

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY, CORVALLIS

**PEOPLE OF THE FALLS**

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by

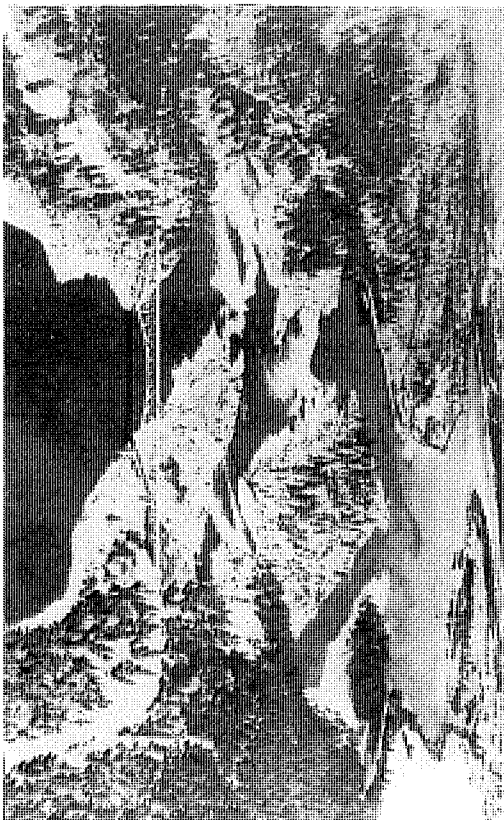
**David H. Chance**



## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

### AN INTRODUCTION

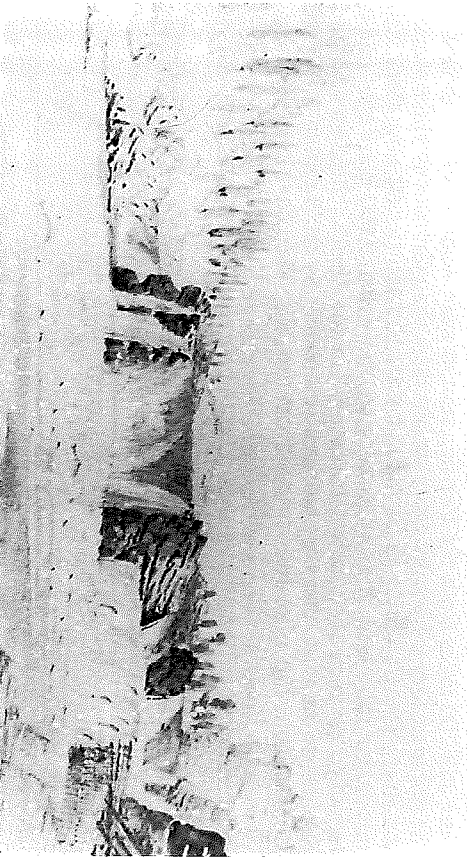
At 500 miles from its source, the Columbia River once plunged through a series of boiling cataracts called Shonitkwa by the Salish Indians. The French voyageurs usually called the falls Les Chaudieres which means copper kettles; English speakers usually called them the Kettle Falls. Even though these falls were still 700 miles from the Pacific, salmon were wonderfully abundant in the summer; they were more easily caught there than almost anywhere else on the river. The Columbia in its natural state had the richest migratory fish resource in the world. It was becoming so, more than 9,000 years ago, and it remained so until the nineteenth century. In the 1930's, the damaged and diminished salmon runs were stopped completely by the building of Grand Coulee Dam, 100 miles downstream from the falls. They have been submerged beneath the reservoir of Lake Roosevelt since 1941, except for a couple of times since when the waters were lowered to allow an enlargement of the dam.



Looking north at the falls from the air in about 1930.

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Slanted beds of hard laminated quartzite of the Colville Formation shaped the falls. Marine fossils in the hills above show that these layers of stone were laid down as sand over 200 million years ago. The falls have, of course, always been changing, gradually wearing back through the rocky dikes across the channels, but very slowly because of the hardness of the stone. It was tough and vitrified enough to be an important source of stone for making cutting tools; in fact the falls were the greatest stone tool quarry known in the Pacific Northwest. Well over half a million tools of this material still lie strewn about the outcrops.



The lower Kettle Falls as Paul Kane painted them with watercolors in 1847. A basket trap is at the right. Courtesy of the Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas.

For more than the past million years great tongues of ice pushed south over Kettle Falls, retreated, then came down again from the mountain icefields. In between these episodes of frozen rivers Kettle Falls would be sometimes covered by a large glacial lake formed behind a tongue of ice and moraine at the mouth of the Okanogan River. Then, like the dams of other glacial lakes in this area, they would break, releasing large amounts of water in cataclysmic floods.

The last time that ice covered Kettle Falls was probably more than 15,000 years ago. After that a more recent version of glacial Lake Columbia filled the valley with a surface higher than the present town of Colville. Its evidence is in the form of the high bluffs of white and gray silts and sands that rear above the shores of Lake Roosevelt. The last lake was still full of water when vegetation began to recover in the upland meadows overlooking

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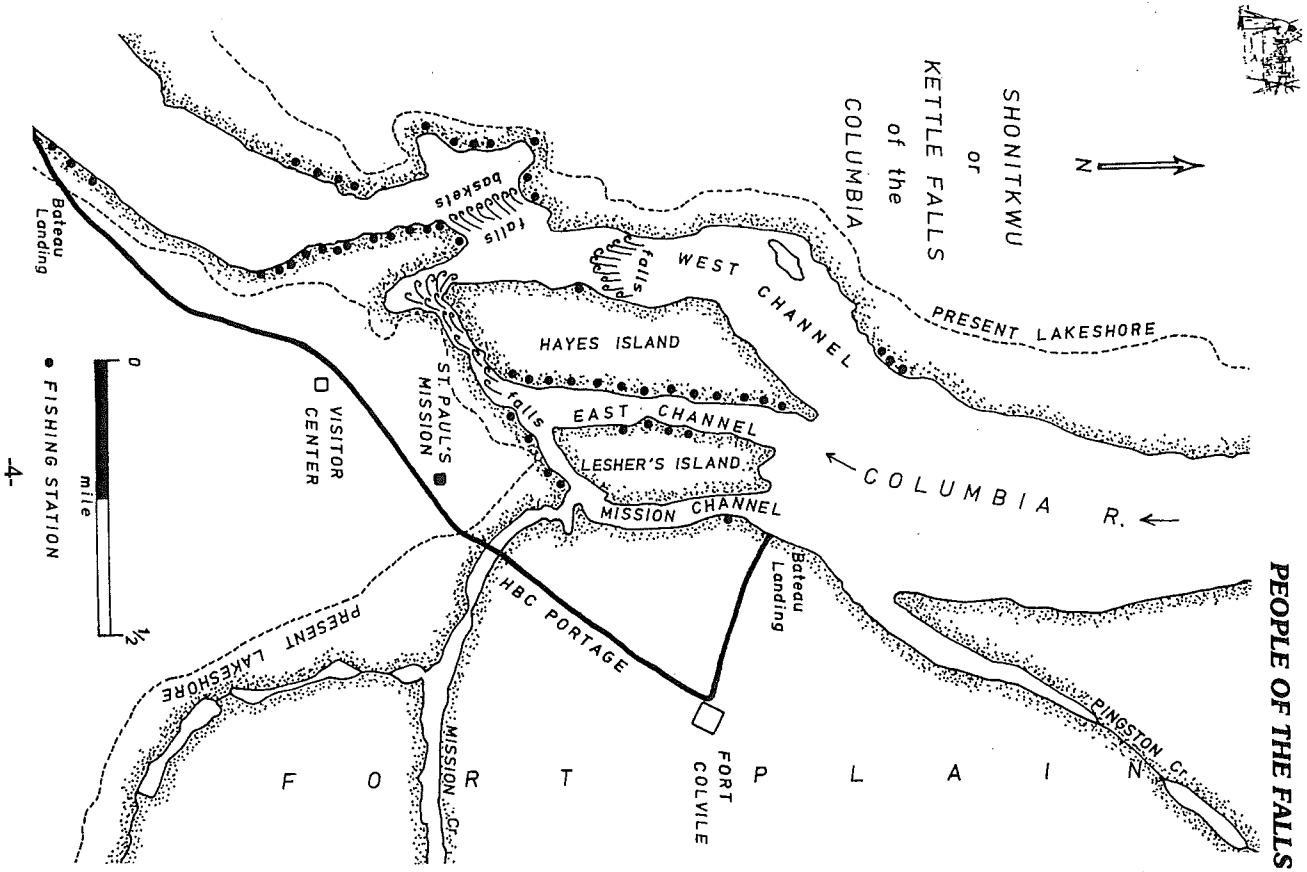
the valley. This most recent lake drained not too long before 11,000 years ago. The Columbia River then began cutting back down once more through all the lake deposits, gravel bars and fans to find its old grooves through the beds of quartzite. The cutting of the lake silts and sands still goes on: every now and then a fresh landslide along the lake makes a long, white scar which on close examination will show the varves, the annual layers of ice melt, from a time at the very beginning of the history of man in the Northwest.

The man-made Lake Roosevelt of today is a replica of glacial Lake Columbia as it was at a late stage of its draining, perhaps as it looked around 11,000 years ago. There probably were human witnesses of most of these final events of the Pleistocene ice ages, for there are clear signs of people 300 miles to the south in Idaho and Oregon from about 13,000 years ago. This means that a few people may well have wandered to the edge of the lake and looked in, perhaps wondering at the milky-green color of the water.

The falls are some 60 miles north of the Columbia Plateau in a deep trench, four to five thousand feet below the ridges of the Kettle and Selkirk ranges. Now most of the slopes are forested, but some are dry and grassy, especially on the southern sides, and more so as one travels south along the river toward the arid plateau. The earliest photographs, of 1860 or 1861, show some slopes around the falls with sparser timber than today; others look about the same. But by that date the Indian population around the falls had been in decline for several generations, permitting thicker stands of trees than before.

The country was probably a little more open, in the late eighteenth century, because of the Indian strategy of burning the woods periodically to improve the forage for deer and elk, and to enhance the wild root and berry crops. Early diaries, from the 1820's and 1830's, speak of the country opening up around Lower Arrow Lake, which is to the north. We also know that there are no tree stumps on Hayes Island in the middle of the falls which are older than 200 years. This sort of thing has been documented in other places of the Pacific Northwest where the forests have encroached under the domination of the whites. To the Indians it made better economic sense to have the land producing berries, hazelnuts, balsamroot, hyacinth, cannas and meat rather than wood fiber.

Immediately around the falls there was very little in the way of brush or trees. Accounts from the first half of the last century refer to both the dwarf and the larger Rocky Mountain juniper growing around the falls. The larger ones were claimed by the Hudson's Bay trader, Samuel Black, to be misshapen when he saw them as he portaged in 1825. Like the older twisted ponderosa pines on the St. Paul's Mission terrace of today, they probably betrayed the disturbance of children and animals in years gone by. Back when Kettle Falls flowed unimpeded, there were just too many people in need of firewood, branches, and fresh needles for an even stand of pines like the ones we see now. Our photographs show that this stand on the Mission terrace was starting in the 1850's and 1860's, a clear sign of human decline.



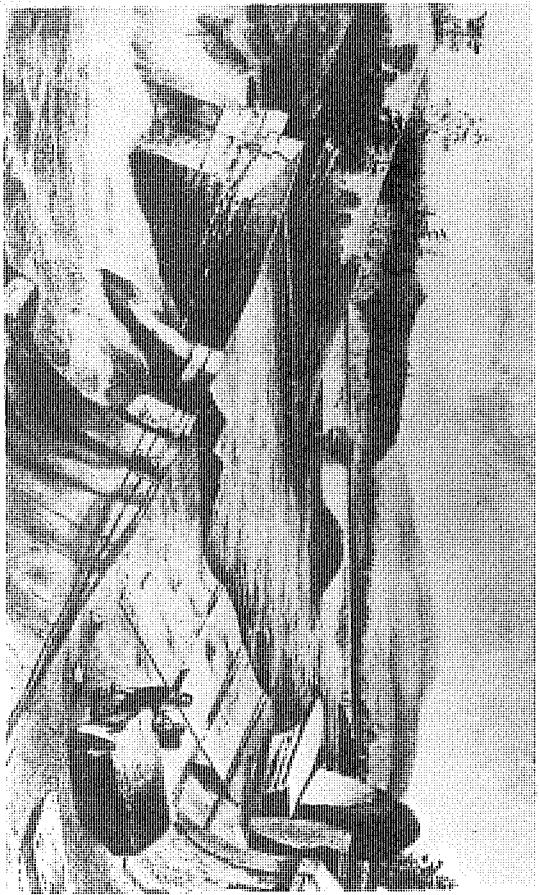
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**WHAT THEY SAW**

When Europeans started coming to the falls they found one of the largest villages on the river, crowded with well over a thousand Indians, if they happened by during the summer fishing season. At other times of the year there was surprisingly little action, for the local Shwayip, Kettle, or Colville Indians, as they were variously called, would have dismantled their houses, storing the planks, poles, and mats in pyramids of racks of various kinds. The people would be off to their root grounds, up in the mountains hunting, or weathering the deepest part of the winter elsewhere in some valley out of the wind.



The falls as they appeared to American explorers in 1853. An engraving based on a drawing by John Mix Stanley. Copied from Isaac Stevens' report of explorations for the northern railroad route to the Pacific.



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Some of this we must establish with the aid of the imagination, for travellers frequently repeated the same basic facts while failing to mention anything about what seemed to be mundane or commonplace. And only a very experienced observer would be able to comment on things that were absent, that perhaps ought, in one's opinion, to be there. A man of many years' experience in this part of the world could make astute comparisons and see the links between the people at Kettle Falls and elsewhere.

David Thompson of the North West Company of Montreal, the first literate explorer to reach Kettle Falls, was such a practised observer. He came in the early summer of 1811, probably then for the first time, and found a large village of well-constructed houses. It is rather clear from Thompson's writings that of all the Indian settlements he saw in a career in the fur trade that spanned two-thirds of the continent, this village impressed him the most for its size, its construction, and for the people who lived in it.

On Thompson's arrival the village chief presented him and his men with a roasted salmon and some roots even though food was short -- it was the very beginning of the salmon run. He found people present from several of the surrounding tribes, for the village was, in his words, "*a kind of general rendezvous for news, trade, and settling disputes, in which these villagers acted as arbitrators as they never join any war party.*" It was, in short, the center of civilization for this part of the river.

At first Thompson thought the people, even if extremely civilized in their behavior, nevertheless very superstitious about unclean things entering the river. He soon discovered that pollution temporarily stopped the salmon run. He had the observant mind of a scientist because he had received a thorough education in London. Yet he still wondered why so many fish were allowed to escape upriver at the beginning of the run, when the villagers were so evidently in need of food.

The men of the village were reported to be of "*common size with tolerable good features, straight, well limbed for activity, their eyes of a mild cast, black and inclining to a deep hazel; their hair long, lightly black, and not coarse.*" Thompson called these people, whom he plainly admired, the Ilthkoyape, and referred to the falls and the Kettle River by the same name. This term has long puzzled people, but the mystery can be solved. If one rolls Thompson's label around in the mouth for awhile, and then compares the results with the Colville name for themselves, it becomes obvious that Thompson was simply trying to render the tribal name. One can spell it about fifteen different ways; we have used Shwayyip, but Shwayseelp is perhaps better. Some versions are as exotic as Quardlpee -- or Ilthkoyape -- all attempts to reduce a Salish term for which the Roman alphabet is totally unsuited.

After Thompson's time the fur traders frequently portaged around the falls on the right or west bank because it was the shorter route. This was



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before the establishment of Fort Colville on the east side in 1825 made the portage on that bank preferable. It is why some of the other early descriptions, based on observations on the west bank, are curiously deficient, for the main village and fisheries were not on that side.

One Hudson's Bay Company fur trader, the young Samuel Black again, noted the large cemetery that overlooked the falls from a promontory on the west bank. It had upright stone markers supported by piles of smaller stones. The graves were covered with pent roofs of painted planks and mats held down by poles. Over some of the graves were woven blankets, both of English and of the local mountain sheep wool; copper pots and pails, shirts, and other gifts to the dead were seen hanging on poles and trees around the graves. The face of death was plain to be seen on the high points around the falls. Any person at any time of the day could raise his eyes a little and see these grave offerings fluttering or swinging in the breeze. A community of Salish included both the living and the dead, and Cemetery Power was one of the local guardian spirits. It is a view of the world for which we are now too inexperienced to understand.

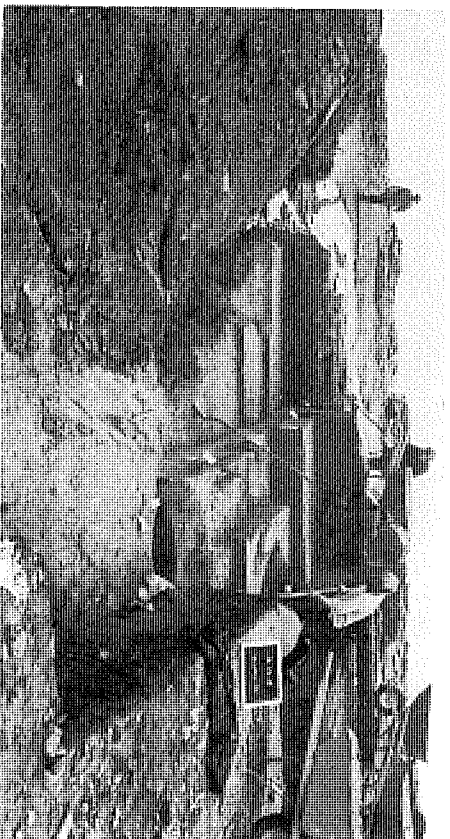
Today, along the unflooded ledges and terraces overlooking this part of the lake where the falls used to be, one finds the prickly pear cactus, small beds of the sky-blue camas, patches of nodding onion, yellowbell, and hyacinth, all favorite and important foods of the Salish. In the thickets of hazelnuts and chokecherries, the nuts and fruits fall off unwater. Below the surface of the lake the currents tear silently away at the vestiges of more than nine thousand years of human experience. It is almost as though no one had been there.



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### A RETURN TO THE PAST

The prehistory -- human history before written record -- and the early history of the Kettle Falls area are known in as much detail as anywhere in the Pacific Northwest. The rocky ledges, promontories, and islands around the falls have been a rich source of information for the past 15 years, studied when the reservoir is lowered during the spring. Archaeological excavations sponsored by the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service have been performed on about 15 sites in Lake Roosevelt. Over half of them, the most important ones, are located around the falls. It is the largest complex of related sites known in the region. These archaeological studies have in turn stimulated both historical research in archives and a renewed interest in the large fund of information that survives in the Indian community, in cultural studies, linguistics, botanical knowledge, Indian geography, and in folklore and religion.



Archaeological excavations conducted by the University of Idaho at the Ksunku site on the largest island in the falls.



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Sometime in the process of gathering the volumes of raw facts we might think that all the major pieces are in place -- until we try putting them together, or until we stumble upon a completely unforeseen account or cultural layer in the ground. We still have a very narrow view of the ancient and traditional cultures of the upper Columbia. So much of what we do know is based upon what was discarded rather than on what was treasured. Somehow we must make the leap from the small portion of the damaged and discarded to a reconstruction of the living traditions. We must constantly remind ourselves that the people of the past were always more intelligent, sensitive, richer, and more varied in their accomplishments than the fragments of stone, bone, seeds, word lists, stories, pictures, or hurried diary entries seem to suggest.



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### THE SHONITKWU (KETTLE FALLS) PERIOD OF EARLY PREHISTORY

We begin our journey up through human time at Kettle Falls with the earliest layers. The lowest ones are those that have been buried the longest, wherein the tools and refuse discarded or lost have been encased in damp darkness since a time when no one in the world knew of agriculture, domestic animals except the dog, or had yet experienced even the settled life of permanent villages. It was a time, over 9,000 years ago, when the tool kits and technology in use at the falls were very much like those found along a line stretching through Siberia to the Baltic, and even to the shores of the North Sea in Europe.

Beneath the deep sands of two of the narrow benches on the east side of Hayes Island in the falls are ancient gravel and boulder layers so old that the rocks were found cemented together into a conglomerate. These gravels lie on the quartzite bedrock or in some cases on slightly older gravels that lack human evidence. Within the gravels and boulders -- in some places underneath rocks weighing hundreds of pounds -- and down within them for almost eighteen inches, are thousands of man-made artifacts which represent the earliest known occupations at Kettle Falls. Over 2,500 artifacts that are unquestioned tools of many varieties have been excavated, making this one of the most productive "early man" locations in the Western Hemisphere. No single early cultural layer in the Americas has exhibited a density of tools quite like that found in the Shonitkwu site on the southeastern side of Hayes Island. This place is just west of the viewpoint near St. Paul's Mission.

These earliest artifacts at Kettle Falls date from about 8,800 to around 9,600 solar or calendar years ago. These dates are based on the comparison of both the layers and the artifacts found here with similar items found elsewhere in the Northwest that have been dated by assays of radiocarbon. More than forty radiocarbon assays or dates have been taken from charcoal secured in northern Lake Roosevelt, but the oldest is just 7,300 years in age, dating a later culture. Unfortunately no carbon has been found

A dart point of stone  
from the  
Shonitkwu period.





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with the Shonitkwu artifacts because the deposits were washed by very early floods, and also because carbon oxidizes in the ground if the conditions for its preservation are not favorable.

It is certain that the Shonitkwu people were fishing on the banks of Hayes Island out in the middle of the falls, catching small salmon, perhaps the sockeye variety, that ran to four or five pounds in weight. There is little doubt that these fish were anadromous or migratory, that is ones that came in from the ocean to spawn. The remains of larger fish, however, have not been found, which contrasts very much with the last 4,500 years whence there is much evidence of the larger salmon known recently.

To catch their fish the Shonitkwu people used some kind of net, one that needed heavy stone weights, which have been recovered in the excavations. The fishing spot they favored most was at the top of the cataracts of the East Channel, after the fish had ascended both the lower falls and the cataracts. The fish at that point were in about the most exhausted state possible, and therefore in the condition easiest to catch. Harpoons were probably used, too; fragments of them have been found but it is difficult to decide whether they were meant for fish.



A harpoon of bone from the Shonitkwu period



A net gauge of polished slate from the Shonitkwu period.

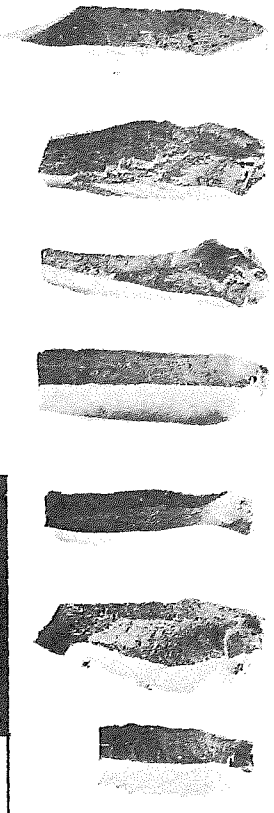


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The people of the Shonitkwu period also hunted. The bones found have been mainly of muskrat, beaver, grizzly, turtles and birds such as the Western Grebe which likes reedy marshes. Fragments of turtle shell occur in large numbers and they are much thicker than those of the local painted turtle of today. There were also a number of teeth which may be from dogs, or wolves, or coyotes -- the distinction cannot be made. Only one deer bone has been found, and nothing of any other animal of that kind. These bones, teeth and turtle shells tell us plainly that the people were staying at the falls in summer, but that the environment around Kettle Falls was wetter than today. The deposits containing the artifacts say as much.

We do not know if the grizzlies were killed on the island, nor do we have direct evidence of how the people got themselves out there. That it was then an island there can be no doubt for several reasons. This means that the Shonitkwu people made water craft that were probably very maneuverable since heavy rafts would be difficult to propel fast enough for them to leave the island with safety. Then, as now, a mistake would almost certainly have resulted in going either over the main falls or down through the east cataract, which would have been just as fatal. The heavy net weights, which still retain the vegetal stains of their lashings, suggest deep and fast water in the smaller of the two channels that bracket the island. Very light rafts, skin boats, even dugouts or bark boats are all possibilities. Since it has been concluded that boats were in use on the Northwest Coast at this time, it no longer requires a leap of faith to think about Shonitkwu period navigation.

Most archaeologists and anthropologists believe that the New World was populated by immigrants from eastern Asia. The archaeological proofs of this proposition have not, however, been abundant. The best one we have is well-represented at Kettle Falls: it is the microblade.



Seven stone microblades of the Shonitkwu period.





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This is a small tool, a precisely made siver of stone, struck from a well-prepared core or block in a series of such sivers or blades. Microblades are so distinctive that they are seldom confused with anything else. They are difficult enough to make that it is quite unlikely that they have been often reinvented.



The cores from which they are struck exist in several styles; when cores of the same style are found in two different places there is a strong presumption of cultural relationship. Microblades that are of roughly the same age and which are more or less continuous in geographical occurrence are almost always presumed to be culturally related. When well made items of this class were discovered at the very bottom of the Shonitkwu gravels, we knew we had what has proven so far to be the southeastern-most end of the chain linking the people of the Old and the New World. A chain of virtually identical microblades and cores provided this link to others equally or more ancient in British Columbia, Alaska, Siberia, and Europe.

A microblade core from which the blades were struck, Shonitkwu period.

Shonitkwu microblades have been found with and below projectile points of styles dated elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest in excess of 10,000 years. Not only is this meaning clear but one can also conclude that these early people were skillful and sophisticated in their technology.

Around 8,800 solar years ago (about 8,400 radiocarbon years ago) the seemingly rich and abundantly watered world of the Shonitkwu people came to an end. There was without doubt a change in climate, an increasing dryness, and it seems very likely that the annual runs of migrating fish were damaged. Fewer people came to Kettle Falls and those few were less skillful in their tool manufacture. It was an ecological crisis of the first magnitude, known elsewhere in the western part of North America as well. The Shonitkwu had ended and large-scale human interest in the falls was not to revive for several thousands of years.



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### THE PERIOD OF THE SLAWNTHEUS (COLVILLE RIVER)

From 8,800 years ago to about the time of the volcanic ash fall from Mount Mazama (Crater Lake) in Oregon some 7,300 solar years ago, the record from the sites around Kettle Falls is unclear and sparse at best. It is evident that some people were visiting the falls in small groups, barely keeping body and soul together. There is not much more we can say -- the world does not love the sight of poverty. By the time of around 7,000 years ago there is evidence of small camps scattered along the upper Columbia, often on high benches far above the river as if occupied by people who were not completely sure of their place in the world.

These were what we have called the Slawntheus people -- or peoples, for the cultural materials are by no means of a piece. They take their name from a small archaeological site five miles to the south, near the Colville River. The site is named in turn after one form of the Colville or Shwayip term for the Colville River. (The nomenclature of places, individuals, and tribes in the Kettle Falls area is one of rich confusion, the most thorough mix of names and languages of any place on the river.) It is appropriate that this name be used to identify a cultural period and collection of people who eluded definition during more than a decade of research.

The clues came together suddenly in 1978, after a series of fortunate strikes and long-sought carbon samples came in quick succession -- in places least expected. The reason was basic to the understanding of these people: little of their work had been seen before because they were so different in their living habits. A most fundamental difference was one already mentioned; they did not have a strong affinity for the falls, probably because salmon were not that big of a factor in their existence.

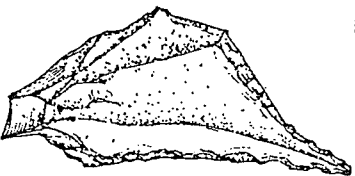
The Slawntheus people lived in small groups, probably of the size and character of those now called minimal bands; these are now understood to be the smallest viable units of human social and economic organization, a world-wide feature of human history. This sort of band numbers generally between 25 and 50 persons. With the Slawntheus period one is compelled to think of numbers at the lower end of the scale. Individual nuclear families might also have camped on some of the sites from time to time,



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but not regularly; for the nuclear family is an economic unit more of recent history when people have been a little less dependent on their relatives.

These people of the Slawntehus made little use of quarried stone for making their artifacts; nearly all of their stone tools were fashioned from river cobbles gathered and broken apart for the purpose at each camping place. This is in considerable contrast to other periods of time on the upper Columbia. It is, comparatively speaking, an unambitious way of going about the business of living, for it shows a willingness to be satisfied with almost anything within reach. In the realm of stone technology it means that the people did not care too much how their tools looked, or whether they would keep a sharp edge, and so on.



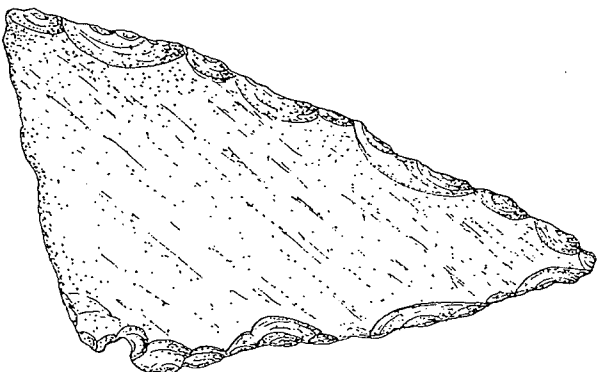
A perforator of stone from the Slawntehus period.

But we do not want to carry this too far, for one site from this period has produced a few microblades, meaning that there is a complexity that we do not understand.

This was a period of scarcity, without much doubt, but fishing was still practised, and small salmon or trout were caught, and sometimes with nets. About 20 miles upstream from Kettle Falls the floor deposits of a small hut were recently found and dated to about 7,000 years ago. Included in the finds were a number of small fish bones, a couple of net weights made of notched cobbles, and a great many very distinctive grinding stones, over a dozen, as if everyone living there had used his own. Charred fragments of the leaf tips of the western red cedar were discovered in the floor, perhaps showing what the roof had been composed of, or if not that, then perhaps the bedding. It was all very small-scale: the hut was evidently irregular in shape, with a bare 14 square meters of floor, not enough for a minimal band. Probably there were other huts nearby.



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A knife made from a slab of quartzite, from the Slawntehus period.

Toward the end of the Slawntehus, as in the beginning, there seems to be a gap in the evidence, almost as if no one was around. Perhaps this is because the right places have not been looked at yet. We can be sure, though, that the level of activity at Kettle Falls was still low.



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### THE KSUNKU (ISLAND) PERIOD

Around 4,800 years ago a new and rather distinctive culture appeared on the scene, hesitant in numbers at first, and then very strong. These Ksunku people, most noticeable on Hayes Island -- called Ksunku in the Salish tongue -- had much vigor and economic efficiency, yet their artifacts illustrate a fascinating persistence of old forms, as if Kettle Falls was a strong point of cultural conservatives. These new people made great use of quarried stone, which they brought to the island in large quantities. They also quarried large amounts of the local quartzite. There was trade in stone as well, at least in obsidian (volcanic glass) from several sources, including central Oregon. Salmon were caught in vast numbers, but apparently not with nets; the fish were large, like the big Chinooks admired at the falls in historic times.

The Ksunku people lived and ate off an environment that was like our own in some other respects. They consumed large quantities of hyacinth bulbs, a practice betrayed by the corn nets that once surrounded the bulbs or corms. Without question these curious pieces of evidence have survived for more than 4,000 years, one of the more spectacular survivals of botanical evidence known. Unfortunately, the same soil acids that preserved these nets also destroyed some of the bones and bone tools.



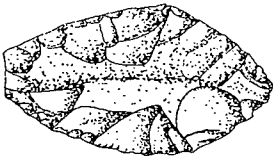
A right perforator of stone from the Ksunku period.

These energetic inhabitants of the northern end of the island were very active with their tool-making, fishing, plant foraging, and hunting of elk,



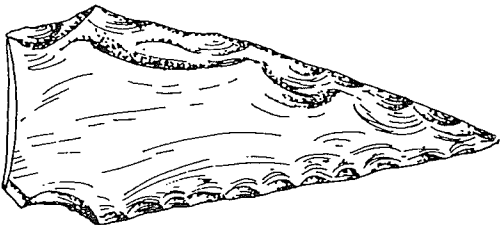
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beaver, bear, and porcupine. They also caught large numbers of the painted turtles which still swim in the nearby streams and lakes. More than anyone else at Kettle Falls they used pigments and paint, to judge by the large quantities of yellow, red and purple pigments they left behind. Since most of this paint was probably applied to their bodies, they must have been a brightly-colored people. This may have been their principal aesthetic expression, for there is otherwise not a sign of any art or decoration. Of the more than 2,000 Ksunku tools recovered, not one shows very much finesse in manufacture, but they are nevertheless all very sturdy and functional. They betray physical strength. One is tempted to think of the Ksunku people as economically efficient but artistically pedestrian, much like we are today.



A dart point of the Ksunku period.

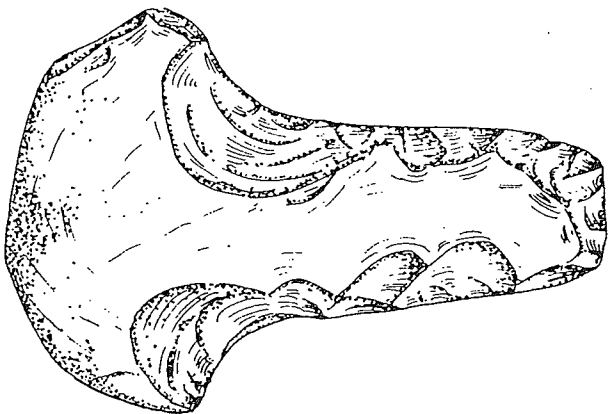
There are so far not many good parallels to the Ksunku culture known in the Pacific Northwest. Hints have been seen near Lake Okanagan and in the Arrow Lakes, and much farther north on the Skeena River in British Columbia and in the Northwest Territories of Canada. Even around Kettle Falls only traces have been found in places other than Hayes Island. They seem to have been cut off from cultural developments to the south and east despite the firm evidence of their trading contacts. As with the Shonitkwu period, Kettle Falls seems to have been pretty much the southern limit of a culture centered to the north.



A spear point of the Ksunku period.



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A pebble tool of unknown function from the Ksunku period.

The end of the Ksunku has been a puzzle. When first discovered, it appeared that the Ksunku people had been suddenly replaced by others with southern affinities. But some doubt was thrown on this hypothesis when what seemed to be a handful of Ksunku artifacts were excavated in 1978, next to a hearth with charcoal that dated to about 1,500 B.C. Yet another excavation showed that massive floods had struck the Ksunku deposits on the island some time after 2,000 B.C., with, however, a lingering manifestation following the floods. The best conclusion now seems to be that massive flooding did serious damage to the Ksunku way of life, and that it may have lingered on in a feeble way for some time before its total disappearance.



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### THE TIME OF THE SKITAK (CROSSING)

The period of flooding we have mentioned was on a grander scale than normal. It started not very long after 4,130 years ago, destroying much of the evidence of earlier human occupations all along the Columbia River, and even along the Clearwater of Idaho and the lower Snake. The archaeological evidence from Kettle Falls shows that there was a long series of these floods, succeeding each other rather closely, very severe at first and then becoming more gentle. Well before 3,200 years ago (1,200 B.C.) this phase was over. There is evidence that the Columbia waters even swept over most of the Takumakst or fishery peninsula which projects toward the lower falls from the eastern end of the two bridges at Kettle Falls. This rocky peninsula is visible today only during the spring drawdown of the reservoir, but when the waters are drawn low it becomes manifest that any flood that crested over that ridge must have been very great indeed.

Not only did this flooding adversely affect the Ksunku culture, it probably also harmed the salmon runs because of the large amounts of sediment which came down the river, sediment that would have fouled the spawning beds. The impact on the salmon which we infer was undoubtedly the chief reason for the problems the people evidently faced.

There is little evidence of human occupation (except in a very few places) on the upper Columbia between 2,000 and 1,200 B.C. Around the latter date, however, clear signs of reoccupation appear from the Nespelem area all the way up into the Arrow Lakes, where small villages have been found. Small pit-house villages were now used in the winter, the first ones known for the upper Columbia. It seems to be more than a mere coincidence that 1,300 B.C. has been identified as a climatic boundary by Washington State University pollen authority Richard Mack and his colleagues, based on cores extracted from bogs not too far from Kettle Falls. The change they have measured -- from counts of several kinds of pollen layered in the peat -- is one from a warmer to a cooler climate.

Both the more or less blank period of flooding and the time of repopulation are called the Skitak or Crossing because it is at this point that one passes



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from the older cultural traditions, which ended after the Ksunku, to the newer ones that carried into our own times. Such a major break is evident in the Great Plains to the east of the Rocky Mountains though it is not quite so obvious in southern portions of the Pacific Northwest where it looks as if the break may have occurred earlier. Undoubtedly we have simplified things, and the more we work on this interesting problem the more complicated the picture will become. It would be safe to observe that with human cultural history simple formulas weather badly.

A dart point of the Skitak.



The artifacts that were left behind around 1,200 B. C., at and near Kettle Falls show much resemblance to those of people to the south on the Plateau. Trade with that area is evident in the types of stone used for many artifacts. A few microblades have also come to light, but these are a northern artifact which do not occur beyond fifty miles to the south.

From these clues, still slender, we conclude that the salmon runs had become re-established as far north as the Arrow Lakes by 1,400 B. C., and that the people who first took advantage of the situation had links with the south. In other words, they were probably not the Salish since a linguistic hypothesis of wide currency holds that the Salish were immigrants from the north or northwest, from southwestern British Columbia, and that they moved into northern Washington anywhere from 2,000 to 4,000 years ago. Because Kettle Falls has been so central an attraction through time, it is certain that any significant movement of people into or through the area ought to show itself in the archaeological record. Such evidence of newcomers can be seen a little later in time.

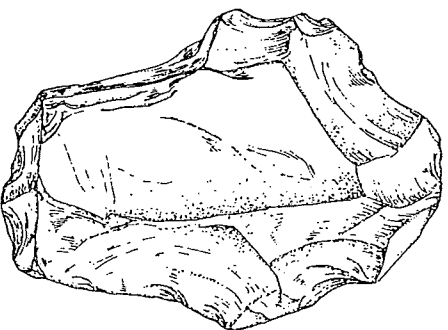
The people of the later Skitak knew how to catch fish at the Takumakst fishery next to the lower falls; they seem to have been the first to show much interest in what became the most intensively used site on the Columbia River. This is one of the greatest puzzles about the fishing at Kettle Falls. While there is a long and very impressive record of human activity and fishing on Hayes Island out in the middle of the upper reaches of the falls, the Takumakst peninsula shows nothing earlier than the Skitak occupation, except for traces of the earlier Ksunku period. The flooding already mentioned may have swept much of the evidence away, but a couple of places protected from such erosion have been examined, with negative results. The Skitak fished at Takumakst, but not in a grand way -- that was to come.



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### THE PERIOD OF THE TAKUMAKST (FISHERY PENINSULA)

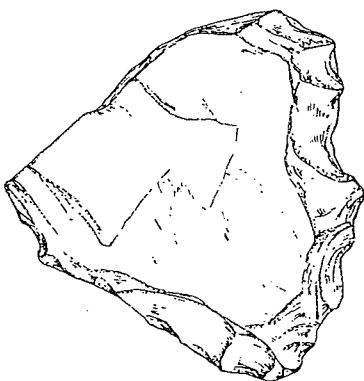
The end of the Skitak is not yet clear, but somewhere around 600 B. C. the action at Kettle Falls, especially at the Takumakst site next to the lower falls, began to increase dramatically. That date is the provisional beginning of the Takumakst period. Coinciding with the increase in activity, measured by the increased density of artifacts, was a clear-cut shift in tool styles and in the types of stone used. The local quartzite bedrock once again began to be the favored article, betraying a more prolonged stay or use of the falls each fishing season. The artifacts now became crude in workmanship and they stayed that way for centuries. One reason is that the more easily worked cherts and chalcodomes of the south were either unwanted or difficult to obtain, and the favored stone for small artifacts was now argillite (a metamorphosed silt or clay) showing that a people of northern habits were on the scene. The temptation to identify the Takumakst with incoming Salish is overwhelming, and it is one of the rare cases in Pacific Northwest archaeology where one risks making the connection between tools and a language, usually a rash enterprise.



A "Takumakst chopper"  
of Kettle Falls quartzite.



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A toothed scraper of Kettle Falls quartzite, Takumakst period.

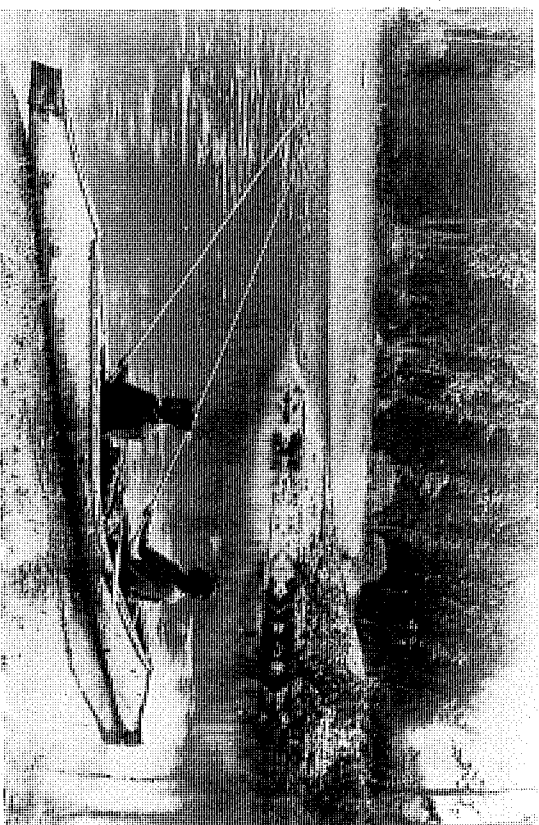
Coincident with these developments was the substantial new use made of Hayes Island as a storage site for underground food caches. We do not know whether these were caches of salmon caught on the island or if they also included those caught and cured on the Takumakst peninsula. (It was possible to make the crossing in canoes.) At any rate, this first substantial display of food storage, and the first appearance of large cooking ovens, spelled the beginning of a new way of life, one with much food preservation, greater harvests by larger numbers of people, more food in the wintertime, more stability. The record of the Takumakst or Fishery site indicates that this period, running from about 600 B.C. to around A.D. 300, saw the first substantial Salish-speaking population at the falls as part of a recurring cycle repeated from year to year. Perhaps it also witnessed the first intensive use of the J-shaped fishing traps in the falls, and conceivably even the development of an institution like that of the nineteenth-century Salmon Chief who regulated the fishing, the installation of the traps, and distribution of the catch.



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### A TIME NAMED AFTER THE SINAJKST OR LAKES TRIBE

There is no perceived break between the soil deposits containing the Takumakst culture and those holding the succeeding Sinajkst, named after the Lakes Tribe which regularly shared in the summer fishing at Kettle Falls in the recent past. There is, however, a dramatic change in the quality and type of artifacts, and it happened rather abruptly. Why, we do not know. The new period ushered in a time of considerable variety and vitality, if not confusion. Certainly it has been confusing to archaeologists.



A "sturgeon-nosed" bark canoe of the type used at Kettle Falls, particularly by the Lakes or Sinajkst, the Flatbow Kutenai, and the Kalispel. Courtesy of the Eastern Washington State Historical Society.



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For the first time one can see slight differences between contemporary artifact collections from excavations at different sites around the falls. It is as if tribes were coming now from far enough away to be the possessors of unique styles or ways of making things. It appears each site in the cluster around these cascades was inhabited principally by just one band or tribe year after year.

After A.D. 300, the isolation of the falls began to give way as more and more exotic stone material arrived, perhaps brought some of the time by people from far away. Stone, of course, is what we mainly see in archaeological excavations along the Columbia, so we must extrapolate to say that other things made of perishable materials were probably coming to the falls as well. By about A.D. 850, Kettle Falls had become the trading place that it still remained when David Thompson saw it nearly a thousand years later.

We cannot yet clearly perceive the fluctuations of prosperity or of arrivals and departures in much detail, and it is uncommonly difficult to separate the events of one century from another in the closely packed layers of black midden in the main village sites of this time period. One looks for lucky breaks, discrete slices from time preserved here and there by rapid coverings of soil.



A stone pestle of the Sinaikst period.



A bone arming point for a fishing harpoon, Sinaikst period.

According to the pollen studies of Richard Mack, the Sinaikst period seems to have been both warmer and wetter than the preceding Takumakst, which could account for the higher population density perceived around the fishery. But unlike the Takumakst, which is represented by, to our knowledge, heavy deposits of tools only at Kettle Falls itself, the Sinaikst is known from significant cultural deposits at many places along the upper Columbia -- in some instances places that were ignored by other people. Pit-

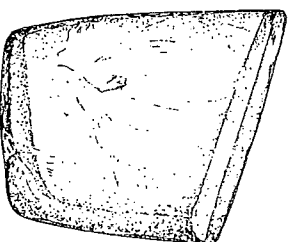


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house villages are more common from this period of time than any other by far throughout the Columbia drainage system. This invites the supposition that the Sinaikst period, running from A.D. 300 to 1400, was the best of times for the Indian people, not only at Kettle Falls but elsewhere as well in the Pacific Northwest. On the upper Columbia the Indian population was then apparently higher than any time before or since, life was economically the most stable, though long-distance trade was destined to increase even more later on.



A dart point of the Sinaikst.



A nephrite adze, Sinaikst period.

During the Sinaikst, two winter villages of pit-houses were established on Hayes Island. That, plus the scarcity of the bones of game animals, points to an unprecedented reliance upon fish for winter food. The remains of plant foods: hazelnuts, pine nuts, chokecherry pits, service berry seeds, hyacinth corn nets, shriveled camas bulbs, and many so far unidentified seeds are common in the Sinaikst deposits, including the floors of the pit-houses.



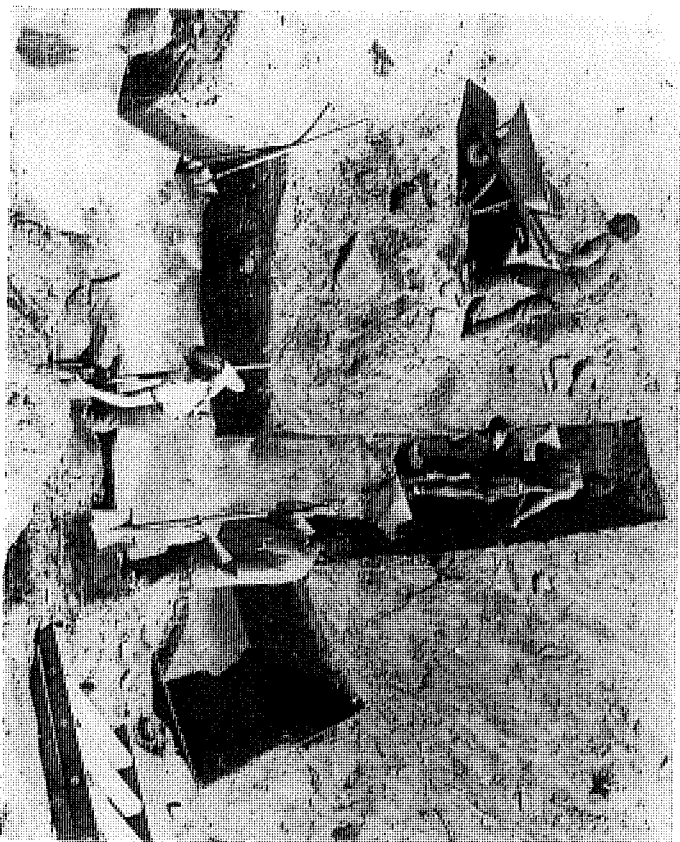


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The houses ranged in depth between three and seven feet. Some had an interior bench that formed a ring around the lower central floor with the fire. Fragments of bark, rafters and posts have been found, and grass seeds in the floors suggest the interior comforts. Undoubtedly the houses were crowded with mats, baskets, wooden mortars and perhaps bowls, birch-bark buckets, drying racks, tools, weapons, hammocks for infants, and all manner of bundles, furs, and other clothing hanging from the ceiling.



A slate pendant of the Sinaikst.

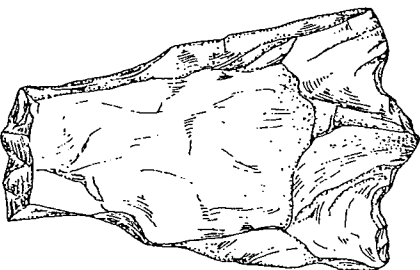


Excavating a pit-house of the Sinaikst period.



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Some of the houses, the deeper ones especially, were entered through the smokeholes at the top of the roofs, so there would have also been a ladder or notched log descending into the middle of the room. During winter feasts food was likely lowered to the throng in water-tight baskets suspended by ropes. Around each Sinaikst period house on Hayes Island were two or three storage cysts built like miniature pit-houses. There is some evidence of cooking outside of the houses.



Toothed scraper of the Sinaikst.

Ornaments in the form of stone and bone beads became abundant for the first time in the Sinaikst period suggesting a certain decline in the desperation of daily life. Cemeteries probably existed earlier, but by the time of the Sinaikst they were certainly a common feature of life at Kettle Falls. Many of the stone and bone artifacts from this time are among the most attractive and carefully made that have been found at Kettle Falls.

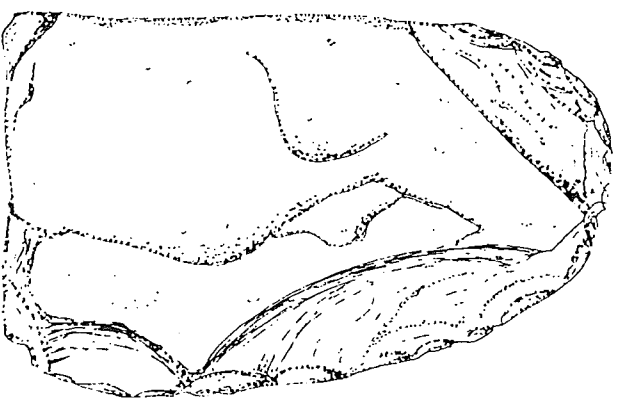


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**THE FINAL PREHISTORIC PERIOD:  
THE SHWAYIP (COLVILLE)**

Very close to A. D. 1400, there were massive fires that burned at the most commanding of the habitable locations out near the tip of the Takumakst peninsula, overlooking the most important fishing stations. The meaning of these fires, a series of them that left a bed of ash a few inches deep over an area the size of a tennis court, is not known. This burning, which was not necessarily something violent, more or less coincided with the last major culture change at Kettle Falls before the coming of the Europeans.

The Shwayip period is named after the Colvilles who dominated the falls at the coming of the whites. It is simply their name for themselves. Its meaning or etymology is uncertain, which indicates a certain antiquity. The period of time so named, lasting for about 400 years, until A. D. 1800, was one in which there was some diminution in population at the falls, perhaps elsewhere also. Part way through the period, around A. D. 1600, there was an apparent drop in the numbers of people, registered in several sites by a decrease in the tool densities. This was followed by a partial recovery in some but not all places. There is no sure way at present to account for this, except to suppose that some exotic epidemic



A knife made from a thin slab of Kettle Falls quartzite, Shwayip period.



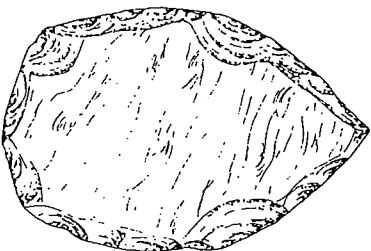
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may have come this way, or that the food supply had become more irregular. Evidence from the early nineteenth century informs us that the salmon runs were not as regular as people would have liked, revealing natural fluctuations that might be attested indirectly in the archaeological record.

The Shwayyip was also an era of considerable cultural uniformity between the sites around Kettle Falls, as if the various tribes using the fisheries in the preceding Sinakst had, by continued contact with each other, lost some of their distinctive characteristics -- at least in stone tools which are, unfortunately, aspects of human culture very insensitive to change.



A typical arrow point  
of the Shwayyip period.



Miniature knife of the Shwayyip period, quartzite.

The continued increase in long-distance trade would have also conducted to cultural uniformity. More obsidian arrived at Kettle Falls during the Shwayyip than ever before, much of it again from Oregon and southern Idaho, but some also now from British Columbia and Wyoming. This has been determined by measuring trace elements through X-Ray spectrometry, the work of Lee Sappington. The trade, and presumably the mental horizons, were continuing the broadening process begun earlier. The arrival of the horse in the middle of the eighteenth century no doubt had something to do



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with this, especially since the obsidian seems to be concentrated in the deposits that date from after about A.D. 1700.

People continued to live in pit-house villages for part of the year during most of the Shwayyip period, but towards the end these more substantial dwellings went out of style. Most scholars assume that the mobility possible with horses had much to do with this, but one must be cautious since the Colvilles did not have many horses until the 1830's. The Sinakst or Lakes, who also left off living in winter pit-houses at around the same time, had even fewer horses in their steep country to the north. Swift changes in life were now beginning to crowd upon the Colvilles and Lakes; soon change would come too fast.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, just when the boisterous whites on the eastern side of the continent were making themselves politically independent and starting their rapid rise in material prosperity and power, the Indians who had been living on the western part of the continent for millennia began a rapid slide in numbers, prosperity, and self-confidence. Soon people would come around to tell the Salish that they had miscalculated everything, that to be truly happy they must change their religion, their food, their houses and clothing, and, furthermore, to avoid breaking the law they ought to give away most of their land and forget about fishing at Kettle Falls.



## THE FISHERY

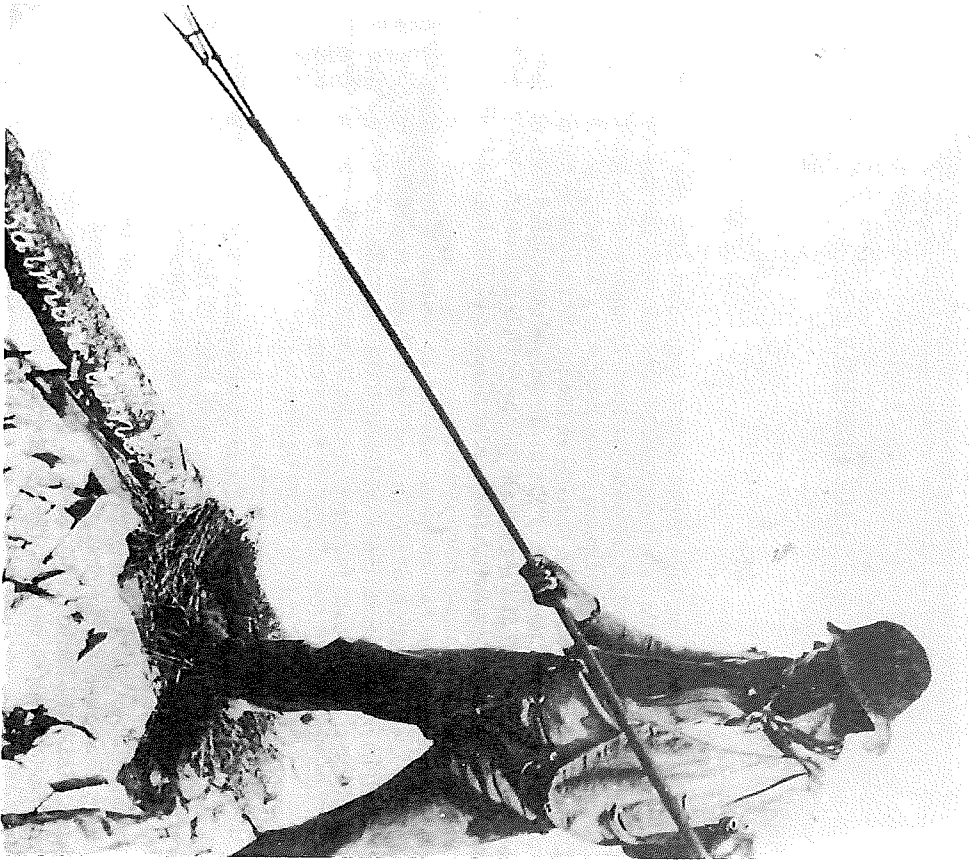
The fishing at the falls began in late June, just after the First Salmon dances, which at Kettle Falls happened to coincide with the summer solstice. At the very beginning of the season just one man speared fish, and the first of the catch was boiled with heated rocks in a natural "kettle" in the bedrock. Everyone present received a morsel, and there were probably other elements of ritual that are no longer known. Some Indians today believe that the Salmon Chief stood at the edge of the lower falls and invited the salmon to ascend by using his Power. After a large number of fish had been allowed to pass upstream more spearman joined in.

When the river had subsided enough to permit it, the Salmon Chief directed the installation of the first of the J-shaped baskets. In leaping the lower falls through its several slots through the rock, the fish would strike the top of the "J" and then fall back into the trough below. Some baskets were made so that the bottom sloped down to one side, away from the rushing water. The sizes and shapes of the baskets varied according to the character and width of slots.

Spearing was accomplished from wooden platforms or stages wedged in to the rocks, or from rock ledges on both sides of the river. Many fish were strong enough to yank the unwary fisherman into the foam when struck with the spear, or when gaffed. To prevent such mishaps, and also to keep the fish from twisting themselves off, the spear-heads and gaff hooks had detachable heads connected to the shafts by strong cords of hemp. It was dangerous work. Since the locations for baskets and platforms were very limited for the number of people needing fish, strict controls on fishing and distribution were necessary, and this is where the role of the Salmon Chief was especially important. It also meant that a strong communal psychology prevailed, so different from many other fisheries in the Pacific Northwest where families had complete ownership of fishing stations.



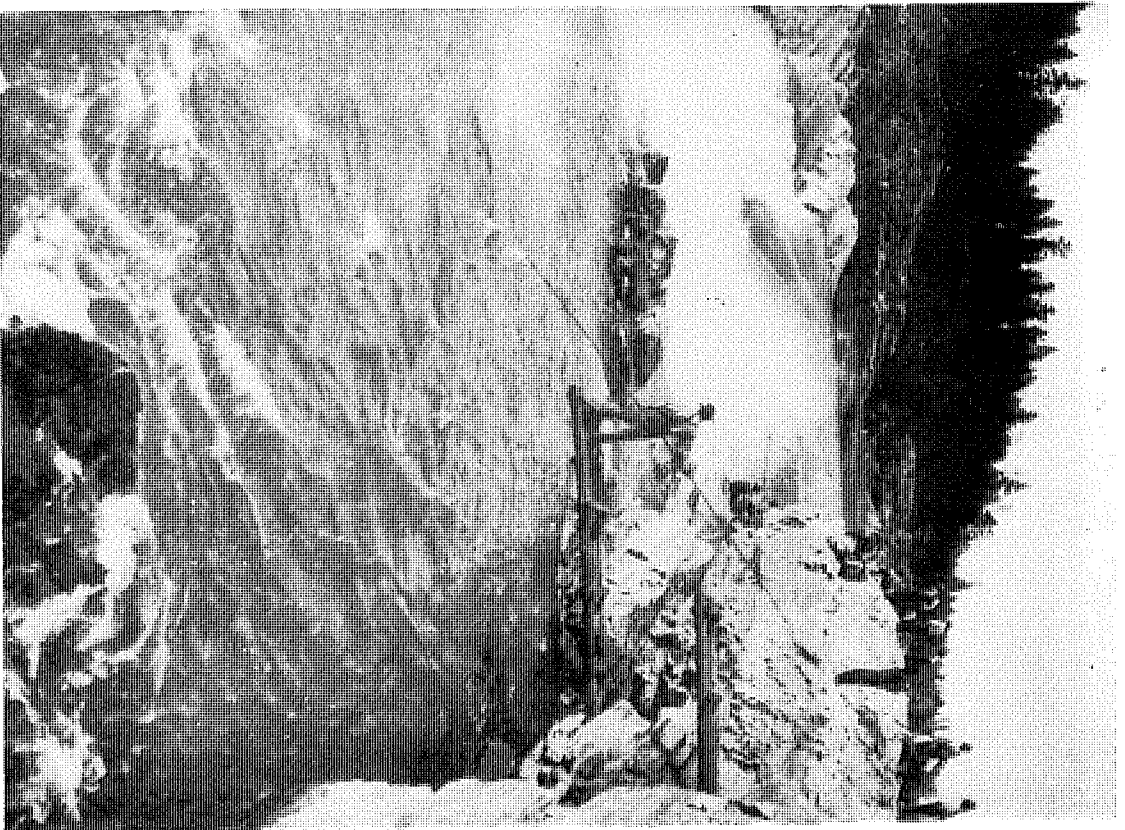
**PEOPLE OF THE FALLS**



Bulldog Kelly, a Colville, with his fishing spear.  
Courtesy of Mrs. Marvel Boyd.



**PEOPLE OF THE FALLS**

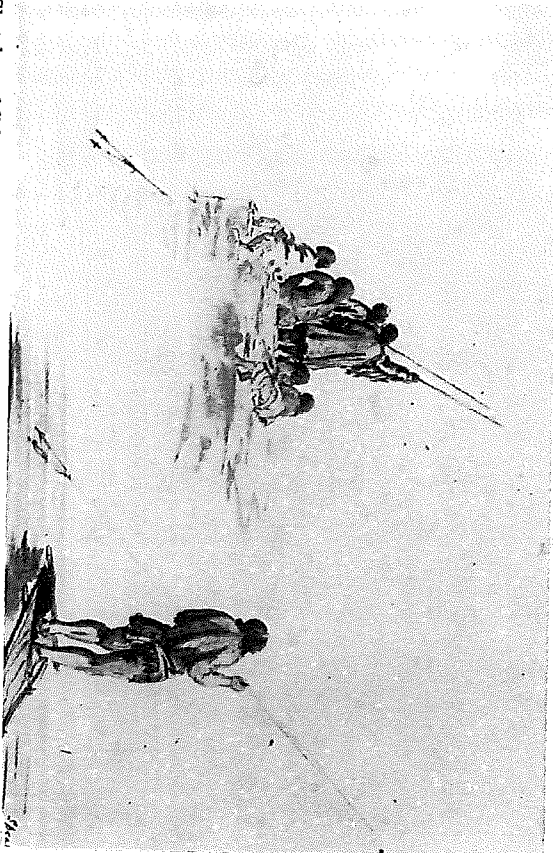


Spearing salmon near the center of the lower falls. Courtesy of Eastern Washington State  
Historical Society.



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As the level of the water fell through the summer, more baskets were put in place until at least half a dozen were in use. By August and September it would be necessary to use sites out toward the center of the falls, which meant an approach to some of them by canoe, navigating the swift foam between the upper and lower falls. As the men approached the islands of rock in the lower falls they would paddle in reverse to maintain steerage.



Sketches of fish spearing at Kettle Falls by Paul Kane in 1847. Courtesy of the Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas.

One can never match the force of description left to us by eyewitnesses. The great Jesuit Missionary, Pierre Jean DeSmet, reported what he saw in the 1840's, in the following words:

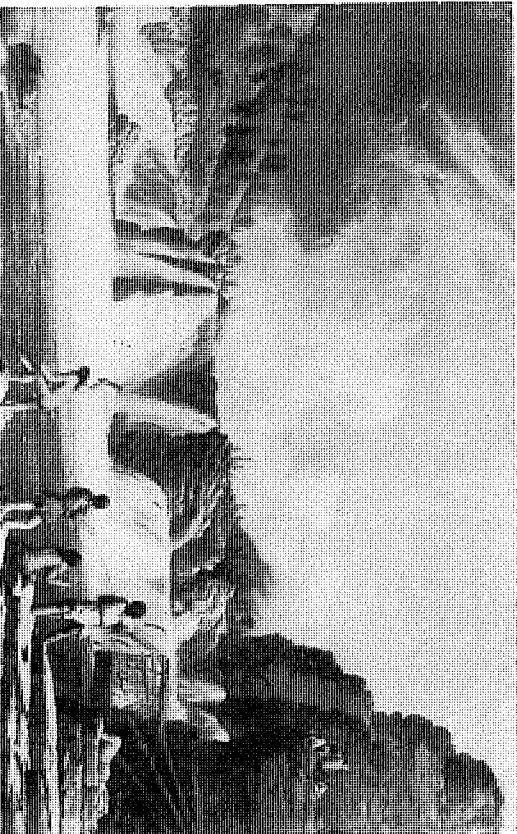
*The basket is made of willow, from fifteen to twenty feet long, five or six wide, and about four feet deep, with a high back upon one side, which is designed to rise above the surface of the water. A stick of timber is firmly anchored in the rocks below the falls, extending out over the stream twenty or thirty feet. To this the basket is suspended, and so far submerged as to leave the back just above the water upstream, while the opposite side is several inches below the surface of the water, and downstream. The ascending salmon rise up the side of the basket and spring into it, where they are held, their passage up being arrested by the high back; and as they never*

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*turn their heads down the current they are retained securely. After the basket in this manner is well filled, a man descends into it and hands out the fish. Two hundred salmon, weighing from six to forty pounds each, have been caught in this way in a few hours. They are also speared in great numbers. It was a common occurrence . . . to take three thousand salmon in a day, since there was no limit to their numbers, and a whole band of Indians were engaged in the work. The fish were divided equally among the women each day, the number of females in each family forming the basis of distribution.*



The lower falls, as painted by Paul Kane in oils after his visit of 1847. Three J-shaped basket traps are visible. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.

The painter Paul Kane's observation, made in August of 1847, is slightly different, as one would expect:

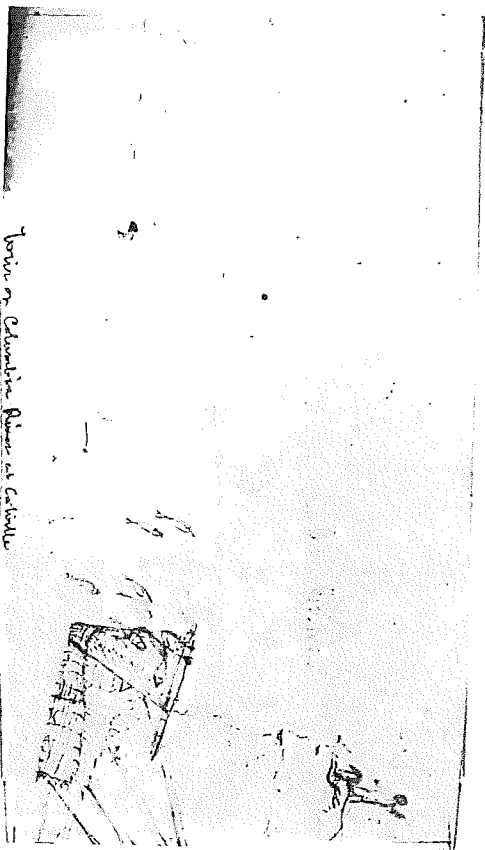
*No one is allowed to catch fish without the permission of See-Pays [the Salmon Chief]. His large fishing basket or trap is put down a month before anyone is allowed to fish for themselves. This basket is constructed of stout willow wands woven together, and supported by stout sticks of timber, and is so placed that the salmon, in leaping up the falls strike against a stick placed at the top, and are*

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thrown back into the confined space at the bottom of the trap, which is too narrow to allow them to attempt another jump. The salmon commence their ascent about the 15th of July, and continue to arrive in almost incredible numbers for nearly two months; in fact, there is one continuous body of them, more resembling a flock of birds than anything else in their extraordinary leap up the falls, beginning at sunrise and ceasing at the approach of night. The chief told me that he had taken as many as 1,700 salmon, weighing on an average 30 lbs. each, in the course of one day. Probably the daily average taken in the chief's basket is about 400. The chief distributes the fish thus taken during the season amongst his people, everyone, even to the smallest child, getting an equal share.



A sketch by Paul Kane, probably one of those used to paint the preceding picture. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.

Kane's scrutiny, made over many days, is certainly very trustworthy, but it must be tempered with the knowledge that he did not witness the first several weeks of the fishing season.

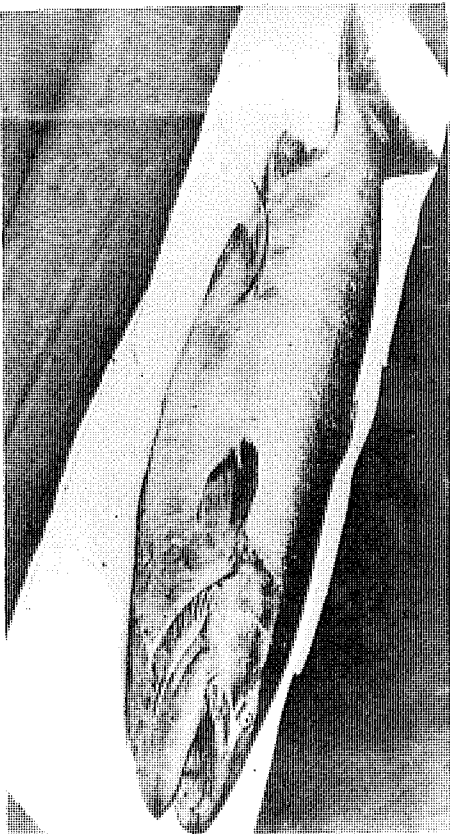
Another witness in August, this time in 1860, was Lieutenant Charles Wilson of the Royal Engineers, who has left us with additional interesting details:

*They catch from 700 to 1000 salmon a day in this manner [in a basket] which are equally divided amongst them in the evening by one of the chiefs. The most curious sight is to see them empty the*



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basket, two men strip & jump into it armed with wooden bludgeons with which they knock the salmon on the head & then pass them on to others on shore; it is rather an awkward situation in this same basket, as part of the fall, though not the full force of it, runs right over their heads nearly drowning them whilst what with the weight of the fish & the rush of the water the frail basket rocks about in anything but a pleasant manner.



A salmon caught at the falls in 1861. Courtesy of the Royal Engineers Corps Library, Chatham.

The yield of the fishery has always been a matter of considerable interest. One estimate, based on off-season hearsay evidence collected in 1841, by members of the Wilkes Expedition of the U.S. Navy, was around 400,000 pounds for a season, surely too low. Such figures are based on just the fishery site and just on basket catches. Because we know there were many other fishing stations at the falls, many of which had been abandoned before 1800, it is better to think in terms of well over a million pounds of fresh salmon for an average season before 1785. That is based in part on the average 16-pound fish purchased at Fort Colville for rations in the 1820's.

About half of the Colville diet consisted of fish, and a family would need around two tons of fresh fish for a year, or about 300 of them. This agrees tolerably well with statements that three to six fish were the normal daily allotment of resident families. After they were taken out of the basket traps, the women cleaned the fish and took four large fillets for drying, suspended from racks in the houses. It took about five days for a fillet to dry; wind-dried fish were preferred, but as the summer waned small fires were made for



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the purpose. When the fillets were cured they were packed in mat bundles weighing about 75 pounds. That was probably about the weight of the packs carried over the mountains before horses came on the scene. For though the Colvilles prepared their own winter provisions, they also had to produce a surplus for trading with the visitors who came to the falls.

Besides the 700 to 1,000 Colvilles and 300 or so Lakes, the Kalispels also came in large numbers. According to modern Indian authorities, the Lakes had residence and fishing rights on Hayes Island and the Kalispels were allotted a fishing place near the south end of the Fishery peninsula and a camp above. Other tribes that sent representatives in great regularity were the Okanagan, Sampoil, Spokane, Chewelah, and the Kutenai. Smaller numbers came from the Columbia, Similkameen, Flathead, Coeur d'Alene, Palus, Nez Perce, Piscoos, Methow, and Shuswap tribes. August was the favorite time to come, after the Colvilles and their closer allies had had the fishery more or less to themselves for almost six weeks. The extent to which visitors participated in the daily distributions by the Salmon Chief is quite unknown. As many as two to three hundred lodges were observed at the fishery in the last century, and through the season three to five thousand people would have been present.



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### THE CYCLE OF HARVESTS

Even though the salmon at Kettle Falls and elsewhere along the river were very numerous in most years, it was still necessary for the Colvilles to go elsewhere for other foods to balance their diet, and to avoid placing too much faith in any single resource. One secret to survival is redundancy, and so a band or tribe would be prepared to harvest foods not just in its home territory but also in the lands of its friends and allies. There was a seasonal schedule for harvesting plants and game which varied from one tribe to another. We cannot always reconstruct the schedule or cycle for every tribe, partly because many traditional foods ceased to be important decades ago, but some solid facts are known.

The majority of food resources became available or matured in the warmer months, almost simultaneously, so that it was necessary for people to be flexible, yet coordinated, rapid in movement yet careful to make accurate predictions so that a crop ripening in some remote meadow would not be missed. Salmon, camas bulbs and huckleberries all came at the same time. This called for hard work. The missionary Henry Spalding wrote that the people of the Columbia Plateau worked far harder to stay alive than did the whites! This certainly contradicts some facile opinions of today. Among the Spokanes, the women would be busy on the camas grounds ten miles away from the fisheries on the Spokane River where most of the men and boys were concentrated. Pack horses moved back and forth between them. For most of the Colvilles the distances between important resources were much greater, and the mountains high between places of work.

The principal camas ground of the Colvilles was 50 miles to the east of Kettle Falls, over the Kalispel Trail or trails, one of which crossed the mountains southeast of Arden to the country of the Lower Kalispels at Cusick, in the valley of the Pend d'Oreille River. The Colvilles had to accomplish most of their camas harvest in May and June, perhaps before the bulbs had reached their greatest size. There are even some reports of them leaving for Cusick in March.

Toward the end of June, the Colvilles would start back to their homeland, where some of their number, including the Salmon Chief,





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had remained keeping watch; but it is possible that families let some of their number linger on by the Pend d'Oreille until later in the summer. Closer to the falls it was possible to harvest chokecherries, serviceberries, wild onions and small numbers of camas and hyacinth bulbs within reach of the fishing. Since the salmon travelled in schools, there would be slack moments by the river. Then the women and girls might take up their antler-handled digging sticks, and their very strong baskets made from conifer roots, and head up the steep mountainsides.

As the fishery tapered off in late summer, the Colvilles scattered more readily to gather roots, to harvest the large numbers of hazelnuts that grew on the sides of the valley, and to collect exhausted salmon floating downriver after spawning. Early fall was also the time when men floated downriver below the falls in small fleets of canoes at night, spearing fish by the light of pine torches.

One observer of the scheme of things in the autumn was the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. On the 26th of October, 1824, George Simpson portaged at the falls, then passing downstream he noted a "*great number of Indian lodges*" below. The next day he remarked that "*the country still continues very beautiful and the banks of the river [are] studded with Indian lodges.*" Two years later, on the 22nd of October, Lieutenant Aemilius Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company passed a "*dense population*" of Indians just below Kettle Falls. They were "*encamped in mat huts along the Banks of the River, employed fishing a very bad quality of salmon, however they smoke them . . .*"

It was about that time or a little later that the Colvilles left the river for their main winter excursions in the mountains. Fall hunting camps could be rather large since families would find it more congenial to work together at drying meat and hides. Most deer hunting seems to have been done by groups of men, often aided with the hunting dogs which the Colvilles used extensively. A camp would move from place to place, the people working gradually up one side of a range and down the other, or in a wide circuit.

When the snow became too deep in mid-December they went back to their winter villages next to the river or to some sheltered place in a side valley with plenty of sun. There is some evidence that many of them went into the lower Colville Valley for the remainder of the winter. Before the fur trade and before horses became commonplace, winter was a time of rest interspersed with dances and displays of Power and the curing of the sick. The larger villages had communal lodges or dance houses which served in some cases as the chief's lodge.

Once horses became important, time had to be spent herding them and in trying to make sure that they survived the winter. If the harvests of fish and game had been poor, then winter was also a time of hardship and semi-starvation. As soon as the snow was gone with the spring, the women and



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children began looking for plant foods, especially the arrowleaf balsamroot which grows abundantly around Kettle Falls. Fresh-water mussels or clams would be gathered in the icy rivers, and anything to relieve the monotony of dried flesh and fish would be welcomed.

The reliance upon plants was much greater than most people imagine. Only a few professional botanists working in the interior of the Northwest can rival the botanical knowledge possessed at one time by many Colvilles, especially the women. Over 450 plant names have been recorded recently by Turner, Bouchard and Kennedy while working with Salish consultants. About 130 species are known to have had medicinal uses, often multiple ones. Every conceivable traditional ailment had its botanical remedy, but the infectious diseases introduced by Europeans were, unfortunately, mostly beyond the scope of Indian medicine, as they were beyond the capacity of European medicine before our century.

Well over a hundred plants had economic uses ranging from building materials to clothing and food. Dresses and rain capes were made of shredded and woven or tied sage and cedar bark -- both sexes wore the capes before the white men came. The roots of at least 23 species contributed significantly to the Colville diet; members of the lily and celery families were the most important. To use these plants effectively, women had to know their habitats and schedules of maturation intimately since few would want to go far if a harvest were not certain. It was not unknown for an old woman to go off by herself on a trip even of several days just to obtain some rare root or bulb in a high alpine meadow she remembered. This required a courage, toughness and memory of topography rather uncommon in our own time. Even today there are a few shamans who know plant habitats over a range better than a hundred miles wide.

Not just any member of a given species would do for medicine or food. Some of our "scientific" species were and are subdivided in Colville botany because of certain differences in appearance or usefulness. Edible tree lichens, for instance, were harvested just from certain types of trees and in particular habitats, otherwise they did not taste good. Much of this knowledge has fortunately been preserved by publication, but true expertise comes, of course, only from long experience. Some of the knowledge is probably still secret.



## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

### COLVILLE SALISH SOCIETY AND ITS SETTLEMENTS

It is extremely difficult now to reconstruct many facets of Salish society. But new increases in the fund of what we know are still possible despite the century and a half that have elapsed since anything like an unadulterated version existed. Around 1830, Colville or Kettle Falls Indian society was perceived by the Hudson's Bay Company fur traders to be divided into two groups, a northern and a southern one, with the Falls belonging mostly or exclusively to the northern. The northern group was also identified in an uncertain fashion with the Kettle River Valley.

Such a scheme does not answer a number of questions we would like to ask, such as who lived in the lower Colville Valley. They were Colvilles, to be sure, but we want to know whether there might, for instance, have been yet a third group. The home ground, probably the wintering village, of the Kettle Falls Salmon Chief was in the valley at what came to be known as Goodwin or Ward, a couple of miles east of the present town of Kettle Falls. The Colville name for this place was Tseris, which means Kingfisher, certainly a suggestive association for the home of the Salmon Chief. One wonders whether the Salmon Chief had Kingfisher Power; probably we will never know.

The Civil Chief of the Colvilles, the Illimi'num, seems to have had his winter domicile at Kihnius near the mouth of Pinngston Creek, not far north of where Fort Colville was established. One would expect that with each of these chiefs was a minimal band of from 30 to 50 people. This, rather than the individual or nuclear family, was the basic social and economic unit of the Colvilles, and the one that prevailed in the cold months of the year.

There were probably not less than twenty of these wintering bands in Colville society before the demographic disasters caused by diseases which began about 200 years ago. These twenty or so bands of winter residence would have stretched from the Little Dalles, 30 miles above Kettle Falls, on down the Columbia to Rogers Bar, with a few each for the Kettle and Colville Valleys. The winter lodge in recent times was an A-frame of multi-layered mats made of rushes sewn together with Indian hemp and tied to poles, with the ends of the lodge rounded with the same mats. One, two, or three of these



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The Salmon Chief seated on a chair at Fort Colville, and Baptiste La Pierre, a builder of bateaux. The Salmon Chief is most likely Kinkinahwa. Compare this man with the blind Kinkinahwa of the 1890's, shown on page 107. Taken in 1861 by the British boundary surveyors. Courtesy of the Royal Engineers Corps Library, Chatham.



## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

lodges made up the average winter village, and inside each would be two or three nuclear families, each with its own hearth. In some tribes two families shared a hearth, but we lack such information on the Colville.

During the summer fishing season many, perhaps most, of the Colvilles converged on Kettle Falls to form a large village at Takumakst -- the Fishery -- which probably had fifty or more summer houses inhabited just by Colvilles. Each minimal band, which may also be thought of as a very large extended family, had its own traditional housing area on the Fishery peninsula. These summer houses were quite different from those of winter. David Thompson described the former thus:

*This village is built of long sheds of about 20 feet in breadth by from 30 to 60 feet in length, they were built of boards which somehow they had contrived to split from large Cedars drifted down the River, partly covered with the same and with Mats, so as to withstand the Rain; each Shed had many cross poles for smoke drying the Salmon as they have no salt . . . the Sheds were clean and comfortable . . .*

Thompson's reference to boards should be taken seriously since they appear on some of the village roofs in the sketches and paintings of Paul Kane, and in a photograph taken in the summer of 1861. These pictures show that the planks were used mainly on the windward or western sides of the roofs; the side facing the strongest sun and the strongest winds which rush down at times from the heights above. It is not clear from Thompson's remarks that the floors of the summer houses were raised off the ground, even though one could suppose that this is what he describes with his "many cross poles."

Paul Kane, the artist who spent many days sketching around the village in the summer of 1847, described it as consisting of lodges:

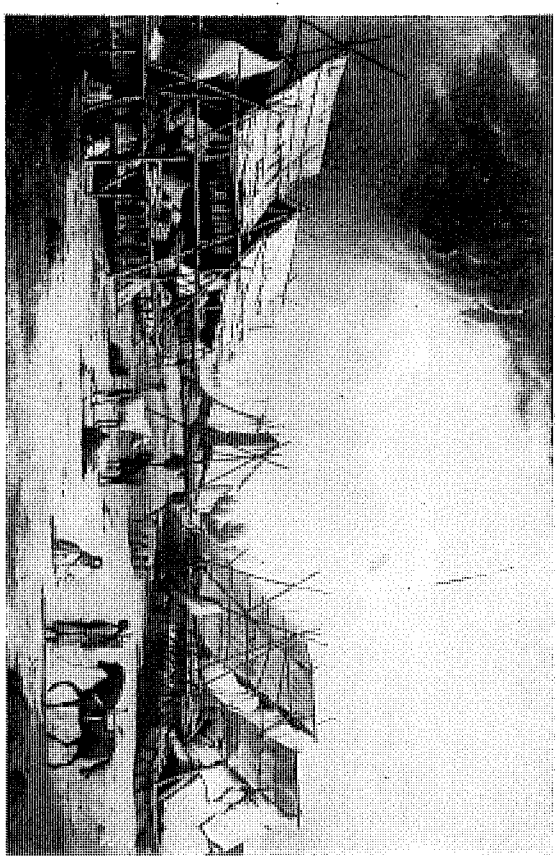
*. . . formed of mats of rushes stretched on poles. A flooring is made of sticks raised three or four feet from the ground, leaving the space beneath it entirely open, and forming a cool, airy, and shady place in which to hang their salmon to dry.*

These interesting houses, virtually unique in this part of North America, were restricted to the Colvilles and the Kalispels, who lived across the eastern mountains. The Pend d'Oreille, first cousins of the Kalispels, probably had this kind of house at one time since their summer tipis of the last century also had raised floors. With the Kalispels it was said by Governor George Simpson to be a matter of escaping the fleas. That could have been a factor at Kettle Falls too, but we also know the fish lasted the longest if dried by the wind, hence the usefulness of increasing the shaded drying area with a raised floor.

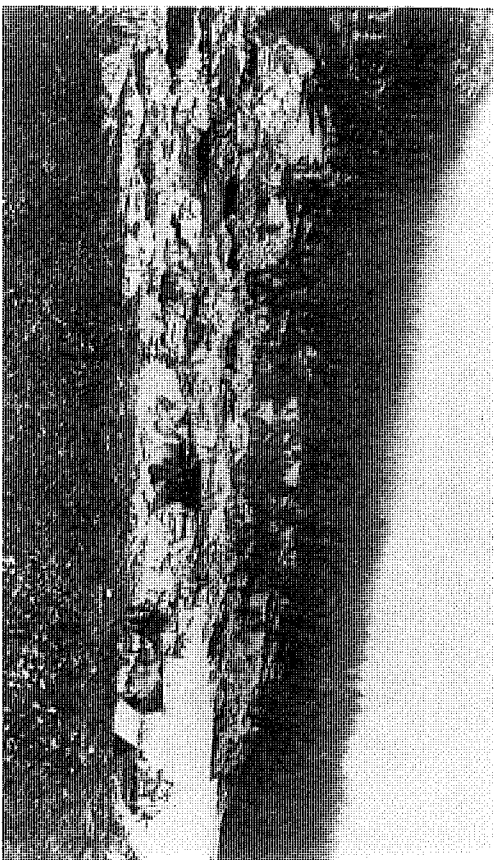
There was actually a considerable variety in the style of houses at the Fishery. Some had pent roofs with planks on one side and movable mats on the other; others had a shed roof of planks or mats, with more mats sloping down slightly on all four sides for walls. Yet others were more conical in



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Part of the village at Takumakst (the Fishery). An oil painting made by Kane after his visit in 1847. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.



Part of the village of Takumakst as it appeared in 1861. The houses in the foreground do not seem to be raised like those of the houses ranged along the ridge in the background. Courtesy of the Royal Engineers Corps Library, Chatham.



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configuration. In the pictures we have, the most substantial houses seem to be located on the rise farthest out on the point, closest to the basket fishing stations. This location has been identified by modern Colvilles as the place where the chiefs had their houses. It would seem that there was some ranking in society. The archaeological evidence confirms this: the variety of artifacts and the quantity of exotic materials and artifacts is richest in this part of the peninsula.

The people of Kettle Falls showed by their dwellings that they were as skilled as any Indians of the Northwest in elementary engineering. The skillfully made fish traps and spearing platforms illustrate this also. Such building required access to plenty of drift cedar which was split with wedges of hardwood pounded with graceful mauls of polished stone. William Ettemendorf, a scholar who studied the Lakes Indians, believed that he had reliable evidence that those relatives of the Colvilles had traditionally built small suspension bridges of twisted cables and cedar slats. Such bridges would have been useful in the numerous narrow stream gorges of the mountains overlooking the Arrow Lakes.

The varied houses of the Colvilles have faded from memory; all of the evidence comes from the last century. This important fact helps to remind us to avoid satisfaction with the fragmentary evidence that survives for houses or any other aspect of life at Kettle Falls. It is humbling also to realize that of all the diarists and letter writers who visited the falls in the last century, only three presented useful details on the housing, David Thompson, John Work, and Paul Kane, and of the three it was the artist who was the most thorough. For all its vaunted superiority, European culture was not up to providing a single satisfactory description of an Indian village, either here or anywhere else in the Pacific Northwest.



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### THE WEALTH OF LEGENDS AND MYTHS

In the evenings there was little work to be done once the main meal was finished; there was not enough light from the fire for much serious work on tools, baskets, or sewing. So the people listened to stories. In this they were the same as people everywhere who have kept the art of entertaining themselves, for whom the arts of language are the supreme mark of the good life, of civilization, of being human.

According to Mourning Dove (Hunnishuma or Christine Quinasket McLeod), who spent much of her childhood at Kettle Falls in the 1890's, there were the stories her mother told, and those which her grandmother told. But there were also other individuals who specialized in telling stories, and in acting them out as they were recounted. Such story-tellers traveled from one village to another, especially in the winter.

There were at least two different kinds of stories treasured by the Colville-Okanagan people; stories about animals, and those strictly about people, some of which we would call histories. Today, there are at least ten collections that survive of Colville-Okanagan stories and myths; together they make up a rich assortment, most of which, unfortunately, remains unpublished.

A large number of the animal stories have to do with the exploits of Coyote, a trickster with magical powers, a human mind, and sometimes the body of a man. At times Coyote seems like the slinking or playful animal that we occasionally see in the woods, looking at us over his shoulder with intent eyes. But in many tales he is very much a man -- the ambiguity is important and intended -- for he has the power to change his identity at will. The stories are often set in a time before the present world was created; and Coyote had a big hand in making it as it is.

One must not suppose that Coyote is portrayed as a highly moral character. He is usually much more interesting than that. Like the average person, he is a mixture of inconsistencies; his actions are often evil or foolish, his sense of humor is quite risqué. He is sometimes very greedy, frequently careless, and his notion of his own worth is usually inflated. But these are all foibles that can be safely laughed at in a coyote.



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Through these stories we can reach into the thoughts of the people who told them -- and of those who listened. It is not just a matter of being charmed by animal myths, or of getting the moral of a tale. They are full of complicated symbols, cryptic messages that lead one's thoughts round and around, pointing to unsuspected relationships, teaching in oblique ways important ethics and social facts, or providing explanations of such simple things as animal markings or behavior. as why Mosquito bites people. This is to avenge his four brothers who were speared to death. A child would thereby learn that a person will avenge, or ought to avenge, his brothers, or that a murderer begets never-ending consequences. There are facts of the heart, such as how Mole, the long-suffering plain wife of Coyote, kept to her domestic duties while her wayward husband was off flirting with other women. But when Coyote returned, Mole was still ready to take him back. Perhaps this illustrates the point that someone, at least, must be dependable.

Mole is weighted with symbolism. She is the wife who digs in the earth for roots -- as a mole does, or like a woman. Like the escapades of Coyote, a man's work might be spectacular, and the venison he killed (often leaving it for his wife to pack into camp) might be relished above most other foods. But it was the woman's roots that were the more dependable, which were eaten every day as the staples. Reading about these facts and moral lessons in the myths we find ourselves drifting back through time as we think about them, about the voices that speak to us across thousands of years. It is an archaeology of the mind.

These tales are rich puzzles or codes of almost infinite intricacy for those who will allow their thoughts to wander through the mazes. There is a kind of numerology: the four cardinal directions, the four Powers of Coyote which he calls upon to help him in every difficulty, the four sons of Coyote. These are associations we are meant to think about, the numbers seem to be guides. And there are the contradictions that seem to be purposeful, such as the fact that two members of Coyote's immediate entourage, Mole, his wife, and Mouse, his sneaking and thieving flunky, are in the "real" life of nature actually the prey of a coyote. Surely every Colville child has lain awake at night wondering about this.

If we could understand the language in which the myths have their real existence we would surely notice much more, and understand, for instance, why the wife of Fox fell in love with the Chief Water-Spirit, the Monster of Kettle Falls. We might then know the meaning of the half-cane that Fox, aided by his brother, Coyote, used to visit the realm of the Water Monster in the foam of the great whirlpool below the lower falls. It is not quite so difficult to understand why Fox decapitated the Monster, or why the Monster's cavernous stomach was full of the people who had been swept over the falls, and swallowed.



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As another tale was re-told by Mourning Dove, Salmon, the local chief, and Rattlesnake both dwelt in the rocks overlooking the falls. Rattlesnake shot Salmon with an arrow, killing him. Then three wolves took and enslaved Salmon's lovely Kalispel wife. Salmon's body drifted downriver, and Mouse found it on a sand-bar below and by magical means brought him back to life. Salmon returned to the falls, burned Rattlesnake alive in his lodge, killed two of the wolves (but let the third one go), and, taking back his wife, went down with her to live in the water below the falls forever, where it was much safer.

Supposedly told to explain the sharp bones in Salmon's head -- which are the arrow points of Rattlesnake -- the story is, of course, the vehicle of much more than that. Slipped in, as it were, is the conflict of good and evil, with the irrationality of evil illustrated by a murder with no motive. We have also a story of resurrection in the person of Salmon, the staff of life, the dramatization of the way in which the salmon return to the falls even though the spawning salmon die and drift downriver, grounding on the sand-bars. There are hints of an uncertain relationship or tension between the Colvilles and the Kalispels, for Salmon had killed some Kalispels to get his wife, who nevertheless loved him. The spectacular scene of Kettle Falls and the mysteries of the salmon runs served as a fitting backdrop to the great moral and social forces that move in the world.



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### A RELIGION OF POWER

While there are still a few Interior Salish, including some Colvilles, who remember or practise the old religion in some form, few attempts have been made to describe it in writing. Those that exist often speak of just a few rudimentary characteristics, as if they represented the essence. One naturally hesitates to be so bold as to summarize the most precious beliefs of a people in a few lines, and in a language utterly foreign to its formulations, just as one hesitates to suggest that one has perfect knowledge of such a complexity as an ancient religion.

This religion of Power survives mainly as secrets carried in the hearts of a few, and in fragments and wisps here and there which do not always fit together or have much meaning for outsiders. It is now in this reduced state because it was discredited by the cruel events of the last century and by the haughtiness of the incoming Europeans who were completely convinced that only they knew the correct formulas. Many Indians as well became convinced that this was the case, and some of them were noticed who seemed to believe that the secret of the power of white men was contained in books. In that assessment they were, of course, very close to the truth.

Francis Heron, the chief trader at Fort Colville during some of the earlier years of that post, found himself treated, in his words, like a messiah. Indians brought him beaver skins, refusing any payment except his fervent prayers to the Master of Life on their behalf. Heron professed embarrassment, but he nevertheless preached and prayed. Much of his preaching took the form of admonitions to hard work, namely trapping. By the 1850's, some of the enthusiasm for Christianity started to wear off, by then some of the traders themselves cared little about Christianity, and the European race in the Northwest was showing that its real interests lay in land. Angus McDonald, the last of the men who commanded Fort Colville, actually believed that the Salish religion was superior to Christianity. He was himself a poet; he could also see that his own children, part-Indian as they were, were not going to fit too well into the Christian world he saw emerging in the 1860's.



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For the Colvilles and the rest of the Salish, religion was not a separate compartment or specialty of life. But we can at least say that it was one of Power. The emphasis was on the Power of nature, the mysterious forces possessed by the spirits lying behind each variety of living thing, the Power that inhered in secret places of great beauty, that caused a mysterious stir in the human breast.

It was the task of religion to harness that Power, called Sumish or Sumih, for the benefit of individuals and of mankind as a whole. This is a little different from the usual view that this religion was just a matter of individual quests and deals struck with guardian spirits. People had guardian spirits, it is true, and finding them and maintaining good relations with them were very important. But the deeper object was to create a relationship with the Power or force that the guardian represented -- for good fortune and success in life, to obtain enough food, to ensnare the love of another, to protect one's children, or to keep one's soul from becoming lost.

Guardian spirits, each one personified by some animal, bird, fish, plant, or place, were sought in the purity and innocence of childhood, before adolescence, though it was possible to find one later on. Some people had difficulty obtaining them. A person aspiring to exceptional powers, especially someone wanting to become a shaman, might acquire more than one guardian, so as to increase the Power and multiply the effects. Guardians were found through lonely vigils, at first near the village, such as around the sweat lodges by the river, then on mountain tops or at spectacular places like alpine lakes and waterfalls, or even in graveyards where one could acquire power over material goods.

Parents, but more often grandparents, were the guides. They sometimes placed a piece of fur, a feather, or a claw for the child to find and take inspiration from when the quest began. Later on there would be tests and proofs of having visited certain places. Some mountains evidently were better than others for finding Power; they may have been in special standing with Amotken, the high Spirit of the sky about whom very little is known.

There were many ways in which Power could flow from the guardian to its protegee. The following description of a late winter dance, held in 1954, and witnessed by the late Norman Lerman, illustrates one way in which a shaman drew on his Power:

*Before performing, a shaman will begin humming a song softly while he sits or stands in some part of the room. As he sings louder he approaches the pole (set up in the center of the room). He may walk around the pole singing to it or hold out his arms to the pole as he sings. When he grasps the pole in both hands he has become one with his guardian spirit. As long as he is holding the pole his words are not his own but those of his guardian spirit. Guardian spirits speak unintelligibly and in a low voice, and, therefore, the guardian*

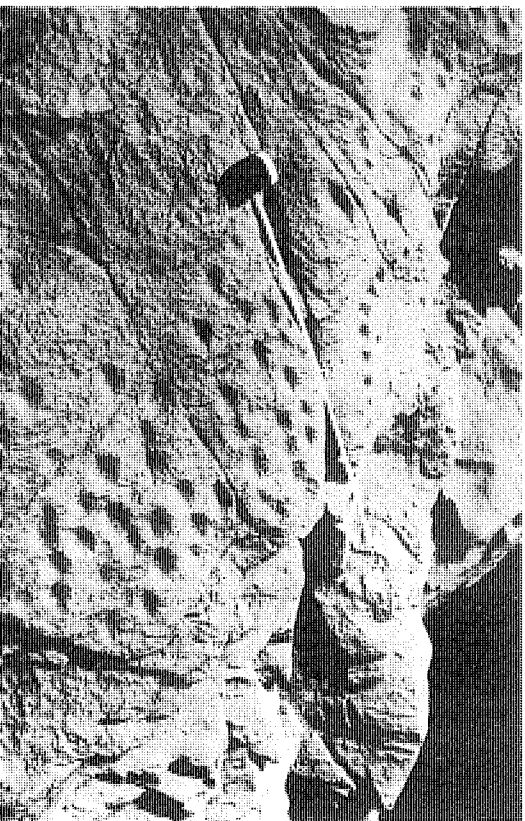
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*spirit's words must be transmitted to the audience by another person. For this purpose an interpreter stands by the shaman and repeats the guardian spirit's speech in a loud voice. The interpreter may be anyone in the audience and is sometimes another shaman. This pipeline from the guardian spirit via the shaman and the interpreter continues for as long as the guardian spirit has something to say to the audience. As a rule the guardian spirit makes prognostications of the future, gives free advice, and makes comments on present events.*

Power from guardians might be used for curing sickness, to bring luck in the almost incessant gambling at Kettle Falls (which was how most goods seem to have been traded), or to control game or fish. Some women had special powers over animals like mountain sheep, to the extent that they could drive them over cliffs by remote suggestion. The Salmon Chief at Kettle Falls possessed power from Salmon, power used to ensure the passage of the salmon through the falls, and perhaps other powers to prevent or control pollution of the fishery. The fact that the fish surged up through the falls only while the sun was visible from that location may have contributed to the high reverence for the Sun, another element of the religion that we are no longer able to confidently link with other facts. We do know that no water was taken out of the river during daylight hours, which meant that all the cooking during the fishing season had to be done in the dark.



Cup-marks in the bedrock overlooking the fishing stations in the lower falls, in 1970. A tape measure serves as a scale. Photo by the author.

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Even more mysterious than the powers over salmon are the thousands of small holes or pits in the tops of ledges and boulders overlooking the falls. Classically known to scholars as "cup-marks," they occur near fishing places all the way from Ireland across the northern Eurasian land-mass to certain locations in North America, Kettle Falls being one of the outstanding examples. Many explanations have been offered for these marks, which average an inch or two in diameter, but none has been compelling. At Kettle Falls they may well be associated with the control of fish, as we suspect they are elsewhere.

The use of Power was encircled with rules and prohibitions. Purity above all else was needed for the effective use of it and for simple peace of mind. As in many religions, pollution was a constant danger and had to be controlled. Cold bathing was used for purification; a virtuous woman bathed every morning in a stream. Most important to both the sexes was the sweat lodge. Sweating, another of those traits linking Kettle Falls to northeastern Europe, was performed in a small dome-shaped structure made of twelve "ribs" covered with grass, boughs, bark and earth, with a small door of skins or blankets.

Sweat lodges were seldom more than six or seven feet in diameter. Red-hot rocks were rolled in after heating in a fire outside, and water was sprinkled over them after they had been stacked in a little pit inside the lodge. People sat naked in the dry steam singing softly or praying in the total darkness. When the temperature was no longer bearable, everyone ran outside and immersed himself in a pool of cold water or in the river. Straight out of a lodge the river water does not feel cold, it merely tingles; one feels unusually buoyant, colors appear brighter, and the mind floats euphorically for several minutes.

There was, and still is, ritual and much etiquette associated with the lodge. It is noteworthy that one must cleanse oneself with cold water before first entering. The reason is that the lodge is the abode of the deity called "Sweat Lodge," the most benevolent and powerful of the spirits. Such beliefs are better understood if one recognizes the need for purity felt by a people so concerned to keep their proper place in the world.

Dances accompanied by impassioned singing were central to religion. Large dances involving several tribes were held in the beginning of summer at Kettle Falls, at a time coincident, as we said, with the summer solstice and the first appearance of the salmon. We also know of a winter solstice dance, held at Kettle Falls in 1830, and attended by the majority of the Colvilles and Lakes. Shamans traditionally authenticated their powers and cured the sick at mid-winter dances. In February of 1812, David Thompson jotted the following notes in his diary:

*Their dances are so many religious acts, that they may, after Death, join the shades of their departed friends, and not wander among*

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*strangers. As their whole life is spent in . . . hunting, digging roots, drying Provisions and care of their Horses, etc., with their continual removing from place to place leaves them little or no time to think of religious ceremonies: they wholly depend for these on the village tribes on the Columbia, who living an idle life have leisure for forming ceremonies, which being sanctioned in public Dances, are made known from Tribe to Tribe . . . These tribes also dance to procure present and future good to themselves and families. Their other dances are few.*

He then lists the greeting dance and the scalp dance as examples of the others. Thompson's note is not entirely clear, hastily jotted as it doubtless was by the light of a winter fire, probably at Flathead House on Clark's Fork. But there is enough here for us to conclude, after considering other factors, that Kettle Falls was very likely the most important religious center on the upper Columbia. Thompson had been there several times when he wrote the above. Thompson's comment on the shades of the dead is also interesting. He expanded on that topic as follows:

*They believe man to be a compound of body and a something that does not die, retaining after Death a clear consciousness of what passed in this Life, and of what they will see and meet with in the Lands unknown. After death the soul goes to the west where they believe the great assemblage of souls to be.*

In the last century, the religion of Power started to lose its grip on the people at Kettle Falls. But the Christianity that came with the fur traders and then with the missionaries was at first just added to the old beliefs since the Power known for thousands of years was by no means dead, even to some of the missionaries. The following account was taken down by Rowena Nichols during an interview with Father Joset, many years after his time as a Jesuit missionary at Kettle Falls:

*I had a strange experience with one of these jugglers [Shamans] once. I met a juggler, and we rode side by side for several miles. He said he thought he would join the church, and be a Christian; finally he asked for a chew of tobacco. Of course, I had none and told him so. He said, 'By and by, you will die; I am a great medicine man.' In a few days I was taken quite ill, and for three weeks I hovered between life and death. The Indian then boasted to the Indians, 'You see, I am a great medicine man, I kill him.' Three days after, the Indian died, and I soon recovered. Then the Indians said, 'See, his medicine returned to his own breast, and killed him.' It all appeared strange to me then, nor can I find any explanation of it yet.*

According to Christina McDonald, who grew up at Fort Colville, the Indians at Kettle Falls decided to accept the Christianity of the priests after a medicine man lost out in a death struggle with a missionary. It is not certain

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whether this is the contest described by Father Josel. Taken together, our sources would incline one to the belief that there were several momentous spiritual struggles and contests of this type in the middle of the last century.



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### THE COMING OF EUROPEANS

The traditional world of centuries without number, in which Kettle Falls had been the center of the world for so many, began to crumble before the blows of change very soon after the Spanish made their first landings on the Washington coast in 1775. The first domesticated horses probably had already arrived by that time from the south. Copper jewelry and iron implements were offered in payment for furs as soon as the Spanish, English, and Americans began their trading on the coast after 1775. New wealth was coming, but the price was going to be extremely high.

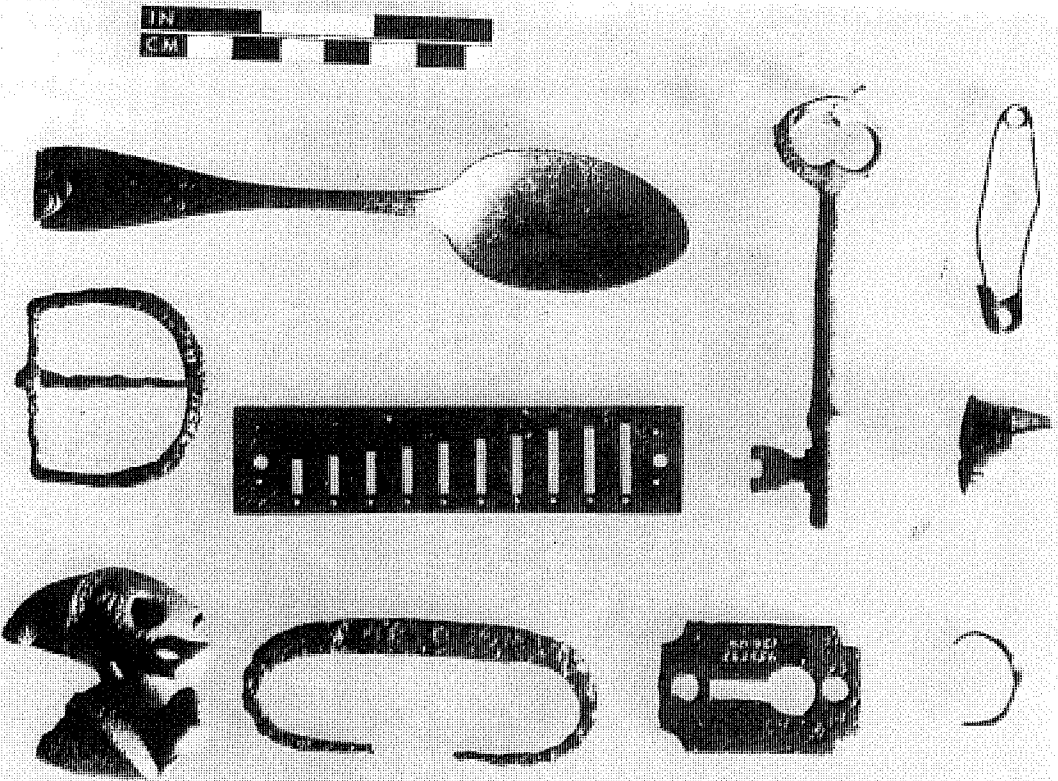
Along with these indirect influences of Europeans and their newly discovered industrial powers came such diseases as had never been imagined. The first "historical" event we know of at Kettle Falls was a smallpox epidemic which spread around 1785, almost certainly from over the Rocky Mountains. There were still survivors around with scars on their faces when John Work, the first clerk at Fort Colville, made inquiries about it in 1829.

We do not know how many died at Kettle Falls; east of the mountains David Thompson observed that over half of the inhabitants of some villages perished in a matter of days during this epidemic. This and other diseases such as measles and tuberculosis haunted each generation into the middle twentieth century. They helped to destroy the native cultures and weaken the resistance to European and white American advances far more than the power of the fur traders, missionaries or military forces. Like epidemics everywhere they destroyed intellectual powers by making people superstitious.

For many years, the Europeans trading along the coast were content to do most of their business from ships, but to the east, European fur companies in Canada were engaged in a race across the northern forests in a struggle to monopolize the continental trade. David Thompson, an officer of the North West Company, was in the lead of his firm when he sent two of his men over into the headwaters of the Columbia in 1800, beginning the direct contacts of Europeans with the upper Columbia River people. By the summer of 1810, Finan McDonald and Jaco Finlay, both working under Thompson, had established Spokane House at the mouth of the Little Spokane River.



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A group of metal artifacts from Fort Colville.



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That post was to be headquarters of the fur trade in the northern Rockies for the next fifteen years, until superseded by Fort Colville at Kettle Falls.

Thompson first went to Kettle Falls in June of 1811, taking a boat crew with whom he was to descend the Columbia to its mouth. As we observed, these men were well treated while they built their cedar canoe for the journey, even though they managed to pollute the fishery and stop the salmon run. The Colvilles calmly removed the cause of the pollution, performed some ritual, and went about their business. Once the canoe was finished, the fur traders embarked. At the mouth of the Sampoil they were entertained by a lavish program of dancing, but as they descended the receptions grew cooler until at the mouth of the Columbia they found some Scots and Canadians building a fort, Astoria, for an American firm.

Retreating back to his chain of small fur posts in the northern Rockies, Thompson soon found Astor's Pacific Fur Company hard on his heels. These men built competing posts to trouble his own at Spokane House, on the Pend d'Oreille River, on the Kootenay River, and one, on their own, at the mouth of the Okanogan. This state of affairs did not last long, however, for the American company had to sell out during the War of 1812. The North West men absorbed the assets and most of the staff of the "Americans" and carried on a low-pressure life until they, in turn, were absorbed by a rejuvenated Hudson's Bay Company in 1821.

To the Indians at Kettle Falls these events may not have meant very much at all. But they could not escape the sight of the boats or canoes that went upriver and returned every fall. From 1812 onward, the North West men used Athabasca Pass, due north of Kettle Falls, to maintain their overland connection with Montreal. This was to avoid using passes farther south along the Continental Divide, passes now too exposed to Plains tribes angered over the introduction of firearms among their Salish and Kutenai enemies.

There are two noteworthy facts about the early transcontinental express traffic past Kettle Falls. Most of the fur traders who used it were, unlike Thompson, not handy with the pen, indeed they were hardly able to use their eyes. But then it was a harsh existence; a few still know how difficult it is to keep a diary while on the move. The traffic also does not seem to have made much of an impact on the people at Kettle Falls either. This was undoubtedly to their benefit, but it was not so good for the commerce of England. When George Simpson passed that way in 1824, he had it recorded that the "Kettle Falls Indians" in the fall went away from the river to collect roots and to:

*... pick up a few Skins to enable them to purchase the trifling articles of British Manufacture they require, but those are few indeed, as they are perfectly independent of us for any necessary; arms they merely require for show or defence as they rarely hunt; tobacco however is becoming almost a necessary of life with them.*



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This lack of enthusiasm for "British Manufactures" was caused by self-sufficiency and pride. The people of Kettle Falls had apparently learned to keep their distance without being unfriendly. But there was probably an additional pair of factors responsible for the situation Simpson noticed, to his chagrin. The Colvilles were a conservative people, carefully regulating their lives with rules and time-tested behavior. Until the 1840's, they were among the most conservatively fixed people in the Northwest. To go out and trap and hunt to an extent beyond what they had done traditionally would have required a disruption of the schedules and patterns of their daily life. They did not, it would seem, feel compelled to take a revolutionary plunge just yet. The result was that they still had plenty of beaver in 1824, when Simpson and his subordinates, especially Alexander Kennedy, decided to increase profits and rationalize the fur trade of the upper Columbia and the Rockies by moving the interior headquarters from Spokane House to Kettle Falls.



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### REMAKING THE FUR TRADE

There were many reasons why George Simpson ordered the abandonment of Spokane House and the construction of a new post at Kettle Falls. One was the need for more room to farm. The men in the forts had now to aim toward, if not completely achieve, self-sufficiency in food. At Kettle Falls were some three square miles of grassy plain just northeast of the fisheries with hundreds of acres of bottomland, some of which flooded in the spring. Like the ancient Egyptians, the fur traders would learn to turn the floods to advantage as irrigation.

Salmon were also in the thoughts of the traders. In 1823, the Hudson's Bay men at Spokane House had got themselves into trouble with the local Spokanes over who got the fish from the weirs in the river. Cannon, rockets, and muskets had been readied at one point when the traders thought that friction with the local chief had reached the flash point. Under these touchy circumstances several officers fondly dreamed of the salmon supply at Kettle Falls, thinking that the resource was without limit.

They were slightly mistaken, for they did not reckon on the conservation practices of the Colvilles, nor on years in which the fish runs were inferior, nor on those summers of high water when the basket traps could not be installed until late in the season. When the time finally came in 1825 to pick the site of the new fort, the chief of the Colvilles wisely retained all rights to the fishery when he let Simpson mark out the lines of the new post, on a rise in the middle of the plain. So there was never any question of the Europeans crowding the Indians on the fisheries.

There were also a number of transportation or logistic reasons for moving the headquarters of the Rocky Mountain trade from Spokane House to Kettle Falls. Horses were becoming rapidly more expensive, for not only were the fur traders constantly buying Indian horses for their long pack strings, they also purchased them to eat. Of late the Hudson's Bay Company had been renting or contracting pack trains from the Spokanes. But the rates were becoming prohibitive.

If horse transportation was becoming more burdensome, especially on the trail between Spokane House and the Columbia River, the solution was



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to increase the use of bateaux, the thirty-foot boats that could carry three tons apiece. Simpson was especially interested in supplying the Flathead post on Clark's Fork by boat all the way from Kettle Falls, which meant going up the deep canyon of the lower Pend d'Oreille River. It had never been done. The other plan was to supply the Kootenay post by the Kootenay River, then known as the McGillivray's or Flatbow River.

Experiments were duly conducted with each river by the small but intrepid William Kittson, a Canadian who had fought the Americans in the War of 1812. He nearly lost his life discovering that the Pend d'Oreille River was impassable below Cusick, as the Kalispels had said. He did descend it in a canoe with a couple of Indians, with numerous portages, but declared it impossible for regular traffic. With the Kootenay River he found some realism to that part of the plan, so the Kootenay outpost was supplied by canoes from Fort Colville for about twenty years thereafter.

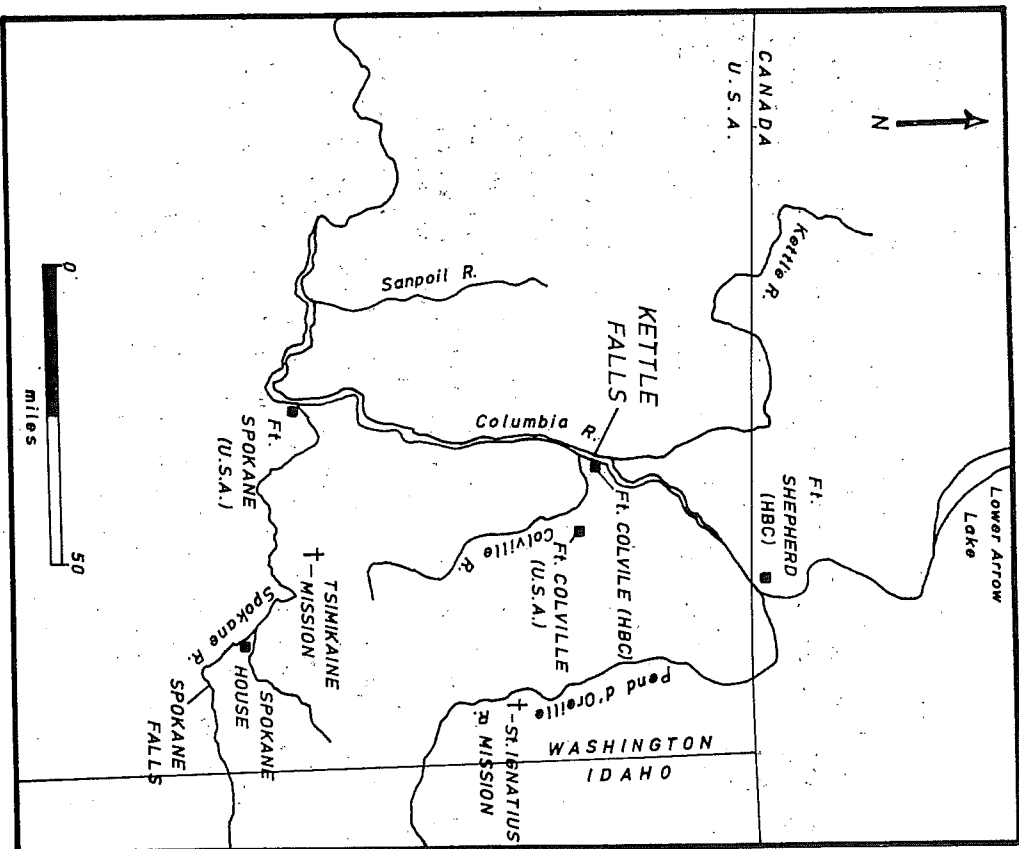
It also made good sense to have a post at the Kettle Falls portage where the express boats had to be hauled for nearly two miles across the high terrace occupied today by the reconstructed St. Paul's Mission. With a fort in the vicinity, wagons and draft animals could be used, and boats could be parked at each end of the portage. One set of boats would be kept at the fort or its beach for the runs north and east to Boat Encampment and Kootenay House. The larger fleet of brigade boats could be kept at Barge Landing, half a mile south of the falls.

The exploitation of the Snake Country -- present southern Idaho, southern Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and parts of two or three other states -- was very much on the mind of Simpson in 1824 and 1825. It is clear that he planned to move the zone of heaviest trapping more to the south, but without crossing the lands of the formidable Nez Perces. The new southern emphasis would make some of the reasons for keeping Spokane House open obsolete, it was no longer viewed as the gateway to the Snake Country.

In addition to the matters of strategy and logistics there was the ordinary but critical matter of who had furs to trade. The Spokanes and Coeur d'Alenes were becoming increasingly irritable; we noted the affair of the salmon weirs. Having what was probably the largest of the Spokane villages within shouting distance of Spokane House did little to foster harmony. The tangled amours of the fur traders were always a continual source of jealousy, plots and conspiracies. All of this could have been endured if the fur supply had held up. However, neither the Spokanes nor the Coeur d'Alenes were by then producing much in that way -- hardly more than "a pack of rats a year," according to one trader's report. The traders thought the Indians were lazy, but the truth is that the resource was becoming locally depleted after fifteen years of heavy trapping. Alexander Kennedy claimed that the Spokanes produced not more than 100 pelts a year, yet they stubbornly "persisted" in



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keeping a village of some 60 families next to the fort, and everyone in the village seemed to need a continual supply of tobacco.

For the usual run of Scots traders like Kennedy or Simpson people had to be clearly deserving of any kindnesses shown them. There was the balance sheet to consider. The fact that the Spokanes owned the land upon which the fort sat was no doubt realized, but perhaps insufficiently. On the other hand, the inoffensive Kettle Falls Indians were known to have an abundance of fur-bearing animals in their mountains, proven in 1823 by impressive trading returns from that direction. The "Old Chief" and the "Young Chief" of the falls had both conducted pack strings of furs to Spokane House, making the greatest possible impression on the minds of the fur traders. It now came to be realized that the vast mountain ranges north of Kettle Falls had been overlooked -- they were still unexploited, and it would be several years before the Kettle River watershed was even explored -- or re-explored. David Thompson had done it, but seemingly without leaving any details for his successors.

When all the pros and cons were aired in a council held by George Simpson, Alexander Kennedy, James McMillan, Alexander Ross, and Finan McDonald on the 8th of April, 1825, on the beach at the mouth of the Spokane River, there seemed to be no reason to wait any longer. Posts and forts wore out their neighborhoods, and the trade system prevailing in the Columbia had been almost wholly exploitative. Now, however, with the move to Kettle Falls, things would be different: Certain precautions would be taken, and the trade would be put on a more self-sustaining basis. No longer would 2000 horses be slaughtered a year to sustain a trading post. And to some extent that is how things turned out. Even the trapping of furs, while clearly an intended exploitation, was not pursued thoroughly enough after 1825 to prevent good returns in the Colville District as late as the 1860's.

Leaving the mouth of the Spokane, Simpson went up to Kettle Falls in his boat, and went straight to the place where he had to obtain clearance for his plans:

*While the people were carrying [at the portage] I went to the Chief's Lodge about a Mile above the Carrying place; had an interview with him and some of his principal followers and intimated my wish to form an Establishment on his Lands provided he undertook to protect it and assured us of his Friendly disposition. He received the proposal with much satisfaction and offered me the choice of his Lands in regard to situation or quantity. We selected a beautiful point on the South side about 3/4th of a Mile above the Portage where there is abundance of fine Timber and the situation eligible in every point of view. An excellent Farm can be made at this place where as much Grain and Potatoes may be raised as would feed all*



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*the Natives of the Columbia and a sufficient number of Cattle and Hogs to supply his Majesty's Navy with Beef and Pork.*

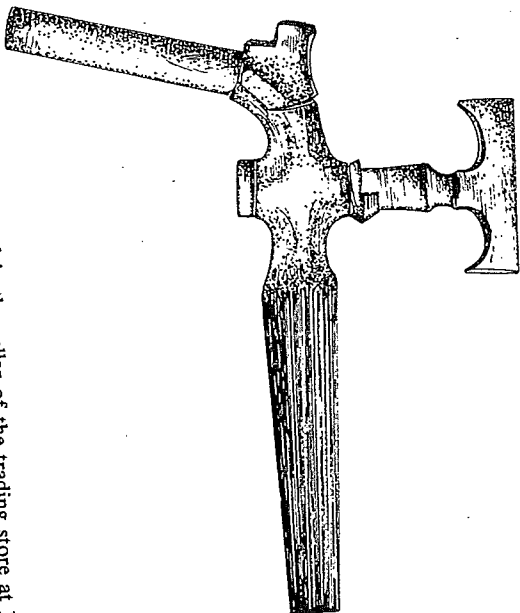
Simpson had food very much on his mind at this point, and his estimates of yield were outlandish, betraying some imperialist elements in his thought. He was obliged, however, to agree with the Kettle Falls Chief that the Hudson's Bay Company would stay away from the salmon fishery. The mistakes at Spokane House would be avoided, and the generosity of the people of the falls would become a continual asset to the Company.

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### ESTABLISHING FORT COLVILLE

The new post was to be called Fort Colville, after the leading member of the Committee of Directors in London, Andrew Wedderburn Colville, the very man who had advanced Simpson to his position of leadership in America. Andrew Colville was also in the rum and molasses business, but the new fort did little to quench the thirst of anyone besides its staff until the gold rushes began in the 1850's.

It fell to the lot of John Work, a recently arrived clerk, an energetic master of detail and a man who kept a good diary, to begin the construction. He did this in the fall of 1825, with the store, but the only structure completed before the snow fell was a potato cellar to protect the first crop.



This brass spigot for liquor barrels was found in the cellar of the trading store at Fort Colville. Liquor was not sold to Indians, but it was to whites, and a dram of rum was an expected courtesy to employees and visiting Indian chiefs.



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The following spring, building was taken up more seriously as more men were now available. The first cattle and pigs arrived by boat from Vancouver, as did David Douglas, the botanist, who came to collect plants. As if the summer's schedule of events were not full enough, some of the Indians present at Kettle Falls decided to settle an old score. Douglas recorded the scene on the 17th of August, 1826:

A party of twenty-one men and two females arrived belonging to the Kootanie tribe, whose lands lie near the source of the Columbia, for the purpose of fishing. Between these and the tribes on the Columbia lakes, about sixty miles above this place, who are now similiarly engaged at the Falls, an old quarrel exists. . . . The parties met to-day stark naked, at our camp, some painted red, some black, others white and yellow, all with their bows strung, while those who had guns and ammunition, brought their weapons charged and cocked. War caps, made of the Calumet-Eagle's feathers, were the only particle of clothing they had on. Just as one of these savages was discharging an arrow from his bow, aimed at a chief of the other party, Mr. Dease hit him such a blow on the nose as stunned him, and the arrow fortunately only grazed the skin of his adversary, passing along the rib opposite to his heart without doing him much injury. The day was spent in clamour and haranguing and unable to foresee what the issue might be, we were prepared for the worst. Mr. Dease, however, succeeded in persuading them to make arrangements for peace, and begged this might be done without delay on the morrow, representing to them how little they had ever gained by their former wars, in which they had mutually butchered one another like dogs.

They agreed to peace the next evening.

For the first few years the post was not actually fortified. However, the buildings were put up on a plan designed to make it possible for all walls but one of each building to be covered by fire from the windows of the others, should the need arise. In the summer of 1829, however, another eruption occurred much like the first, and once again the fort was chosen as the field of battle by the opposing sides. The businesslike John Work dragged his dying superior officer, Chief Trader John Dease, from his bed and took him outside into the thick of the shooting. Learning on Work, Dease once again harangued the belligerents into a cease-fire.

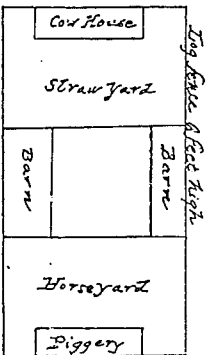
It had been a very close call, and to prevent more of the same, Chief Factor John McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver agreed that additional men would be sent to Fort Colville in the summer of 1830, to erect a stockade and bastions. But before that came to pass Dease had died at The Dalles, having traveled to Vancouver in vain for medical attention.



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Mervin Yavasour's plan of Fort Colville, made in 1845, when he and Henry Ware came to see if the Hudson's Bay Company forts would be of use in a war with the United States. They concluded that the forts would not serve. Yavasour never took anything too seriously, which may be why he left several buildings and interior pickets out of this plan. Courtesy of the Hudson's Bay Company.

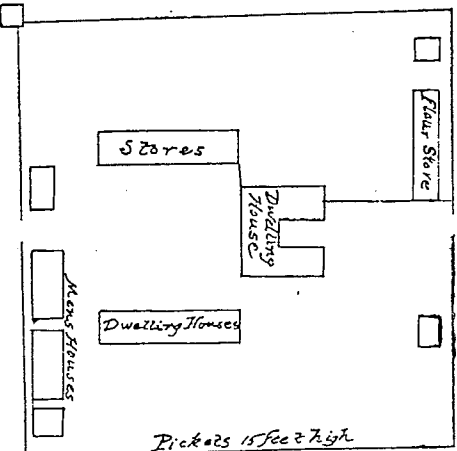
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Big fence 4 feet high

Plan of Fort Colville

Columbia River



Pickets 15 feet high

Bank about 30 feet high





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Since the new stockade of squared logs was about 15 feet high, and the fort only 225 feet by 250 feet in area, it was an imposing structure, especially from the inside. On going in through the front gate, which faced the Columbia, a person found himself in a confined courtyard surrounded by the principal buildings of the fort, all of them a storey and a half high. These central buildings, six in number, plus the internal picket lines that connected them, prevented the visitor from seeing much of anything in the other parts of the fort's interior. The inside pickets divided the fort into four segments, of which the front court was but one. Around it were a warehouse, the store, the chief trader's house or Hall, a range of officers' quarters, a dwelling, and the Indian Hall.

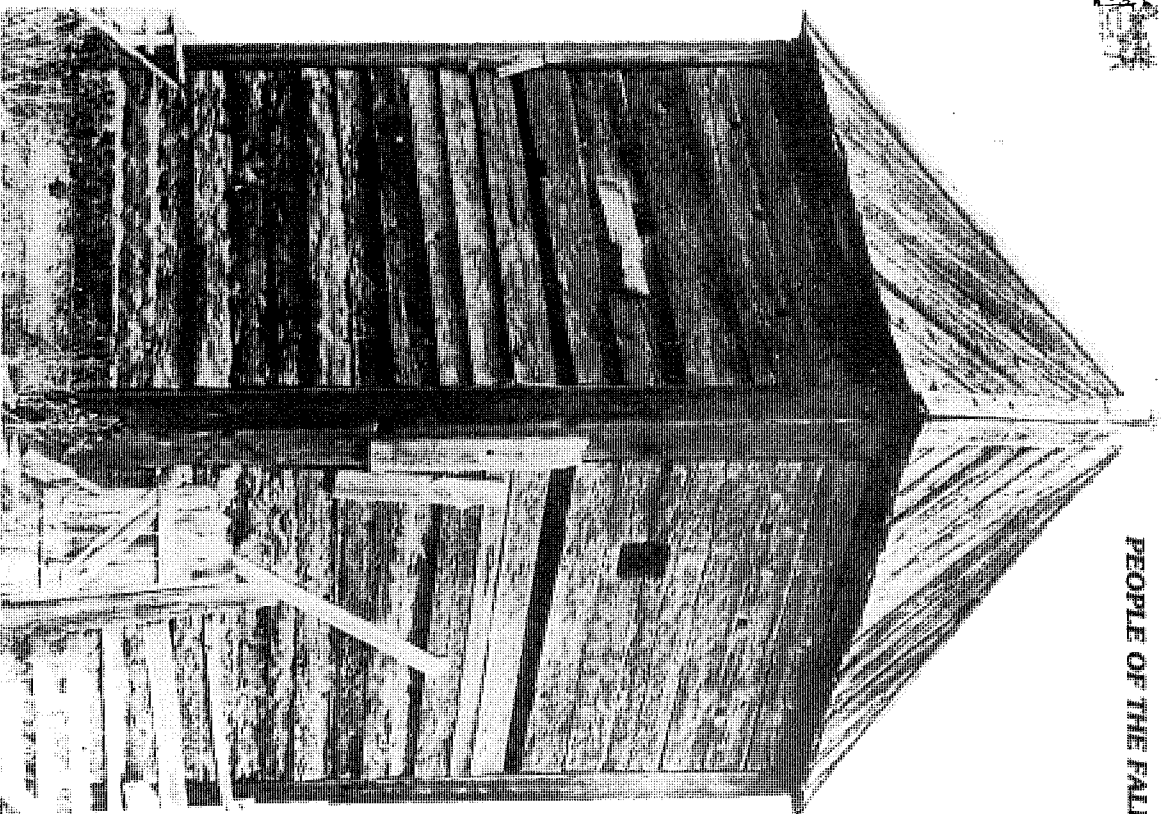
This subdivided fort with its confined spaces embodied a defensive feature not widely remembered today. It was also a solution to the problem of visitors who had developed the habit of entering houses uninvited during the winters to warm themselves. Unguarded hospitality was a Colville Indian ideal: a visitor expected not only a warm place by the fire but food as well. On several recorded instances when the Colvilles were at the point of starvation they nevertheless offered salmon to the fur traders. For example, on the 1st of July, 1830, Francis Heron wrote: "*To us, however they are very generous, giving us a sufficiency for all our Establishment, though they starve themselves.*"

Probably above all other Interior Salish, the Colvilles prided themselves on the civilized arts of hospitality, which, naturally, required a certain reciprocity to be worth doing. Europeans had discovered, however, that the hospitable person seldom became rich. It was also known that if an Indian was warming himself by an adobe fireplace or cast-iron stove in the fort he could not also be out hunting for beaver. During the winter of 1830, the Indians were repeatedly invited to go out of doors and begin hunting. But as long as the dried salmon held out, little was done to make the white men happy. Eventually the Lakes climbed into their bark canoes and headed back toward their homes around the Arrow Lakes, but only after being lavishly outfitted on the credit plan.

Most of the fifteen or so buildings that a visitor would have noticed inside Fort Colville's walls during its twenty-year heyday of the 1830's and 1840's were made from large timbers squared with the ax. Horizontal filling pieces had tenons that fit in long slots cut in vertical posts. The latter were mortised to sills on the bottoms and to plates at the tops of the walls. This was the rather massive 'piece-on-piece' or 'Red River Frame' style of architecture developed by the French. The reconstructed St. Paul's Mission that stands today at the falls is one of the best surviving examples of the style. While much care went into the joining or fitting of these buildings, not much, rather curiously, was given to their foundations, with the result that



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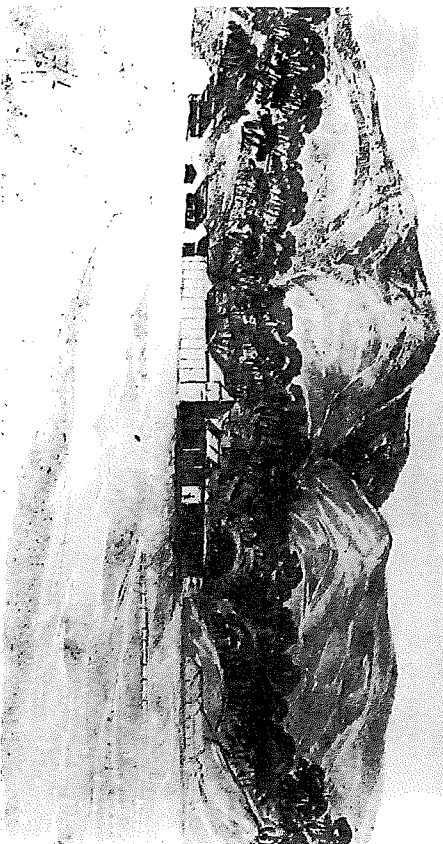


The northwest bastion of Fort Colville was built in 1831, and remained standing well past the year 1901, in which Palmer of Spokane made this photograph. The walls of squared logs mortised to vertical posts at the corners illustrate the piece-on-piece construction used at Fort Colville and St. Paul's Mission. Courtesy of Jerome Pelletier.



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the buildings soon sagged and needed restoration more often than one would think. Only two structures in the fort rested on continuous foundations of the good building stone of quartzite flags so plentiful at the falls. The Hudson's Bay Company men might, however, have been surprised if accused of having no thought for the future. There are probably many factors that remain to be discovered in the thinking of these fur traders, but we do know that virtually every officer expected to leave Fort Colville after a tour of duty. The first man to put a rock foundation under the chief trader's house was the only one who thought about staying. That was Angus McDonald, who planned to eventually turn the post into the family ranch once the Company had withdrawn. He had to wait until 1871 for that to happen.



A watercolor of Fort Colville, by Henry Warre, painted in 1845. The view is from the boat landing, toward the southeast. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.



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### THE TRADE

Trading took place at Fort Colville on almost every day of the year, Sundays excepted. In just about every year from 1826 to 1871 the same fourteen species were traded from the Indians: beaver, brown or black bear, grizzly, muskrat, fisher, fox, lynx, marten, mink, otter, raccoon, wolverine, badger, and "wolf" (including coyote). Beaver and otter were the most important in the early years, but marten and bear became very much sought after later on especially after the beaver hat lost out to silk and pelts of other species in the 1840's. It is likely that a very significant number of those beaver skin hats worn by British soldiers came from the warehouse at Kettle Falls.

In a good year, over 20,000 pelts would be taken in; of that number more than half might be muskrat, but they were the least valuable of the furs. Indians did all of the trapping in the Colville District except during the 1820's and 1830's when some pelts were traded from "free" Iroquois, French-Canadian and white American trappers in what is now Montana. The Indians were encouraged to trap in the winter when the pelts were in their prime. This meant that they had to work out of doors for long hours in the winter, a custom new to them and for which they were not adequately clothed. This should, of course, have made them all the more eager to buy English wool blankets.

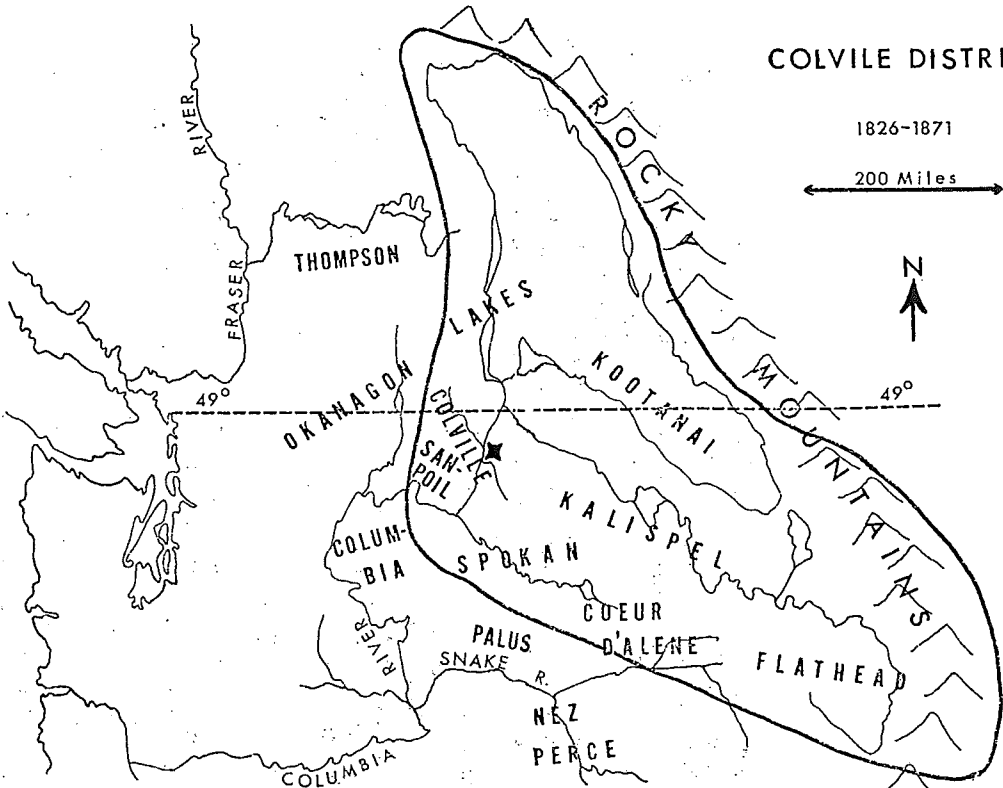
Many products harvested or made by the Indians, other than furs, were purchased by the traders of the Colville District, usually at bargain prices. These included deer and elk hides bought in the hundreds each year, a very few mountain caribou hides, hide tipis, pine pitch for boats, leather shirts, leggings, and gowns; also berries, roots, thousands of pounds of salmon, and the tongues, grease, dried meat, robes, sinews, and horns of buffalo. They also traded for reed mats, roofing bark, horses, canoes, hair bridles, baskets, leather rope, parfleches (leather trunks), appichimons (buffalo-hide saddle blankets), snowshoes, and all sorts of fresh game, wild fowl, and small fish. Everything was entered in ledgers and summarized in annual statistics, a few of which have survived.



## COLVILLE DISTRICT

1826-1871

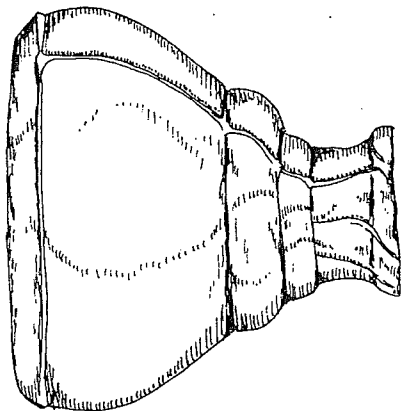
200 Miles



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The Colville District of the Hudson's Bay Company, with the rivers and lakes as portrayed by the American exploring expedition commanded by Charles Wilkes in 1841. The headquarters of the district--Fort Colville--is shown by the star.

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PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

This ink bottle was found on the site of the trading store. Hudson's Bay Company traders kept and maintained many kinds of financial records and were expert letter writers.

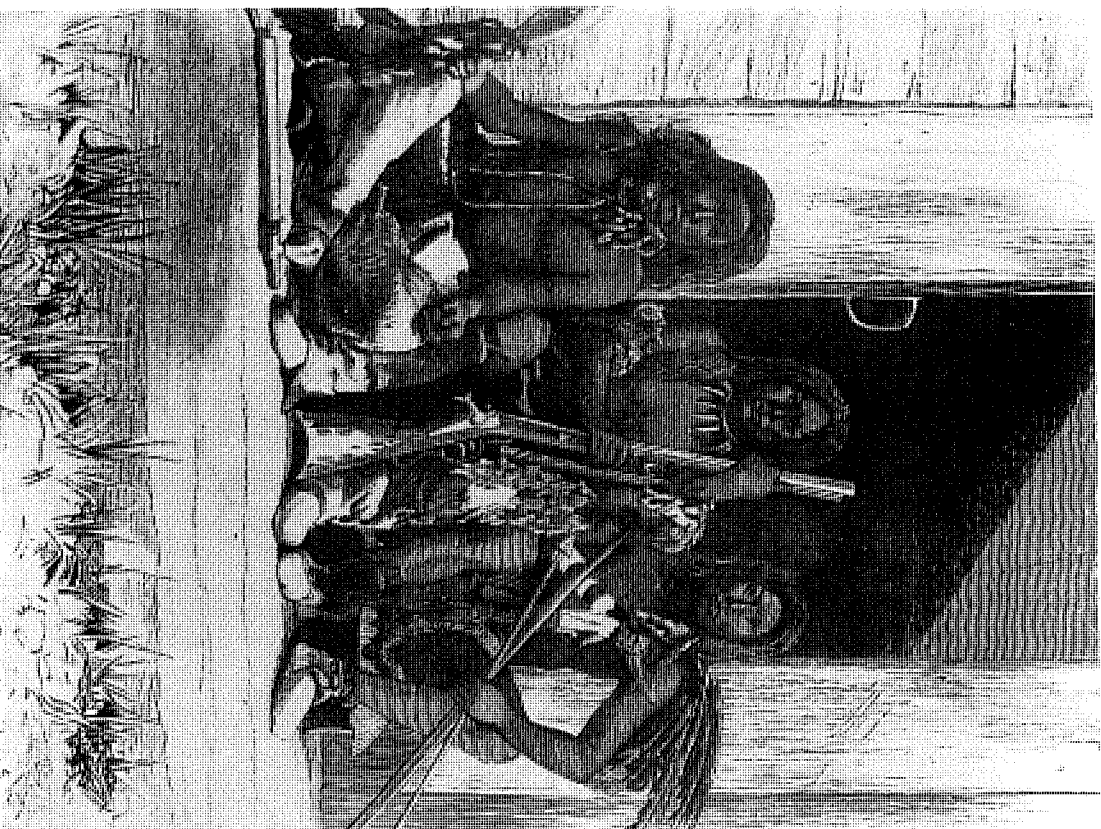
By the 1830's, the Colville and Spokane Indians were selling wheat to the Hudson's Bay Company, and probably vegetables such as tomatoes, which the Colvilles became adept at raising for sale to the white settlers who had poor success with them. Most of the deer and elk leather was bought from the Kutenai. The Hudson's Bay Company then turned around and sold some of it to the Colvilles. By 1830, there were allegedly no elk, "reindeer" (mountain caribou), or mountain goats left in the country of the Colvilles, and deer were scarce. The leather not sold locally to Indians at Kettle Falls was made into bags and bale covers to ship flour, biscuit, furs, and grain.

What did the Indians receive in return? Again, there are long lists, very long ones, many of which have survived. Here one should just mention the more important items: guns and ammunition, traps (sold, not given), wool blankets and capots (hooded blanket coats), cotton clothing and cloth, beads, axes, files which were very popular, knives, mirrors, and firesteels. The list goes on; all the way down to playing cards, jews harps, brass tacks, and cheap brass rings with glass settings. The trading inventory remained almost unchanged from 1807, when Thompson opened for business at the source of the Columbia, down to 1871 when Angus McDonald got rid of the last of his stock. Most of these items were of British manufacture before 1852. Then the Company had to start "buying American" to beat some of the very high customs duties. British goods had a reputation, even among hostile Americans, of being well made and sturdy. The baubles and bangles were naturally cheap stuff, but those things were just small change. The main trading was in hardware and clothing, especially blankets.

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## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS



Three Spokanes seated in a doorway at Fort Colville, 1861 or 1862. The engraving, published by John Keast Lord in 1866, was based on a photograph.



## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

No liquor was ever sold to the Indians at Kettle Falls by the Hudson's Bay Company though American traders ran grog shops intermittently from 1855 onwards. In the 1860's, Angus McDonald, then chief trader at Fort Colville, tried to develop a liquor trade with American miners, but for some mysterious reason this plan did not succeed. The fur traders were not extremists, however. A glass of rum was the standard greeting offered to a chief visiting Fort Colville, which he would enjoy while sitting with the chief factor or chief trader in his house. There were no social barriers for Indians, provided they were of sufficient rank -- or members of the trader's household.

Indebtedness to the Hudson's Bay Company was discouraged except with chiefs and favored trappers. With the latter the motive was merely to make sure they headed out into the mountains properly equipped to do the work. There is no evidence that any attempt was made to actually bind Indians to the company by debts even though every effort was made to whet the desire for trade goods. It required nothing to develop a craving for the tobacco the traders sold and gave away as gifts; smoking had been traditional at Kettle Falls before Europeans even thought of leaving Europe.



The brass lid to a snuff container, found in the Fort Colville trading store. Tobacco was a very important article of trade.

The influences of the white traders on the Indians were extremely varied yet profound, though probably less thorough and devastating than would appear to the casual investigation. The Hudson's Bay Company had a deliberate policy of trying to 'civilize' the Indians, which covered things now considered both good and questionable. They were given some encouragement and experience on the fort farms in agriculture to make the supply of food more secure and regular for everybody. They were taught some religion along the lines of Deism -- at a time when it had gone out of fashion in Europe. The Indians were instructed in various kinds of "morality," especially the morality of working hard at trapping, but also that of not going to war.



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On a July evening in 1830, Francis Heron penned the following in the Fort Colville journal:

*Never did I see such good, well disposed Indians as they are all . . . and what is wonderful, from the little instruction I have given them on religious matters, they have become perfect saints.*

Then in November:

*Made a speech to the whole [Indians] in the evening, the purport of which was to inculcate religion, morality, and industry, to all which they promised a faithful observance, and I really do believe them sincere, as they have already by their improved conduct given me positive proofs of their amendments.*

One might wonder whether Heron was as naive as he seems.

As nearly everyone knows, the morality associated with European trade and industry was mainly designed to get the poor, whites or Indians, to apply themselves to the enrichment of their betters. At the time, most of the Indians at Kettle Falls were perhaps aware of this, even if the ways to avoid participating were less than obvious. One bit of morality a fur trader might have difficulty in himself was the matter of providing for his native wife and children. Some did so and did it well, others were less successful.

The long-term results of intensive fur trade influences were that tribes in close proximity to traders, missionaries, and forts lost some of their own ways of life more rapidly than others who lived at a greater distance. But what is much more interesting is the impressive amount of Salish tradition that has survived the continual assaults, insults, and dilutions of the last two centuries. We are fortunate that the undercurrents of older cultures continue to flow beneath the surfaces of the twentieth century.



## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

### VARIOUS MISSIONARIES

The first Christian missionaries to Kettle Falls were really the fur traders and trappers. While the British officers of the fur companies taught the doctrines we have already discussed, their French-Canadian, Metis, and Iroquois employees were such devout Catholics that they taught their Indian friends and relatives prayers, hymns, and the Power of the Cross.

With the Salish tribes to the east of Kettle Falls this form of Christianity was well-received; at Kettle Falls the impact was not so great, probably because the falls were such an important center of Indian religion. By 1830, a powerful craving for Christianity and the secrets of the whites had been fostered in the Northwest, prompting several journeys by Flatheads and Nez Percés to St. Louis to seek missionaries. This was one of the most famous "Macedonian" calls in the history of modern Christianity, and it brought a large response from both Protestant and Catholic missionary organizations.

First, the Reverend Samuel Parker arrived in 1836, from Boston, to scout the possibilities for his American Board Mission. His overbearing attitude toward Catholicism and the Hudson's Bay Company did not leave a favorable impression around Kettle Falls. Two years later, two Congregational missionaries, Elkanah Walker and Cushing Eells, came to Kettle Falls representing the American Board, looking for a place to establish themselves. Archibald McDonald, then Chief Trader at Fort Colville, obviously did not want American missionaries at Kettle Falls, so he suggested that they build their station at Tsimikaine, two day's journey to the south.

It was a good second choice, for it put the missionaries on the main Hudson's Bay trail between Kettle Falls and Walla Walla, a position advantageous to both parties. The Indians at Kettle Falls were kept from too much disruptive exposure to Protestantism and American influence, for Walker and Eells rarely preached there. When at the fort for supplies, Walker especially was apt to spend his spare time using McDonald's library, for which we can hardly blame him; but the fact is that he spent less time than he could have among the Indians.



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*Desmet*



Both sides of a religious medal found at Fort Colville.

In 1839, Walker and Eells moved their families to Tsimikaine to begin ten desultory years that produced little in the way of results that were visible to the missionaries. Walker, who wrote much more than Eells, was prone to mental depression and in 1840 he wrote to the American Board in a vein to be frequently repeated by Americans in Oregon, sometimes in self-justification: *It has been very sticky in this region the last part of the winter.*

*Many have died. I know not what can be done to save them from utter extinction. They seem as fated to fade away before the whites as the game in their country. There seems but one way that they can be saved, and that is by settling and civilizing them, and this I fear they cannot bear. I sometimes think it will be as injurious to them as their superstitions, which are carrying them off very fast. Whatever is done for them must be quickly done, for there will soon be nothing to labor for.*

We must remember, of course, that for Calvinist missionaries, fate was nothing less than the will of God.

There were other missionaries with a more hopeful view. No sooner had Walker and Eells left Kettle Falls for Tsimikaine in the late fall of 1838 than two Catholic priests, Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modeste Demers, arrived in the Hudson's Bay Company express boats from Canada to begin Catholic missions in the Pacific Northwest. Their reception at Kettle Falls was tumultuous, by their report, and they baptised both fur trade families and some of the local infants. But the Hudson's Bay Company intended that they concentrate their efforts on Company employees, and chiefly on those west of the Cascades. So the priests continued, as planned, on to Vancouver. Demers returned the next year on a tour, but it was to be a decade before Kettle Falls received the full-time attentions of missionaries.

The Jesuits under the initial leadership of Pierre Jean Desmet were the ones who touched the lives of the people at Kettle Falls most profoundly. While establishing mission stations in the Rocky Mountains, Desmet visited Kettle Falls in 1841 and 1842, baptising infants for the most part — adults were not quite ready. He crossed the mountains to Curlew Lake, taking



### PEOPLE OF THE FALLS



Chief Martin Ilmustusolix of the Colvilles who was determined to have his people become Christians. Courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum.

## PEOPLE OF THE FALLS

Martin Illimuxstolix, principal chief of the Colvilles, as his guide. Three years later, in 1845, after Chief Martin had subjected his people to a bizarre round of confessions and penances that included the lash (he had himself whipped too), DeSmet returned to find the tribe ostensibly ready for him during the fishing season. Here we can make use of DeSmet's own extravagant prose:

*I was received by my dear Indians with filial joy and tenderness. I caused my little chapel of boughs to be placed on an eminence in the midst of the Indians' huts. I gave three instructions daily; the Indians assisted at them with great assiduity and attention. More than 100 children were presented for baptism, and eleven old men who were borne to me on skins. A solemn mass was celebrated, during which the Indians chanted canticles in praise of God. The ceremonies of baptism followed, and all terminated in the most perfect order. It was indeed a most imposing spectacle, all around contributed to heighten the effect. The noble and gigantic rock, the distant roar of the cataracts breaking in on the religious silence of that solitude, situated on an eminence overlooking the powerful Oregon river, and on the spot where impetuous waters rush in fury and dash over a pile of rocks.*

This had taken place on the rocky peninsula of the Fishery.

One can conclude that Archibald McDonald and his immediate successors at Fort Colville, Paul Fraser and John Lee Lewes, were opposed to a mission at Kettle Falls as long as they had the power to prevent it, that is until the area passed to the control of the United States in 1846. McDonald, a nominal Presbyterian, took a dim view of the Jesuit missions, and he was especially upset by the disruption of the buffalo grease trade in the Rockies, occasioned by the gathering of the Flatheads and Pend d'Oreilles into the missions. The grease was needed for voyageur rations. Yet McDonald was cordial to DeSmet, as he was with all visitors, and supplied him with seed, livestock, and tools from Fort Colville, for a price.

Anthony Ravalli of the same mission arrived in 1846, and superintended the Colvilles in the erection of a chapel and dwelling for a priest, but he was forced to leave almost immediately because of another priest's illness elsewhere. Adrian Hoecken came over from the mission at Cusick for yet another round of baptisms and marriages, and in 1847 a more substantial church was begun by the French-Canadians under the promptings of Joseph Joset, who was thereafter to figure prominently in this mission, named St. Paul's by DeSmet.

Finally, in the spring of 1848, Peter Devos, a Belgian like DeSmet, became the first resident missionary at St. Paul's, and it is likely that he completed the church and adjacent buildings. Joset was kindly and absent-minded, seemingly often engaged in momentous struggles with both Colville shamans and the Devil. DeVos, on the other hand, is today an obscure

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personality, but he established extremely good rapport with the Indians, proceeding to fill his registers with long lists of baptisms, marriages and funerals.



St. Paul's Mission as it appeared in 1861, when it was only seasonally active. Note that the area now covered with large pines was then somewhat bare. Courtesy of the Royal Engineers Corps Library.

Despite the stirring welcomes given the priests on each visit, and the baptisms of infants and the dying, the mission records show plainly that few marriages, confessions, or baptisms were administered to adults at Kettle Falls before the beginning of DeVos' masterwork in 1848. These facts suggest some reservations about Christianity on the part of the Colvilles, and perhaps some doubts about the usefulness of white political and religious domination.

In about 1850, there were some "scandals" involving a couple of chiefs and the allegedly wayward conduct of the daughter of one of them. Both chiefs then died, as if by the hand of God. According to Joset, a shaman sent by the Devil visited Kettle Falls from the Okanagan country, claiming to have spent six days in heaven where he saw the two unforgiven and unchurched chiefs. For some this shocking news proved that the missionary, DeVos, had been wrong. The resulting uproar became so bad the DeVos had to be sent away to recover his health.

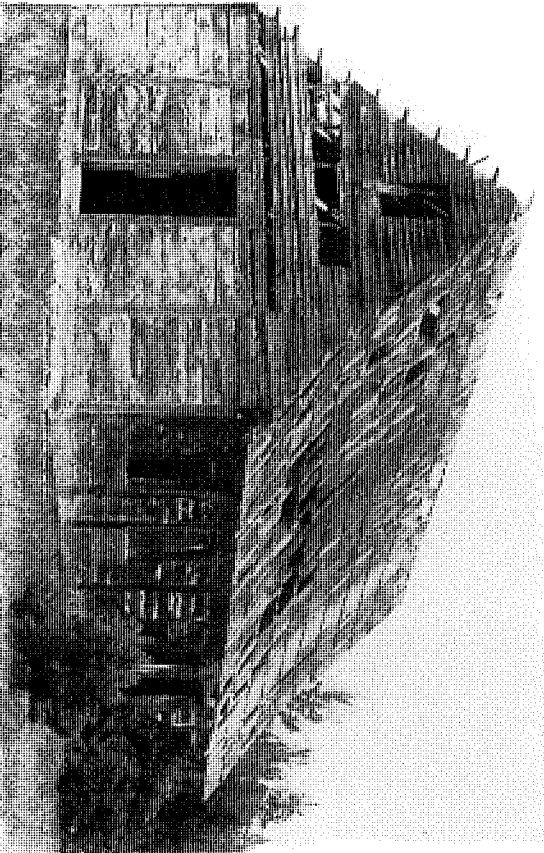
Up to this point, St. Paul's Mission had seemed to everyone involved to be the most successful station in the Rocky Mountain Mission of the Jesuits. This is saying a great deal. Then the tragedy of the smallpox epidemic of 1853, the pressures caused by the introduction of whiskey, and the influx of gold miners followed by war, mounted one atop the other until St. Paul's was closed in 1858.





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Yet even though the mission was officially closed, it was still visited by the priests, and the necessary rituals were all attended to. In 1863, Joset came to reopen it and stay until 1870. Another mission, St. Francis Regis, was started east of the present town of Kettle Falls in 1869, with the intended result that St. Paul's gradually fell into disuse and ruin after 1886. As late as 1874, the Jesuits were obliged to hold a mass burning of Power talismans at the foot of a great cross. In 1910, the St. Paul's church was partly burned by arsonists, but enough remained that an accurate reconstruction could be commenced in 1939 by the Knights of Columbus.



A photo of St. Paul's Mission from about 1900.

Today, as one walks around the silent church standing among the ponderosa pines, it is difficult to imagine the thousands of important transactions in people's lives that were made there, just as it comes as a surprise to learn that hundreds of Indians and dozens of fur traders lie with their families beneath the pine needles behind the church.



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### AN AGE OF RAPID CHANGE

The Hudson's Bay Company had vainly hoped that the boundary between the British and American possessions would somehow include Fort Colville in the former, or that the boundary would at least follow the Clark's Fork and Columbia rivers. But the Treaty of 1846 left the fort and the falls some 30 miles south of the international line. Yet in 1846 there was no American authority to assume governance on the upper Columbia, nor a single American soldier anywhere in the Pacific Northwest; this condition remained around Kettle Falls for thirteen more years. Power and responsibility were shared between the Company and the Indian leadership as before, though the grip of both gradually weakened under the hammer blows of events centered mostly to the south, out on the Columbia Plateau.

These events of gold rushes, three wars, and white settlement came rapidly in the mid-nineteenth century; this was the physical conquest and initial exploitation of the more easily acquired riches by what was then the most dynamic and rapidly rising society in the world.

The prelude was the Cayuse Indian killing of some fourteen people at the Whitman Mission in 1847. It was a response to several factors, including the arrival of American immigrants over the Oregon Trail and the diseases they brought. Measles was the foremost culprit at this time. It spread north to Kettle Falls where it took well over one hundred lives in a few weeks, mostly children.

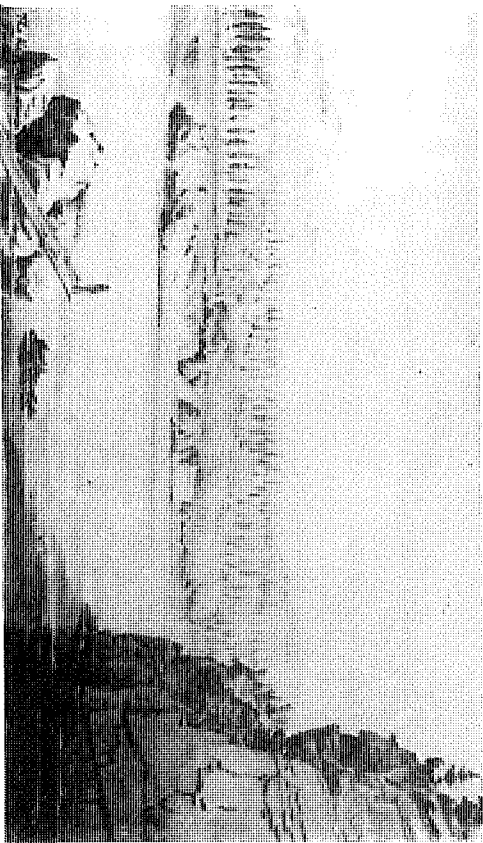
The response to the "Whitman Massacre" by the white community in Oregon was war. The Colvilles and most of the surrounding Salish tribes stayed out of it. Chief Martin Illimuxsrolix promised to help protect Fort Colville should the northward fleeing Cayuse tribe reach Kettle Falls. Chief Factor Lewis at Colville kept the missionaries at Tsimikahne posted on developments. On the 12th of February, 1848, he reported as follows:

*... Affairs at this place have taken a most serious turn and we have been under Arms ever since 3 o'clock this Morning. An hostile attack upon us is threatened by the Indians who live on the border of the Columbia below this, this in revenge for the rumored Murder of many of the Indians of the upper Country (visiting Oregon City)...*

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*I have called in all my Men and it will be necessary for our safety to keep an armed Watch Night and Day. These Braves seem bent on making us responsible for the acts of the Americans on the Willamue . . . The party in array against us so far is small and not to be much dreaded.*

Lewes went on to say that the Indians he feared would be probably joined by the Sampoils who had, according to rumor, lost three of their number to the Americans. He wanted the missionaries to watch for spies.



A watercolor of Kettle Falls by Paul Kane, painted in the year 1847 on the very brink of the modern world. This was the year after Kettle Falls became absorbed into the United States, and a few months before the epidemic that killed nearly half of the children at the falls. The next year would witness the Cayuse War, which led to gold prospectors, who brought whiskey, then more war, followed by the loss of lands. Kane painted this from inside the deep cove on the west side of the river. The Takumakst Village is at the center, overlooking the lower falls which extend across most of the painting. Mission Point rises above Hayes Island on the left. Courtesy of the Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas.

The Walker and Eells families, under Lewes' repeated urgings, finally abandoned their Tsimikaine mission and took refuge at Fort Colville. Sentinels were posted at night; there were a couple of further alarms in the night and incessant rumors. After many weeks the missionaries departed under the escort of a mounted troop of Oregon Volunteers, and the war fizzled out. There is no evidence that the Sampoils actually did more than frighten Lewes.

In 1853, the new territorial governor of Washington, Isaac Stevens, arrived at Kettle Falls from the Missouri River and made rendezvous there with Captain George McClellan who came from west of the Cascades. Other than making the first display of American authority at Kettle Falls, their job

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was to give detailed report to War Secretary Jefferson Davis on the possibilities for a transcontinental railroad by the northerly route. Stevens and his men were feted in the best fur trade manner by Angus McDonald --with plenty of liquid refreshments -- but this did not keep Stevens from later lashing out at the Hudson's Bay Company from time to time, going so far as to declare in 1857 that Colville was then "*practically a British dependency, the road thither is closed to American citizens.*"

Stevens was playing partly to the white settler and mining opinion which was suspicious that the Company had allied itself with the Indians against the white Americans. This has never been proven, and most of the evidence points to the contrary. There had been several further developments since 1853 that had increased tensions. Gold had been discovered in 1854, just above Kettle Falls, and then at the mouth of the Pend d'Oreille River. This precipitated a small rush to the upper Columbia. This discovery was the work of Angus McDonald and his men, which shows either a lack of foresight or perhaps a simple desire to profit by the mining market. Sales to miners did become an important branch of business for Fort Colville, but the Yakima War also started in 1855, partly over the movement of miners to Kettle Falls. This injured both the fur trade and the Indians around the falls.

Pierre Jean Tselkakashin, by 1855 the principal chief of the Colvilles, forbade the transit of miners through Kettle Falls to the Pend d'Oreille placers after August of that year. The U.S. military authorities at Vancouver forbade the sale of ammunition to Indians in the Colville District. War came that fall on the southern Plateau, and the Hudson's Bay Company began building a new post on the Columbia just north of the international boundary to solve its problems with the U.S. Customs and to make it possible to continue the sale of ammunition to the Indians. Without it the Indians were going to starve. The new post was Fort Shepherd, which was operated for more than a dozen years. It solved some of the difficulties, but it provided a poor outlet for most of the Indian trade. Consequently, Fort Colville could not be shut down.

No sooner had the Yakima War quieted down in late 1856 than miners began to travel north again. By the spring of 1858, a few more had been killed or attacked on their way to Kettle Falls and the Fraser River. The small number of miners and settlers in the Colville Valley began their long series of petitions to the Army, now for a garrison, later to keep the garrison. These petitions were always exaggerated in their claims of the Indian threat in the Colville Valley. But they generally had the desired effect, which was to ensure a military market for the products of the settlers' farms. The first petition of 1858 brought Lt. Col. Edward Steptoe and his infantry and dragoons probing north from Walla Walla. He was stopped short in the famous Indian victory near Rosalia.

Francis Perkins, an American, was at Fort Colville a month and a half



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after Steptoe's defeat. He wrote a long and lurid account of his visit for a Washington, D.C. newspaper, implicating the Hudson's Bay Company as an accessory:

*We remained at Fort Colville four days, and during that time thirty of the Coeur d'Alenes, with their head chief, were occupying a room in the fort. It will be remembered that these were the very ones who defeated Col. Steptoe; and they had with them a great number of American 'U.S.D.' mules and horses, which were sold to the chief of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Colville for a small nominal price -- he thus furnishing a market for stolen goods, knowing them to be such, and that they had been taken at Col. Steptoe's defeat. While we were at Fort Colville every night the Indians would have their scalp dance, with their drums beating and war-whoop sounding. They did exactly as they pleased there; and would go into the kitchen and take smut off the kettles to black their faces, which is a well known sign of hostility, indicating war to the knife. . . . While at Fort Colville the sword of poor Lieut. Gaston was waved in my face by the Indian who had taken it from him at the time of Steptoe's defeat. The saddle of Captain Taylor was also shown to me, covered with his blood. These things the Indians displayed with exultation, saying that the white soldiers were women and could not fight, and the more that should be sent into that country the better they should like it, for they would kill them all.*

Perkins did not fully understand the situation his protectors, the Hudson's Bay traders, were in. The mules and horses were later turned over to the Army. Perkins eventually married a Lakes girl he had saved from drowning, taught school at the fort, and their descendants are numerous.

The defeat was avenged by Col. George Wright in the summer of 1858, at the paired battles of Four Lakes and Spokane Plains, just southwest of modern Spokane. Some warriors from Kettle Falls reportedly participated in this last fighting defense of Salish independence, not surprising since there was always a faction of Colvilles who wanted to be done with the whites. The Army followed up its victory with the establishment of a garrison of infantry a dozen miles east of the falls, just northeast of the present town of Colville, calling it Harney Depot, then Fort Colville. For the next dozen years there were two forts with the same name; the distinction is usually made by spelling the two names slightly differently.

Besides "pactying" a part of the Northwest that had seen no fighting, the troops at Fort Colville furnished escorts to the American and British survey parties that were sighting in the 49th Parallel by celestial observations. They connected their points with a wide swath cut through the mountain forests. The American survey parties worked from military Fort Colville;



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the British, who arrived in 1860, based themselves in log barracks erected by an American contractor two miles north of the Hudson's Bay post, at what came to be called Marcus.

Lt. Charles Wilson, secretary to the British party, kept a diary that gives one of the more three-dimensional insights into life around Kettle Falls in the years 1860-62. Attending a dance held in February of 1861, he wrote: *We had the other day a grand ball up at the Hudson's Bay fort given by Mr. Macdonald, at which all the beauty and fashion of the place was present, all the old trappers and voyageurs of the Company drove over in their sleighs, some from a distance of over 30 miles. You have no idea of the scene, such a wonderful collection of people, from the lighthearted trapper with his gaudy moccasins and leggings, through all shades of colour to the dusky hue of the Indians; songs and dancing were the order of the evening; some of the Canadian boat songs sung by a lot of voyageurs were capital; but the dancing after all was the great thing and at 4 o'clock in the morning I found myself dancing a 'veel de dex' with an Indian squaw, in a state of uncertainty as to whether I had any legs on at all, having danced them clear away and nearly dislocated them into the bargain by trying to pick up the proper step, a kind of spasmodic kick in which the legs are doubled up and thrown out again in the most extraordinary manner. The lady's part is much easier, as she simply stands up and dances the double stuffle in the same place till she has tired out two or three partners, when she sits down.*

With troops around to avenge any miners disturbed in their pursuits, the mining and new discoveries mounted rapidly. A big strike was made on Rock Creek, northwest of Kettle Falls, in 1860, and the Pend d'Oreille placers were also resumed. In 1861, there was a small battle between the miners and some Lakes at the mouth of the Pend d'Oreille with men killed on each side, but this only temporarily checked the advance of prospectors up the Columbia and its tributaries.

The Chinese began to arrive in 1863, and by the next year there were several hundred working the bars above and below the falls. They were to remain a prominent part of the scene until the 1880's, when they were suddenly no longer wanted. Most of the placer mines in the northern interior of the Pacific Northwest went through three phases. The discovery was usually by French-Canadians and Indians, who were followed within months by American whites after the inevitable leak of secret information. The moment gold dust appeared on a store counter somewhere the game was up. After the easy gold had been washed from the gravels, the Chinese would be allowed on the diggings. We know next to nothing of how "ownership" was transferred each time. The whites had their own mining law, developed in California,



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but information about this kind of thing from the upper Columbia is very scarce.

The Wildhorse gold strike of 1863 in the Kutenai country brought more traffic through Kettle Falls, and Angus McDonald put some Indians to work cutting a bridle path to the mines. In about 1863, or a little earlier, gold was discovered above the Arrow Lakes on small creeks running into the Columbia. As in 1854, Angus McDonald had a big hand in this discovery. He recommended to his superiors in Victoria that the Company get into the steamboat business at Colville to supply the northern placers, but he was turned down since no hard-rock deposits had been located.

Captain Lemuel White, an American, also failed to interest the Hudson's Bay Company in his steamboat plans, so he turned to the powerful Oregon Steam Navigation Company for backing, and built the steamer "Forty-Nine" just above Kettle Falls in 1865. White bought the lumber for the boat on credit from the U.S. military mill at Fort Colville. The steamer was 114 feet long, over 20 feet wide, and she had a hull depth of 5 feet. Her twin engines, taken out of an Oregon Steam Navigation boat at The Dalles, each had a 12½-inch bore with a four-foot stroke and a nominal power of 80 horses.

White very confidently took the new boat for a maiden voyage, heavily loaded with passengers, down to just above the falls before turning around. He was saluted from Fort Colville by the raising of a fur pelt on the flagpole and a blast from a small brass cannon lashed to a large rock for the occasion. All the excitement came to a sudden end in 1867. When it was learned that the "Forty-Nine" was about to depart on her last trip south from above the Arrow Lakes, the mining camps emptied completely; dinners were left on the tables and goods were left on store shelves as the men scrambled for the overloaded steamer.

The numbers of fish reaching the upper Columbia continued to decline in the 1860's as the catch on the lower Columbia rose wonderfully. The Indians around Kettle Falls turned to farming for more and more of their food, but this was scarcely welcomed by the white settlers who covered the valleys for themselves. The Hudson's Bay Company held on grimly after the local economic downturn of 1868, and began to lose much money, partly because of the exorbitant import duties it was charged.

When the losses had reached an alarming figure, the Colville traders sent off the last pack string of furs in the summer of 1871, closing the last Hudson's Bay Company post in the United States. The McDonald family remained at Fort Colville and eventually filed a claim, subsequently patented, to the buildings and to some of the now-exhausted farmland. Arsonists burned the fort down in 1910, but the McDonalds had already retreated to the Flathead Reservation in Montana. Unfortunately, they had left behind a large cache of records in the attic of their house.



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Under the prompting of Indian agents and local settlers with ulterior motives, the federal government in 1872 got around to outlining a reservation for the Colvilles and nearby tribes. With these Indians the government had never made a treaty. The reservation boundary had to be revised almost immediately by President Grant in one of his many weak moments as chief executive. He succumbed this time to agitation and untruthful statements by some of the Colville Valley settlers. This second version left out the Colville Valley, putting the reservation entirely on the west side of the river, though providing, in theory, for the retention of a narrow strip along the east bank so that the Indian use of the Kettle Falls fishery would not be impaired.

The Indian title to the east bank fell through the cracks of history and became a dead letter, though the Indians continued their fishing on both sides of the falls, catching progressively smaller numbers until the construction of Grand Coulee Dam stopped the yearly migration completely in the early 1930's. But the salmon had ceased to be a major source of food for the Indians more than forty years before, and the northern half of the Colville Reservation had been ceded back to the public domain in 1891, for a very nominal price.

The Colvilles were very angry over the arbitrary switch in the definition of their reservation in 1872, as well as in the sometimes corrupt, often inept, conduct of the Indian agents. One agent was accused of encouraging a house of ill-repute staffed with Indian women. The man was also a Sunday-school teacher and one of the architects of the 1872 revision of the reservation. The Indians had no trouble in recognizing such inconsistencies, and their pleas were acknowledged after several of their letters to the President had been carelessly filed in what may have been a wastebasket.

The Indian Department sent a new agent, an upright man named John Simms. Along with the Indian Superintendent of Washington Territory, R. H. Milroy, and Special Commissioner John Shanks, Simms met with the Colvilles at Kettle Falls in 1873. These investigators completely accepted the Indian point of view. The settlers and former agents would not defend themselves at the meeting, a reaction that would surprise no one today. Symptomatic reports were written, but they had no result.

Several speeches by such Colvilles as Salmon Chief Kinkinahwa and Civil Chief Antoine Sohomie survive in the minutes of the council of 1873, giving us a rare interior view of their torments. Here are a few excerpts:

*Kinkinahwa said: I never hurt the whites and they take our women and lock them up while I would in vain be scratching at the door; they would give us a slap or a blow on the face and tell me not to hurt them or else they would do worse . . . The President never answered our letters . . . They said the west side of the Columbia River was best for us: I was bewildered.*



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*Antoine Sohomie said: Those whites killing our children, not one of them is hung . . . I want liquors to be stopped . . . The whites would take our women, and if I would go after them, they would give me a slap or blow and send me off . . . I have plenty of children belonging to white people [fathers] now.*

*Kinkinahwa said: I am naked, gentlemen, and all these Indians are naked: If any money is to be given to them or spent, give it elsewhere. Give me my land.*

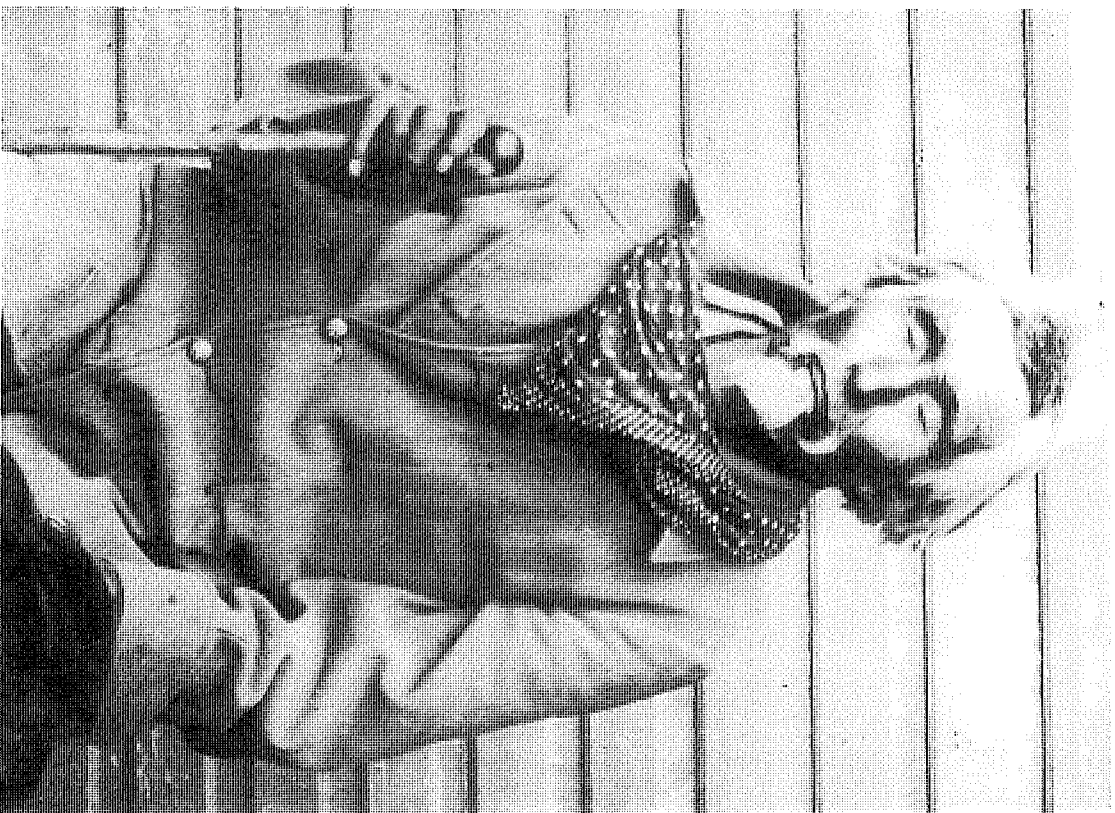
*Antoine Sohomie said: I love my country and do not want to leave her. We do not want to be mixed up with the whites. We want the Colville Valley for a reservation; this is our hearts. We never saw a better country than this. It was the Indian country before the whites came, and we want it.*

*And Kinkinahwa said: I am leaning against a big mountain, and I will not leave this land.*

We do not know if either of these men ever did move over to the west side of the river. Their exertions may, it is true, have bought some ten years of additional time for the Colvilles, for it was not until the middle 1880's that many Colvilles were evicted from the Colville Valley. Indian Agent Sidney Waters expelled Indians from their lodges in the "new town of Colville" in the spring of 1884, and called on the U.S. Cavalry to support him. But it was not all as sudden as that. Mourning Dove claimed that Kinkinahwa was still supervising the fishing at the Takumakst promontory, on the east side of the falls, when she was a little girl, in about 1890.



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Kinkinahwa, the last of the Salmon Chiefs. Courtesy of Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane.



## THE CONSOLIDATION

The history of Kettle Falls has been largely a memory for decades now, a fading one as we lose those of our friends old enough to remember details of its traditions, and as some of the now-submerged landmarks and their meanings grow dim. The river and the hills around it have been made into a kind of primary economic producer of electricity, water, and fiber for other parts of the country. The land and lakes have excellent scenery which are widely appreciated, and a many-layered cultural tradition which is also recognized and loved by many, but not by enough and certainly not by many of the visitors who stream through, seeing nothing more than water under the Kettle Falls bridges.

For too many of us the waters covering the falls are just an irrigation reserve with slumping banks. There is mostly silence except for the sounds of trucks and factories; the human voice is not very often heard on the hillsides. The forests seem to be emptied of almost every mystery and threat or surprise even though occasional attempts have been made to revitalize the landscape with talk of sasquatches, or by shooting cougars. There was a time when every prominent rock or body of water had its guardian spirit and message that explained its part in the creation of the world.

There are two communities, vaguely defined it is true, around Kettle Falls: the Indian and the white. But they are not divided nearly as much as they are in some other parts of the country. Many cross over and join the other community, and many have been members of both all of their lives. There is an insufficient knowledge and love of the long history of the Indian societies that lived around the falls: many societies through time, and those of the people who came to the falls from many directions.

To go beyond the economic necessities of the day, to overcome the effects of the homogeneous mass-culture produced elsewhere, and to enrich our cultural and spiritual environment, we look for a new emporium at the falls not only to preserve, but to also revivify the local traditions so that they will grow with new life. We look to a place where the communities can come together to rediscover old truths, and to settle our dispute with time and the mountains around us.