since graduating from high school in New Jersey. He’s a veteran of the US Navy and US Air Force, and served as both an enlisted member and as an officer. Lee retired from the US Air Force as a C-141 pilot. His career as a commercial pilot began with Western Airlines, and he retired from Delta Airlines after 25 years of service. Lee now enjoys the hunt for obscure military aviation history.
IT’S TIME TO LEAD THE CLimb

TOUCHSTONES FROM THE COLLECTION

Jessica Spring and Chandler O’Leary, authors of Dead Feminists: Historic Heroines in Living Color, selected the boot pictured here for display in A Thousand Words’ Worth. It was worn by early female mountaineer Faye Fuller as she climbed Mt. Rainier, aka “Mt. Tahoma.”

From Spring and O’Leary’s writing for the exhibition:

History and the objects that remain as reminders and inspiration have taken a central role in the Dead Feminists series. These touchstones are as varied as the women we’ve featured and help to tell their stories. Writers, politicians, scientists, artists and athletes, these women have helped grow and build a movement towards equality. While they might not have identified as feminists or even played nicely together if they had met in person, these women fiercely protected the notion that we all have a story worth sharing.

We are reminded again and again that we’re still fighting the battles our foremothers fought generations ago and there is no choice but to engage. As we approach the 2020 centennial of the passage of the nineteenth amendment, it’s critically important to use our voices to demand intersectionality and honor the voices of all women. Today in the shadow of Mt. Tahoma, we look to educator and activist Mary Church Terrell, who founded the National Association of Colored Women in 1896: “Lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long.” It’s time to lead this climb.

More information at WashingtonHistory.org/1000words
FINDING PEACE ACROSS THE OCEAN:

Mushroom cloud from atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in August 1945. Public domain.

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the world’s first deployed atomic bomb from a Boeing B-29 bomber over the city of Hiroshima. In the aftermath, the devastation of the city drew a small number of Seattle peace activists to organize an effort to help rebuild Hiroshima and to extend an olive branch to the people affected by the nuclear destruction. Daisy Tibbs Dawson, an African American woman, accompanied the inter-racial and inter-faith group to Hiroshima in 1949. Dawson would become known abroad as an international peace advocate for her efforts, and known in Washington State as a community and civic leader for her commitment and service to the education of Seattle’s children.

Rural Life In Alabama

Daisy Lee Tibbs was born in Toney, Alabama on July 24, 1924 to Calvin and Martha Tibbs. Her parents both died when she was very young, leaving Daisy and her two siblings in the care of their maternal uncle, Robert, and his wife, Mary Leslie. Daisy’s elders instilled in her the value of education, although they did not receive formal schooling in rural Alabama past the primary grades. Growing up in the Jim Crow South in the 1920s and 1930s, Daisy attended segregated public schools throughout her early years and then, as a teenager, she attended a private black high school established by white Presbyterian missionaries in Athens, Alabama 17 miles southwest of her home. To earn money to pay for tuition, Daisy ironed handkerchiefs, washed clothes, and cooked for the teachers on Sundays. The diversity of faculty at Trinity High School in the early 1940s included both black and white teachers and one Japanese music instructor who was arrested by US authorities after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Daisy remembered the initial shock that she felt:

“As soon as they announced the bombing[,] the government came right in and took that man off and took him down in the South...because they were gathering up all the Japanese...It was heartbreaking for everybody...and for the community.”

Her firsthand experiences and friendly interactions with her Japanese music teacher in Alabama would shape her understanding of the war and its impact on local communities.

During her time in high school, Dawson developed a close relationship with the principal J.T. Wright and...
his wife, a white couple, who served as mentors and provided an opportunity for Daisy to earn money by taking care of their daughter. When Wright accepted a position as Dean of LeMoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee, the couple encouraged Daisy to join them by securing her a scholarship after she graduated from high school in 1943. Dawson moved once again with the Wrights to Seattle in 1944 when J.T. Wright became the new director of the International House at the University of Washington.

Dawson later wrote that Wright convinced her to come along with them and attend the University of Washington. “They wanted to make sure I got an education...and I took care of their daughter so I became like their maid...he helped me get into the U,” Dawson told Jonathan Houston in a 2009 interview. The Wrights’ relationship with Daisy reflected the paternalism many Northern white educators harbored in their quest to help educate African Americans in the South. Yet, Daisy accepted their benevolence and saw it as an avenue to obtain a better education—the pathway to a much better life.

Striving to Belong in the Pacific Northwest

When Dawson arrived in Seattle in 1944, she became part of the largest migration of African Americans in the history of the Pacific Northwest. In 1940, 3,789 African Americans lived in Seattle with women constituting 43% of the population. By 1950, due mainly to wartime migration, the African American population in Seattle had skyrocketed to 15,666, quadrupling the population in just a decade.

Unlike the migrations of the 1880s and 1890s, women in the 1940s came in larger numbers than their male counterparts and were mostly from southern rural areas in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Like most of her female contemporaries, Dawson moved to Seattle in search of economic, social, and educational mobility and to escape the racial violence and oppression of the South. While Dawson studied at the University of Washington for educational advancement, many southern black women migrants found economic opportunities in the defense industries or joined their husbands stationed at Fort Lewis and Fort Lawton.

As one of fewer than 70 black students at the University of Washington, Dawson interacted with a culturally and ethnically diverse group of students. She befriended Akiko Kurose, a Japanese American student who would later become a famed educator. As the only African American in many of her peer and social groups, it became a normal experience for her on campus to carry the burden of being the “token black,” especially in her department. For instance, Dawson was the only black Home Economics major and realized early on from her professor that she would not be allowed to teach in the state of Washington because of her race. Seattle Public Schools hired its first black teachers, Thelma DeWitty and Marita Johnson, in 1947. Yet, the district still closed its doors to the majority of African American teachers for many years.

Like most of her female contemporaries, Dawson moved to Seattle in search of economic, social, and educational mobility and to escape the racial violence and oppression of the South.

For African Americans, particularly migrants, Seattle represented a place of racial parity where they could escape the entrenched racism in the South and could pursue economic mobility. But they quickly realized that many people in the city engaged in varying forms of racial and gender discrimination under the guise of racial equality. Perhaps because of this reality, Dawson focused her attention on returning to the South in order to teach and help other black southerners attain an education.

Despite an almost invisible black campus life, Dawson did manage to find a place in Seattle’s small black community. On the weekends, she would attend church in Seattle’s Central Area, the city’s historically black neighborhood. In 1946, she was initiated into the Alpha Omicron Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc, one of the first African American sororities founded on the campus of Howard University in 1913. The chapter was also the oldest African American Greek letter organization established in the Pacific Northwest. Members held the initiation ceremony in the living room of one of the organization’s founding members, suffragist Bertha Pitts Campbell. “Bertha just took me under her wing once she found out I was in Seattle and did not have family here,” Dawson stated. When Dawson could not afford her graduation regalia, Campbell loaned her a cap and gown. As an influential leader and sorority sister, Campbell
encouraged Daisy to join the Seattle Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Christian Friends for Racial Equality (CFRE). Therefore, Dawson’s connections to Seattle’s black community were strengthened through her involvement in the church, social and civil rights organizations, and the sorority.

While on campus, Dawson met Floyd Schmoe, a forest and marine ecology professor and Quaker, and his wife Ruth. As Quakers and humanitarians, Floyd and Ruth Schmoe were dedicated to social justice, peace, anti-racism, and the love of nature. They embraced people from all racial backgrounds and cultures and invited them to their home. Their daughter Esther Schmoe married Gordon Hirabayashi, a Japanese student at the University of Washington who was later jailed for contesting the evacuation and incarceration of Japanese in internment camps during World War II. The Schmoe’s influences on Dawson drew her to Quakerism, but she decided to remain faithful to the Presbyterian Church. Her connection to Floyd Schmoe as a mentor, nonetheless, secured her a place at a residence house he set up for women on campus. Through his connections and the Quakers, she became involved in an effort (called “work parties”) to repair the Nisei homes on the weekends after the US government had ordered the evacuation of the Japanese in King County in early 1942. The homes left behind by many Japanese citizens became vulnerable to neglect, vandalism, and burglary. After the war ended, Dawson continued to help with the Japanese resettlement efforts in Seattle between 1945 and 1946.

When Dawson graduated from the University of Washington in 1948, she returned to the South and took a teaching position at Harbison Junior College, a private historically black college established by Presbyterians in Irmo, South Carolina. While there, Floyd Schmoe contacted her about the possibility of joining him and a small interracial and interdenominational group based in Seattle to travel to Japan and help build houses in Hiroshima. He wanted to demonstrate that many Americans had opposed the war and believed in peace. Schmoe felt that Dawson could get along with people, especially the Japanese, given that her best friend was Akiko Kurose, and because she had experience with Japanese evacuees on the West Coast.

Although apprehensive about the project, Dawson consented to embark on the endeavor to bring about peace to Hiroshima as a member of the “Houses for Hiroshima” mission.

Bringing Peace to Hiroshima

Floyd Schmoe used his resources and connections as a university professor and peace advocate to raise funds for the project from around the world. Along with Schmoe and Dawson, two more volunteers journeyed to Hiroshima in the summer of 1949: Rev. Emery Andrews, an esteemed Baptist minister of the Japanese Baptist
Church, and Ruth “Pinkie” Jenkins, a Methodist elementary school teacher from Tucson. The group traveled third-class aboard the ocean liner General Gordon, departing from San Francisco. Dawson and Jenkins slept in a large compartment with about twenty other women and children. After fifteen days at sea aboard the General Gordon, the group stopped in Hawaii and was “treated royally,” according to Schmoe, and felt overwhelmed by the hospitality. Local friends of Schmoe loaded their ship with bananas, papayas, mangoes, apples, and other tropical fruit as they departed Hawaii and set sail for Hiroshima.

The group reached Hiroshima in August 1949. Once there, they found very little resources and supplies. While waiting for materials necessary to start working on the homes, Dawson put her home economics training to work by volunteering at the Hiroshima Memorial Hospital preparing food in the kitchen. At the hospital, she witnessed patients with bodies so frail, their bones protruded from their skin. The living conditions in Hiroshima were appalling, and the threat of radiation-caused cancer passing to the next generation frustrated Dawson. She lamented, “Oh, it was horrible to see what the radiation had done to people.” According to Schmoe’s account, the hospital was inadequately equipped to handle the devastation that had been inflicted on the people of Hiroshima. Dawson also saw how the city had been reduced to rubble and empty building frames.

The American and Japanese volunteers worked six hours a day for five days a week on the construction of houses. On Saturdays, they worked until noon and then went swimming. At other times, they engaged in leisure activities such as folk dancing. Schoolchildren participated in the arduous labor by helping to carry buckets of mud and dirt without the assistance of a wheelbarrow. The volunteers built houses with only one type of construction—timber frames and mud walls. Dawson and Jenkins assisted the men by hauling lumber and mixing straw with mud for mortar to build the three-room, tile-roof houses.

“It was primitive,” Dawson said. “Everything was crude.”

She fashioned makeshift nails from wooden pegs since the war destroyed much of the materials and tools in the city. She also walked back and forth to her job site every day and slept on the floor in the basement of a church that had been damaged by the bomb.

Despite the appalling living conditions, Dawson encountered a friendly work and social environment in Hiroshima alongside Japanese volunteers. The dark hue of her skin attracted a number of curious Japanese observers. Dawson recalled, “They hadn’t seen a black person or a redhead (fellow volunteer Ruth Jenkins). Everywhere we went there was a sea of Japanese people surrounding us. It was unbelievable.”

Impressed by Dawson’s involvement with the “Homes for Hiroshima” project, Ebony Magazine traveled to the site to document her experiences in a four-page spread in their January 1950 issue. The magazine observed that Dawson “fitted well in the house-building routine and won the hearts of Japanese in Hiroshima, many of whom had never before seen a black girl.” Both the magazine and Schmoe
attested that Dawson’s convivial personality and eagerness to master the Japanese language “made her a great favorite.”

After the conclusion of the three-month intensive labor project, Dawson had assisted in building four houses and a garden as a symbolic shrine of peace. The family units included a kitchen, two main rooms, and toilet facilities. Out of nearly 4,000 applications, only four families had been chosen to receive new homes. In the garden, the volunteers erected a statue with the inscription: “That There May Be Peace.” Dawson later acknowledged, “I shall never be able to show my appreciation to the people from all over the world whose feeling toward world peace and brotherhood made our trip possible.”

Daisy Tibbs Dawson had become the first and only African American to travel to the city for the “Houses for Hiroshima” mission to promote peace. Floyd Schmoe continued the project, making four more trips with American volunteers to Hiroshima until 1953.

Returning to Seattle As An Educator

When Dawson returned to the United States, she married Leonard Dawson, a native of Portland, Oregon. The wedding took place on April 22, 1950 in Athens, Alabama where Dawson worked as the food and nutrition instructor at her alma mater, Trinity High School.

The couple relocated to Seattle a year later. Dawson put her teaching career and education on hold to raise a family and became an active member of Grace Presbyterian Church, one of the first black churches established in Seattle.

Although Seattle had hired only a few black women teachers in the late 1940s and 1950s, the gains of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s coupled with the burgeoning anti-poverty programs opened doors for African American women in Washington state who usually headed and operated these programs.

In 1965, Dawson volunteered with the Head Start program under the direction of Dorothy Hollingsworth, who would become the first African American woman elected to the Seattle School Board and the first black woman to serve on a school board in the state of Washington in 1975. Head Start was a federal program aimed at providing educational, health, and nutritional services to low-income children from birth to age five.

“I shall never be able to show my appreciation to the people from all over the world whose feeling toward world peace and brotherhood made our trip possible.”


THIS PAGE: The Schmoe House is a branch of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum; it was originally built in 1951 as a community center, and now serves as a gallery where stories are shared of people who came to help rebuild the city. Photo by Mitch Homma.
anti-poverty preschool program created to provide children and families from historically and economically disadvantaged communities with comprehensive early childhood education, nutrition, health, and parental involvement services. It essentially sought to give low-income children a “head start.” Dawson was hired shortly thereafter and became an assistant teacher during her first year and was hired as a teacher’s aide at Colman Elementary School. She was then promoted to Head Teacher in 1966 and served in this role until 1969.

During the following years, Dawson continued to develop her leadership skills by serving as Supervisory Teacher, Volunteer Coordinator, and Education Specialist in the Head Start program. In 1971, she became the Program Manager and Director of Seattle Public Schools’ Head Start program until her retirement in 1984. In this role, she fought for low-income children, championing the cause for educational access and equity for people of color and low-income families. Her work involved assisting handicapped children, volunteer coordination and training, and curriculum planning. Demonstrating her leadership skills and service to the communities of the Pacific Northwest, Dawson served as President of the Washington State Head Start Directors’ Association from 1972 to 1975 and served on Governor Daniel J. Evans’ Committee for Early Childhood Education. She was President of the Administrative & Services League of the Principal’s Association of Seattle’s Public Schools from 1983 to 1984. In 1981, she received her Master’s of Education from Seattle University.

Dawson also served her community in many volunteer capacities, thus continuing her commitment to the uplift of marginalized and disenfranchised communities. She remained a lifelong member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Altrusa of Seattle, the President’s Forum, the Presbytery of Seattle/Synod of Alaska - Northwest, the Central Area Senior Center, the United Blind of Seattle Neighborhood House, and the Seattle Section of the National Council of Negro Women.

Throughout her lifetime, Dawson worked to eradicate racial and economic disparities in education. However, in 2003, she would shed light on her more private battle of fighting racism within the presbytery. As a longtime church leader, at 79 years old, Dawson publicly spoke out against the Presbyterian Church, highlighting what she believed was its 50-year history of secrecy enveloped in racism. In 1953, the local presbytery had sold the only black Presbyterian Church in Seattle, Grace Presbyterian, without first giving proper notice to its members. Daisy had served as a deacon, elder, Sunday School teacher, and Sunday School Superintendent of Madrona Presbyterian Church. She also served on the Christian Education Committee of the Presbytery of Seattle and as a representative to the General Council Synod of Alaska Northwest from 1981 to 1986.

For decades, Dawson had accused the church of using the funds from the sale of Grace to help build a new church for white congregants on Mercer Island and then relocating its black parishioners to Madrona Presbyterian Church under the facade of “integration.” When Grace members entered Madrona, white congregants refused to worship alongside their new African American parishioners and left the church, leaving its new black members with a faulty building, a leaky roof, and decades of neglect. White ministers, who Dawson claimed did not understand the needs of the black congregants, were appointed to lead the congregation, ostracizing their black minister. Because of Dawson’s testimony, along with help from a Los Angeles journalist, the ministers of Madrona and Mercer Island in 2003 held a service of racial and spiritual reconciliation to mend the deeply inflicted wounds that had been caused by the sale of Grace Presbyterian. In the spirit of reconciliation, Mercer Island members raised funds to assist the Madrona Church in much needed repairs.

Leaving a Legacy

Daisy Tibbs Dawson’s story sheds light on the important contributions of African American women in Pacific Northwest history. Dawson’s legacy of resiliency, leadership, hope, and peace has shaped the futures of school children in the state and demonstrated the impact of black women’s leadership in a region where their numbers remained relatively small compared to the total population. Because of her influence in the Japanese peace efforts in 1949, she was recognized and forever memorialized in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, also known as the Schmoe House, in 2012, and is the only African American to be honored there.

Daisy Tibbs Dawson died on May 26, 2013 in Seattle at the age of 88. Reflecting on her long and vibrant life a few years before she died, Dawson chuckled, “I always was a leader.”

Have you heard? WSHS partnered with KNKX Radio and created the podcast ForgottenPrison.org. Six episodes are available!
UNDENIABLY NORTHWEST READS

Interwoven Lives
Indigenous Mothers of Salish Coast Communities
Candace Wellman
In this companion to the award-winning Peace Weavers, meet Jenny Wynn, Elizabeth Patterson, Mary Allen, and Mrs. Pickett—four intermarried indigenous women who influenced mid-1800s Bellingham Bay area settlement, and discover new details about Confederate general George E. Pickett.

Citizen Jean
Riots, Rogues, Rumors, and Other Inside Seattle Stories
Jean Godden
Former journalist and city councilmember Jean Godden recounts—as only she can—a dynamic inside view of Seattle events, rivalries, and politics.
“A must-read for Seatleites.”—Joann Byrd, former editorial page editor, Seattle Post-Intelligencer

Sagebrush Homesteads
Laura Tice Laje
The author was a child of ten when her family moved to a claim north of Othello, Washington, where nearly waterless lands were rapidly being taken up by farmers. Her vivid memories from 1906 to 1914 recall eastern Washington’s homestead era.

Hardship to Homeland
Pacific Northwest Volga Germans
Richard D. Scheuerman and Clifford E. Trafzer
First published in 1985 as The Volga Germans, this revised and expanded edition chronicles a unique saga stretching from Germany to Russia and across the Atlantic. The Volga Germans’ late 1800s arrival significantly influenced agriculture, religion, politics, and social development in the Pacific Northwest.

Waterlogged
Examples and Procedures for Northwest Coast Archaeologists
Edited by Kathryn Bernick
Waterlogged presents previously unpublished original research spanning the past ten thousand years of human presence on the Northwest Coast. Seventeen experienced wet-site archaeologists offer guidance and share their expertise.

Nowhere to Remember
Hanford, White Bluffs, and Richland to 1943
Edited by Robert Bauman and Robert Franklin
Hanford Histories Volume 1
Drawn from Hanford History Project personal narratives, Nowhere to Remember highlights life in three small close-knit eastern Washington agricultural communities—until the Manhattan Project’s requirements forced a permanent, mandatory evacuation.

Monumental Seattle
The Stories Behind the City’s Statues, Memorials, and Markers
Robert Spalding
Beginning with a stolen Tlingit totem pole and stretching to a Ken Griffey Jr. sculpture, Seattle offers an impressive abundance of public memorials. Monumental Seattle explores the intriguing history of these works.
Paperback / ISBN 978-0-87422-359-0 / $22.95

Leading the Crimson and Gray
The Presidents of Washington State University
Leading the Crimson and Gray chronicles the lives and legacies of those who served in one of WSU’s most visible roles—president. From launching the college to winning state legislative backing for a new medical school and numerous contributions in between, they left a legacy that makes the Cougar Nation proud.

Wheat Country Railroad
The Northern Pacific’s Spokane & Palouse and Competitors
Philip F. Beach
Competition between the Oregon Railway & Navigation Co., Union Pacific, and Northern Pacific played a critical role in Palouse agricultural and population growth. This is the most comprehensive and detailed study ever compiled on their intense regional rivalry.

The Rusty Dusty
Great Northern’s Wenatchee–Oroville Branch
Mac McCulloch and John E. Langlot
The Rusty Dusty summarizes the development of the Great Northern Railway in Washington State, emphasizing the Wenatchee–Oroville route. Published by Yakt Publishing, Inc.

Available at bookstores, online at wsupress.wsu.edu, or by phone at 800-354-7360
“SOMEDAY, THEY’LL FIND MY SON”

The Search for Navy Aircraft Number 90586

By Lee Corbin
Shortly after 10:00 o’clock on the morning of Friday, March 11, 1949, a single-engine Navy SNJ-5 training aircraft departed Seattle’s Sand Point Naval Air Station for a local area familiarization flight. At the controls were Lieutenant Junior Grade (JG) Benjamin Oliver Vreeland and Ensign Gaston Eugene Mayes.

The aircraft headed east towards the Cascade Mountains, intending to land back at Sand Point in just under two hours.

It never returned.

It was a tragic event that happened all too often in military aviation in the mid twentieth century. But this disappearance was different, for it would inspire a family, and in particular, a mother, to begin a search that would last for much of the next two decades.

The two pilots belonged to the Navy’s VR-5 air transport squadron, based at Seattle Naval Air Station, also known as Sand Point. Air Transport Squadron 5 was commissioned during World War II at the Navy’s Seattle airfield to provide regular air service between California, Washington, the Aleutian Islands and interior Alaska.

In its heyday, the squadron’s fleet consisted primarily of the workhorse aircraft of military transport: the twin-engine Douglas R4D “Gooney Bird,” similar to the civilian DC-3 airliner;
and the four-engine R5D, the military version of the larger DC-4. With an assortment of smaller transport, liaison, and training aircraft, versatility was a required skill for the squadron’s pilots.

Lt. Vreeland was the instructor pilot on this flight or, at least, he would’ve been considered the “pilot in command.” Vreeland was 25 years old, and he came from the Bridgeton area of New Jersey. He had been in VR-5 for about seven months and had accumulated 1,900 hours of total flying time, much of it flying the squadron’s fleet in the weather conditions of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. Of these 1,900 hours, 600 were in the SNJ-5 as both a student and instructor. He was considered well-qualified in the aircraft.

Ensign Mayes had graduated from Navy flight training in the summer of 1947, and then received additional training in flying multi-engine aircraft. In December 1947, he was assigned to VR-5. Mayes was from Clinton, Tennessee, near Knoxville. He was 23 years old.

The Aircraft

The SNJ-5 was the Navy’s version of the North American Aviation T-6 Texan, the Army Air Corps’ primary advanced training aircraft of World War II. Over 15,000 various models of the T-6 were produced over the wartime years and into the 1950s, and they served with the US military well into the 1960s.

This specific aircraft, although originally destined to be delivered to the Army Air Force in 1942, went straight to the Navy instead. Picked up fresh from the Dallas factory in August 1944, it was delivered to NAS San Diego.

Five years later, there was no record of what particular paint scheme that aircraft number 90586 had when it went missing. Newspaper accounts at the time varied, with some referring to a blue aircraft and others to a silver one. Meanwhile, some photos indicate the aircraft may have been painted Navy yellow.
Training Flight of March 11, 1949

The weather was typical for a March day in the Puget Sound region, with overcast skies and 10 miles of visibility; not great, but not bad flying conditions for that time of year. The forecast, published that morning in The Seattle Times, called for partly cloudy skies and surprisingly warm temperatures of 55° to 62° on the west side of the mountains, and 40° to 48° on the east side. The only mention of precipitation was a few light showers along the eastern slopes of the Cascades.

That morning, as pilots Benjamin Vreeland and Gaston Mayes had breakfast in the officer’s mess, Gaston struck up a conversation with a nurse he occasionally dated. She mentioned that she and a girlfriend were planning to drive up to Snoqualmie Pass the next day for some skiing and wondered if they would need to chain-up their car for the drive. Mayes said he’d be flying up that way and offered to take a look at the road conditions for her.

With enough fuel for four hours of flying, and a planned flight duration of under two hours, they departed the airfield. The tower at Sand Point heard from the crew during a routine radio check-in about five minutes later. It was the last confirmed contact anyone would ever have with the plane and the two aviators.

When the flight did not return and with no radio communications, it became clear that the plane was likely down somewhere. The search for the missing aircraft began that Friday afternoon. The official accident report states: “Air-ground search conducted extensively by Navy, Coast Guard & Air Force planes and ground search parties. A/C (aircraft) not found.”

The first that Gaston Mayes’ parents heard of the missing aircraft was from a telegram that arrived at the family home in Tennessee shortly after breakfast on Saturday, March 12.

His mother Nora Mayes told a newspaper reporter, “It was a crushing blow. Our world tumbled in.” But there were no tears shed, because she was sure that he would be found alive. It was not until a week later, when all hope of finding him alive was gone, that she finally broke down.

Gaston Mayes’ father Oscar C. Mayes flew to Seattle later that week to meet with the search and recovery team. He was told that the search had been all but abandoned and that the plane was likely lost in the mountains. Mayes was not happy with the news. He immediately returned to Seattle with a plan to launch his own search and rescue operation.

The official Navy search continued until Saturday, March 19, but no trace of the aircraft or the pilots was found.

Who was Benjamin Oliver Vreeland?

Little is known about the lost aviator Benjamin Oliver Vreeland. He was born July 13, 1923, in Hudson County, New Jersey. The 1930 census shows him living with his parents and three siblings in Kearny, New Jersey. According to Benjamin’s nephew, at some point in the 1930s Benjamin’s mother, Estelle, passed away, possibly due to tuberculosis, and the four Vreeland children eventually were taken in by New Jersey’s Children’s Home Society and placed with foster parents.

On June 4, 1942, at the age of 19, Benjamin Vreeland enlisted in the Navy’s V-5 Naval Aviation Cadet program, and was sent to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. His flight training was completed in September 1943. The Navy must have recognized his flying talents, because he was immediately ordered into training as a flight instructor. He served in that position until nearly the end of the war, receiving orders in June 1945 to join transport squadron VR-11 in Honolulu.

Six months later, however, Vreeland found himself out of a job. With the end of World War II, there would be no need to maintain the number of pilots required in the wartime Navy and he was released from active duty.

Returning to New Jersey, Vreeland worked as grocer, and as a bus driver for Trenton Transit. Occasionally, he would do some private flying, or fly with the inactive Naval Reserves at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn, New York, all the while making regular requests to be recalled into Naval service. Finally, in September 1948, he received orders to report to VR-5 in Seattle.

A Mother’s Love

Gaston Eugene Mayes was born on March 9, 1926 in the Tennessee coal mining town of Devonia, also known as Moore’s Camp. His father, Oscar Clarence Mayes, was the paymaster and assistant supervisor of the Moore Coal Mining Company, and a member of the Anderson County school board. He was a veteran of World War I, having served 15 months in France with the 11th Infantry and...
One Family’s Search

By the summer of 1949, the military had given up the official search for aircraft number 90586. But the Mayes family was just getting started.

In July 1949, Oscar Mayes and his wife, Nora, along with Gaston’s brother Bert, age 21, and sister, Bernice, age 16, set out for the first time together for Washington State. It would be the first of 19 annual trips for Gaston’s mother.

The family’s search began after mountain snows had melted. For three weeks, they drove every logging road in the Cascades that they could find, occasionally getting out of the car to scan the hills with binoculars.

In early September 1949, the wreckage of a small plane was spotted on a ridge just north of Lake Kachess near Snoqualmie Pass, but it proved to be a different aircraft.

A few weeks later, the Mayes family increased their reward offer to $2,000, but the first summer search came to an end with no further discoveries, and the family returned to Tennessee.

On the first anniversary of the disappearance, Nora Mayes wrote a letter (unpublished) to The Seattle Times asking that hunters, fisherman, and flyers keep a lookout for her son’s aircraft. Nora Mayes believed that her son’s plane had gone down somewhere in the North Bend area, and the family returned to the Northwest in July 1950 to renew the search. On August 6, the Navy announced that they would try to get a helicopter into the area for a low-altitude search.

As had happened during the summer of 1949, the search turned up nothing, and the Mayes family went home to Tennessee.

Over the next few years, the Mayes family returned each summer to search for their son. Tantalizing clues turned up occasionally, including a rubber seat cushion, similar to those found in Naval aircraft, discovered at the headwaters of Griffin Creek, southwest of the town of Carnation in the Snoqualmie Valley.

The Search Narrows to Black Lake

Black Lake is a small, tree-ringed, mountain lake about ten miles north of the town of North Bend in the Cascade foothills. In the summer of 1954, the search for the lost plane was centered between Black Lake and the South Fork of the Tolt River a few miles away.

This area became a focus of the search as a result of conversations the Mayes family had with loggers who had been working in the area in 1949. The loggers placed an aircraft having engine problems in a small gap in the mountains northeast of Black Lake. A forest ranger had also written to Nora, telling her of an odd change in the color of Black Lake. For about six weeks in 1949, the ranger wrote, the water had turned a reddish-yellow phosphorescent hue, the same color that dye packets from an aviation life jacket would produce.

Black Lake is roughly six football fields in length and two football fields wide, or about 1,700 feet long by 600 feet wide. It’s a rather shallow body of water, perhaps 25 to 35 feet in depth. But below that 35 feet of water is probably another 10 to 20 feet of organic ooze that might easily hide an aircraft the size of the SNJ-5, and that could certainly conceal one that had broken into pieces.

Nothing of note was found in 1954. In 1955, Nora and her daughter Bernice, now in her twenties, returned. This would be the final year that Nora came to Washington with a family member. All of her subsequent trips would be solo, to and from Tennessee by train.

In 1956, Nora noticed two odd-looking evergreens along the edge of Black Lake. The trees were each about 90 feet tall and stood about 30 feet apart, and it appeared as though they had been sliced off at the tops, as if hit by an aircraft’s wings.

But a search of Black Lake by scuba divers would have to wait until 1957. On August 4 of that year, seven divers, believed to be from one of the local sheriff’s departments, entered the murky waters.

The underwater search went on for several hours, but the divers found nothing. The mud and silt, building up for years, was quickly stirred up, and visibility was reduced to zero. However, more evidence of the crash was found by ‘trolling’ the lake with a magnet. Segments of wire, later identified as from an aircraft antenna, were pulled from the water this way.

It’s unclear what took place in 1958, but additional clues emerged in 1959 that pointed toward Black Lake as the resting place of some kind of Naval aircraft, including the discovery of an aviation-type ‘Mae West’ life vest on the shore.

In 1960, dives took place at Black Lake throughout the months of August and September.
AVIATION CHART: Seattle Area aeronautical chart, originally published 1933. Courtesy NOAA Historical Map & Chart Collection.

TOP IMAGE: Nora Mayes inspects a map of the area where her son Gaston’s plane may have crashed. Courtesy Anderson County (Tennessee) Historical Society and Lee Corbin.

MIDDLE: Bertram Mayes, Nora Mayes and Bernice Mayes. Courtesy Anderson County (Tennessee) Historical Society and Lee Corbin.

BOTTOM: Nora Mayes on Black Lake. Courtesy Anderson County (Tennessee) Historical Society and Lee Corbin.
On September 3, 1960, four Navy divers from the minesweeper USS Acme went into the lake but came up empty-handed. On September 4, The Seattle Times reported 60 divers at the lake with an audience of 40 onlookers. Dragging operations were also taking place, which brought up two more pieces of evidence: a partial seatbelt and buckle, and fragments of plywood flooring, both identified as the type found in an SNJ-5.

In mid-September, a diver named Jack Miller noticed an oil slick and, while probing the deep mud and silt, released a gush of gas bubbles and fuel.

In October 1960, Nora Mayes once again boarded the train for the trip back to Tennessee, and vowed to return the next year. In 1961, yet another tantalizing clue was discovered on the shores of Black Lake: the algae-covered sleeve of a leather flight jacket.

Divers returned in 1961, too, and this time, they had a metal detector, courtesy of Oregon manufacturer White’s Electronics. Unfortunately, the near-freezing temperature of the lake water caused the detector to malfunction. Despite these problems, the divers located what appeared to be a large metallic object that they believed to be the engine of the SNJ-5.

The detector was returned to White’s for modifications to handle the freezing temperatures. When it came back, signals indicated a hundred or more pieces of metal, suggesting the aircraft had disintegrated on impact with the lake.

For the next five years, local newspapers dutifully reported Nora Mayes’ arrivals and departures, why she had come, and how long she had been searching, but little else.

The final chapter of this story concludes with a quick, three-day trip by Nora to Seattle and North Bend in October 1968.

“I don’t want to break the chain,” Mayes told a newspaper reporter.

Although her intentions were to return the following year, she may have also come to say her good-byes to all the friends she had made over the years.

And, despite the evidence that points toward Black Lake as final resting place of Lt. Benjamin Oliver Vreeland and Ensign Gaston Eugene Mayes, the aircraft and the two men remain lost 70 years later.

What might have happened on March 11, 1949?

About ten miles north of North Bend was a filers’ shack, where loggers working in the area would get their saws sharpened. On the day in March 1949 when the SNJ-5 disappeared, there was a former pilot, most likely military, at the shack who later reported that he saw the aircraft flying overhead. He told investigators that operation appeared to
be normal, with the aircraft flying at a proper altitude and the engine running smoothly, as they headed up the North Fork of the Snoqualmie River.

Several miles up the river canyon, the engine may have started running rough. The foreman of a work crew, bulldozing a new logging road near the river, reported to investigators that he heard an aircraft with what sounded like engine problems, and that the pilot might have been trying to gain altitude. The foreman heard the aircraft turn around and, apparently, head back down the canyon.

A couple of loggers working about a mile from Black Lake saw a low flying aircraft pass overhead at tree top level and then disappear. Shortly after, they heard a loud noise. One reported the sound as a “roar,” while the other described it as a “thud.” The latter stated that he always regretted not taking time to investigate the noise and what might have happened to the aircraft.

In the tree-filled foothills of the Cascades, with little altitude to spare, Mayes and Vreeland would have been looking for somewhere flat to put down the SNJ-5. As nighttime temperatures in March 1949 were still dropping into the low 30s, Black Lake may have presented itself as an inviting ice runway for an aircraft in trouble. Frozen or not, Mayes and Vreeland may have had no other choice than to land on Black Lake.

They could have hit the trees later noticed by Nora Mayes. This may have slowed them down enough so that the aircraft stalled and fell into the lake. Or, they may have tried to stretch the glide with the same results. Either way, the aircraft likely hit hard enough to break up before sinking. Partial seat belts, splintered flooring, life vests, and portions of flight uniforms coming to the surface would probably indicate a catastrophic impact.

It’s unknown why the US Navy appears to have had little interest in pursuing the search after the evidence that presented itself at Black Lake.

As noted, the loss of a military aircraft was an all too common occurrence in the post-war decades. Today, the military goes to great lengths to recover remains of service members from World War II-era crashes. It seems that another search of Black Lake would make sense, much like the one 60 years ago, but using today’s diving and detection equipment. If the lost aircraft is there, the remains of Vreeland and Mayes are also there. As dedicated members of the military, they deserve a proper burial.

Postscript

Gaston Mayes’ father Oscar passed away in 1976; his mother Nora passed away in 1983; and his brother Bertram passed away in 1998. His sister Bernice Mayes Gilbert is alive and well and living in Tennessee at the age of 86.

In 2013, Bernice Mayes Gilbert sent this email about her brother to the author, Lee Corbin:

In closing this letter, let me say one very important thing. The people of WA were wonderful to my family. We, especially mother, made many wonderful friends who kept in contact with her almost to the end. I only remember a few people so I will not try to mention individuals. I made seven trips with mother so I definitely know the graciousness we were all shown year after year. Numerous people truly went out of their way in so many ways to be extremely nice to us. Those actions were never lost on my family. Not finding the plane was not because the people of WA did not try their best to help us.

Black Lake as it appears today, in a recent photo by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife.
In Defense of Wyam

Professor Katrine Barber has studied the social, cultural and other impacts of the loss of Celilo Falls, and recently published her second book on the subject. This excerpt is drawn from In Defense of Wyam: Native-White Alliances and the Struggle for Celilo Village, published in 2018 by the University of Washington Press.

TOP RIGHT: Aerial photo of The Dalles Dam. Public domain.
RIGHT: Postcard showing Indians fishing with dipnets at Celilo Falls, circa 1935. Public domain.
In Defense of Wyam examines the intersecting lives of two Pacific Northwest women who worked together in the mid-twentieth century to address changes to Celilo Village along the Columbia River during construction of The Dalles Dam in the late 1950s.

Flora Cushinway Thompson (1898-1978) was enrolled on the Warm Springs Reservation and living full time at Celilo Village by the 1950s where she assisted her husband, Salmon Chief Tommy Thompson.

Martha Ferguson McKeown (1903-1974) was a Hood River, Oregon school teacher and the author of two children’s books about the Thomsons and other families at Celilo Village.

Together, along with Portlander James “Jimmie” James, whose archived correspondence with both women made this research possible, Flora Thompson and Martha McKeown intervened in the disruptions that the dam and other infrastructure expansion posed to residents at Celilo Village. Their alliance left an important legacy of cross-cultural intellectual and social networks that mediated mid-twentieth century economic development and federal Indian policy as implemented in the Pacific Northwest. –Katrine Barber

PROTECTING HOME

The US Engineers could decide to cut Mt. Hood off at its base and dump [it] into Crater Lake to make an International Golf Course, they could even start before we knew it—and who would you go to, to get the thing stopped?...This sounds ridiculous I know and if you had been told that Celilo Falls would have been covered by water by building a dam five years ago we would have been aghast—but just such a thing could happen over and over again until our state would be stripped of all of its beauty.

Jimmie James to Martha McKeown, January 21, 1953

More than anyone else before or since, Martha McKeown shaped how non-Native Oregonians understood Celilo Village and the Thomsons. She eventually wrote two children’s books, published in 1956 and 1959, that invited Oregonians—who knew the community next to the falls only fleetingly as they drove by on Highway 30 or because they stopped to watch fishers haul salmon onto their wooden platforms for an afternoon—into the community’s homes and longhouse. Even before the publication of her books, which would remain in print for decades, she wrote several full-page articles that highlighted various aspects of Northwest history, including one about the Thomsons and Celilo Village. Celilo Indians: Fishing Their Way of Life came out in October 1949 to contextualize the threat widening Highway 30 posed to village homes.

By the time of the article’s publication, the highway was not the only hazard the community faced. Proposals to build The Dalles Dam made clear that portions of the village would be inundated by the dam’s reservoir and that the picturesque Celilo Falls, which drew tourists to the area, would disappear under its man-made lake. Indians throughout the basin, especially those with familial fishing rights, were alarmed but faced the proposed dam as part of an ongoing struggle to access the river’s resources and doubled down on efforts to maintain their treaty fishing rights on the river. The potential loss of the falls, however, energized non-Native people in Oregon and Washington—and eventually from farther afield as well—who rallied to stop their inundation. Activists interested in Indian cultural persistence joined efforts with conservationists, at least for a short time, to protest river development that would abrogate treaties and reshape the gorge landscape. The “Save Celilo Falls” campaign brought together a variety of people who hoped they could, through letters and other forms of lobbying, influence federal policies in one of the most scenic sections of the state.

At the center of these activities was James J. James, a retired Portland Port Authority employee who offered his services as the tribe’s “press agent” to Yakama tribal chairman...
Alex Saluskin in 1950. James would eventually count Flora and Martha among his friends. James, who lived in Portland, relied on occasional visits to the mid-Columbia as well as typewritten letters to connect him to Indian and non-Indian friends upriver. His copious correspondence quilted the threads of opposition into a concerted and organized effort. James’s typewriter briefly brought together Portland clubwomen conservationists eager to protect the Gorge, like Martha’s associate Gertrude Jensen; politicians like Oregon senators Richard Neuberger and Wayne Morse; and Indian advocates and regional writers like Martha herself and Click Relander, the city editor for the Yakima Herald in Washington State. James also wrote to Indian leaders—his press agent designator Alex Saluskin, Flora and Tommy Thompson, Yakama tribal council member and fishing activist Wilson Charley, and many others.

James wrote hundreds of letters over a period of about two decades. Over time, his letters became more personal, asking after spouses and children, speculating on the activities of mutual friends, and disclosing the health struggles of his wife and silent partner, Maude. Senator Neuberger became Dick. James’s correspondence with Martha McKeown extended to her husband Archie, and James worried when his letters went unanswered. As it became increasingly clear that dam construction would proceed, James turned his energy to termination policy and strengthened his relationship with the Thompsons at Celilo Village. Years later, Flora Thompson would describe James as being “just like a son.”

The letters Jimmie James left behind make visible the political and social networks briefly forged among Indians, their allies, and conservationists attempting to halt construction on The Dalles Dam. They also reveal ruptures in those networks, which often hinged on competing conceptions of time, the scope of opposition, and the very meaning of citizenship. White allies held a spectrum of views, with some focused on Indian fishing rights and self-determination and others, like Gertrude Jensen, primarily interested in preserving the scenic Columbia River Gorge, including Celilo Falls. The white allies who opposed the dam and who were brought together through James’s efforts illustrate the variety of approaches offered by advocates to Indian communities in the midst of crisis. One particularly negative experience with a man who went by “Chief Rising Sun” made James cautious and perhaps appreciative of Martha’s focused interventions in issues at Celilo Village, as well as her careful documentation of the community through her writings.

This chapter charts the lobbying that Martha, Flora, and Chief Thompson embarked on in 1949 to mitigate changes to Celilo Village as a result of road development. Their campaign did not stop road expansion, but it did familiarize Oregonians with the Thompsons and Celilo Village. Martha shifted gears by 1952 when she successfully reversed a case of land fraud perpetrated by BIA employees against Indians living in the Hood River Valley. Thanks to her investigation, two employees were fired and sent to prison, and one victim received fair market value for the timber on his land. During this period, Martha and Flora also cared for an ailing Chief Thompson, eventually placing him in a nursing home. Defending village homes in BIA meetings, following up on suspicious Indian land sales, and locating suitable housing for elderly Indians provide a
counterpoint to the rush of activity among white allies to stop The Dalles Dam.

James’s isolation from the mid-Columbia at his home office in Portland limited the strategies available to him and meant that he sometimes misjudged those who promised to help. His efforts—though fraught with missteps—also brought advocates and Native leaders into a network of his own making as he disseminated correspondents’ personal news along with information related to dam construction, and recruited potential advocates in other regions. He also forged lasting personal relationships with Martha and Flora that continued until his death in 1967.

**Protecting Celilo Village, Documenting a Native Home**

When Flora Thompson spoke before the Oregon State Daughters of the American Revolution board, it was one of many talks she, her husband, and Martha would deliver in the last months of 1949. The day before the DAR meeting, Flora had translated Chief Thompson’s statements at a Portland Chamber of Commerce luncheon. The Thompsons also joined Martha McKeown when she spoke to more than three hundred people gathered for a banquet at Fifty-Fifty Club, an association for businesswomen. The following month, Flora Thompson spoke to the Salem Council of Women’s Organizations, among others. Together, Martha McKeown and the Thompsons engaged in direct advocacy as they appeared before audiences at luncheons, libraries, and even department stores. In a mere six weeks at the end of 1949, they used public presentations, publications, and testimony before BIA officials to slow the relocation of Celilo Village homes necessitated by the widening of Highway 30. At the campaign’s onset, McKeown wrote a lengthy illustrated article published in the *Oregonian*. As a result, the trio reached government officials, Portland’s decision makers, and the general public all within a matter of weeks. They employed these strategies to protect Indigenous homelands, honing techniques they would use later to address changes wrought by The Dalles Dam.

The lobbying in 1949 gathered steam around three primary issues: support for an autonomous tribal council of River Indians, restructuring of the Celilo Fish Commission, and alternative designs for new home construction slated for the village. The first two issues were perennial, part of broader concerns over who carried legitimate authority on the river. The Thompsons argued that river communities should form a federally recognized River Indian tribal council separate from and equal to reservation governments, instead of being treated as subsets of federally recognized tribes like the Yakama or Umatilla. Moreover, Chief Thompson called for changes to the Celilo Fish Commission, an intertribal board that mediated fishing disputes, complaining that it distorted traditional forms of Indigenous leadership such as his.

A more immediate concern that demanded quick intervention was the physical changes to the village residences. The Thompsons argued that plans to relocate homes to allow for the widening of Highway 30 were poorly orchestrated and based in miscommunication between village residents and federal authorities that disrespected them personally. Flora told the audience at the Portland Chamber of Commerce luncheon that the new houses lacked privacy, and Chief Thompson complained that the engineers “did not listen to me on how we wanted the houses built after pleading with us to move and promising they would build them as we wanted them.” Their efforts were rewarded when the Portland Chamber of Commerce organized an investigation of conditions at the village. The *Oregonian* newspaper reported that the Thompsons arrived at the meeting “to plead for the white man’s help . . . and won it.”

A month later, Martha McKeown and Tommy Thompson used the talking points they developed before Portland audiences at a Celilo Village meeting with local BIA representatives and engineers. Chief Thompson and E. Morgan Pryse, director of the BIA’s Portland Area Office,
Chief Thompson argued that he may have no money with which to pay for lights, and accused the Director of at first declaring that the houses were free to the Indians and now announces that there will be lights to pay for; that prior to re-building, his people never paid for electricity, and had been encouraged by the government to accept remodeling of Celilo Village; that his people feel that they should be free as before even though the houses had been modernized; that the two things—light and water—to pay are becoming an obstacle in the way of moving into the houses.

When Director Pryse pressed Thompson about who paid for the electricity used in the longhouse, James Dyer, an adopted member of the community, pointed out that he personally paid that bill.

Thompson, McKeown, Dyer, and others presented the BIA officials with a laundry list of issues, many of which had no easy resolution. McKeown asked about access to a strip of land in the village site and who had authority over it, and complained about the incursion of the Celilo Fish Commission into matters pertaining to the community itself, which she claimed they had no jurisdiction over. The issues were wide-ranging, and it quickly became apparent that those in attendance would not agree to the terms of relocation that day. Well into the meeting, Pryse tried unsuccessfully to excuse himself to return to Portland. Another white advocate demanded that the director stay to hear further complaints. Pryse and others from the BIA eventually pried themselves from the discussion, having resolved little in regard to the meeting’s original purpose.

Nonetheless, Thompson and other leaders at Celilo impressed upon BIA representatives the real and critical problems they faced at the off-reservation community. Of course, attention did not automatically lead to action, and it is likely that Pryse left the meeting aghast at the myriad issues he was asked to address and the divisions between residents of Celilo and reservation Indians. While BIA representatives sought to narrow the day’s discussion to the relocation of ten families to new homes, Thompson and others focused on the community’s long-term functioning. The modern homes—in the eyes of BIA employees, clearly improvements over the dilapidated housing typical of Celilo—threatened to upend the careful balance of authority in the village. While Pryse may have thought the meeting was about replacement housing, the Thompsons and other Celilo residents knew it was a test of their inherent sovereignty over their community and individual lives, and what kinds of homes they would live in.

Martha McKeown narrated the governmental and economic issues at Celilo Village through a personal tour of the Thompsons’ home in an Oregonian article, “Celilo Indians: Fishing Their Way of Life.” Using a method she had used when writing about Frank Hachiya and would employ in subsequent writing on Celilo, Martha provided Oregonian readers with “an intimate view, from the homeside” of village life that was indelibly shaped by fishing controversies and struggles for self-determination. In doing so, Martha domesticated the policy discussions at meetings like the one described above. Moreover, the piece insisted on Indigenous belonging outside reservation boundaries at the resource sites so important to the Thompsons and others. Because it reached a statewide audience, the article had the potential to alter public opinion about Indians, their homelands, and their regional status.

Although an important figure in the article and in the home, Chief Thompson was silent. It was Flora who welcomed her guests. “She came to the door of the low, weather-beaten house, under the high, overhanging cliff...and said, ‘I am Mrs. Chief Tommy Thompson. Won’t you come in?’” Flora was the “youthful, slender, erect figure” beside Chief Thompson, who “whether in beautiful ceremonial garb or at her household duties in a simple, worn, work dress, with a double strand of wampum at her neck and dangling coin earrings, is a woman of rare distinction and intelligence.” Martha’s description was echoed years later by Barbara MacKenzie, a social worker hired

Aerial view of Lake Celilo on the Columbia River, after construction of The Dalles Dam, showing the former locations of Celilo Falls, the Short Narrows, and the Long Narrows. Note from the source of the photo: “the river bends to the southwest downstream of Browns island; the left panel is rotated so that the image fits horizontally.”
by Wasco County to supervise the relocation of Celilo families whose homes were going to be inundated by The Dalles Dam. “Flora was very dignified,” MacKenzie recalled in an oral history interview. “I never saw Flora flustered or at a loss. Usually she wore the calico but her hair was always combed and you knew that she was the lady of the house, you knew that she had to be consulted.” Martha declared that “no woman could be more loyal to the man whose name she proudly bears, or more eager to share his burdens” than her friend.

Martha brought readers into the Thompson home and thereby showcased domesticity, kinship connections, community relations, and the gendered work necessary for the fishery. In phrasing that echoed Frederic Homer Balch’s description of Wallulah’s longhouse, Flora’s home was “typically Indian, reminding one of the pictures of Oriental interiors.”

There are two large rooms. The front one, opening onto the porch contained four neatly made beds; one in each corner. There were no bedsteads: the bedding was placed directly on the floor. In the center of the room was a round, highly ornate, antique iron stove. There was no other furniture. At the windows hung simple, green draw curtains. The walls were lined with pictures; most of them were of the chief, others were of his children.

In contrast to Balch or the field matrons of Flora’s childhood and early adulthood, McKeown did not seek out evidence of “civilization,” nor did she evaluate the household against assimilative standards of cleanliness and order. She made women’s labor in the fishing community visible but did not judge it or seek to reform the lifeways of the women about whom she wrote. She thereby reversed the long tradition of women’s organizations targeting Native women for assimilative transformation. While she may not have recognized it at the time, her rejection of the WNIA-styled homemaker hierarchy signaled a turn toward what Amanda Zink calls “domestic sovereignty.”

Women’s contributions to the Indigenous salmon industry took place in the home and in nearby drying sheds, where women hung filleted fish out “like great scarlet fans.” Flora related to Martha the process of constructing dip-nets with traditional materials, when women pulled the bark of a rose-like bush until it stretched like twine and could be knotted into netting. As Martha and Flora chatted, another Celilo woman, Effie Smith, who was related to the Thompsons through marriage, flaked dried salmon onto a tule drying rack, the first step in producing chelaé, the powdered salmon that was a treasured trade item. Despite the article’s subtitle—“Fishing Their Way of Life”—the picturesque and public platform fishing performed by men, which often dominated white-led discussions of Celilo, was integrated into the private domesticity of kinship in a way that mirrored Indigenous conceptions of work and life.

It was a domestic life that Martha presented as closed to most outsiders except for the rare “privileged, trusted guest.” Martha and Flora’s shared history in the region and Martha’s grandfather’s treatment of Indians “swung open wide the door of the chief’s home.” The welcome allowed Martha to position herself as the mediator through which other Oregonians could virtually visit the community. She directed her readers to approach their stay with respect for the village’s rich heritage. But she also addressed shared sacrifice when she included the wartime experiences of Steve Boise, Young Boise’s son and Flora’s stepson, who was quick to downplay his service record in order to return to the more immediately pressing treaty fishing rights, a reminder that sovereignty and the struggle for it organized the Thompsons’ domestic space. Martha’s sympathetic portrayal and the speaking tour came at the close of a difficult decade, which opened into the challenging period of the 1950s, when, among other things, the widening of Highway 30 would proceed.
**PORTLAND, OREGON**

**Experience Oregon at the Oregon Historical Society**

[www.ohs.org](http://www.ohs.org)

Valentine’s Day 2019 marked the 160th anniversary of Oregon becoming a state. It also served as opening day of a new long-term exhibit at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. Experience Oregon took three years to research and fabricate, and features hundreds of artifacts drawn exclusively from OHS collections. The 7,000-square-foot exhibit includes an introductory theatre experience, interactive displays and a “river” along the floor emphasizing the importance of water in Oregon’s history.

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**VICTORIA, BC**

**Maritime Museum of British Columbia Expands Its Mission**

[www.mmbc.bc.ca](http://www.mmbc.bc.ca)

Many Pacific Northwest history enthusiasts have fond memories of the Maritime Museum of British Columbia that was housed for decades in a historic former courthouse near the inner harbor of Victoria, BC. The museum vacated the ornate building at 28 Bastion Square in 2015, and has been operating in a much smaller space nearby for the past three years. The board of the museum announced in January that they will seek designation and funding as a national institution to be known as the Canadian Maritime Museum. Under this new plan, the museum would return to 28 Bastion Square, following extensive renovation and seismic upgrades. Support from the provincial government of British Columbia and the Canadian federal government will be key to the Maritime Museum’s future.

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**REMEMBERING HISTORIAN ROBERT FICKEN**

The Washington State Historical Society marks with sorrow the death in January of Dr. Robert Ficken who, among other contributions to the field of Northwest history, also served as a trustee of the society.

“He made Washington history jump off the page for readers of all ages,” said John C. Hughes, the chief historian for the Office of the Secretary of State. Longtime WSHS director and historian David Nicandri called Dr. Ficken “a prolific author whose research and his writing on the territorial period had no peer. He had an unusual ability to weave quotes from original sources into his narratives. His centennial history of Washington, written with Charles LeWarne, is the single most incisive treatment on the history of the state that has ever appeared in print. He was a valuable member of the WSHS board, known for his insights and wit.”

In 2011, the society presented Dr. Ficken with the Robert Gray Medal for distinguished and long-term contributions to Pacific Northwest History. Throughout his career as an independent historian, he produced some of the most outstanding scholarly works about Washington, including eight books covering varied aspects of the territory and state’s history.

Dr. Ficken was a member of the WSHS Awards committee and is remembered by his colleague Hughes as “a fastidious researcher and a compelling writer. Washington has lost one of its all-time finest historians. Bob was a generous mentor and encyclopedic source.”

Robert Ficken will long be remembered as an important and valued historian. Without his work, our knowledge of Washington’s past would be the less.

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The historic courthouse at 28 Bastion Square in Victoria may once again be home to a maritime museum. Courtesy Maritime Museum of British Columbia.

The Beaver State’s mascot is featured in a major new exhibit at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. Courtesy Oregon Historical Society.

DISCOVERY: RARE YAKIMA VALLEY IMAGES

The photographs for this edition of WASHINGTON GALLERY were discovered recently by Kelsey Doncaster, historian with the US Bureau of Reclamation’s Columbia-Cascades Area Office in Yakima.

They had been under care of the Kittitas Reclamation District since the mid-1930s and contain many images never before seen, with a majority of them not listed in the agency’s holdings and not deposited with the National Archives and Records Administration.

Doncaster reports that the total number of images discovered is in the thousands, and they include glass plate negatives, nitrate negatives as well as prints. Some were loose, while others were collected in photo albums.

The significance of this collection, besides the photographic record, according to Doncaster, is that the files contain the original note cards showing the exposure, name of the photographer and additional information not contained in the US Bureau of Reclamation’s photographic logs.

This past October, Doncaster presented an illustrated lecture at the Kittitas County Historical Museum in Ellensburg entitled “The Lost Photographs of the Kittitas Division of the Yakima Project.”

As seen in the examples Doncaster shared with COLUMBIA, these are not just construction photographs or images meant to document contract activities. These rare photos show an eye for composition, and reveal interesting scenes, buildings, and people working and going about their lives in the Yakima Valley more than 80 years ago.

HISTORY PODCAST: COLUMBIA CONVERSATIONS

Voices from COLUMBIA Magazine and around the Pacific Northwest are now as close as your digital device with the monthly COLUMBIA Conversations podcast. Visit ColumbiaConversations.org for the latest episode!
The concept of “place,” says a team of archaeologists from Eastern Washington University (EWU), has a special meaning when it comes to archaeological context. “It demands a thorough examination and knowledge of landscapes and landscape interactions,” the team writes, “especially those that involve the people whose adaptations influenced and altered the landscapes.”

This quote comes from an essay in The Spokane River, a provocative and eclectic new collection of history, science and poetry edited by Eastern Washington University English professor Paul Lindholt and published by University of Washington Press. And it’s this concept of place that informs nearly every piece in the book, whether it’s the essay from which this quote is drawn, “Spokane River Archaeology,” by a trio of EWU archaeologists, or personal tales of life along the banks of the river and its tributaries.

Lindholt and the other authors take the notion of a “thorough examination and knowledge and landscape interactions” as marching orders or a kind of mission statement as they go wide and deep to bring the Spokane River to life throughout the book’s nearly 300 pages.

Like many Western Washington natives, I’ve been traveling to Spokane for most of my life but always feeling as if I didn’t have a sense of the true identity or even the soul of the city. I’ve long suspected that having been raised within sniffing distance of salt water makes all river cities, including Spokane, feel like a different species or at least a mystery that needed to be solved.

Now, after a few evenings spent exploring the pages of The Spokane River, I have more sense of the river and the city than I’ve ever felt in years of visiting in person.

With this collection, there’s no need to read in linear fashion. In any order, the essays present insights that feel as though they are drawn from a shelf full of vintage and recent books about Spokane and the Inland Empire.

In addition to archaeology, The Spokane River presents views of indigenous history in a piece by editor Lindholt; early contact in a piece about Spokane House by acclaimed historian and author Jack Nisbet; and multiple looks at the work that went into reclaiming the river through town for the environmentally-themed world’s fair called Expo ’74. Well-known artist Don Fels even connects the dots between 19th century production of industrial dyes a world away, recent paper recycling efforts in Spokane, and the ongoing challenges to fish and wildlife caused by contamination of the Spokane River.

More maps would’ve been helpful, especially for the essays that touch on dams and fisheries, and the relative locations of Riverfront Park, People’s Park and the mouth of Spokane River tributary known as Hangman Creek.

And speaking of Hangman Creek, this body of water previously (and perhaps once again) known as Latah Creek, emerges in many of the pieces as a stalwart supporting character in the larger tale of the Spokane River. Perhaps this creek, whatever it’s called, is a cultural and environmental force in need of thorough examination, and a place worthy of its own separate collection of essays.
True Tales of Puget Sound by Dorothy Wilhelm
The History Press
Longtime researcher, writer, broadcaster and history storyteller Dorothy Wilhelm compiles nearly two dozen of her favorite stories, often with an unknown or unexpected twist, about people, history and communities around Puget Sound.

Don’t Never Tell Nobody Nothin’ No How: The Real Story of West Coast Rum Running by Rick James
Harbour Publishing
British Columbia historian and author Rick James serves up a powerful cocktail of Prohibition-era stories about the unique trade in illegal alcohol that flourished between British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest during the 1920s and early 1930s.

On Duty in the Pacific Northwest during the Civil War: Correspondence and Reminiscences of the First Oregon Cavalry edited by James Robbins Jewell
The University of Tennessee Press
James Robbins Jewell, who chairs the History Program at North Idaho College, edited this collection of wartime letters from the first US Army regiment in the Pacific Northwest to serve during the Civil War.

Chinook Resilience: Heritage and Cultural Revitalization on the Lower Columbia River by Jon A. Daehnke
University of Washington Press
The Chinook Indian Nation is not recognized by the federal government, but this hasn’t stopped Chinook citizens from preserving, studying and celebrating their culture and ancestral lands at the mouth of the Columbia River.

Nowhere to Remember: Hanford, White Bluffs, and Richland to 1943 edited by Robert Bauman and Robert Franklin
WSU Press
This is the inaugural title in the new multi-volume Hanford Histories series from WSU Press and the Hanford History Project archives, examining the evolution of three agricultural communities from the 19th century to the early years of World War II.

Beyond the Rebel Girl: Women and the Industrial Workers of the World in the Pacific Northwest 1905-1924 by Heather Mayer
Oregon State University Press
Heather Mayer of Portland Community College explores the vital, if mostly overlooked, role played by women in the early 20th century activism of the International Workers of the World, better known as the Wobblies.

Born December 31, 1920, in Seattle, Berner attended Garfield High School, served in the Army’s 10th Mountain Division, studied economics at the University of Washington, and received graduate degrees in history and library science at the University of California, Berkeley.

At UC Berkeley in the 1950s, Berner began a long collaborative friendship with Robert E. Burke, then director of the Manuscript Collection at the Bancroft Library. Like his friend Burke, Berner was hired by the University of Washington, where in 1958 he established the University Archives and Manuscripts Division, now known as Special Collections. Berner implemented procedural innovations and made acquisitions that greatly enhanced the collection’s accessibility and scope, making it a leading national archive.

In 1983, Berner authored Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis (University of Washington Press), a well-received text that documents the evolution of how and why public archives preserved materials from the early 19th century to the middle of the 20th century.

It is his three-volume Seattle in the 20th Century, though, that will preserve Berner’s place in Northwest historiography.

Seattle 1900-1920: From Boomtown, Urban Turbulence, to Restoration, Volume 1; Seattle 1921-1940: From Boom to Bust, Volume 2; and Seattle Transformed: World War II to Cold War, Volume 3 (Seattle: Charles Press, 1991-1999) take us beyond the early and sometimes hagiographic histories of Arthur Denny, Frederic Grant, and Clarence Bagley, into a magisterial survey that is inclusive and incisive, rich in detail, and decidedly non-worshipful.

Seattle in the 20th Century is a sprawling work that paints a vivid, sometimes visceral, picture of a city in constant turmoil.
Berner offers no grand synthesis. His overarching theme, if one must be identified, is struggle: struggle between public and private interests, working class and establishment, conservatives and progressives, dominant and minority racial groups. Politics and the convolutions of successive City Halls are covered in full detail.

Closest to Mr. Berner’s heart is the struggle for workers’ rights and economic justice, which he deals with at length in all three volumes. Highlighted, too, are the tragedy of the Japanese-American “removal” at the onset of World War II, local manifestations of racial discrimination, and the lingering specter of elite repression of constitutional rights.

Front and center, too, are the personalities who shaped this eternally restless city, from Mayor Hiram Gill to college founder Nellie Cornish, from labor leader Dave Beck to Mayor Bertha Knight Landes. Says photo historian and author Paul Dorpat, Richard’s friend and collaborator on the illustrated edition of Volume 1, “Within Berner’s three books are the wonders of what they did, the touchstones of their devotions and deceptions, their courage and hypocrisy, meanness and compassion.”

Berner was a true Seattleite who loved the outdoors. He and his wife Thelma, herself a distinguished professor of Physiology and Biophysics at the UW, were avid skiers, mountaineers, and byway trekkers, ever sensitive to the spirit of the Northwest, ever alive to its lasting promise.

Richard Berner felt the passions and struggles of his community keenly, and closed his final volume with a sobering warning: “In such times of widespread public hysteria, when the true mettle of constitutional protections is really tested, they have been practically shredded.”

FINDING PEACE ACROSS THE OCEAN


SOMEDAY THEY’LL FIND MY SON


IN DEFENSE OF WYAM


USED BOOKS


ALASKAN WAY BY ANY OTHER NAME

Seattle’s venerable Alaskan Way Viaduct was replaced earlier this year by a “deep-bore” tunnel under the city’s downtown.

Over the next several years, the city’s waterfront, which has served as Seattle’s front porch and loading dock for more than 150 years, will undergo a series of transformations. The Alaskan Way Viaduct will be demolished, and the downtown core will be reconnected to the piers and sidewalks along Elliott Bay, and to the salt water that was once the primary means of travel between Seattle and the rest of the world.

It’s pretty much forgotten these days that the surface street from which the viaduct got its name wasn’t always a commemoration of Seattle’s economic and cultural ties to the northernmost state.

“The City Council is absolutely right in wanting to identify some prominent thoroughfare in Seattle with Alaska,” said a front-page editorial in The Seattle Times of July 7, 1936. “[B]ut…the waterfront thoroughfare must be given some designation typifying the function it performs in the city’s business life.”

The city had spent the previous few years rebuilding the seawall and the roadway along the waterfront, replacing acres of railroad tracks and wood-covered roadway with track-free pavement. When the new and improved street cried out for a new and improved name, the city council didn’t exactly take the newspaper’s renaming advice.

Prior to the official name change to Alaskan Way on July 6, 1936, the roadway had been known as Railroad Avenue, a name that dated to perhaps as early as the 1880s and that reflected the primary purpose of that strip of land. In those years, all north-south railroad tracks in Seattle ran along the waterfront, and a large passenger depot was also located on the shores of Elliott Bay.

Other names considered by the City Council included Pacific Way, Cosmos Quay and Cosmos Way. “Cosmos Quay” proved something of a lightning rod for criticism, as some worried that it would create confusion over how to pronounce “quay.” Merriam-Webster defines “quay” as “a structure built along the bank of a waterway for use as a landing for loading and unloading boats,” and lists no less than three pronunciations: kee, kway and kay.

Less troublesome names that were considered included The Pierway, Puget Portal, Klatawa Avenue, Hiak Avenue, Maritime Avenue, Maritime Way and Marine Way.

No matter what it’s called, as work progresses to reconnect downtown to Elliott Bay, it’s a good bet that the street along Seattle’s waterfront will remain key to the city’s future.

FROM TOP: Alaskan Way, née Railroad Avenue, looking north from Marion Street, in January 1941, showing improvements made in the 1930s. Courtesy Seattle Municipal Archives.


Railroad Avenue, looking north from Marion Street, in March 1934, with much of the area between the shoreline and downtown buildings occupied by railroad tracks and “paved” with wood planking. Courtesy Seattle Municipal Archives.

Railroad Avenue, near Broad Street, showing scope of the reconstruction of the roadway and seawall taking place near the Hamburg-American Line terminal in 1935. Courtesy Seattle Municipal Archives.

Is there a geographic name you’d like to know more about? Or a great story about a unique Northwest place that you’d like to share with COLUMBIA readers? Please send email to editor.columbia@gmail.com.
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“History is no longer just a chronicle of kings and statesmen, of people who wielded power, but of ordinary women and men engaged in manifold tasks. Women’s history is an assertion that women have a history.”
– Toshiko Kishida, 1863–1901, writer and political activist for women’s rights, known as Japan’s first woman orator.

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