

In The Stream

Nearly 200 years ago, in 1825, the Hudson's Bay Company established Fort Colvile (spelled with only 2 l's because it was named after the Andrew Colvile, a London governor of the HBC) north of Kettle Falls on a fertile floodplain of the Columbia River. The Heritage Network, an association of museums and historical societies in Northeast Washington, is preparing to commemorate the occasion with an online library of documents, a gallery of images and a forum for discussion of the many topics of interest associated with the fort, <http://www.theheritagenetwork.org/>.

At first thought, some might dismiss this event as too ancient to be relevant. It is not surprising how many things have changed since then. What is surprising is that the way we do history has itself changed dramatically. With the emergence of DNA testing and online genealogy, history has become personal.

As this project developed, an expanding circle of people with interest, expertise and personal connections to ancestors associated with the fort has emerged. They have contributed stories, pictures and links to other websites with more to explore. This column will highlight some of that material and invite more from you, its readers, as we plan events surrounding the 2025 bicentennial.

One of the documents that has come to light and is on the website is [In The Stream: An Indian Story](#) by Nancy Perkins Wynecoop and N. Wynecoop Clark. It is about the life of Nancy's Sinixt (Lakes Indian) grandmother, Able-One. Her tribe lived across the river from present day Bossburg. In 1815, when Able-One was born, her band had little or no contact with fur traders. By the end of her life, Able-One was given a place to live near Angus McDonald, the last chief fur trader of Fort Colvile. So her life corresponds very closely with the period of the fort's existence. As such it mirrors the changes that took place in just one lifetime.

Able-One related the customs and world view of her people to Nancy in Salish. You can see that Nancy struggles to express in English their original meaning. Part of Able-One's carefully crafted education is to learn the meaning of life and death. She learns a lesson from how foam emerges from the churning waters of the river, shines with rainbows and returns to the river. Able-One reflects that "we are the foam of the Great Spirit" and that we must keep "in the stream" to return to the main spirit "like the foam goes back to the "great Growling Water". (The Salish name for Kettle Falls is nearly the same, "noisy waters", or "sounding water".)

There is a lot more than history to be learned from this account. There are triumphs and tragedies. Serious character flaws and inspirational courage are depicted in both Native Americans and Europeans and in women as well as men. Sweeping caricatures such as cowboys and Indians are not supported.

The middle of the 103 page narrative shifts to a series of coyote stories that recount Coyote's efforts to dissuade animals from eating each other. The final chapters recount the lives and often harrowing episodes in those lives of Nancy's more immediate family. These stories include the multiple times that Nancy's home burned down and the manuscripts of this book burned with them, only to be rewritten and eventually completed by her daughter, Nettie and Fanny Wynecoop LeBret.

Like many explorations into history, this one leads to much more material. Anthropologist William W. Elmendorf interviewed Nancy Wynecoop and many other local Salish speakers. He wrote books about those who lived on the west coast of Washington, but not about the inland Salish. We have hundreds of pages of notes he took during these interviews. They are in PDF format and can be downloaded from the Heritage Network website. They are hand-written and include many words written in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). It would be wonderful if they could be transcribed into digital text so that they can be searched and the native words pronounced so they can amplify our understanding of that language and culture.

In the Stream is only one of many topics that seem to flow into and out of the history of Hudson's Bay Fort Colvile. The fur trade itself; unique boats designed to carry cargo up and down the Columbia; Métis music and crafts; tough ponies, flour mills and much more are all being described and discussed leading up to the bicentennial.

By Joseph Barreca, President of the Heritage Network