Kitchen SCIENCE
How Seattle Got Schooled in Modern Cooking Techniques
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COVER STORY

Kitchen Science by Jacqueline B. Williams .......................... 4
The evolution of cooking, and learning how to cook, in the Northwest.


Elsie Parrish: Working Class Hero by Bob Young .......................... 12
A hotel worker in Wenatchee revolutionized how American courts viewed the Constitution.

Michael Finley: Tribal Liaison for Washington State Historical Society
Interview by Feliks Banel ............................................................... 20
Meet the Washington State Historical Society’s tribal liaison.

COLUMBIA FEATURES
Editor’s Note/Contributors .................................. 2
Collecting Washington ........................................... 3
39 Counties ......................................................... 26
Notable ............................................................. 28
Washington Gallery ........................................... 29
Used Books ....................................................... 30
Reference Desk .................................................. 31
Maps & Legends .................................................. 32

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, artifacts and a link to the podcast COLUMBIA Conversations.

ON THE COVER
A baking class at Longfellow School in Seattle, circa 1914, is evidence of how people in the Northwest learned to prepare food, which is the subject of Jacqueline B. Williams’ cover story in this edition of COLUMBIA. Asahel Curtis photo. WSHS 1943.42.29924.
Thank you for supporting the Washington State Historical Society (WSHS) and COLUMBIA magazine for what’s been another great year. We’re grateful that you share our commitment to publishing images, features and stories that help readers understand the many meanings of living in the Evergreen State, beyond the constant stream of headlines available on the nearest digital device.

In this issue we look back, of course, but we also look ahead to 2020. It’s very exciting to see the list of programs and activities supported by WSHS grants that will be offered around the state to mark the centennial of women’s suffrage. And we’re proud to share a profile of Michael Finley, WSHS’s recently hired tribal liaison, and learn what initiatives he’ll be working on in the coming months.

I’m particularly pleased by the enthusiastic participation of friends and colleagues from the Pacific Northwest museum, heritage, archive and historic preservation community in new features that premiered in COLUMBIA in early 2018. For this edition of Washington Gallery, Amy Platt of the Oregon Historical Society investigates two intriguing images of a long-ago frozen Columbia River, while Maps & Legends finds Tenino city historian Richard A. Edwards debunking myths about that community’s name. In our literary pages, Seattle’s Knute Berger has an appreciation of historian and author Stewart Holbrook for Used Books, and Stephanie Martin of the Whitman Mission National Historic Site reviews a new book that draws inspiration from the history of Narcissa Whitman.

We encourage anyone with an interest in Northwest history, and a desire to research, write and share stories—including specific ideas for any of our regular features—to get in touch with us here at COLUMBIA by sending email to editor.columbia@gmail.com. The more people, organizations and communities represented in these pages, the better COLUMBIA reflects the complexities of Washington’s past, present and future.

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COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHT:
A WASHINGTON MAN OF CHANGE

Men of Change: Power. Triumph. Truth., an inspiring new exhibition from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, opened on December 21 at the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma. WSHM is the only museum in the Pacific Northwest slated to feature this significant exhibition; plan your visit between now and March 15, 2020.

Men of Change highlights more than two dozen known and unknown African American men whose journeys altered the history and culture of the United States through politics, sports, science, entertainment, business, religion and more. The exhibition illuminates their historic contributions through stories, literary and historic quotes, poetry, original works of art, and dramatic photographs. Men of Change weaves a collective tapestry of what it is to be an African American man and the shared experience of African American men across generations.

These change-makers prompt us to think about Washington’s African American men of change, such as Judge Jack E. Tanner. Judge Tanner was born in Tacoma in 1919, and passed away in 2006. Tanner’s father, Ernie, was active in the leadership of the Tacoma local of the International Longshoremen’s Union, while Jack moonlighted as a longshoreman to supplement his young-lawyer salary.

Tanner had a long and illustrious career, and was appointed by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 as district judge for Washington’s Eastern and Western districts. Judge Tanner was the first African American to serve in this position in the Pacific Northwest.

Judge Tanner also had a long association with longtime Washington Senator Henry M. “Scoop” Jackson and with Jackson’s family. The late senator’s son, Peter, says that his father was drawn to Tanner’s civil rights and labor efforts at home and around the country.

“As Tanner grew absorbed in state politics and civil rights protests through the 1950s and 1960s, he and Scoop became friends,” said Jackson. “[My father] had no inkling of what it was like to serve in a segregated Army unit or to face racism on a daily basis…’Scoop’ needed Tanner’s guidance and sharp elbows,” he said.
Native Americans have made use of the abundant natural resources of fresh fish and game, berries, and wild greens in the Pacific Northwest for millennia. When European settlers arrived, they, too, feasted. “We have strawberries, raspberries, dew berries, Salal berries, salmon berries, cranberries, whortleberries, and wild grapes...picked by the Indians and brought in by the barrel,” Reverend David Blaine wrote his parents from Seattle in 1853. The settlers slowly added non-native foods to their diet such as wheat, potatoes, apples and grapes.

In spite of this abundance of resources, those charged with daily cooking, from the earliest days of settlement, planned meals to enhance these basic foods. Knowing their families would want bread, baked beans, and puddings, most likely some settlers tucked a recipe book into the provisions box to help with planning meals. By the 1850s when significant numbers of immigrants began establishing homes in the Pacific Northwest, there was already a large body of American cookery literature and recipes available. It was the scientific method of cooking, a concept popular within the domestic-science movement in the 1880s, that changed the way women and men made a serious attempt to improve their methods of cooking.

The idea of a scientific way of cooking came from the well-educated, reform-minded women who belonged to the Woman’s Education Association (WEA) in Boston. They believed in improving education for women and children, and were convinced that teaching the correct way to cook gave women useful skills to improve home life. To implement their ideas, they opened the Boston Cooking School.

The WEA opened its school in 1879 and “devoted the sum of one hundred dollars” to hire Maria Parloa, a cookbook author and cooking teacher. The WEA committee benefited from the assistance of the Industrial Aid Society, a free cooking school in Boston, which earlier had attracted more than 3,000 eager participants.
in just three months. The Society’s ideas relating to “demonstration lectures, class or practice lessons, and training classes for teachers” became incorporated in the Boston Cooking School program.

**In its first year,** 94 students, comprised of “young ladies, cooks already in service, and on Saturdays a class...of girls from the public school,” attended the Boston Cooking School. A training class for teachers was added the next year. A six-lesson course cost $1.50. From October to May, students numbering from 75 to 125 came to the lectures, “attracted by the special menu of the day,” or, in the case of housekeepers, wanting to learn the latest and best ideas for food preparation. After a few years of steady enrollment in the cooking classes, the Boston Cooking School incorporated in 1882. Its stated purpose was to give instruction in scientific cookery, and to “disseminate information of hygienic methods in the culinary art to all classes of society.” Eventually, the school became so popular that nurses, caterers, restaurateurs and boarding-house proprietors enrolled in the classes. The school’s first principal, Mary Johnson Bailey Lincoln, published her popular Mrs. Lincoln’s Boston Cook Book: What to Do and What Not to Do in Cooking in 1884. According to the preface in the early editions, the work was “undertaken at the urgent request of the pupils of the Boston Cooking School, who have desired that the recipes and lessons given during the last four years in that institution should be arranged in a permanent form.”

The domestic scientific movement coincided with the development of packaged goods in tin cans, glass bottles, and sealed cardboard boxes. The domestic scientific movement coincided with the development of packaged goods in tin cans, glass bottles, and sealed cardboard boxes. By the turn of the 20th century, advertisers trumpeted these foods as “scientific and efficient,” terms that were gaining an aura of divinity.

In these early classes, women learned about the chemistry of food, were advised to keep their kitchens as clean and orderly as a well-run office, that they needed to understand the difference between nutritious and non-nutritious meals, and that there would be an emphasis on preparing meals so that the final result would be neat and attractive. There would be no messy plates of food for these educated women who considered it their duty to teach the details of scientific, hygienic cookery. Moreover, many of the women who became part of this scientific trend were looking for a career, especially one with meaning. They were, at this time, realistically aware that they would be entering a man’s world, but they believed “the best way...to re-create man’s world was in women’s sphere,” wrote Laura Shapiro in *Perfection Salad*.

Food preparation in the Pacific Northwest was enlivened by ingredients arriving from afar by railroad, such as tomatoes in syrup, preserved Louisiana figs, Christmas plum pudding, bottles of ketchup, mustard, and Worcestershire sauce; canned fruit, canned vegetables, canned condensed milk, and cans of roasted coffee. Additionally, Washington newspapers such as *The Territorial Republican* and *Washington Standard* regularly offered advice and printed recipes.

In the 1890s Seattle women joined the domestic science movement. “The cooking schools are doing much...in showing us how to prepare appetizing meals from what our mothers would have thrown away, and also how, in a pinch, to serve the same article of food every day for a week, but prepared in so many entirely different ways,” reported the *Washington Standard*, an Olympia newspaper, in 1895. The following year the newspaper again announced: “A lady lecturer hailing from the famous Boston Cooking School is doing the Sound cities and telling young girls what they ought to know about kitchen work.” The reporter may have heard about the Seattle food exposition at that city’s Armory in November 1896. Even before the doors opened,
people, “principally women” who had the leisure to attend such outings, were waiting at the entrance to view the display of products, such as the Seattle Cracker Company’s pilasters resembling Everton taffy, and such treats as barley sugar sticks, backed by a variety of common-sense biscuits or crackers of every kind. But it was the cooking lectures that drew the largest crowd and filled the large hall in the armory. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer described the event:

Mrs. Camille L. Greene-Laughlan, the lecturer, carried forward this idea of the science of domestic economy in a marked degree yesterday afternoon. She hails from the Boston cooking school...From her point of view success or non-success in life depends entirely upon the cook. She has probably never studied the esoteric doctrines of the Himalaya philosophers, yet to hear her talk, one could not fail to be impressed with the idea that she had added to the thirty-nine articles, unconsciously or otherwise, and firmly believed that the seat of the soul was in the stomach. Her first Emersonian phrase showed this: “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” This was her text, and while her finely shaped but large, sensible white hands were flitting about the skillets and the raw beef she went on [to say] “No truer words were ever spoken,”...“Only it should have included women also. The subject of cooking is so old that most people do not stop to consider whether there is any art or science in it...To be a success as a cook is to have rules, and to follow them explicitly. Do not think because you have made a dish from a recipe once or twice, that the third time you know it well enough to guess at it, then wonder why you failed. You must follow the rules explicitly always.”

When the 1897 edition of the food exposition came around a year later, a Seattle Post-Intelligencer headline boldly stated, “Seattle Matrons Have a High Idea of Culinary Art.” This time, the lessons focused exclusively on salads, which the newspaper described as “fancy.” Miss Tracy, the cooking instructor, said “the demand for recipes of salads, dressings, sauces, entrees and pastry has been more general in this city than in any other she had visited.”

Advertisers as varied as Cottolene (vegetable shortening), Baker’s Chocolate, ice cream freezers, and Borden’s
Classes were first offered in a Boston high school in 1885, and similar offerings became popular throughout the country. By 1907 most Seattle high schools offered courses in cookery.

In Boston in the 1890s, women from the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) also realized the benefits derived from a knowledge of scientific cooking and set up a School of Domestic Science. Classes offered included cooking, chemistry of food, physiology and hygiene, marketing and keeping family accounts. Again, Seattle followed suit. “The school of cooking and domestic economy lately inaugurated in connection with the Young Women’s Christian Association in this city is a movement in the right direction,” reported The Seattle Republican on May 1, 1903. The school would have regular courses, give diplomas, and hoped to be a model “in its equipment and perfect in the attainment of the ends sought.”

In 1905, The Seattle Times confidently announced: “WOMEN TO LEARN HOW TO COOK. Expert will give Lessons in Culinary Science. All the girls and women in the city, from the mud-pie artist of six summers to the woman gray in years, whose education in culinary work has been neglected” were invited.

The YWCA instructor, Miss Bertha Stewart Smith, came from a Detroit cooking school, attesting to the fact that the movement had definitely spread from Boston. The classrooms would provide all modern conveniences and cooking was done with gas, piped into a counter behind which the students stood. Instruction covered the uses of food and the foods best adapted to “different people in various occupations.” In addition, students would learn

Peerless Brand Evaporated Cream, followed the trend and mentioned that their products were endorsed by cooking school instructors.

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the history and practice of food as well as nutrition and “digestibility” of foods. Special courses were set up for children. Each course consisted of twelve lessons and, in addition to lectures, students cooked. The cost of $5.00 included membership in the YWCA.

Public schools offered another way to improve cooking skills. Classes were first offered in a Boston high school in 1885, and similar offerings became popular throughout the country. By 1907 most Seattle high schools offered courses in cookery. The idea was sanctioned by Frank B. Cooper, who came to Seattle as School Superintendent in 1901. “Cooper essentially standardized the curriculum citywide... The high schools continued to provide solid preparation in the liberal arts, which vocational and commercial

classes, physical education, home economics music, and art became integral parts of the curriculum,” wrote Doris Pieroth. Members of the local Home Economics Association such as Ellen Powell Dabney, one of the Seattle group’s founders, taught classes in foods and cooking under the name “Domestic Science” at the University of Washington. She also taught “Cookery” at Lincoln High School in the city’s Wallingford neighborhood and, in 1910, she became the first Supervisor of Home Economics for Seattle Public Schools. The name Home Economics had replaced Domestic Science in 1899 and had become a recognized field and acceptable, full-fledged profession.

In 1907, the girls in the cooking classes at Broadway High School showed off their skills at a banquet they prepared for the Seattle School Board. The menu included:

- Cream of Corn Soup
- Breaded Veal Cutlets
- Caper Sauce
- Creamed Asparagus
- Scalloped Potatoes
- Fruit Salad
- Peach Short Cake with Whipped Cream.

Commenting on the girls’ choice to learn more about cooking, the school board said, “We are glad indeed that you young ladies have found desirable to choose this work. This is the place to begin—at the foundation of things of the home...Food well prepared in accordance with the laws of health is essential to sound bodies. The easiest way to the heart of a man is the way you have chosen.”

BUT IT WASN’T ONLY GIRLS who clamored for instruction in cooking.

In 1920 classes for boys quickly filled, too. They appealed to would-be chefs, young men caring for invalid family members, and those who thought learning to make flapjacks would be beneficial when camping. Wearing butcher’s aprons, the boys cooked for an hour every morning. Besides learning the rudiments of cooking the aspiring young men acquired knowledge of the nutritive values of each food,

FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A student adjusts the decorations on a formal dinner table she has prepared as part of a homework assignment from Seattle Public Schools in 1914. Photo by Asahel Curtis. WSHS 1943.42.29993.

A student examines loaves of bread as part of a Domestic Science class in Seattle Public Schools, circa 1914. Photo by Asahel Curtis. WSHS 1943.42.29994.

A group of male students from Franklin High School in Seattle learn the fundamentals of baking, and also, perhaps, that such things are not the exclusive domain of females, on May 11, 1909. Photo by Asahel Curtis. WSHS 1943.42.13687.

A cookbook resulting from a “Men’s Favorite Recipes” contest in The Seattle Times in 1938; the editor is listed as “Dorothy Neighbors,” a fictitious name representing several different writers and editors over many decades of domestic columns in the newspaper. WSHS 1997.1.49.
especially Seattle’s seasonal vegetables. The only complaint seemed to be about washing the dishes. Dora Dean, who wrote an article about the class in The Seattle Times, speculated on where this trend would lead:

So the old adage about woman’s place being in the home is liable to reconstruction to read about man’s place there. For when Dad knows more about baking biscuits and broiled steak than Mother, who doesn’t get home from her law office in time anyway to prepare the evening meal, Dad will just somehow manage to get there first to have the table set and the dinner cooking by the time she gets in.

In addition to classes at the YWCA and Seattle Public Schools, free cooking schools were offered by companies such as Puget Sound Traction, Light & Power Company, which later became what’s now Puget Sound Energy, and drew sizeable crowds. Eager to promote the use of electricity for cooking, the private utility company offered lectures and demonstrations on how to use electric stoves and other electric appliances.

J.D. Ross, Seattle City Light’s superintendent of lighting, was also keen to promote the installation of electric ranges in Seattle homes and apartments. Still, even with Ross’s interest and drive, City Light customers did not rush out to purchase electric ranges. Furthermore, Seattle City Light had a difficult time acquiring parts and key materials during World War I. The big boom for electric cooking came after the Great War, when improved range designs came on the market, and appliance companies and City Light collaborated to promote the sale of electrical appliances.

In 1923, the Seattle Electric Club, which had as its members businesses concerned with any and every aspect of electricity, celebrated a promotional initiative called “Electric Week.” One of the highlights was an exhibit held in a large tent in Bothell, a few miles northeast of Seattle, that showcased cooking demonstrations and promoted the idea that “the work is done by the most willing of servants, electricity harnessed to push buttons...Let Electric Mary do your work...[She] will take a big load off the shoulders of any housewife.”
Lowen, Jesse Marie DeBoth and other cooking instructors gave many classes at various venues in Seattle throughout the 1930s. In 1934, DeBoth was considered the nation’s leading cooking school demonstrator. According to the Times, she drew crowds wherever she presented classes. In fact, the city expected so many people to attend, special street car routes were published in the newspaper.

In the early days after Pearl Harbor, the Times Cooking School advised homemakers on dealing with shortages and preparing economic meals, such as using cheaper cuts of meat. “This cooking school will help me a great deal,” a mother wrote to The Seattle Times in 1942. “I have a boy working the night shift in a defense industry and I want to give him well-balanced meals.” Unfortunately, as the war continued and more food products appeared on the rationed list, the Times Cooking School was suspended for the duration.

In the postwar 1950s, there were just a few classes offered, but in the 1960s the cooking class movement regained its popularity. Public television was a natural outlet for how-to programs about cooking, such as Julia Child’s The French Chef, which debuted in Boston on station WGBH in 1963, and which ultimately inspired public TV stations around the country, including Seattle’s KCTS, to offer Child’s program as well as to produce their own culinary video offerings. Around the same time, a myriad of organizations, such as the Orthopedic Guilds, Junior League, and Hadassah, began offering special classes in cookery. It was a great way for each group to promote itself as well as create an income stream. These club classes were followed by offerings from culinary retailers such as Magnolia Kitchen School, Puget Consumers Co-op, Frederick & Nelson department store, and Yankee Kitchen.

By this time, domestic cooking was being transformed by the introduction of specialized cuisines such as French or Indian, vegetarian, low fat, low salt, low sugar, gluten free, and cooking for those looking to lose weight.

It was not until the 1980s that what could be called a Pacific Northwest Cuisine, which focused on fresh local ingredients and highlighted the region’s vast agricultural areas, began to emerge. Recalling his childhood in the Northwest, noted American chef and author James Beard wrote in 1983, “During my long lifetime...there has never been a restaurant that glorified the great gifts from the sea, nor the fine vegetables...or the small fruits or the game.” That sentiment was echoed by Jerry Traunfeld, who had come to the Northwest from the San Francisco area, where he worked with author and chef Alice Waters of world-renowned Berkeley, California restaurant Chez Panisse. “When I started cooking [in Seattle] in ’86, there wasn’t much,” Traunfeld wrote. “We had a little media thing with a bunch of local chefs about ‘Is there a Northwest cuisine?’” Traunfeld became chef at the Herbfarm at its original location in Fall City, east of Seattle in the Snoqualmie Valley. The Herbfarm was one of the first restaurants in the area to offer cooking classes with an emphasis on the flora and fauna of the Northwest. Today, of course, most of the cooking schools and restaurants feature recipes made with local foods.

In the 21st century, cooks no longer have to leave their homes to learn how to improve meals. Cooking shows on public and cable television and especially YouTube give detailed instructions. Still, an online search of cooking schools in Seattle shows that the cooking school movement is very active. One can choose classes for adults, groups, singles, and even children. Some take place in a commercial establishment, while some cooking teachers will make “housecalls” and give in-home culinary instruction using the homeowner’s appliances. As they have done since the settlers added sugar to freshly picked berries, Seattle cooks have devised many ways to enhance their cooking skills, and enhance the menus and dining experiences of those for whom they cook.
Elsie Parrish had reached her limit. No stranger to perseverance, she was a toddler when her father died in a gruesome farm accident. She was married at 15 and bore seven children. As a chambermaid, she scrubbed toilets and changed bed sheets for a living. And in the spring of 1935, she just wanted what she was owed for working at Wenatchee’s splendid Cascadian Hotel.

With the countryside pink in the fragrant blush of its signature apple orchards, Elsie walked to the handsome Doneen Building, a block from the Cascadian, and the law office of Charles Burnham Conner. Her question was simple: Why shouldn’t the hotel owners pay her what state law required?

Washington was the fourth state in the union to adopt a minimum wage law for women. And Elsie knew she wasn’t paid the prescribed minimum of $14.50 for a 48-hour week.

Yes, she had cashed her deficient paychecks in the depths of the Great Depression, when Wenatchee’s unemployment rate stood at a stubborn 24 percent. “I took what they gave me because I needed this work so badly,” she said. Still, it gnawed at her that the hotel, over the course of a year, had shorted her $216.
Her gumption appealed to Conner, a part-time justice of the peace known as “C.B.” He agreed to take her case, even though she couldn’t afford to pay him. He would soon learn the hoteliers didn’t dispute Elsie’s job performance. Or the chambermaid’s math. And they were versed in state law. They just believed it was unconstitutional.

The U.S. Supreme Court had famously ruled several times against state regulation of wages and work conditions. The white male justices, seemingly frozen in a 19th century view of laissez-faire economics, had decreed in 1923 that a minimum wage violated a woman’s right to make her own contract with an employer. That was a Constitutional liberty, they opined, no matter how callous an employer might be.

By a narrow majority, the high court once again reached that conclusion just six months before they took up Elsie’s complaint, when they considered the case of Joe Tipaldo, a laundry manager. Tipaldo admitted he had only pretended to pay his women employees New York’s minimum wage. In fact, Tipaldo forced the laundresses to kick back one-third of their wages to him.

Even then, the court once more invoked a woman’s right to contract while invalidating New York’s minimum wage. “The sacred right of liberty to contract again,” scoffed Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. “The right of an immature child or a helpless woman to drive a bargain with a great corporation.”

In its conservative interpretations, the court had also swatted down a dozen of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal proposals aimed at economic relief and recovery. “After slaughtering practically every New Deal measure that has been dragged before it,” one national columnist wrote, the court’s halls were “as in the last act of a Shakespearean tragedy, strewn with the gory dead.”

This is what Elsie, a grandmother without a gray hair, was up against.

When all the lawyers were done deliberating, to the nation’s surprise, the chambermaid’s case would take a stunning turn. And she played a pivotal role in a profound change in the justices’ thinking.

The victory won by this “ordinary Washington citizen benefited millions of other low-income Americans,” says Gerry L. Alexander, former chief justice of the Washington Supreme Court.

“The only did it give the green light to the states to pass minimum-wage laws, which are ubiquitous today,” Alexander says. ”But it quickly opened the floodgates to other New Deal legislation, such as the Social Security Act, which has had a huge effect on just about everyone in our nation.”

As one historian put it, Elsie Parrish “detonated” a revolution in how American courts viewed the Constitution.

Surprisingly, history’s gaze was never really trained on the 38-year old grandmother. Instead, attention dwelled on why Justice Owen Roberts reversed his position and shifted the court’s teetering balance in a new direction.

The chambermaid’s legacy is so overlooked and untold that many of Elsie’s descendants had no idea she was at the center of a landmark lawsuit. Among the clueless was Barbara Roberts, her grandniece and Oregon’s first woman governor. Roberts only recently learned about Elsie’s landmark victory from Helen Knowles, a professor in New York writing a book about Parrish.

ELSIE DELIAH MURRAY was born in 1899 in Penalosa, Kansas, in the south-central part of the state, about 60 windswept miles west of Wichita. Elsie’s family had come to America from Ireland in the early 1700s. They eventually made their way west to Illinois and then on to the sparsely populated Great Plains where bison and Indians roamed just several decades before.

Elsie’s father, Ed Murray, was “one of the most highly respected citizens of the county.” When Elsie was 15 months old he was killed in what the Wichita Eagle called “one of the more deplorable and horrible accidents which ever has occurred in Reno County.” Murray was walking on top of a thresher that separated grain from stalk when he slipped and stepped into its rotating cylinder and blades. His leg was almost torn from his body. “With almost superhuman strength he struggled from the machine and had pulled himself free...before any help reached him.” He died a few hours later.

Elsie’s oldest brother drowned the next year. Her mother was left with a 160-acre farm and six children under 14 to care for. Emma Murray soldiered on as a single mother until she remarried in 1907.

Family members, including Elsie, later migrated west to homestead in Montana. So did the Lee family, whom the Murrays knew, from a neighboring Kansas township. Both
the Murays and Lees ended up living near Coffee Creek, Montana. Elsie married Roy Lee, nine years her senior. She gave birth to their first child in 1915, five days shy of her 16th birthday.

Details are scant about their lives in Montana. In 1927, their 8-year old son died. It’s not clear how, says Knowles, a political science professor at State University of New York at Oswego.

With the Depression gripping the country, the couple and their six remaining children trekked to Neppel, Washington. (With a population of just over 300, it became Moses Lake in 1938.) When Elsie and Roy arrived, Neppel’s sizable lake supported some agriculture and fishing. Disputes over water rights kept the community from growing much until the 1940s when the Grand Coulee Dam provided irrigation to the arid landscape.

It’s not clear how the Lees survived in Neppel, but their marriage did not. Elsie divorced Roy, finally unable to tolerate his alcoholism.

By 1933, Elsie had moved about 70 miles west to Wenatchee, a crossroads city of river and rail transportation ambitious enough to proclaim itself “Apple Capital of the World.” Elsie, a single mother, started working at the Cascadian Hotel for 22½ cents an hour. The next year, she wed Ernest Parrish, who listed “orchard work” as his occupation on their marriage license. She worked a full shift, court records show, on the day of her wedding.

The Cascadian was part of a growing chain that would become Seattle-based Westin Hotels. An imposing mix of Art Moderne and Beaux Arts styles, it was the tallest building in Wenatchee, with 184 rooms and amenities such as air conditioning. It remains the city’s tallest building.

Two decades before the Cascadian welcomed its first guests, the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire had spurred reforms in work conditions. New Yorkers, including FDR’s future Labor Secretary, Frances Perkins, watched in horror that Saturday afternoon while smoke billowed from a 10-story Greenwich Village building. Factory owners had locked some doors so they could check workers for stolen goods before they left the premises. The factory’s single fire escape collapsed due to heat and overloading. Forty-seven workers, mostly young immigrant women, jumped from the 8th and 9th floors to their deaths. In all, 146 workers died in New York’s most lethal workplace tragedy until the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

In Seattle, reformer Alice Lord had already organized the Waitresses Union, Local 240, to lobby for better conditions for women who tended to be single, worked nights, served strangers and were eyed with suspicions of immorality. Lord pushed for an eight-hour day, six-day work week, and a minimum wage. She was also a suffragist, helping women in Washington win the right to vote in 1910, a decade before the 19th Amendment extended suffrage to female citizens in all states. Soon, Washington lawmakers would pass a minimum wage for women—with a twist.

The 1913 Legislature featured the state’s first two women representatives, Frances Axtell of Bellingham and Nena Jolidon Croake of Tacoma. Both women had campaigned for a minimum wage. But it was Croake, a physician, who sponsored a bill to that effect. Her version languished until the final days of the session, when it was voted down.

A minimum wage for women wasn’t unpopular. Its supporters included Progressive movement reformers, women’s clubs, the state labor federation, and others who worried that poverty was the “parentage of prostitution.” Washington didn’t have much in the way of sweatshops then, but many advocates saw a minimum wage as a preventive measure to protect
women’s virtue and health, while stabilizing society and lifting morals.

Business leaders in Washington were largely indifferent to the idea. Their apathy, in part, owed to the fact that women accounted for just 4 percent of all the state’s employees in manufacturing. Business leaders also knew they faced a zealous coalition. Newly armed with the vote, “an unprecedented number of women flocked to the Capitol to lobby.” One legislator said they made an opponent “look like a mangy kitten in a tiger fight.”

Male lawmakers said they disagreed with Croake’s proposal to set a specific floor of $1.25 per day for women’s pay. Instead they overwhelmingly supported a bill by state Senator George Piper of Seattle that created a state Industrial Welfare Commission to determine wages for women and children. Some said the commission’s deliberations would be more legally defensible than Croake’s flat wage for all.

Governor Ernest Lister quickly appointed three women commissioners to survey wages around the state. A newspaper editor in Everett called the trio “emissaries of His Satanic Majesty in the guise of halo-lighted angels of philanthropic regard.” In early 1914 the commission set minimum weekly wages in different industries: $8.90 for workers in manufacturing, $9 for laundry and telephone operators, $10 for mercantile and clerical employees.

In 1918, the commission increased the minimum to $13.20 in all industries, and eventually to $14.50 by the time Parrish filed her lawsuit.

Passed first in Massachusetts, then Oregon, Utah and Washington, minimum wage laws didn’t sweep the heartland because of the “decidedly hostile treatment that the first round of laws received at the U.S. Supreme Court.” Starting with the Lochner case in 1905, a narrow majority of the justices ruled that state regulations of work conditions ran afoul of 14th Amendment protections against state deprivations of “life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” This logic was applied to wages in 1923’s Adkins v. Children’s Hospital, a decision against the District of Columbia’s minimum wage law.

Despite the odds, Elsie Parrish was determined to take on one of Wenatchee’s biggest employers even if it meant risking job prospects in her adopted hometown.

On June 10, 1935, Charles B. Conner tossed the rock that would start a judicial avalanche. He filed Ernest Parrish and Elsie Parrish, his wife, vs. West Coast Hotel Company at the Chelan County Courthouse; Washington’s community property law did not then allow married women to file lawsuits in their own names.

Conner’s motive for taking on such a long shot—at some expense—appears to come from a sense of social justice, Professor Knowles says. Conner believed charitable work was a lofty calling, Gerry Alexander points out.

“I would be false to myself did I think of compensation from this case as is measured by money,” Elsie’s attorney wrote. “Working women are receiving better wages, children have
more food and better clothes. May I not have a reason to hope that I have served my country and in this thought receive a very handsome remuneration indeed?"

Back in Wenatchee, Parrish and Conner were quickly dismissed by Superior Court Judge William O. Parr, who relied on the Adkins precedent in his October 1935 ruling that the state minimum wage was unconstitutional. Conner would not quit. He appealed to the state Supreme Court. He argued Parrish's pay was a matter of statewide concern. He insisted her cause “reaches into every home where the woman does or may have to perform labor for the purpose of feeding herself and children."
The Cascadian’s lawyer, Fred Crollard, a former Wenatchee Chamber of Commerce president, stuck to the U.S. Supreme Court’s arguments against minimum wage laws.
The state Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision on April 2, 1936.

» In upholding the minimum wage, Millard said low-paid employees are “peculiarly subject to the overreaching of the harsh and greedy employer.” «

It was written by Chief Justice William J. Millard, a Republican. Millard had worked in railroad yards and was a proud member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. During his 1936 election campaign, he gave his view of a jurist’s role: “I don’t consider cases as much as a judge as like a human being. The law should be used to further progress, not block it.”

In upholding the minimum wage, Millard said low-paid employees, “are prone to accept pretty much anything that is offered” given their circumstances. “They are peculiarly subject to the overreaching of the harsh and greedy employer,” he continued. “The evils of the sweating system and of the long hour and low wages which are characteristic of it are well known.”

Good quotes for the newspapers, but the chief justice stood on shaky legal ground. Because the Adkins case involved the District of Columbia, Millard concluded that the high bench had not explicitly shot down a state minimum wage law. “The same Constitution applies” to states and the District of Columbia, former chief justice Gerry Alexander, notes.

Crollard later asked Millard how he could have reached such a decision in light of what the U.S. Supreme Court had said in Adkins.

“Well,” the justice replied, “let’s let the Supreme Court say it one more time.”

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT agreed to revisit minimum wages by taking an appeal from the Cascadian’s owners, which became West Coast Hotel Co. v. Parrish.

Shortly before the justices heard arguments, a newspaper reporter and photographer caught up with Elsie in her new job at a hotel in Omak, 90 miles north of Wenatchee. They said they wanted the story of her life. “My goodness,” she said, thinking they were mistaken. They pumped her for details of her early marriage, her grandchildren, and her willingness to help her husband “keep the wolf from the door” while raising six children.

“Why, when you’ve worked hard all your life, you can’t just up and quit,” she said. In one of the few pictures ever published of her, Parrish smiles, making a bed in her crisp uniform and low heels.

With the time and cost of traveling to the nation’s capital sinking in, her attorney sought help from state officials, pleading “the welfare of the whole state is at stake.” Conner even wrote a letter to state Attorney General Garrison Hamilton saying that supporting Parrish would help Democratic candidates win elections in 1936. Arguments for Parrish’s case were scheduled for mid-December. A state assistant attorney general, Wilbur Toner, already had plans to be in Washington, D.C., at the time. Toner would argue Parrish’s case before the high bench in December 1936, sparing Conner the long trip.

MARCH 29, 1937 CAME DURING the Easter holidays, with the capital resplendent in cherry blossoms. On that Monday morning, tourists and children filled the steps of the Supreme Court building. They lined up in record numbers to enter the marble palace, opened two years earlier, with “Equal Justice Under Law” chiseled above its columns. It was to be the first day of rulings handed down since FDR had suggested “packing” the heretofore unfriendly court by appointing additional justices beyond the Constitutionally mandated nine. Newshounds would not be disappointed.

Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, who narrowly lost to Woodrow Wilson in the 1916 presidential election, was known for leading the court with the skill of a symphony conductor. The silver-bearded judge began his analysis by stating why Parrish’s case called for “fresh consideration” of the court’s Adkins decision.
There was the “importance of the question” to states with minimum wage laws like Washington’s, Hughes said, and the narrowest of margins in the *Adkins* ruling.

But more important were the economic miseries of the Depression and the court’s reliance, while striking down state wage laws, on the doctrine of freedom to contract.

“What is this freedom?” Hughes asked. “The Constitution does not speak of freedom of contract.”

He turned to women’s welfare. “What can be closer to the public interest than the health of women and their protection from unscrupulous and overreaching employers?” If protecting women was in a state’s interest, he said, it only followed that a minimum wage was legitimate.

Hughes then added an “additional and compelling” argument. The exploitation of “relatively defenseless” employees not only injured women, it burdened the larger community. What “these workers lose in wages,” he reasoned, “the taxpayers are called upon to pay.”

He called that burden “a subsidy for unconscionable employers.”

The scales of justice were tilting left. With Roberts joining the liberals this time in a 5-4 majority, the Chief Justice confessed an earlier error by the court. Hughes concluded that *Adkins v. Children’s Hospital* “should be, and it is, overruled,” and the Washington state Supreme Court judgment on behalf of Elsie Parrish “is affirmed.”

Some two years after Parrish last swept rugs in the Cascadian, the Wenatchee chambermaid was to receive her $216.19 in back pay.

Some ardent feminists argued that women shouldn’t enjoy any special privileges, including a minimum wage. But most reformers hailed the *Parrish* ruling as a proper response to grim times when it had become clear the “market and states had found the crisis beyond their competence.”

The court’s reversal in Parrish—really Justice Roberts’ reversal—could be seen as reflecting changes in ideology across the legal profession in 1937, Bernard Schwartz wrote in *A History of the Supreme Court*. In this transformed thinking, unregulated markets were not meeting minimum needs of human welfare. If there ever was a need for the federal government to exert power, it was aroused during the Depression.

On the day *Parrish* was decided, the Court also upheld the rights of railroad workers to unionize and affirmed a revised version of a law that made it harder for banks to repossess farms. (Justices had struck down the original one in 1935.) The court’s shift hinted at massive changes to come.

Two weeks later, the court again marched in a new direction. In another 5-4 vote, with Roberts joining the
lifers, the court validated the Wagner Act. Called the “Magna Carta of the American labor movement,” it guaranteed workers’ rights to bargain collectively and strike, while barring paid goons from interfering.

In the following month the justices turned aside challenges to the Social Security Act. In doing so, they gave broad authority to Congress to tax and spend for the public welfare, including on unemployment insurance created by the act. It marked a new role for government.

Thanks to the “constitutional revolution” Elsie Parrish helped spark, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, the nation’s first female presidential cabinet member, got most of her ambitious agenda, including a federal minimum wage, passed.

DID THE THREAT OF FDR’S court-packing plan cause Justice Roberts’ critical conversion? In effect, Parrish was already decided, some six weeks before FDR unveiled his court-packing scheme. The public didn’t know that.

It’s possible that Roberts’ heart and mind had finally been opened to laissez-faire’s inability to meet the Depression’s pressing problems.

History will never know for certain what motivated Roberts’ change of mind, says Gerry Alexander, who has written about the Parrish case for the Washington State Historical Society and Washington Bar Association. Roberts was a private man and closemouthed about the matter for the rest of his life. “Judges are like everyone else,” Alexander says. “We aren’t the same all of our lives. I think he just changed his mind.”

Parrish’s unappreciated legacy still echoes around modern Washington. In 2018, Washington had the highest minimum wage of any state.”

Elsie did finally get some recognition decades later when author Adela Rogers St. Johns tracked her down in Anaheim, California. Then the plucky chambermaid was elevated to royalty in St. Johns’ 1974 book, Some Are Born Great, a feminist version of John F. Kennedy’s Profiles in Courage.

Parrish came to the door “looking much younger than I had expected, dressed in something pink and freshly-washed and ironed,” St. Johns wrote of Parrish, then

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Parrish’s unappreciated legacy still echoes around modern Washington. In 2018, Washington had the highest minimum wage of any state, $11.50 per hour. California and Massachusetts joined Washington at the top in 2019, with hourly minimum wages of $12.

Shortly after her Supreme Court victory, Elsie Parrish disappeared from the public eye. Later accounts and records had her toiling in Omak, where her husband worked at a lumber mill, then they moved to Snohomish County, and on to Southern California. Although her case later “launched a thousand law review articles,” she was never the story. She was not prominent in feminist or labor-history literature—or, as it turns out, even in family lore.

a septuagenarian like the author. Parrish said she was surprised that few women seemed to pay much attention to her historic triumph.

“I had to do it,” she told St. Johns, herself a trailblazing female journalist. “What they did wasn’t right.”

The author was astonished at the possibility that “the women of Lib and let Lib do not know the name of the woman who won this early big victory for them, bigger than the Vote, which of course was inevitable!”

Elsie’s grandnephew, Bill Murray, a Washingtonian, says he reached out to a number of relatives after learning of her lawsuit from the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center in 2013. “Other than one distant cousin, who had a newspaper clipping about the trial in her grandmother’s keepsake box that she always wondered about, no one was aware of Elsie’s Supreme Court adventure,” Murray says.

He did recall meeting Elsie at a couple family gatherings when he was a boy. If his parents ever discussed her lawsuit with him, he doesn’t remember.

Debbie Stewart, a great-granddaughter, says Elsie was a big part of her upbringing in Southern California and bought her a middle-school graduation dress. Stewart’s father, Darald, was actually Elsie’s grandson, the son of her oldest daughter Vera. But Ernie and Elsie adopted him as their son and Stewart knew Elsie as her grandma. Stewart, also a Washingtonian, says her father told her about the legendary lawsuit, but she never talked about it with Elsie.

Stewart recalls Elsie as sweet but stern, fond of crocheting and gardening, with a “you kids got it easy” toughness forged in the Depression. One afternoon in April 1980, after going to see her newly-born great great grandson, Elsie came home, took a nap, and died in her sleep, Stewart says.
MICHAEL FINLEY RECENTLY BECAME Tribal Liaison for the Washington State Historical Society. COLUMBIA editor Feliks Banel spoke with Finley by phone in November from his home in Inchelium on the Colville Indian Reservation. The two had a wide-ranging conversation about Finley's personal history and about what he hopes to help accomplish. The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Q: Tell me about your early life and where you grew up.

A: I was born in Colville, Washington. I’m the fifth of six children born to David and Bonnie Finley of Inchelium, both tribal members. I was pretty much raised and spent the majority of my life here on the reservation in Inchelium. I attended elementary and high school here. Inchelium is a small ‘B’ school, and it’s on the easternmost side of the Colville Reservation. I’ve lived here pretty much my entire life except for my time away for college.

Q: And were you quarterback of the high school football team or anything like that?

A: Yes, I was. We took third in state two years in a row, my junior and senior year, and I went on and played a little bit at Walla Walla Community College. And then I played at Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas before returning to Eastern Washington University where I finished my BA and my master’s degree.

Q: What sort of work have you done since graduating from college?

A: I did some archaeological technical stuff on a few archaeological digs. I was there early on. Later, I was elected chairman of the Colville Business Council, which is the [tribe’s] governing body, for four years. After that, I went into a private consulting. It’s very diverse. For instance, one of the big things that I’m working on right now is I’m serving as a technical person to do historical work for our tribal attorneys and our hunting and fishing rights case in Canada right now. We just learned last week [that it’s] going to be heard before the Canadian Supreme Court. A few years ago, I was appointed by the governor to the Board of Trustees at my alma mater, Eastern Washington University.

Unless otherwise noted, images in this article are courtesy of Michael Finley.
A family photo of Michael Finley and his siblings from 1989 at the Inchelium Community Center. In the back row is Michael’s late brother Duke Finley; on the far left, Michael Finley; on the far right, Kara Finley; sitting left, Jalene Finley; sitting right, David Finley, Jr.; standing in front, Jesse Finley.

Michael Finley and his family take part in the Ceremony of Tears gathering at Kettle Falls Historical Center in Kettle Falls, Washington, circa May 2007. From left to right: Summer Finley, Jacquelyn Finley, Duke Finley, and Michael Finley carrying Tyee Finley.

Michael Finley and eldest daughter Summer Finley in May 2019, following Inchelium’s victory to secure a third-place finish in the Washington State 1-B High School Softball Championship.
Q: Do you have a family?

A: I have five children. I have a 21-year old who will be 22 next month. I have a 17-year old, a 14-year old, a 13-year old and a 9-year old, and they’re all in sports. And it’s not just a single sport. Because we’re a small school, you’re expected to play all sports . . . and so it keeps me very busy. I’m just fortunate that the work culture [at the Washington State Historical Society] really promotes family. It’s considered a high priority and everybody realizes that family comes first. I appreciate that, because that’s not always the case in different work environments that I’ve been a part of.

Q: What do most non-Native people not understand about living on a reservation in Washington?

A: We’re a sovereign nation within a sovereign nation, and we are governed by a governing body of elected officials [the Colville Business Council]. We are very diverse, very complex tribal government with a lot of the same governmental services that others are familiar with and enjoy within the state or the local municipalities or through federal programs. We have our businesses [and] we have our own healthcare services that we provide. There’s just a lot of services that we are in charge of as a governing body of the reservation, which encompasses 1.4 million acres, which is bigger than the state of Delaware.

Q: Are there dynamics or unresolved issues going back to the treaty era and before in terms of the reservations in Washington or the tribes in Washington?

A: Yeah, there is a lot of it we deal with today. As we cross the boundary, whether we’re going off or coming on [the reservation], we have a different set of laws that apply to us as tribal folks. As far as criminal activities that are maybe carried out by non-tribal members, we don’t have jurisdiction over them. Our law doesn’t apply to them. We’re not allowed to prosecute them in our courts due to the Oliphant v. Washington decision that came out of Suquam’ish, and so it makes it difficult for us to properly govern our land. Yet when we step foot off of the reservation, we’re subject to the law that’s there and all the laws that are passed by the State of Washington, or local counties or what have you, and there’s no reciprocity. And so it’s frustrating for us, especially in leadership, and we’re trying to get a better handle on violations of our law by non-members within the boundaries of our reservation.

Q: Is there a dialog going on between tribes and local and federal government about this issue?

A: The tribal leadership are always willing to talk about it, and they want to talk about it. And you have members in Congress or even the local scene and some of them want to talk about it. Then you have others that say, ‘Well, there’s no way I’ll ever agree to allow my constituents to be prosecuted in your courts.’ We’ve actually heard those very words many, many times and you think it’d be easy for people to want to understand it, and maybe sympathize with, but it doesn’t resonate as much as we think it should within the halls of Congress, because we’re always having to go back and educate them. We’re always having to go and fight for legislation to give us what little jurisdiction we do have.

Q: I have begun to hear at programs at many museums in the last several years a staff person, as part of welcoming the audience, acknowledging that we live on Native ground. I think a lot of non-Natives want to be sensitive about tribal recognition, but I know I personally worry that I will come across as patronizing or sounding as if I’m trying to be politically correct when I truly and sincerely want to understand and be understood. What effect does this have on you?

A: I think it’s a good start for people to try to acknowledge the homelands that they’re on. You didn’t hear about that too often, even a few years ago, but you’re starting to see more of it and I think that’s a step in the right direction. I can fully appreciate the concern of maybe doing a misstep and having to deal with the backlash that might come from it. But I think the effort overall means more to me than any mistakes. If I’m going to get upset about a mistake someone made or by a comment or maybe even saying the wrong tribe, I would definitely use that opportunity to educate them. I would appreciate personally that they acknowledge tribal law and tribal government to the extent that they support movements such as trying to get legislation to give us more parity when it comes to enforcing our laws. It’s one thing to acknowledge and appreciate the local native population, but we need more people besides native people screaming that there’s inequality when it comes to some of these things. And we need others that are from the non-native community to understand, recognize it, and educate themselves and help voice our concerns.

Q: How did you come to work for the Washington State Historical Society?

A: I have my master’s degree in history. Prior to sitting in tribal leadership, I worked for the tribe’s archaeology department and I had a few things published. I was just always interested in reading and writing and sharing our tribe’s history. And so throughout my leadership years, I really got to know a lot of the other leaders from the other nations within the state. And then, since leaving public office here on the reservation, I went into private consulting and so I stayed connected in that regard. And so when this job announcement came about, it checked all the boxes. It was being offered part-time, which was the only way I could have applied because of the other work that I do. And they were going to allow me to do it remotely.
Part of my preference presently is to raise my kids here on the reservation because it’s a big part of me. I want them to know their people, their culture and where they come from, the good and the bad. I think it helped mold who I was and who I am today, and I think it’s my responsibility as a parent to my children, who are tribal members, that they have that connection to their people because they’re going to carry forward the responsibility of hopefully caring for and working on behalf of their people someday. It’s a responsibility that we share as native people that we owe to the generations that came before us and made the sacrifices, to carry out work that’s going to be beneficial to our tribe. But in this case, [in the role of WSHS’s tribal liaison], it’s going to be beneficial not just to my tribe, but to all the tribes in the state to hopefully help mold a different way of doing things within the museum.

And insofar that [the tribes] have a bigger voice in some of the things that are done at the museum that involve their tribe or their tribe’s history or the native populations in general in Washington state, I think it would be a better outcome. I think it would be valued more on both sides, whether you’re native or non-native, that the native voice played a bigger role in how things are going to be developed about their story, and about their history.

And to me, that encompasses a lot of the things that I’m very passionate about. We’re in a different era now than we were even 50 years ago or 20 years ago. We don’t need other people to do things for us now. We’re fully capable of getting educated in a certain field and to be the ones telling our stories. I have most of the connections in the state to where I can...get the right players to the table and have that dialog about what the new Great Hall exhibits [at the History Museum in Tacoma] will look like, how we should present things. So it was a good opportunity.

Q: Where do you see areas where the Washington State Historical Society can do better?

A: There are different things that we can do with the exhibits, and that’s a big part of it. For the Heritage Capital Projects, [a state-funded grant program], they haven’t had too many projects within Indian Country or done by tribes. They need help with that, and I’ll be glad to help with that... there is some room there to maybe do a little more outreach with tribes to share what that program is all about. There are things with the In The Spirit initiative that [the Washington State History Museum in Tacoma has] every summer where I think [my liaison role] can help develop relationships for them. They do have extensive relationships already, but we can always be better. And there are other things that they want to do with outreach to try to assist rural museums developing their museums, and certainly they want to try to reach out to tribes, as well, to offer those services. I could be of assistance there to try to help bridge the gap of communication.

Q: What are your top goals as Tribal Liaison?

A: First and foremost, with the Great Hall exhibit, having an exhibit that, after everything’s all been redone or renovated, that the tribes look at it and they take ownership of it. I want them to be proud of it, and I want the museum to be proud of it because I think that if both sides are happy, and the tribes feel like their voices were heard and it reflects in what they see, I think they’ll take ownership of it and it will serve to be a more powerful exhibit and story that I think that anybody who lives there, or anybody who visits there, can appreciate. So that’s the number one for me. And in the same regard, [this is the goal I have for] In The Spirit. I hear a lot of good things about it, but meeting with the technical folks who have been doing it, they say they could always use more help, and so I have ideas on that.

And hopefully, I want to be that person that the tribes can trust. That if there’s anything that they need to communicate with the museum, if they have concerns about whether something that’s in the collection that they think maybe wasn’t repatriated, if there’s something just about the museum in general that they feel needs to be more tribal-friendly, I hope to be that person that they can trust to approach and hopefully get them connected with the correct folks so that their voice is heard, or that they feel like they are appreciated because they had an opportunity to engage with people there. I just hope that I serve in that capacity to where I’m at least fulfilling that for them.

To contact WSHS Tribal Liaison Michael Finley, email him at michael.finley@wshs.wa.gov, or call 253-241-3675.
UNDENIABLY NORTHWEST READS

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2020 SUFFRAGE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATIONS

Along with the Washington State Women’s Commission and the Women’s History Consortium, the Washington State Historical Society is providing local groups with funding to recognize and celebrate the 100-year anniversary of Congress recognizing women’s right to vote in America. Organizations across Washington have been selected to receive Votes for Women Centennial Grant funding for commemorative projects.

Dynamic exhibitions, events and programs are already underway, and others throughout 2020 will honor the suffrage centennial in a variety of engaging ways. Most are open to public participation. For a complete list of programs and dates, visit www.suffrage100wa.com, or follow @suffrage100wa on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

A partial list of programs includes:

THE COWLITZ COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM in Kelso is interpreting the struggle for woman’s suffrage using artifacts from the museum’s collections and highlighting local Cowlitz County suffragists.

THE OLYMPIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND BIGELOW HOUSE MUSEUM have created online and printed materials, including an Olympia Women’s Suffrage Trail to highlight the role of local places and people in the women’s suffrage movement.

THE HISTORIC TRUST will bring a National Women’s Party exhibit with customized Washington-specific displays to the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site and local libraries, and the League of Women Voters of Washington will complement the exhibit with events.

THE CENTRALIA DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION will present the exhibition, The Women Came Downstairs: The Movement of Women’s Power from Above the Shops to Owning the Buildings and Running Our Towns, which features the accomplishments and contributions of Centralia and Lewis County women through a permanent and traveling display, social media storytelling, speakers, and more.

THE WHITE RIVER VALLEY MUSEUM in Auburn will present Domestic Fantasy, an exhibition that considers what the impact would have been if social media existed in 1919, featuring stories of Washington state suffragists alongside prominent tastemakers of the time.

THE WING LUKE MUSEUM in Seattle will present Asian Pacific American Feminism, an exhibit and public programs that reflect on the history of women, feminism and civic engagement in Washington’s Asian Pacific American community.

THE WASHINGTON STATE JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY will expand on the exhibit, *Agents of Change*, and continue efforts to collect stories by and about Jewish women in Washington.

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN will present Port Townsend’s ‘Women Vote!’ centennial celebration program will host free films, live performances and exhibitions that celebrate the history of suffrage, to be held at locations in the community including the Port Townsend Library, local high schools and the Jefferson County Historical Society.

THE ISLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM in Coupeville will offer a professional historical reading and portrayal of suffragist Elizabeth “Lizzie” Ordway, performed by Jill Johnson of the Seattle Storytellers Guild.

THE DUPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY will present a traveling display in local schools and libraries chronicling and celebrating the women of the DuPont area throughout history.

THE WASHINGTON STATE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN COLONISTS will place a marker on the Littlerock Elementary School grounds to celebrate the eight Littlerock women, along with seven women in Grand Mound, whose votes were the first women’s votes counted in Washington Territory.

THE LEWIS COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM in Chehalis will present an exhibit featuring ten women change makers from Lewis County and highlight their influence on the community with a focus on local women’s suffrage.

SEATTLE’S AZEOTROPE will present a free public showcase of *Say Our Names*, a play with music about race relations and conflicts within the women’s suffrage movement, highlighting contributions from and barriers faced by suffragists of color.

THE WENATCHEE VALLEY MUSEUM & CULTURAL CENTER will partner with the Women Painters of Washington (WPW) to host an art exhibition featuring historic paintings, highlighting the history of the WPW and vignettes on local women in state and national politics.

THE YAKIMA VALLEY MUSEUM will host *Divergent Voices/Common Ground*, an exhibition and program which shows the artwork of four Central Washington artists. It will also present performances of Living Voices’ *Hear My Voice*, examining the fight for women’s suffrage.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF PULLMAN will host several performances and discussions at school campuses throughout the city in honor of the women’s suffrage centennial.

THE RITZVILLE LIBRARY will create a presentation titled *Rural Suffrage: Winning the Vote for Women in Adams County*, which will celebrate local, state and national women who shaped the movement.

THE MID-COLUMBIA MASTERSONGERS will host a collaborative concert in Richland by female choral ensembles that celebrates the history and impact of women’s suffrage through song.

**VOTES FOR WOMEN CENTENNIAL FESTIVAL AT THE STATE CAPITOL**

Saturday, August 22
10:00 AM-4:00 PM, Olympia, WA

SAVE THE DATE TO CELEBRATE!
Mark your calendars to join in a nationwide commemoration of women’s voting rights!

In 2020, Americans everywhere will mark the 100th anniversary of the Ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which extended voting rights to women. In Washington State, the place to celebrate is the Votes for Women Centennial Festival in Olympia. Family-friendly, FREE, and open to the public with lots to see and do including women-led performances, panel conversations, video presentations, exhibits, speakers, vendors, music, women-owned and operated food trucks, and more!
Debra Gwartney’s book *I Am A Stranger Here Myself*, winner of the 2019 River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize, recounts her early years in Salmon, Idaho with a large family of conservative, bottled up characters. She leaves Salmon to build a life and finds herself using Narcissa Whitman as a touchstone—the iconic if often over-simplified Narcissa, who in 1836 became a missionary to the Cayuse. Gwartney returns to Whitman’s story throughout her own unsatisfied life and derides Narcissa’s choices and actions.

Narcissa’s mother influenced her to be a missionary and, with her journey as a young woman to what’s now Washington, she moved up and out of her comfort zone. Gwartney’s Grandmother Lois encouraged her to learn about the outside world, yet the author’s review of her life seems hesitant and cheerless. Where were her mentors? A proponent? The book comes full circle when the author admits she invented her own version of Narcissa and bemoans the parts of her own life she has yet to address. What is it about Idaho that failed Debra Gwartney? The institutions? The culture of her family? She calls herself a stranger or intruder yet rejects everything her family offered. In her telling, Gwartney is a descendant of settlers who had to “settle” herself – for her wedding dress, for her place in the family. She spent years researching Narcissa but did not learn how to pronounce her Mission’s name, Weyíiletpuu. All through the book, you feel the process of self-study evolve.

Two family tales in the book are little gems. A Fourth of July rafting trip on the Salmon River ends with the raft hitting a cottonwood snag and bodies go flying. Fueled by lots of beer on “a day worthy of native Idahoans,” their raft is sucked into a whirlpool but somehow, they all end up surviving. In another touching story, Gwartney awakens as a child and makes her way downstairs. She witnesses a tender moment between her great-grandparents, Hazel and Mick; these are two people with a long and rocky past.

Gwartney acknowledges that her command of history is sketchy, and it is. Inaccurate dates, people, and events concerning Narcissa fill the book. But that is not the point. Narcissa evolved, got older and wiser. Gwartney also talks about how she eventually finds her own sense of place. Salmon is hers—her best place—and no one can take that away, no matter how far she drifts. The Cayuse can tell you about place. The Cayuse can also tell you how to pronounce Weyíiletpuu: way EE let pu.

WHEN THE RIVER STOPPED COLD
Amy Platt, Digital History Manager
Oregon Historical Society Research Library

The ice-blocked Columbia River dwarfs the woman in the lower right corner of the photograph, her dark clothes a dot on the white landscape. An unknown photographer set up a camera on the Oregon side of the river near Astoria to catch this remarkable image of an icy Pacific Northwest winter, preserving the moment on a 3-by-4 inch glass-plate negative, now held in the Oregon Historical Society archives. The invention of the silver gelatin dry plate in the 1870s required short exposure times and allowed photographers to develop the negatives much later (as opposed to immediately in the field, required by collodion wet plates), perhaps saving the woman on the ice from hypothermia.

In the past, it was not unusual for ice to form on the Columbia River. Most winters, sections froze over and broke up into large ice blocks, impeding shipping lanes and marooning travelers. During exceptionally harsh winters, the temperature of the Columbia dropped to zero, forming ice from shore to shore—sometimes for several miles and thick enough to drive a horse (or car) across. From the time newspapers began reporting on these weather phenomena in the 1860s until the 1930s, the Columbia and Willamette Rivers had frozen over at least eight times.

“We are so used to open and moderate, even mild rivers,” the Daily Astorian wrote in January 1885, “that a season such as we have experienced since the 15th instant, when the snow set in, that has blocked our two eastern outlets and almost paralyzed the business of our city, makes the average webfooter lose his reckoning.”

In December 1919, a massive snowstorm hit the Northwest, dropping almost 19 inches of snow in Portland over two days. Parkdale, high in the Hood River Valley, received a record-breaking 40 inches of snow, and Pendleton hit a low of -28 degrees. And the Columbia River froze over, an event the Morning Oregonian described on its front page under the subheading, “Weather Man Laughs at ‘End of World’ Alarm.”

“Hundreds of people walked across the Columbia river at the interstate bridge today,” the paper reported, “or skated up and down the great expanse of ice, which is as smooth as glass where there are no obstructions in the river to cause formation of what is known as ‘slush ice.’”

This second glass-plate negative likely memorializes those few days in 1919 when river traffic stopped and Oregonians and Washingtonians skated across the ice to bravely meet each other in the middle. Warmer air turned the ice to slush and broke through what the newspapers called “rotting” ice.

The Willamette froze again in 1924, and the Columbia in 1933. But newspaper accounts of iced-over rivers petered out after that, as the Northwest began to dam and dredge its waterways in earnest, making another river freeze nearly impossible.
STEWART HOLBROOK:
LUMBERJACK BOSWELL

By Knute Berger

I’m not sure where I first ran across Stewart Holbrook, but it could well have been on some high dusty shelf at the old Shorey’s bookstore in downtown Seattle, a veritable ark of literary treasures. Holbrook, a Northwest writer, author and newspaper columnist was as prolific as you can get. His heyday was the 1920s through the ‘50s and by the time of his death in 1964, he had penned some 40 books covering colorful historic American characters, logging, railroad barons, and the essence of the forested, newly civilized Pacific Northwest. He sought out the odd, the overlooked, the forgotten, and brought it to life.

Holbrook wrote at a time when there was national interest in the region and the literature that sprang from here—and abundant magazines hungry for material. He came here as a young New Englander who had come west as a Maine logger to work in the forests of British Columbia. He wound up in Portland, Oregon where he turned to writing. He often wrote what he knew: the life of the lumberjack, earning him the label, the “Lumberjack Boswell.” Cutting timber was one of the defining characteristics of the region, and Stewart turned out a series of books about the lore, life and industry of timber country.

He gained a national reputation as someone who could entertainingly reveal Northwest culture—his work appeared in The New Yorker, The American Mercury, Esquire, American Heritage, and scores of others. He did stints as a flack for the lumber industry, too.

As his reputation grew, he hung out with the likes of H.L. Mencken, Bernard DeVoto, Wallace Stegner and William Faulkner. But his real fascination was not literary hobnobbing.

He was a long-time columnist for the Oregonian. He traveled the region widely and prided himself on what he called “lowbrow” stories. Many of his pieces and books feature backwoods murders, rollicking logging camps, ape-like men of strength, shanghaied sailors, utopian anarchists, and outlaws. A good collection of this work is Wildmen, Wobblies & Whistle Punks: Stewart Holbrook’s Lowbrow Northwest edited by Brian Booth (Oregon State University Press, 1992).

For me, the essential volume is the first one I picked up: Far Corner: A Personal View of the Pacific Northwest (Macmillan, 1952). It’s a compendium of stories that helped define the region for a generation or two or three. Holbrook lectures readers on the correct rendering as “skidroad” or “skid road” never ever “skid row,” and writes about the settlement of Pluvius, Washington, which was claimed to have had 362 days of rain each year. Holbrook also manages to tweak the “cult of the pioneers” – those who spent so much time hero-worshipping their frontier forebears – though he found their “mild snobbishness” harmless.

Holbrook, by the way, was also the “founder” of the James G. Blaine Society, the mythical organization that resisted newcomers in Oregon, undoubtedly an inspiration for Emmett Watson’s later Lesser Seattle, and part of a regional tradition of celebrating one’s claim to the region while disdaining those who come later. Holbrook himself recognized the Northwest was changing in his own time, but held his fascination for a past that was still within reach. In the first chapter of Far Corner, “The Frontier Lingered,” Holbrook writes of the Northwest as he found it in youth, contrasted with his boyhood impressions of what he had expected it to be, and where amid the clash of fantasy and approaching modernity he found elements and nooks that sparked his curiosity and defined the region as unique.
Hobnail boots, wild men of the forest, weird characters, con men, brothel-keepers and bartenders: Holbrook’s Northwest is not one of hipster beards, dog lounges, and artisanal beers. While his menagerie doesn’t tell the whole story of the region, few would deny they are an essential part of our regional brew, one well worth sipping on rainy nights.


KITCHEN SCIENCE

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USED BOOKS: STEWART HOLBROOK

WASHINGTON GALLERY: WHEN THE RIVER STOPPED COLD

MAPS & LEGENDS: TENINO
TENINO MYSTERY

By RICHARD A. EDWARDS
Tenino City Historian

For more than a century the origin of the name Tenino for the city in south Thurston County has been a mystery. The name has been attributed to the Northern Pacific Railroad’s (NPRR) use of a survey stake, locomotive, or railroad car’s number 10-9-0, and to a local Chinook Jargon word meaning “meeting of the ways.” All these stories have been disproven, and so the mystery remained.

Recent research revealed that in early October 1872, a committee of Northern Pacific Railroad executives, including newly appointed President George Washington Cass, toured the line under construction from Kalama, on the Columbia River, to Puget Sound. After viewing several potential Puget Sound terminal ports, they returned to Kalama and spent several more days touring the Columbia River on steamboats of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company (OSN).

The committee traveled as far as Wallula, a port for the OSN’s well-advertised steamboat Tenino. The Tenino had been operating on the upper Columbia River for more than a decade and held the record for having gone the farthest up the Snake River, to Pittsburg Landing in Idaho. Earlier in 1872, the NPRR had purchased 75% of the stock in the OSN to create a larger network of steam transportation.

On October 11, 1872, while meeting at the OSN offices in Portland, they referred to the “present northern terminus of the Road,” calling it by its locally known designation, “Hodgden’s.” Stephen Hodgden had a farm nearby that had become the local post office, known as Coal Bank, as well as a stage stop.

On October 12, NPRR President Cass made a proposal that the committee consider driving the unfinished line from Tenino – which had been Hodgden’s Station – to Seattle. Though the railroad later would choose Tacoma for its terminus, this proposal is the first known use of the name “Tenino” for the area. The Tenino depot would grow into a town, and eventually a city.

Olympia’s Washington Standard newspaper noted the railroad link between the town and its nautical namesake: “The extension of the North Pacific railroad, from the old Tenino [steamboat] to the new town of that name, was completed.”

Not long after, when the country was hit by the financial crisis known as the Panic of 1873, the NPRR sold its Oregon Steam Navigation Company stock for debt, severing the fiscal ties (if not the physical connection) between the two Teninos.

It is worth noting that the steamboat was built near what was once the summer village of the Native American Tenino band, after whom it was named. When asked in 1935 what the word meant, the Tenino elders said that, aside from being their name, “it is merely a word without meaning.”

TOP TO BOTTOM: At far right is the Northern Pacific Railroad depot in Tenino, circa 1880. South Thurston County Historical Society.

Oregon Steam Navigation Company steamboat Tenino dodges rocks and rapids on the upper Columbia River, circa 1870s. Oregon Historical Society, OrHi9029.

Northern Pacific Railroad 1872 survey map showing location of Hodgden’s Station, later known as Tenino. Minnesota Historical Society.

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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“This is my invariable advice to people: Learn how to cook—try new recipes, learn from your mistakes, be fearless and above all have fun!”
—Julia Child, chef, writer and TV personality.

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MEN OF CHANGE


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