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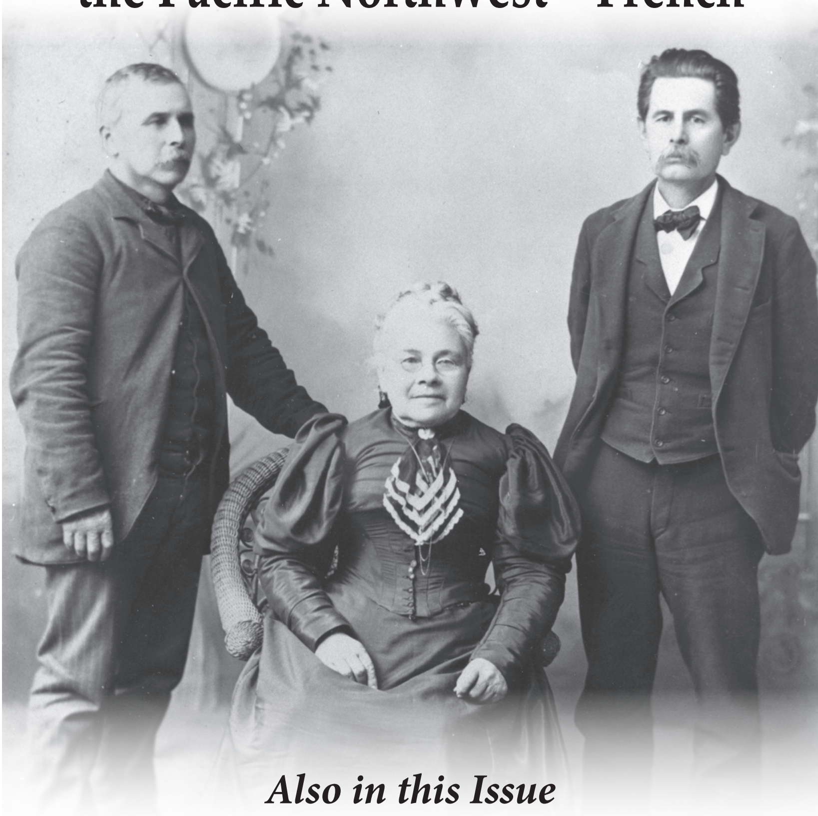
La Question de l'Oregon:

The Original European Language of the Pacific Northwest – French



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Featured Map: the Kalama River Power Plant **...................Page 46**

Bill Watson continues his map feature pieces. This one, drawn by engineer R.M. Boykin, opens the door to an examination of the Kalama River Power Plant.

Cover Photo: Some Metis descendants of French trappers and traders, circa 1900. Left to right are Louis Ducheney (Junior) and his mother Mary Rondeau Ducheney Preble Kelly, and Silas Smith. Mary was the granddaughter of Chief Concomley, whose daughter Margaurite had married a Frenchman named Rondeau. Her first of three marriages was to another Frenchman, Louis Ducheney (Senior). Silas Smith was the grandson of Clatsop Chief Kaobi. *CCHM 1999.0031.0401*

Cowlitz Historical Quarterly

The Cowlitz Historical Quarterly is published four times a year by the Cowlitz County Historical Society, State of Washington. Single-copy price is $7.50. The Quarterly Editor welcomes articles dealing with the history of Cowlitz County, Southwestern Washington and Washington State.

Nick Fazio
President, Cowlitz County Historical Society

Joseph Govednik
Director, Cowlitz County Historical Museum

Jim LeMonds
Editor, Cowlitz Historical Quarterly

Cowlitz County Historical Museum
405 Allen Street
Kelso, Washington 98626

Museum Hours
Tuesday through Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Closed Sundays & Mondays
Phone: (360) 577-3119
Website: www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/museum

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Editor's Letter

Jim LeMonds

Jim Tweedie died on September 3rd of this year. He was just shy of 94 years old. Although Jim passed away in University Place, Washington, a large part of his heart remained in Cowlitz County.

His grandfather came to Longview in 1924 after reading Long-Bell's advertisements for workers. After graduating from Kelso High School in 1945, Jim started his working career at the Long-Bell mill and was employed in the wood products industry for 45 years, most of them with Weyerhaeuser.

That experience – coupled with an interest in all things related to logging and milling – led Jim to contribute nearly a dozen articles to the *Cowlitz Historical Quarterly*. He also published a history of Long-Bell titled *The Long-Bell Story* in December 2014.

His stories talked about the labor movement in logging camps and mills during the 1920s; about the rise and fall of the shingle trade; about fires that destroyed mills and significantly impacted area economies; about welfare efforts during the Depression; about sawmills and tie mills located on Coal Creek, Mill Creek, Ostrander Creek, Italian Creek, Owl Creek, Cedar Creek, and just about every other drainage in Cowlitz County.

Both Jim and his unique historical perspective will be missed.

La Question de l'Oregon: The Original European Language of the Pacific Northwest – French

by Robert R. Foxcurran and John C. Jackson

The other early settlers

Today, the French language is missing from what was once known as the Oregon country. Time has stilled the voices of the original speakers of this tongue in the Pacific Northwest. Its slow retreat is tied to the people who spoke it, and the rarely told story of the initial settlement of the vast Columbia River drainage and its adjacent coastal region.

This language involved the French dialect spoken by the multiethnic descendants of the 'Canadien' employees of the fur trading companies that settled in the Pacific Northwest before the American settlers arrived. Prior to the confederation of the colonies comprising British North America assuming their name later in the 19th century, the term Canadian still referred to only one of the component peoples of that new nation: the one that happened to speak French and had been raised Catholic. And this was not about purebreds or anyone imposing his language on others. These early newcomers, the Canadian linguistic amalgam present within our region, did not exclude the small number of recently arrived people of assorted British and Anglo-American ancestry. It also included Indians from Eastern Canada, such as those of Iroquois and Abenaki antecedents, along with those of the Northern Plains and individuals of mixed Indian and white ancestry. The one thing they had in common, besides an employer, was that they all spoke the 'Canadien' dialect of French, soon to be complimented by the regional Indian pidgin of the Pacific Northwest, the Chinook trade jargon. The only exceptions would have been that part of the work force that had been hired in the Hawaiian Islands, and from among the local

tribes. These people relied mostly on the local Indian pidgin, which absorbed terms of French and English origins.

The offspring of 'les Canadiens' by their local Indian wives later came to be known by the French term *metis*, designating people of mixed ethnic ancestry. Within our region, they were referred to in Chinook jargon as *sitkum siwash*, which meant "part" or "half Indian." At points east, the most common term in use was *bois-brule*, French for "*burnt wood*," as in coloring. Regardless of terminology and their subsequent marginalization by the American newcomers, descendants of the original metis families would continue to speak their ancestral French dialect in small pockets throughout the Pacific Northwest – both on and off the reservation – well into the second half of the twentieth century.

Prior to being fully marginalized, these multilingual, bicultural people, with their French-speaking priests, proved themselves to be very useful intermediaries for the new majority. But somehow, as the 49th parallel was extended across the continent, the story of "their" West fell out of Canadian national history and was not written back into that of their new country – other than to note their highly publicized "disappearance" with the end of the fur trade and the belated arrival of the Americans.

French makes its first appearance

French was first heard west of the northern Rocky Mountains during winter 1800-01. Two *Canadiens*, Charles La Gasse´ and Pierre Le Blanc, were sent by the Montreal-based North West Company (NWC) to spend the winter with Kutenai Indians living on the headwaters of the Columbia River.[1] They were charged with learning if western tribes would be receptive

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[1] *En derouine*, literally "drumming up trade," was a term long used in the British fur trade to explain the practice of sending workmen to live with Indians so the trading post would not have to provide for them during the winter.

to the extension of trade from the upper Saskatchewan River to the upper Columbia River. La Gasse´ and Le Blanc had been advanced a small assortment of enticing goods to repay Kutenai hospitality and create an appetite for more.[2]

Officers of the North West Company spoke and wrote in English in their business communications, while speaking Scottish Gaelic with fellow countrymen. But when they had to communicate with *les engage´s* (contracted workmen), French was the operative language.[3] NWC partner David Thompson does not reveal what La Gasse´ and Le Blanc reported when they returned in spring 1801, and it would be another six years before expansion plans were renewed, sending Finlay and Montour over the divide. Even then, the small crew of workmen supervised by two Metis (mixed-blood) clerks spoke only French and Cree. This duo, Jacques Raphael Finlay and Nicolas Montour, were later damned by Thompson for failing to cut a proper trail across the northern Rocky Mountains, one that would accommodate the pack train he took to the headwaters of the Columbia River. Both, however, would prove to be indispensable in the developments that followed.

The men who helped Thompson build the first European trading post on the headwaters of the Columbia River the following year were named Beaulieu, Bercier, Boulard, Boisverd, Buche,´ Clement, and Lussier. They relied on their native tongue and familiar oaths as they chopped and planted the posts for the new building. Thompson and his young clerk, Finnan McDonald, spoke French in order to coordinate the crew's activities. The construction of Kootenae House on what

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[2] Jack Nisbet, *Sources of the River: Tracking David Thompson Across Western North America*, Sasquatch Books, Seattle, 1994.

[3] Lewis & Clark made a brief visit in the winter of 1805-06 with an expedition that included a half-dozen French speakers, but the operative language was English. In communicating with the Indians, however, all translation, whether through speech or sign language, went through the French-speaking staff.

is now known as Lake Windermere was still in process when Kutenai Indians returned from the eastern buffalo hunt with an astonishing letter from an American officer declaring how foreign traders were to conduct themselves.

> *The new ceded Territories to the American States northward and westward of the Illinois, comprehend the Mississourie Red River and all the Lands westward to the Coast of California and the Columbia River with all its branches; of which we have now taken Possession and on which we are now settled down to the Pacific Ocean; extending northward to about 50 Degrees north Latitude.*[4]

The officer, who identified himself as Captain Zackery Perch, headed a party of 42 French-speaking boatmen from the Louisiana Territory that included a supplement of around 30 discharged *engage´s* of Montreal trading firms.[5] With the exception of the captain and two former members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition that returned the previous year, those nominal Americans spoke French. After the death of their leader, a number of these freemen, or *gens libres*, remained with the Salish (Flatheads), trapping and relying on the British-led traders for the supplies they needed to continue living off the land. Some were still operating along the Clark Fork of the Columbia River in late 1809 when another small party of French-speaking trappers appeared, now sporting American nationality.

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[4] The only copy of the letter is in the Edmonton House Journal entry for 10 November 1807: "A Sketch of the principal Transactions and Occurrances on the Passage to and from Oxford House and during a Winter's residence at Edmonton House, Commencing July 19, 1807, Ending June 25 1808 by James Bird," HBCA B60/a/7, fols. 6-8d. The story of the American officer is followed in John C. Jackson, *By Honor and Right: How One Man Boldly Defined the Destiny of a Nation*, (Amherst, New York; Prometheus Books, 2010).

[5] Only two individuals can be identified with certainty, Francois Rivet from St. Louis and Louis Capois Hoole who joined at the Mandan villages on the Missouri River. In 1798 Hoole had accompanied Thompson on his survey for a boundary between British and Spanish possessions.

Those Francophones were the source of landmarks we still know as the *Platte* and *Laramie* rivers, the *Grand Tetons*, the two *Deschutes* rivers, *les Dalles*, and *les Cascades*. French speakers gave the tribes the Gallic nicknames they are still known by:*Tetes Plattes* (flatheads), *Nez Perce* (pierced noses), *Pend d'Oreille* (hanging from ear), and *Coeur d'Alene* (pointed hearts). Again, if postmasters at the North West Company's Kootenae, Kullyspell, or Saleesh trading houses wanted something done, their orders were given in French.

The seven paddlers who carried David Thompson down the Columbia in 1811 to a meeting with the partners of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company all spoke French, even the two Iroquois.[6] Two and a half years later, when Astoria was purchased by the Montreal based NWCo and renamed Fort George, the list of the combined complements recorded 133 francophones compared to only 43 English speakers. Other than the perplexing dialects of different tribes, fur trade French would continue to be the lingua franca of the Oregon country. For the next three decades, nothing moved on the Columbia River or penetrated into what is now British Columbia unless the orders were given in French.

Most Scots officers spoke French from command necessity. Thompson's clerk, Finnan McDonald, was fresh from home when he entered the NWC's service and learned French from the *engage´s* he commanded. The Astorian clerk Ross Cox picked up his French from workmen and boatmen and took pride in his proficiency, later salting French phrases into his memoir. NWC partner James Keith showed off his command of French in the names of the horses carrying goods and returns between Okanagan and Spokane: *Mon*

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[6] Robert F. Jones, ed., *Annals of Astoria: The Headquarters Log of the Pacific Fur Company on the Columbia River, 1811–1813* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999). Of the 32 who came by ship 18 were French as did 4 proprietors and 4 clerks. Of the 56 who came overland 41 were French.

Petit Gris, *La Queue Couple*, *De La Vallee*, and *La Crème de la Corne Fendue*.[7]

Marital arrangements between *les Canadiens* and Indian women were inevitable. Francois Rivet soon formed a relationship with a 19-year-old Salish widow identified as Therese Tete Platte.[8] Children of those unions *a la facon du pays* (according to the custom of the country) grew up at posts or in hunting camps learning the language of both parents. French was the preferred language at Spokane House, Okanagan, Kamloops, Fort Nez Perce, and the Flathead and Kutenai outposts. Although records were kept in English, daily business was conducted in the language workmen understood, making French the platform from which operations were launched.

In 1821 the reorganized Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) began to take over western operations. However, reorganization of the western trade between 1821 and 1825 to HBC standards failed to silence the operative language. Orders continued to be given in French to boats ascending the Columbia and to trapping brigades fanning out through Snake River country. The Southern Brigade carried it into Spanish-speaking California.

Leaders continued to be known as *bourgeois*, clerks as *petit bourgeois*, and a prime beaver pelt was traded as a *plus*, which roughhewn American mountain men alliterated into a plew. Commanding the Columbia Department from Fort Vancouver, Chief Factor John (baptized Jean-Baptiste) McLoughlin was the son of a French-speaking mother. Conversations with his Metis wife, or his mixed-blood step-son, Thomas McKay, were in French.

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[7] Ross Cox, *The Columbia River*, Edited by Edgar I. and Jane R. Stewart. (1831: Reprinted Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 226, 364-65.

[8] For a fuller biography of Francois Rivet see John C. Jackson, "Old Rivet," *Columbia: The Magazine of Northwest History* (Summer 2004), 17-23.

There were no IRA's, no 401Ks, and no retirement plans for aging Company employees with families to support. Never paid enough to build up a competence on Hudson's Bay Company account books, those families had to learn to live by other means. Well before overland immigration from the East Coast began, retiring fur trappers with Indian wives and mixed-blood children found promising locations in the Willamette Valley. They learned to live as agriculturalists. In 1841 there were more than 50 male French-speaking settlers with families living on the French Prairies of Oregon's Willamette Valley.

The broad, open meadows, kept clear by annual Indian burning, soon took the name *les Prairies Francais*. They were particularly attractive to men who had to learn how to plow and range cattle. Interest in the area developed from Astorians sent there to hunt provisions for the Pacific Fur Company and later from trappers moving through with the Southern Brigades. Joseph Gervais and Etienne Lucier are said to have relocated there in 1828, Pierre Belleque in 1830, and Michel Laframboise in 1831.

Those new farmers grew grain crops that could be traded at Fort Vancouver and ranged cattle on the same meadows that the Kalapuya Indians inhabited. Until their decimation by the malaria epidemic in the early 1830s, the Kalapuyans had kept the land open through their burning practices in order to improve hunting. The HBC hoped the Columbia River would become the northern boundary of the disputed Oregon country. A colony with HBC loyalty was planned for locations north of the Columbia River.

Metis settlers were sent overland from the Red River settlement in 1841. They arrived at the Dalles within days of the first American wagon train. The Metis immigrants arriving that year outnumbered those of the first American wagon train by five to one. However, the plan to settle the Red River Metis colonists north of the Columbia to reinforce British claims failed. Because they were brought in as tenants only, the HBC's commitment to provide start-up equipment and furnishings fell well short of what had been promised.

The St. Francis Xavier Mission Church on Cowlitz Prairie north of Toledo in 1950. The mission was established at Cowlitz Farm in 1838 for the majority Catholic *Canadiens* and their Metis children. The brick church shown was built after the original church burned down in 1916. *CCHM 1999.0031.1491.0002.*

The draw of free land further south was too powerful. Most of those disillusioned colonists abandoned their assigned pastures and farms near the Cowlitz and Nisqually rivers in order to move south of the Columbia to the French Prairies and Tualatin Plains.[9] Two parties of British officers sent to assess the potential military support from those subjects of the Crown reported negatively. When *La Question de l' Oregon* was settled diplomatically at the 49th parallel, those among them, whether French speakers or English speakers, had the option of becoming Americans. Most did.[10]

[9] John C. Jackson, "Red River Settlers vs. Puget Sound Agricultural Company," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Fall 1984, 279-289.

[10] John C. Jackson, *Children of the Fur Trade: Forgotten Metis of the Pacific Northwest*, Mountain Press Publishing Company, Missoula, Montana 1996.

Meanwhile, in late 1838, Fathers Francois Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers had descended the Columbia River, sanctifying country marriages and baptizing children at the trading posts they passed. The census they made at Fort Vancouver included 76 Catholics and included *Canadien* and Iroquois men, women, and children.[11] On the French Prairies, those informal relationships with Indian or Metis wives had produced around 37 children by then. Because they spoke French and renewed a Catholic belief system that had lain dormant through so many years away from a parish church, the two priests became a strong presence on the French Prairie. In its beginnings in the Pacific Northwest, the Catholic Church was a French-speaking institution and remained so for several decades.

Americans arrive in numbers and new lines are drawn

Northeastern Protestant churches heard "the Macedonian call" to save benighted savages. Congregationalist missionaries soon located in the interior of Columbia plateau country. Methodists continued to the Willamette Valley, where they converted very few Indians but found good farms and an opportunity to gain a political foothold. The intention of the English-speaking missionaries in the Willamette Valley may have been as much nationalistic and wealth-seeking as religious.

During the first attempts to organize a provisional government in Oregon's Willamette Valley, it is uncertain what portion of the preliminary arguments in English were understood by the *Canadiens*.[12] When it came time to organize the provisional government, the vote was 52 to 50. The French speakers generally credited with swinging the final vote were Etienne Lucier, along with his friend, a political refugee from Quebec's Patriotic

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[11] Wilfred P. Schoenberg, S.J., *A History of the Catholic Church in the Pacific Northwest, 1743-1983* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1987).

[12] In this study the authors use the term's historic designation *Canadien* for French-Canadian to avoid confusion with the modern broader term of Canadian.

Rebellion of 1837-38, Francois X. Matthieu. Catholic priests cautioned others that they were still British subjects who would find themselves called upon by the new authority to pay taxes.[13]

Some overland pioneers mistrusted what parish priests might be saying in French during their homilies. Meanwhile, Protestant ministers were preaching the dangers of Popish influence. Anti-Catholic bias was published in *The Oregon American and Evangelical Unionist*, a rag written by rabid Protestants. One dramatic item described lynching of a rapist as an ungodly example of half-breed justice.[14]

Overland immigrants arriving in large numbers soon overwhelmed the French speakers. Intent on taking land claims, they found that choice locations on the French Prairies were already occupied by retired trappers who did not even speak English. To many Americans, the *Canadiens* seemed an accident of preemption that needed to be corrected to make room for later arrivals.[15] Although British subjects initially

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[13] S. A. Clarke, *Pioneer Days of Oregon History* (Portland, Oregon: J.K. Gill Company, 1905). The French-Canadians in attendance were: Xavier Laderoot, Antoine Bonanfont, Andre LaChapelle, Pierre Paepin, Jean DuCharme, Louis B. Vandalle, Fabien Maloin, Luc Pagnon, Etienne Gregoire, Amable Arcouette, Pierre deLord, Louis B. Vandalle, John Sanders, Pierre Pariseau, Charles Rondeau, David Doupierre, Andre DuBois, Pierre Dupot, Moyse Lor, Pierre LeCourse, Pierre Beleque, Augustin Remon, Joseph Matte, Francis Bernier, Joseph Bernabe, Baptiste Dequire, Adolph Chamberlain, Jean Lingras, Jean Servas, Alexis Aubichon, Michelle Laferte, Jean B. Dalcourse, Louis Osant, Jean B. Aubichon, Antoine Felise, Michael Laframboise, Joseph Gervais, Jean B. Pau[e]pin, Oliver Brisbois, Thomas Roa, Louis Boivers, Andre Langtain, Etienne Lucier, Alexis Lapratte, Gedereau, Sencalle, Thomas Moisan, Pierre Gauthier, F.X. Matthieu.

[14] *The Oregon American and Evangelical Unionist*, Oregon Historical Society newspaper microfilm.

[15]Melinda Marie Jette´, "French Prairie, Oregon," *Encyclope´die du Patrinome: French Cultural Heritage in North America*. http://www.ameriquefrancaise.org/en/article-31/French_Prairie,_Oregon.html.

resisted the formation of any form of interim local government with the Americans, both groups cooperated and tried to be good neighbors.

When Sheriff Joseph Meek made the first census in 1844, most of the French refused to pay taxes, perhaps on the advice of their priests, because they were technically British subjects.[16] Sometime later, John G. Long reminded Judge of Elections L. H. Judson that Article 4, Section 2 of the Organic Laws held that anyone descended from a white man who has resided in Oregon for six months could vote in any election as long as he has paid his taxes. The problem was that most French had refused because many were too poor to pay taxes.[17]

The question of enfranchisement

The enfranchisement of French-speaking Canadians was still in question when the Donation Land Act of 1850 allowed single men to claim 320 acres of land and another 320 in the name of his wife, as long as they were citizens or produced a documented statement of the intention to become citizens. The cutoff date of 1853, extended to 1855, triggered a rush of new overland immigrants. Because a claim of 640 acres was larger than a pioneer family could expect to clear, break, and plant, the extra land could be used for pasturing their herds of cattle and horses, then sold later as values increased. Many French speakers would be tempted to cash in on the increased value of their claims and move to new locations.

After Congress granted Oregon territorial status in 1848, legislation was in the hands of a body consisting of an upper chamber of nine known as the Council and a lower House of Representatives apportioned by counties. A hint of what

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[16] Leslie M. Scott, "First Taxes in Oregon, 1844," *The Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 31:1 (March 1930), 1-24.

[17] Charles H. Carey, *General History of Oregon*, 1971 as cited in Eliza Cantry-Jones, "Voting Rules 1843, Oregon History Web Project; http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/index.cfm.

took place before Oregon voting rights were decided was reflected in the first meeting of the new Washington Territory legislature six years later.

Debates in the first session of the Washington Territorial Assembly reported in two March 1854 issues of Olympia's *Pioneer and Democrat* newspaper show that Council Bill No. 1 quickly zeroed in on an awkward issue, concerning who could enjoy the rights of citizenship, including eligibility to vote. As the Washington Territorial Legislature met, an amendment was put forward in the Council that attempted to reverse the Oregon agreement.

> ***No American half-breed Indian, not*** *at the time a citizen of the United States…whose life does not conform to the habits of civilized life,* ***should vote*** *in any election in the territory unless he obtains…a certificate stating the said citizen conforms in his mode of life to the habits of civilized life.*

Another member pointed out that

> *Three-fourths of the half-breeds did not know for whom or what they voted – that many could not read or speak the English language, or understand it when spoken…our jurors would consist of men unable to comprehend testimony.*

Excluding anyone from the rights of suffrage who might have one-quarter, one-eighth or three-eighths Indian blood was too much for Washington Territorial House Speaker Francis A. Chenoweth.

> *It is around this one class that we wish to throw, not only the protection of the law, but to place them on such terms of equality, as to show them that, while we tax their property for support of the government, we are willing that they be heard at the ballot box. Our legislation should be humanizing and civilizing in its effects. We should encourage this class of men in their efforts in adopting our habits.*[18]

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[18] *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, Washington, 25 March 1854.

By a vote of nine ayes to four nays, Washington Territory legislators finally accepted the same solution previously hammered out in the Oregon Legislature that allowed *Canadiens* to vote, if they met the necessary stipulations.

Hybrid communities retreat into the backcountry

Determined pockets of *les Canadiens* continued to gather to worship in their tiny churches or came together to sing the old boatmen's songs and dance Red River jigs. But the French language slipped into the background as the pioneer community sorted out social and religious differences. The schools replacing the original Catholic institutions were taught in English instead of French, and it would be several generations before the disquieting question of racial origins disappeared.

Uncomfortable in the midst of what must have seemed like an alien invasion, many of the French-speaking Catholics cashed in their farms and pastures and sidled away to new places on the pioneer periphery: the Umpqua and Rogue River country in southern Oregon Territory, to the region's two "Frenchtowns," one in the Walla Walla Valley, the other in the lower Bitterroot in western Montana. Others stayed in pocket communities around the old trading posts of Okanagan, Spokane, and Colville and returned to the tribes of their mothers and grandmothers that had been relocated to reservations. Moving was less of an exodus than a gradual withdrawal to places where there were like-speakers and like-believers, where the old ways were still intact.

The HBC's Southern Brigade had visited the Umpqua River drainage in 1820, 1825, and 1828, spreading out to trap tributaries and becoming so familiar with that country that an outpost was left at the mouth of Calapooya Creek on the Umpqua River in 1832. Four years later, the post was relocated to the mouth of Elk Creek and left under the charge of the "*coureur [en] derouine* Jean Baptise Gagnier who had married a girl of the lower Umpqua band sometime before 1836, at the time their son Antoine was baptized. Described as "a common

Canadian ... fully competent to the management of the trade," Gagnier was the HBC postmaster from 1839-42 and 1846-50.[19]

In late 1848 the Gagnier family watched the frantic passage of packers and a wagon train numbering 47 guided by Thomas McKay as it rushed to the gold discoveries in California. After the post burned in 1851, Gagnier retired from the HBC to settle on the lower Umpqua. Like so many of his countrymen, Gagnier chose to settle among his wife's people near the mouth of the river, with their three sons. There, Gagnier would assume the role of an elder among his wife's band of the Suislaw Indians.

Other Metis located in the vicinity of the "French Settlement"[20] that was farther up the South Umpqua River. The Roseburg Land Office eventually counted 2,141 Donation Land Claims but only a few were attributable to Metis relocated from the Willamette Valley.[21] Most of the Metis settlers who transplanted from French Prairie arrived in the late 1850s after the Rogue River Indian War, which had cleared out most of the prior inhabitants.[22]

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[19] Douglas to London, Fort Vancouver, October 18, 1838, *The Letters of John McLoughlin to the Governor and Committee, Second Series, 1825-38* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1941), 261.

[20] The French Settlement was seven miles northwest of present Roseburg and is now known as Melrose.

[21] Oregon Donation Land Claims (DLC) published in 1857 by the Geneological Forum of Portland Oregon, Vol. ?.

[22] For excellent background on this obscure but violent period of regional history see:

John Beeson, *Plea For the Indians*, originally published in 1857, re-published by Webb Research Group, Medford, Oregon.

R. Glisan, *Journal of Army Life*, A.L. Bancroft and Company, San Francisco 1874.

Stephen Dow Beckham, *Land of the Umpqua: A History of Douglas County, Oregon*, Commissioners of Douglas County, Oregon, Roseburg 1996.

Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen, 1971*.

Nathan Douthit, *Uncertain Encounters: Indians and Whites at Peace and War in Southern Oregon 1820s –1860s*, Oregon State University Press, Corvallis 2002.

E.A. Schwarts, Rogue River War (of 1855-56) & Its Aftermath, 1997.

Still, in 1858 when Archbishop Francois Norbert Blanchet set out from Oregon City, he found settlers whose cabins and cleared fields could be called farms. Catholic Church records show about 30 familiar names of French speakers.[23] Basil Courville's wife was baptized Marian Tlikakate (Klickitat?) and Alexander Dumond was married to Josepthe Finlay. Other French names appear to have been those of miners who moved north to new discoveries.[24] The last of the Montour and McKay lineages also moved to the Umpqua drainage and submerged themselves into backwoods obscurity.

The North West Company erred early in allowing a band of Iroquois trappers to kill several Cowlitz tribesmen in a fight over women, and resentment simmered for many years. But the corridor linking the Columbia River to Puget's Sound could not be denied. After acquiring a Cowlitz wife, a daughter of Chief Scanewa, and then helping to build Fort Langley on the Fraser River,[25] Simon Plamondon traveled to the Nisqually area to establish a halfway station.

Cowlitz Farm

When Catholic priests arrived at Fort Vancouver in 1838, there were enough French-speaking Catholics at the HBC's Cowlitz Farm to justify an early visit to perform baptisms and marriages. Three years later, Lt. Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition anchored his ship off Fort Nisqually where half a dozen Canadians had settled with their Indian or Metis wives. The population increased dramatically with

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[23] Harriet Duncan Munnick, *Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest; Roseburg Register and Missions, 1853-1911* (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1986), Annotations.

[24] Ella Mae Young, "French Settlement," *Umpqua Trapper*, (Roseberg, Oregon: Quarterly of the Douglas County Historical Society, 1980), 16:4, p.75.

[25] Bruce Alastair McKelvie, *Fort Langley: Birthplace of British Columbia*, Porcepic Books Limited, Victoria B.C. 1991.

Simon Plamondon Jr. of Olequa and his family. Children seated (left to right): Alfred Catlin (son of Anna Catlin), Sadie Cottonoir, Vera Bertrand. Middle row (left to right): Dorothy Bertrand, Anna Catlin (holding Chester Catlin), Simon Plamondon Jr., Mary Plamondon (Simon Jr.'s wife), Mary Bouchard (holding Alvie Bouchard), Oliver D. Bouchard, Mamie Cottonoir (holding Mable Rose Cottonoir), and Norbert Bouchard. Back row (left to right): Alice Bertrand, Leon Plamondon, Daniel Plamondon, Mary Plamondon (Daniel's wife), Simon Plamondon III, and Eugene Cottonoir. *CCHM 1999.0031.1471.*

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the 1841 arrival of Red River colonists. Lt. Wilkes promptly hired Simon Plamondon and his Abenaki Indian friend, Pierre Charles, to guide his mapping and surveying parties. The town of Pe Ell, Washington, derived its name from that of the Indian pronunciation of its first official settler, the same Pierre Charles.

The mix of servants and freemen at the HBC Cowlitz farm – near modern day Toledo, Washington, just off Interstate 5 – included former fur traders speaking French and overseers

issuing orders in French, while Hawaiian and local native laborers chattered in their own languages or the Chinook trade jargon, which was used as a common denominator. The farms of 23 French-speaking heads of household were eventually patented near the HBC Cowlitz farms.[26]

A recent interview with a Cowlitz tribal member, descending from both Chief Scanewa and Simon Plamondon, determined the approximate timing of the expiration of the language with the final generation. This descendant, Cowlitz tribal genealogist Michael Hubbs, remembered a family reunion as late as 1997, at which he was startled to discover his great uncle Leo Cottenoir talking with an elderly St. Germain cousin, alternately, in French and Chinook jargon. Michael had no idea that his great uncle knew these tongues.[27]

After failing to negotiate a boundary following the Columbia River, the HBC withdrew to new headquarters on Vancouver Island. Even in an English-speaking place like Fort Victoria, the French language prevailed. The governor's lady, the half Cree Amelia Douglas, conducted her afternoon teas in French. However, her husband, James Douglas, sent their daughter to England for a proper early Victorian education. Following her husband, John Work, on the brigade trail, Francophone Metis Josette Lagace´ of Spokane ancestry, became a very close friend of Amelia Douglas. Together they commanded a respectable place in Fort Victoria society.[28] English became the majority

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[26] John C. Jackson, "Mixed Bloods on the Cowlitz," *Columbia*, Spring 1998, 12-16.

[27] Interviews July 2013 by Foxcurran with Michael Hubbs, Cowlitz Tribal member, Metis and genealogist.

[28] Josette is descended from one of the first two *Canadiens* to cross the mountains. For background on the marital arrangements of HBC officers see Jennifer S. H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver and London; University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980); and John Adams, Old Square Toes and His Lady: The Life of James and Amelia Douglas (Horsdal & Schubert Publishers, Victoria, BC, Canada.

language in Victoria only with the arrival of the Royal Navy during the Crimean War, followed by the discovery of gold on the mainland in 1858.

Frenchtown develops near Walla Walla

It is uncertain when *Canadiens* first settled along the Walla Walla River. In the summer of 1818, Donald McKenzie built Fort Nez Perce near its confluence with the Columbia as a depot for the first expedition of a Snake River hunting brigade. Left as postmaster, Alexander Ross sent horses and herders to pasture on the lush meadows straddling the loops of the lower Walla Walla River. In 1820-21, uncertain of his future in the newly reorganized Hudson's Bay Company, McKenzie allowed the hunting brigade to falter. Many trappers were subsequently stranded until one of their own, Michel Bourdon, led most of the freemen back to their families and the ever indulgent Salish further up the Columbia.

It is believed that Joseph Sebastian Larocque and his wife Lisette Walla Walla, may have settled up the valley as early as 1823 or 1824. In 1830, Larocque petitioned to be sent back to Fort Walla Walla but continued working in the Snake Country for the next nine years. Larocque and Narcisse Raymond were listed in the 1839 Snake District with the notation, "No married man to be permitted to leave the Establishment unless for good & all."[29] Later, after a futile attempt to live in the Willamette Valley, the Larocque family moved back to the Walla Walla area where a French-speaking community had developed.

When Marcus and Narcissa Whitman arrived in 1836 to found a Protestant mission, they were reluctant to acknowledge that about a dozen *Canadien* settlers were living nearby in the Walla Walla Valley. The number of French-speaking Catholic families had grown to about 50 in October 1847 when a party

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[29] James Douglas, "Establishment of the Columbia District, 1839," James Douglas Correspondence, AG 206 26, Archives of British Columbia.

of Canadian priests and several Oblates of Mary Immaculate from France stopped at Fort Walla Walla. To open a mission for the Cayuse, Father J. B. A. Brouillet moved into a cabin provided by a hospitable Cayuse leader. Two days later the Whitman mission was attacked by a number of Cayuse, and the priest had to ride to the massacre site to bury the bodies as best he could.

Brouillet's Christian kindness was poorly rewarded as slurs against Catholics and French-speaking half-breeds spread downstream.[30] Although the Hudson's Bay Company sent Peter Skene Ogden to rescue the survivors, the coincidental arrival of the priests and the massacre of respected Protestant missionaries cast a shadow over Frenchtown.

The French-speaking community was tolerated by Indian neighbors long before the plateau tribes were assembled to cede their lands through treaty, opening the greater part of recently created Washington Territory to white settlement. During this period, the only non-Indian settlements east of the Dalles were Frenchtown, another *village des Canadiens* near the confluence of the Colville and Columbia rivers at Kettle Falls (translated from the French *Les Chaudieres*), as well as a settlement at Chewelah, located immediately to the south, up the Colville River.

Reaction to the 1855 treaties led to a clash between Yakama warriors and a punitive expedition into their heartland. After driving the Yakama north, Oregon mounted volunteers turned upon suspect, but innocent, Walla Walla Indians. As disaster threatened, the Frenchtown Metis gathered in a camp along Mill Creek until a hysterical Indian agent convinced around 60 of them to flee to The Dalles. After a dramatic battle and the tragic murder of their old chief, the Canadiens saw tribesmen who had been their neighbors for 30 years driven

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[30] Catherine, Elizabeth, and Matilda Sager, *The Whitman Massacre of 1847*, Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Washington 2002.

from their homes.[31] After matters quieted, most of the French-speaking fugitives returned to their claims in the valley while others, mistrustful of the new order, moved further inland. A U.S. Army invasion of the Spokane country in 1858, during which several mixed-bloods assisted as guides, couriers, and interpreters, resulted in the forced pacification of the plateau tribes. This, however, was only after a timely intervention by the francophone Jesuits, resident among the Coeur d'Alenes and Flatheads, had prevented a widening and prolongation of the war.[32] During this entire period, John Owens, the local agent of the office of Indian Affairs, had been AWOL.

Confident of their right to be there and trusting in their church, the Frenchtown community in the Walla Walla Valley grew to around 300. Mother Joseph of the Sisters of Providence made two visits to scout possibilities for a school taught in French at Frenchtown. Unfortunately, the Idaho mining boom of the early 1860s brought more believers, non-believers and dollars to the nearby town of Walla Walla. When the French-speaking sisters finally appeared, they bypassed the French community to serve a new, mostly white, parish and taught in English.[33] It was some time before a county school came to the nearby Frenchtown, and when it did the local pupils were taught in English rather than French.[34]

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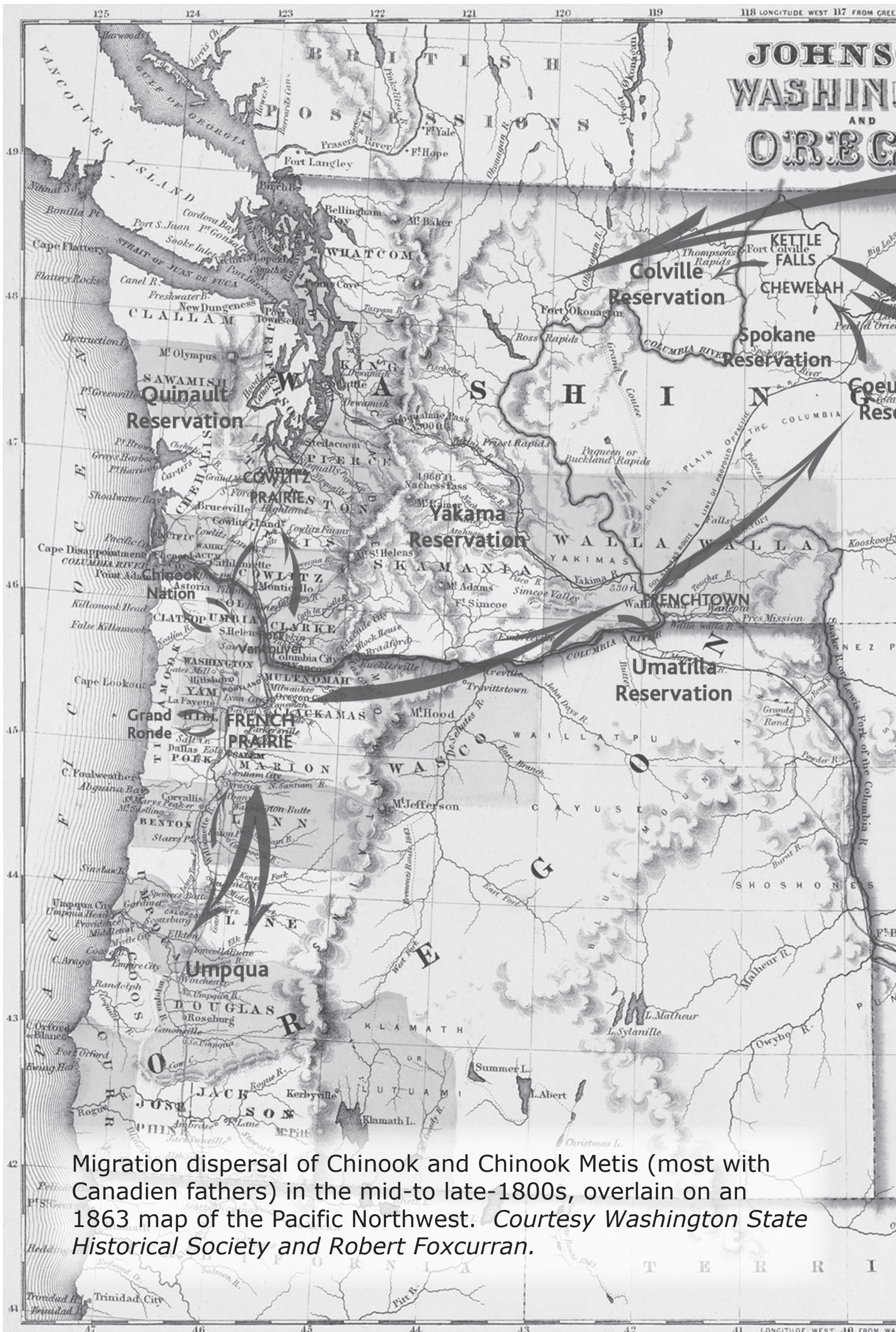
[31] John C. Jackson, A Little War of Destiny: *The Yakima Walla Walla Indian War of 1855-56*, Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Washington 1996.

[32] Robert Ignatius Burns, S.J., *The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Pacific Northwest*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1966.

[33] The Washington State Library has recently acquired an 1881 catalog and prospectus for the nine-year-old St. Paul's School for Girls in Walla Walla, Washington where young ladies could be boarded while being taught piano, organ, voice, drawing and painting, German and French. "All members of the School aid to some extent in the work of the family… and prevents them from acquiring a distaste for work and habits of indolence."

[34] McCrosson, Catherine *The Bell and the River*, Pacific Books, Palo Alto, Ca 1957.



Migration dispersal of Chinook and Chinook Metis (most with Canadien fathers) in the mid-to late-1800s, overlain on an 1863 map of the Pacific Northwest. *Courtesy Washington State Historical Society and Robert Foxcurran.*

BY JOHNSON & BROWNING.

BRITISH POSSESSIONS

NEBRASKA TERRITORY

Flathead Reservation

FRENCHTOWN

Three Buttes

Marias Pass

Snakes Head

Milk River 2301 ft.

Missouri River

Fort Benton

Great Falls

Teton River

Lewis & Clarks Pass

Cadottes Pass

Flat Head Lake

Bitter Root Mountains

Fort Owen

Cantonment Stevens

Hell Gate Passes

Gate of the Mountains

Muscle Shell R.

Judith R.

Gallatin R.

Madison R.

Wisdom R.

Jefferson R.

North Branch or Salmon R.

Fayette R.

Big Wood R.

Three Tetons

Sublette L.

Yellow Stone R.

Wind R.

Fremont's Peak 13570 ft.

Three Buttes

Fort Hall

Cantonment Loring

American Falls

Fishing Falls

Snake R. or Lewis' Fork

Windmill Rock

Old Crater

Beer or Soda Springs

South Pass 7489 ft.

Coal Basin

Fort Bridger

Medicine Butte

Spring Bay

Great Salt Lake

UTAH

French speakers in western Montana

The open country at the lower end of the Bitterroot Valley was the place where buffalo hunters following Cokalarishkit, the Salish road to the buffalo, found grazing for their large horse herds.[35] The Iroquois call for priests had been answered in October 1841 when Jesuit missionaries established St. Mary's Mission of the Bitterroot 25 miles upstream from the infamous Hellgate. After nine years, Black Robe missionary efforts were consolidated in the Flathead Valley to the north, and the St. Mary's buildings were sold to an American trader who later was appointed Indian agent. In 1853 an advance element of the Isaac Stevens' northern railway survey forecast changes that came two years later at the Hellgate treaty when the Salish were told that their Bitterroot lands had to be ceded in exchange for relocation to the Flathead Valley. There, a new reservation would be established around the Jesuits' St. Ignatius Mission.[36] During the spring of 1859 and the summer of 1860, U.S. topographical engineer Lt. John Mullen supervised crews building a military road from Walla Walla to Fort Benton that ran through Hellgate and another community known as Frenchtown, which was located just downstream.[37] The road was soon being used by gold seekers and pack trains headed for Montana mines.[38]

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[35] Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, Mountain press Publishing Company, 1999, Missoula, Montana.

[36] Bigart, Robert, and Woodcock, Clarence, *In the Name of the Salish & the Kootenai Nation: The 1855 Hellgate Treaty and the Origin of the Flathead Indian Reservation*, Salish Kootenai College Press, Pablo Montana 1996.

[37] *Report on the Construction of a Military Road from Fort Walla Walla to Fort Benton*, Capt. John Mullan, Preface by Glen Adams and Introduction by Kimberley Rice Brown, Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Washington 1998.

[38] James W. Watt, Introduction by Lawerence Dodd, *Journal of Mule Train Packing in Eastern Washington in the 1860's*, Ye Galleon Press, Fairfield, Washington [originally printed in The Washington Historical Quarterly in three issues between July 1928, and January 1929].

A Canadien by the name Louis Brown, in company with his wife, Emilie Pend d'Oreille, were in the process of moving their mixed-blood family from a farm in the Colville Valley to the lower end of the Bitterroot Valley. He missed being counted in the 1860 census of Spokane County, Washington Territory, but gained the not entirely deserved reputation of being the founder of Frenchtown.[39] He actually co-founded the settlement with Baptiste Ducharme who had moved inland after abandoning his claim near a Nisqually village along what was now called Muck Creek by the mostly English-speaking Canadian neighbors. Unlike the Browns, whose daughters married into later arriving Canadien families that stayed on in Frenchtown Valley, the six children of Baptiste chose to move over the ridge line to the Flathead Reservation to join their relations.

The irrepressible entrepreneur Telesphore Jacques DeMers (one of the Bishop's nephews) soon arrived from Quebec via the Colville Valley. He saw opportunities for running pack strings to the mines while ranging cattle on the open grasslands south of Frenchtown. By 1870, T.J. DeMers had fathered a handful of Metis children and amassed roughly $10,000, mostly in livestock grazing on the free range. Already one of the wealthiest men in western Montana, T.J. had become the employer of choice for dozens of *Canadiens* relocating to the region over the next several decades.

With so many miners streaming up the Clark Fork and the Blackfoot River in search of gold instead of beaver pelts, the Frenchtown settlement in the Bitterroot Valley became a vibrant new world of cowboys, miners, soldiers, road builders, and individuals seeking the main chance. This drew a reinforcement of latter-day French speakers who came west and were pleased to find a community that understood their language and honored their church. Between them and their Metis neighbors, the French language persisted, though it had fallen into disuse in other places.

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[39] Father Demers thought Brown a virtuous man for teaching Christian prayers to the natives.

In the cemetery on the hill overlooking Frenchtown, there are the names of later French-speaking arrivals: Lacasse, Tetrault, Rouillier, Lebeau, Tremblay, Poirier, Longpre, Dorvall, Plourde, Lavoie and Joseph Houle who was born at Saint Gregoire, Quebec, Canada, in March 1836 and came to Fort Benton as an employee of the American Fur Company.[40]

With such a critical mass, the community succeeded in maintaining its French identity for some time. In the 1880s the rival town of Missoula, Montana, surpassed Frenchtown. Marginalization would help preserve the language and culture of the Frenchtown community, but only for a while. The settlement had always been more of a circumstance than a planned development, a magnet for entrepreneurial newcomers from eastern parts who wanted French-speaking neighbors with a mission church nearby and served by lay brothers from St. Ignatius in the Flathead Valley. Although the community succeeded in maintaining its identity and language, by the 1920s a teacher noted that "the county superintendent of schools came to visit and forbade me to speak any French in the classroom. Most of my pupils were bilingual, but a few could speak French only, like Oliver Touchette. As in other schools, many or most children spoke only French even in 1924."[41]

From the very first, the Salish Country[42] was the crucible where Salish and French speakers amalgamated. Francois Rivet and Louis Campois Hoole married native women and

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[40] James Sanders, ed., *Society of Montana Pioneers* (The Werner Company, 1899), 1:209. There appears to be no direct connection to Old Hoole who crossed the mountains in 1807 and was killed around 1814.

[41] *Frenchtown Valley Footprints*, (Mountain Press Printing, Missoula Montana 1976), 86 & 92.

[42] http://www.davidthompsonbook.com/OBS.htm has aerial photos of the Clark Fork including one map that extends south as far as Frenchtown and the Missoula area.

seeded a mixed-blood, freeman, subculture that is still found in the Flathead Valley. Francophone voyageurs sang their songs all along the Clark Fork of the Columbia River, and trapping brigades took French to the Snake River country, the central Rocky Mountains, and California. As the years passed, the Flathead Valley, just north of Frenchtown, Montana, remained another reservoir of a language in retreat as aging trappers passed French to their mixed-blood progeny.[43]

The Salish heartland can be seen as one of the last stands of French-speaking freemen whose language retreated with them. Realizing that they couldn't live comfortably while closely crowded by strangers with little reason to understand or accommodate their uniqueness, they went back to the Flathead Valley and joined tribal kinsmen who could. The informal acceptance between tribesmen and mixed-bloods who shared similar experiences was later federalized by laws passed in distant places. Opening what was termed underused reservation land to outsiders, the Dawes Act legalized division within a division. Increasingly marginalized, the Metis were allowed to benefit by gaining allotments they could call home.[44] The natural processes of intermarriage increased the mixing and preserved the French language, sometimes a bit longer than the tribal tongue.

New reservations accept French speakers

After the Indian wars, a plethora of reservations burst upon bewildered natives during the last third of the 19th century. In Oregon, reservations were created at Grand Ronde, Siletz, Warm Springs, and Umatilla. North of the Columbia River, free-roaming tribes were impounded on the Yakama, Spokane,

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[43] Hunter, p113, citing McWhorter Papers: D. McDonald to McWhorter, 11 December, 1930.

[44] Eugene Mark Felsman, "Brief History of the Enrollment Process on the Flathead Reservation, Montana, 1903-1908," unpublished paper presented for a Contemporary Issues course, at the Salish and Kootenai College, to instructor Ron Therriault, March 2, 1991.

Coeur d'Alene, and Colville reservations. To the west along the shores of the Salish Sea, every salmon stream supported extended families, so assigning centralized reserves was almost impossible.[45]

The reservations set the Indians aside but did not resolve suspicion of bicultural Metis families whose influence on their native kinsmen was believed to undermine dealings with territorial and state officials. Some authorities continued to believe Canadians were responsible for the resistance of tribes to treaty terms or violence that ensued. Only later, when interior reservations were opened to outside settlement, did the government apparently decide that French-speaking, mixed-bloods cousins were the right kind of neighbors for encouraging Indians to settle down as good Christian farmers and ranchers.

The extravagant generosity of the Donation Land Act expired in 1855. Subsequent interpretation and revisions widened

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[45] For an overview of this ethnic reconfiguration of the Pacific Northwest during this period, the authors would refer the readers to:

Ruby, Robert H., and Brown, John A., *Indians of the Pacific Northwest: A History*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1982.

Ruby, Robert H., and Brown, John A., *A Guide to the Indian Tribes of the Pacific Northwest*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1986, 1992.

Rick Rubin, *Naked Against the Rain: The People of the Lower Columbia River 1770-1850*, Far Shores Press Portland, Or. 1999.

Roy I. Rochon Wilson, *"Cheholtz and Mary Kiona of the Cowlitz,"* Wilson, Napavine 2012.

James G. Swan, *The Northwest Coast, or Three Years in Washington Territory*, University of Washington Press (originally published in 1857).

Berg, Laura, Editor: *The First Oregonians*, The Oregon Council for the Humanities, Portland, Oregon, 2007.

Alexander Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound*, Univ. of California Press 1998.

coverage to Indians, including those of mixed ancestry. Then, roughly two generations after the original land claims had been certified, descendants of the first wave of settlers got a second chance at free land. During the last decades of the 19th century and into the early 20th, the federal government decided that the reservations needed to be opened up and surplus land put to use. After the experiment of the Slater Bill and the implementation of the Dawes Act, a displacement of the Metis communities followed. Three interior reservations took in significant French speaking populations. Those were the Flathead, Umatilla, and Colville, with the Coeur d'Alene, Nez Perce and Yakama adopting smaller numbers.

As a matter of practicality, the French language fell out of use in communities where English now dominated as the operational language. Metis settlements began to submerge into the surrounding white communities. Over the following decades, Washington Territory's two Frenchtowns, near Walla Walla and Missoula, were upstaged by the nearby Anglo-American settlements that soon became the principal urban centers of their respective regions. Other historic Metis settlements, like Chewelah and Kettle Falls in the Colville Valley, also became overwhelmingly white.[46]

There was a realization that the frontier was closing up, and cheap or free land was becoming harder to obtain. Even after intrusions on the Nez Perce Reservation led to a tragic tribal flight toward Canada, settlers in the Pendleton area agitated for opening the nearby Umatilla Reservation to white settlement. Government policy was adjusted under the Slater

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[46] After education in Quebec, Jean Francois Grant joined his father at Fort Hall in 1848 and married a Lemhi Shoshone wife who he proudly wrote spoke French, English and several Indian languages as well as riding rough horses and making "very nice butter" Lyndel Meikle, "Very Close to Trouble: The Johnny Grant Memoir," H-West, H-Net reviews, February 1999, http//www.h-net.org//reviews/showrev.plp.id=2734 (accessed June 4, 2012).

Bill in 1885. This led to a plan for the entire West, enacted two years later as the Dawes Act.[47]

Most French-speaking Metis families traced mothers or grandmothers to tribes that were now confined on reservations. The residents of Frenchtown felt a powerful inducement to rejoin the relocated survivors of the Walla Walla tribe now living on the Umatilla Reservation about 40 miles southeast of the Walla Walla Valley. Adoption by one of the three tribes would entitle individual members of a Metis family to a free allotment of up to 160 acres of land on the north part of the reservation. By 1886 there were 723 full-blood Indians and 171 mixed-bloods at Umatilla. Another 25 mixed-bloods were counted the next year. They were attracted by allotments where the agency expected their "inherent capacities" would encourage farming.[48]

By 1881, any person with even a portion of Indian blood was to be considered an Indian and entitled to reservation benefits.[49] Of the three confederated tribes on the Umatilla Reservation, Chief Homilie's Walla Wallas willingly served as an adoption agency for Metis. Later, in the course of the 20th century, the one-fourth blood quantum rule began to exclude many descendents of mixed marriages. Much the same would occur among the mixed-bloods on the other reservations. In the face of these developments, use of the French language narrowed to the older generations.

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[47] Kurt Kim Schaefer, "A Bitter Pill: Indian Reform Policy, Indian Acculturation, and the Puyallup Act of 1893," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Winter 2010/2011, Vol. 102 Number 1, University of Washington, Seattle.

[48] James B. Kennedy, "The Umatilla Indian Reservation, 1855-1975, Factors Contributing to a Diminished Land Resource," PhD Dissertation, Oregon State University, 1977, p.48.

[49] Ibid, Whites also married Indian women to gain allotments but the language in those households was not always English.

On the Umatilla Reservation there were two Indian boarding schools, one funded and manned by the Protestant missionaries (Presbyterians) at Tutuilla and one by the Catholic Church (the Franciscan Sisters) on the edge of the Blue Mountains at Saint Andrews. Given their cultural antecedents, the children of mixed-blood families were almost exclusively concentrated in the latter. Lydia French Johnson, who was born in 1920, commented on the priority during this period of promoting assimilation and the English language while suppressing the Indian languages spoken at home. In the book, *As Days Go By*, edited by Jennifer Karson, Johnson cited the experience of her mother as a child, which involved a double standard in language enforcement. "My mother, Isabelle Craig French, said that at St. Andrews, the French breeds could speak French but the other Indian children could not speak their language, especially in the 1910s to 1920s and before that."[50]

Though the forces of assimilation tolerated the Metis-speaking French during this time, their day was coming. A century later, Martha Franklin, assistant archivist at the Tamastslikt Institute on the Umatilla Reservation, related during a 2007 interview that when her mother Annie Quaempts passed in 1967, she had been one of the last speakers of Cayuse.[51] Many members of Annie Quaempts' generation were multilingual, and Martha noted that her mother also retained her ability to speak both French and Walla Walla. Annie and her daughter Martha were descendants of an early *Canadien* fur-trader-turned-settler named Michel Laforte, whose son Antoine worked as an interpreter for the Indian agent. In 1898, after a wave of adoptions on the Umatilla Reservation, the number of

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[50] Jennifer Karson (Editor), *As Days Go By: Our History, Our Land, Our People The Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla* (Tamastslikt Institute & Oregon Historical Society Press in association with the University of Washington Press, 2006), 124.

[51] Interview 2006 by Sam Pambrun and Robert Foxcurran with Martha Franklin, Umatilla Reservation assistant archivist and tribal member. The name Quaempts was of Klikitat origins.

mixed-bloods per tribe along the upper Umatilla River totaled 218 among the Walla Wallas, 16 among the Umatilla, and zero among the Cayuse. Cayuse descendants with some amount of white ancestry were adopted by the Walla Walla tribe. A 1906 Office of Indian Affairs Annual Report stated, "There were about 1,200 Indians residing on this reservation, of which number about one-fourth were of mixt [sic] blood, principally of Canadian-French descent."[52]

Over the next three decades, under the provisions of the Dawes Act, similar restrictions or reductions awaited those on the Colville, Flathead, Coeur d'Alene, Yakama, and other reservations. The tribes tried to dilute the impact of the loss of land declared surplus by federal authorities by adopting relatives. After allotment of individual parcels of land to Indians and adopted Metis – with the caveat of a 25-year trusteeship - surplus land would be sold off to white settlers. Better to apportion some of what little land remained to them by expanding the old practice of the Indians of adopting close relations from the mixed-blood community.

Having vacillated as to whether to acknowledge or resist the practice of adoption of the Metis, the position of the Office of Indian Affairs during the initial period of allotment was to endorse it. Again, the decision was based on the assumption that the net effect of the presence of mixed-bloods on these reservations would be a positive for implementing the federal government's dual policy of turning the Indians into farmers of the Christian sort. Metis could serve as useful intermediaries in encouraging the transition of the Indians toward this goal. Then in the early 20th century, confronted with a diminished supply of land on the reservations and with increasing resistance from the tribes to the demand from

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[52] 1906 Annual Reports of the Department of Interior, Indian Affairs Report of the Commissioner and Appendices, "Oregon, Umatilla Reservation," Agent O.C. Edwards, p. 333, National Archives, Seattle.

their proliferating Metis cousins, policy again reversed itself, swinging back toward tighter restrictions.[53]

For the five confederated tribes on the Flathead Reservation, just north of Frenchtown and Missoula, implementation of the Dawes Act came later. A final round of adoptions preceding distribution of allotments brought the total number of mixed-bloods in 1905 to 1,183, or 55 percent of the enrollees. Several Finley family members were interviewed on the Flathead Reservation in 1942 for the Montana Writers Project. During one such exchange it was noted that Peter (Pierre) Finlay, a descendent of Jocko Finlay, one of the first Metis to enter the Northwest, "prefers to talk in Indian or French, although he understands English."[54]

Metis authors John C. Jackson (left) and Chalk Courchane (right) at Spokane House circa 2010. *Photo courtesy Robert Foxcurran.*

More recently, Metis historian David 'Chalk' Courchane told the authors that his mom, Viola Ashley (1909-1965), along with her ten siblings, spoke some French as children on the Flathead Reservation, but only with their grandparents. The Indian name of Viola's grandmother, Mary Ermatinger, was actually Malleseme, which meant "of French origins" in Salish. Pressures to conform were having

[53] Roblin Rolls, NARA, Seattle.

[54] Whealdon, Bon I., edited by Robert Bigart, *I Will Be Meat For My Salish*, Salish Kootenai College Press, Pablo, Montana, and Montana Historical Society press, Helena, Mont. 2001.

their effect and the 11 Ashley (originally Asselin) children who were born between 1903 and 1919 spoke English and Salish amongst themselves and their friends, but French only with their grandparents.

Through his mother, Chalk and his siblings were among the hundreds of descendants of Jocko Finlay on the Flathead Reservation. Their parents, however, though both francophones, never spoke French to the children. Chalk's dad was from one of the landless Metis families of Chippewa extraction that had lived in Eastern Montana for several generations.[55]

The majority of the Metis population of the *Canadien* settlements at Chewelah and Kettle Falls left the Colville Valley following the end of the Columbia Plateau Indian wars in 1858. Most migrated east along the Clark Fork to Flathead country, though others followed the Colville Reservation's shifting borders across the Columbia River. Here too, adoption by one of the 12 Confederated tribes of the Colville Reservation allowed Metis to settle and eventually obtain individual land allotments. Among those who stayed behind in the Colville Valley were the Metis daughters of the Gendron and Finlay families who married white settlers.[56]

There were two rounds of allotments on the Colville Reservation: first in 1890 for the north half, and the southern half just prior to U. S. entry into World War I. It was during these two periods that a significant number of Metis were adopted by the confederated tribes and received allotments of former reservation land. Luana Gendron, who headed the

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[55] Interviews in July 2011 by the authors with David, 'Chalk,' Courchane, Metis, historian, and Flathead tribal member.

[56] Jean Barman and Bruce M. Watson, "Fort Colville's Fur Trade Families and the Dynamics of Race in the Pacific Northwest," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Summer 1999, a quarterly publication of the University of Washington.

child development program on the Colville Reservation in 2009, remembers her grandpa speaking only French with his brothers at family gatherings in the 1950s and 1960s. While the language was not passed on to any of those born in the 1940s and 1950s, several dozen Metis families had been successful in maintaining their community and language for several generations.[57]

Toponyms, a regional pidgin, and a legacy of the demographic sort

Echoes of a lost language could only be traced through the persons who spoke it. It was not a development that a majority of the white population recognized. By the beginning of the 20th century a significant proportion of the grandchildren of the original Pacific Northwest Metis were either accepted members of white communities, in retreat on the fast diminishing fringes of development, or relocated to reservations. Some moved south to the more remote Umpqua River region of Southwestern Oregon where land was still available; others shifted north or east across the Cascade Mountains to places their parents had known during the fur trade. They carried their French language with them.[58]

These families, often disparaged as French-breeds, usually practiced smaller scale farming and ranching than their American neighbors, supplementing limited agriculture by seasonal work as packers, cowhands, woodcutters, or ferry operators. Others were hired as guides, interpreters, and scouts by authorities.

The retreat of French in the Pacific Northwest after a half a century of dominance left a communication vacuum that

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[57] Interview in August 2009 by Foxcurran with Luana Gendron on the Colville Reservation.

[58] Robert Foxcurran, "Les Canadiens: Resettlement of the Metis into the Backcountry of the Pacific Northwest," *Columbia*, Fall 2012, 22-26.

fostered a parallel expansion in use of an earlier, and still evolving, regional Indian trade jargon. This pidgin, known as Chinook jargon, had incorporated words of several native languages - principally Chinookan, but also Nootkan and Salishan - into a vocabulary of several hundred words.[59] Originally composed of a core vocabulary derived from Nootkan language, by the late 18th century the jargon began to incorporate English words brought in by the British and American crews of trading ships calling at the mouth of the Columbia River, and along the rugged coastline northward past Vancouver Island. With the establishment of an onshore presence by the Euro-Americans along the lower Columbia, Chinookan vocabulary became dominant as the pidgin continued to evolve.[60]

In the early 19th century words began to be adopted from French to describe body parts, tools, utensils, furnishings, domesticated animals, and finally the new religion. Though the wives of these early *Canadiens* were drawn from tribes throughout the region, by far the largest single host tribe providing mothers for their children were those of the Chinookan speakers. The children of these unions grew up speaking this fluid pidgin. Examples of accretions from this French include those closely associated with the accompanying sign language: *lamah* from French *la main* for the 'hand,' *latate* from French *la tete* (head), *lapush* from *la bouche* (mouth) and *lepie* from *le pied* (foot). There was *lahash* from *la hache* (ax, or hachet), *lacaset* (box or trunk) and *lebal* for bullet. Spiritual matters for catechism or teaching also utilized the Chinook jargon for terms as *leplet* from *le pretre* (priest), *lesai* for *le saint* (saint), *lamesse* for a religious service, and of course the *deaub* for *le diable*, or the devil. Then there are those of more general use like 'massie' or even 'masha,' derived

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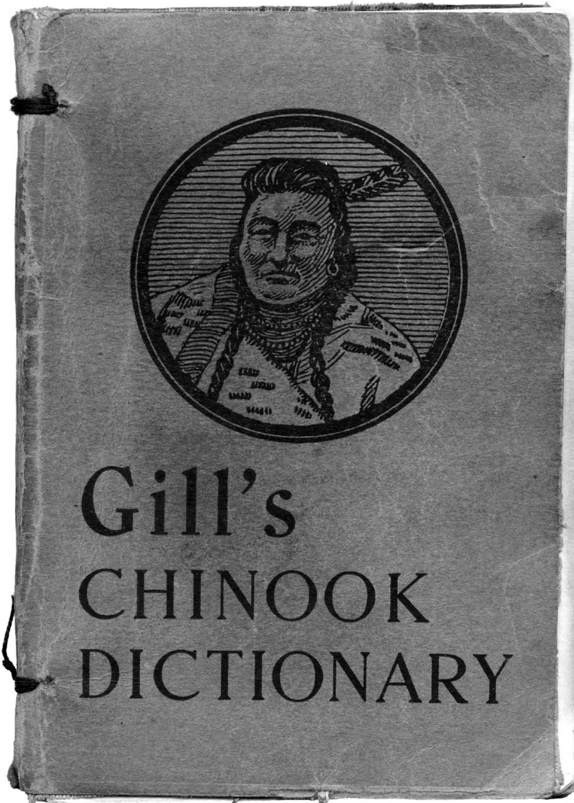
[59] Edward Harper Thomas, *Chinook: A History and Dictionary*, Binford & Mort Publishers, Portland, Or. 1980.

[60] Roy I. Rochon Wilson, "Chinook Wawa," Second Edition, Wilson, Napavine 2011.

from *merci*, again the local folks having trouble with the 'r' sound. As of the mid-19th century, about three quarters of the vocabulary of the jargon then in use was still drawn from Native American languages, while English and French each accounted for roughly 1/8 of the balance.[61]

When these hybrid communities began to scatter across the Pacific Northwest during the 1850s and 1860s, they took



Well-used copy of Gill's Chinook Dictionary from the Museum's collection. This copy was a 15th edition, published in 1909 in Portland, Oregon by J. K. Gill & Co. *CCHM 1991.0095.0001.*

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[61] R.R. Foxcurran, unpublished manuscript, "Washington Territory's Tale of a Few Frenchtowns: and resettlement of the 'Canadien' Metis - or 'French-Breeds' - into the backcountry and onto nearby reservations, 2001."

the Chinook jargon with them, spreading it far and wide. In ever more widespread use, especially west of the Cascades, usage of this pidgin expanded into the early 20th century as a principal means of communication between the natives, the Metis, and the whites. This extended through British Columbia and along the coastal regions of Alaska. The native and mixed-ancestry populations continued to represent a major component of the seasonal workforce in the scattered lumber camps, sawmills, farms, and fisheries of the region. At any one time, a significant percentage of the Indians resided off reservation, especially along the lower Columbia and in Southwestern Washington where the two principal tribal groups, the Chinook and the Cowlitz, remained unrecognized by federal authorities. Here they could make a living, often on land that until only recently had been theirs. For a while, mutual dependency and ultimately economic assimilation, expanded the use of the jargon amongst the American and Canadian *cheechako* (newcomers). In this way, the words of a language in retreat were preserved in a pidgin that would, in its turn, become one of the historical oddities of the region.

While the displaced Canadiens and their Metis populations took their languages with them, these communities also took a significant portion of the surviving population of Chinook descendants, further depleting their numbers in their home territory on the lower Columbia and along the shores of Willapa Bay.

Their displacement by the English-speaking majority is as much the result of their recognition of the difficulties of staying, as it was flight from an inhospitable situation. Cultural bias toward mixed-blood marriages or religion was eased by keeping to themselves, or moving among Indian kinsmen. Tribal politics can be complex, and retreat to reservations was not always welcomed. The allotment system undermined tribal unity, later contributing to dilution of the federally imposed blood quantum. Metis did not always enjoy a vote in council or a hearing at the agency after French translators were gone.

One hundred and seventy years after the 1850 census had identified the scale of the mixed-blood population and the 1860 census began to show their relocation, the most recent national count shows a greater social acceptance of the outmoded concept of race as a distinguishing factor. The languages of our indigenous populations are under siege, although efforts to revive them are now proliferating. Still, it is odd to think that a modern language as vital as French was reduced to isolated enclaves, going the way of the Kalapuyan language and the Kalispel's Salishan.

The point is clear. French is not a foreign language in the Pacific Northwest. Nor is it an anomaly that it is a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) requirement, with directions appearing today on many of our consumer products. These people established a transcontinental presence long ago on both sides of the evolving border. During most of the first half of the 19th century, French was more widely spoken in the Pacific Northwest than English. Moreover, these same communities — often relocating to more remote corners of the region — continued to speak French well into the 20th century. We read it as we pass road signs for Boise, Payette, Bruneau, Malheur, Grand Ronde, the Deschutes, the Dalles, and the Cascades. That lost presence is recalled by Touchet, Coeur d'Alene, Pend Oreille, and the names of many other rivers and lakes.

But French ultimately faded, and what remained was as much a lineage as a language. By mid-century aging voyageurs and freemen were ready to rest on the sunny side of the cabin and tell lies to their grandchildren. By the time those children had lived their lives and were old enough to have grandchildren, the French words were forgotten. And who was left to wonder where they had come from? Regardless of the ebb and flow of languages, the real legacy of these people lies in the tens of thousands of their descendants who live among us today. One might imagine that the presence and contributions of their ancestors are worthy of mention in our history books. Representative sampling including these earlier

multi-racial and multi-cultural communities should matter, especially given their increasing relevance to future national demographic trends.

One final anecdote might be fitting at this point. Doctor John McLoughlin was lauded by many overlanders as "the Father of Oregon." McLoughlin was one of the HBC officers who chose to remain behind following the partitioning of the region in 1846 to become an American citizen with his half-Cree Metis wife, Marguerite, and their children. When he died 11 years later at his house in Oregon City, John was suffering from diabetes and nearly an invalid. He was 72 years old. His nephew from Quebec, Dr. Guillaume DeChesne, was serving as his caretaker. One of his biographers tells us, "French was the language of the family, and on September 5, 1857, when Dr. DeChesne entered John's room, he asked his uncle as always, "Comment allez-vous," (How are you?) Dr. John replied "*A Dieu!*" which were his last spoken words.[62]

This article is the joint effort of Robert Foxcurran and John C. Jackson who gratefully acknowledge the contribution of our many generous informants. John wrote most of the first half and Robert most of the second, with each cross-editing the other. The article was drafted during the 2012-2014 timeframe, as John Jackson finished his last book, one which he co-authored with Lloyd Keith. It was published by WSU Press in 2016 several months after John's passing. The book is a business history of the operations of the Montreal-based North West Company in the Pacific Northwest. It was provisionally titled The Columbia Adventure, *but was later published under the title* The Fur Trade Gamble: North West Company on the Pacific Slope, 1800-1820. *A reference to the interplay between the book and the article appears toward the end of chapter 11 where John summarizes much of the first half of the article, while expanding upon the second half in the last chapter (19), which is titled* "The Human Legacy."

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[62] Dorothy Nafus Morrison, *Outpost: John McLoughlin and the Far Northwest* (Portland; Oregon Historical Society Press, 1999), 472.

Finnish Language

Use at the Mount Solo School in the Early 1900s

Excerpted from the Cowlitz Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (September 1972), with memories of Anna Johnson Powell and Betsey Johnson Cammon.*

Anna Johnson Powell was not certain when the Finns came to the Mt. Solo area but did remember her mother telling the following story. Her father was away from home giving music lessons when her mother was frightened by hearing strange "gabbling" voices that might have been Chinese for all she knew. However, it was just a boatload of Finns on the slough looking over the Mount Solo area.

The two Mount Solo families, other than the Johnsons, sold out to the Finns, leaving the Johnsons as the only English-speaking family. In spite of the language barrier, the Johnsons and their Finnish neighbors became good friends. Anna remembered them as "marvelous neighbors."

Betsey Johnson Cammon (no relation to Anna Johnson Powell) was a young school teacher at Mount Solo for the 1905-1906 school year and recalled the problems with language in her classroom:

"The problem that concerned me most was that of a language barrier, especially among the younger pupils. All of these Mount Solo pupils, with the exception of the three Johnson children, were the offspring of native-born Finns. I soon learned that the Finnish language was predominantly spoken in their homes. On the playground, this strange-to-me language was used; also, while school was in session, I overheard whisperings that sounded strange.

"A requisite, in order to obtain a teaching certificate, was a passing grade in Washington State School Law, and from

this book I had learned that only English language should be spoken during the school day. Thinking I could possibly eliminate the barrier, I made several attempts to enter into playground games during intermission, but to no avail. They promptly withdrew and stood silently in groups, apparently awaiting my withdrawal. Each time I took the hint.

“I constantly puzzled over the situation; then one day on the annual visit of H. A. Taylor, the county school superintendent, I laid the problem before him. Now, thought I, the solution! Said he, ‘I once taught this school and soon learned the language barrier was stronger than I. It will take years to overcome and it must be gradual.’ That took a burden off my mind; however, I felt every effort must be made to help these dear young Americans use the English language in daily conversation. We had fun studying new words as well as old words and phrases and applying the meaning to objects and to

Students of the Mt. Solo School with teacher Betsy Johnson, spring 1906. The identified students are listed as Hille Lahti, John Wainenan, Victor Jacobson, Eino Rytinge, [?] Matta, Ina Simonsen, Anna Johnson, Hilia Lahti, Olega Jurmu, [?] Patterson, Astrid Jurmu, Oscar Johnson, Hilda Nickelson, Anna Jurmu, Hilda Lahti, and Albert Johnson. *CCHM 1972.0055.0002.*

pictures of objects. I encouraged them to carry on conversation during class and intermission.

"Whether or not I accomplished much to remedy the situation during the term, I do not know, but at least I tried. I felt rewarded when eager faces lighted up as realization and application of words to objects were comprehended."

Three years later, when Anna Johnson Powell was in the sixth grade, they had a "hard-boiled" teacher who laid down the law: *No Finnish language in the schoolroom or on the grounds*. She explained to the children that it was all right to remember their native language, but since they were living in America they had to learn to speak English. Anyone overheard breaking this rule had to "sit out" a punishment. Anna said, "It worked and there was marked improvement in the schoolwork that year."

Featured Map
The Kalama River Power Plant

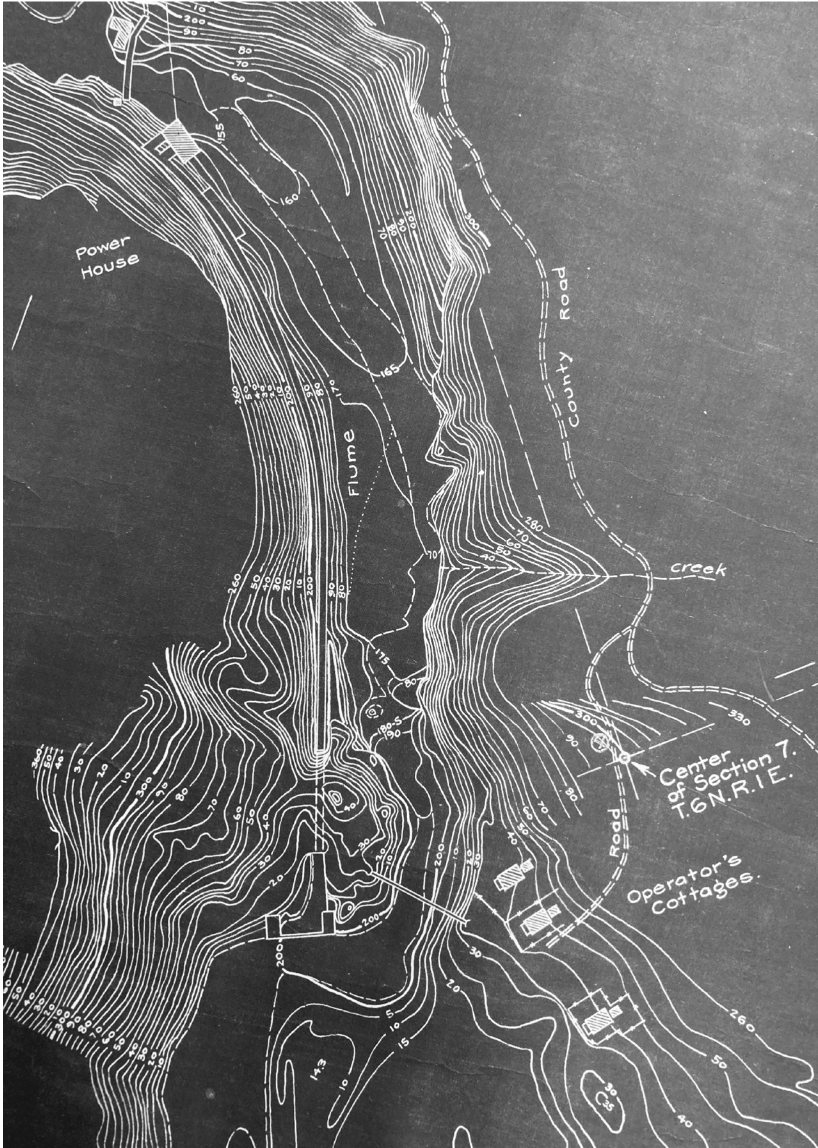
by Bill Watson

Kalama was the first town in Cowlitz County to build its own plant to generate electric power. A group of enterprising Kalama businessmen finished constructing the power plant on the Kalama River in 1902 and finished stringing the wire to bring "juice" to town in 1903. A good description of the endeavors of the Kalama Electric Light and Power Company can be found in earlier quarterlies (Vol. 32, #1, 1990).

In the museum's collection is a map dated September 1917 of the Kalama River, showing proposed development of the Kalama River Power Plant for the North Coast Power Company, which bought the plant in 1915. The map was drawn by engineer R. M. Boykin from a survey by W.

The Kalama River power plant and lower end of the flume, circa 1910. *CCHM 1966.0080.0023.*

A. White. It is three feet wide and almost eight feet long and details the section of river and county road between Woolford Creek and Peck's Bottom, just above the Little Kalama River, with the topography of the river bank and hillsides above the road.



Detail of the power plant on map *CCHM 1997.0022.0003.*

On this map we can see the structures that comprise the power plant, which was set up at the Lower Kalama River Falls, just below the present Kalama Falls Fish Hatchery. The powerhouse is at the lower end on the south bank, at the base of a cliff, with a foot bridge across to the north bank and the road for access. A 1,250-foot wooden flume brought water to the powerhouse from above the falls. The flume was mostly in the open at the base of the cliff, but near the top a 150-foot section had to be bored through the cliff. Above the falls, at the top of the flume, was another foot bridge across the river for maintenance, with three operators' cottages on the north bank.

Other features marked on the map, proceeding upstream from the cottages, are an old log chute, cultivated fields, a ruined splash dam and dismantled sawmill, ruined farm buildings, an abandoned orchard, and, just above Devil's Den, Phil Johns' log chute. Some of these features are described in more detail in Virginia Urrutia's article "Up the old Kalama River Road" (CHQ Vol. 34, #4, 1992).

According to an August 19, 1953, *Longview Daily News* article, the original generator at the plant was only 75 KW, but it was later increased to 600 KW. Robert H. Moody and his son George were the operators of the plant for most of its lifespan, even through ownership changes. North Coast Power Company sold the plant to Puget Sound Power & Light Company in 1920, and they sold it to Northwest Electric Company in 1927. Eventually, the plant helped supply power to Woodland, Rainier, Kelso, and Goble, in addition to Kalama. The plant was sold to Cowlitz County P.U.D. in 1946 and dismantled in 1948. By that time, electricity generated from Merwin and Bonneville dams was cheaper and more reliable than that produced by the antiquated power plant on the Kalama River.