Summit Synopsis

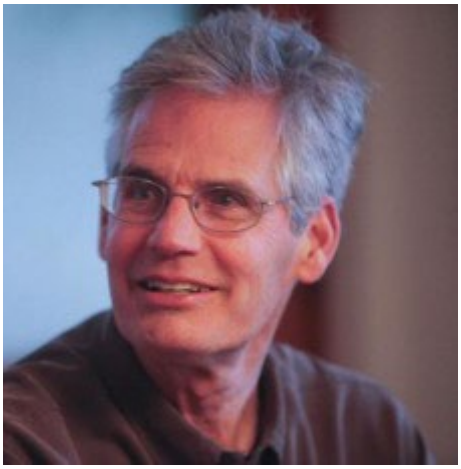
By all accounts the Fort Colvile Summit was a big success. An article about it by Mathew Callaghan in the Spokesman Review was picked up by the Seattle Times. I heard about it from one brother and one sister who live on the coast and get the Times online. Notoriety and buzz aside, the main questions coming in are “Where can we read or watch more about it?” and “Can we do that again?” To those ends links to articles about the Summit and to this article (which is shaping up to be the first in a series) will be posted on the Fort Colvile Summit page of TheHeritageNetwork.org website. As for future events, none have been scheduled but there are ideas in the works.



HBC Fort Colvile by Steven Anderson

The Silverado is not the Seattle Times. I count that as a good thing. In the end this is about us, the place where we live and who we are together. The Summit was wonderful in that it

let us focus on that identity. We don't want that to fade in the face of content from national media and the holiday season. But it is almost winter. The Salish term translates to "a time of waiting". So, this article will discuss the presentations from the Summit in hopes that folks will regroup to pursue some of the many directions that it opened to us and others that are unexplored.



Jack Nisbet

Fifteen authors and historians spoke either in person or via the Teams Teleconference. Jack Nisbet opened up by inviting Warren Seyler, historian and self-described politician from the Spokane Tribe, to begin with a prayer. Warren advised us that we did not need to stand for the prayer. Native gatherings did not call for that.

"*Open our hearts and our minds so we can really listen to and understand one another.*
As you have told us to do, to always think about the seven generations ahead of us.
And also to never forget the past for all the things that all of our ancestors have done to make sure that we are here today."



Warren Seyler

That was a good start. He went on to remind us about his ancestors that "*Upwards of 80% died off because of smallpox, whooping cough… All these other diseases that were foreign to this country till European immigrants arrived. So, by the time the fur traders arrived in 1810, the numbers were down.*" He reminded us that the Chewelah Valley was originally Kalispel land and that they did not understand land ownership. If you have 80 acres that you pass down, will the next generation and those to come be able to live off those 80 acres? He said that Tribal people know the names and stories of hundreds or thousands of their relatives. Those connections were evident in the people at the conference. Many had tribal and fur trade relations including others in that same room. That family feeling carried on in the following speakers.

Moderator and well-known historian, Jack Nisbet, compared the arrival of David Thompson in 1811 to his own arrival in the 1970s. Both men realized that "*Even though we call them all Salish languages, they're different.*" Thompson had to find different translators to distinguish nuances between Coeur d'Alene, Kalispel and Spokane Salish. Nisbet listened to intense discussions about those differences today among native speakers. In another similarity with historical figures, he had to go up and down the Chewelah Valley learning about plants just a David Douglas did in 1826. He offered to continue to educate participants about the significant places and plants in the valley. (That trek did not happen after the conference but still may be in the offing.)



Mark Weadick, President of the Northwest Fur Trade Historians, talked to us about the work his group has been doing for years in association with the Spokane House Interpretive Center. They have been giving living history presentations to local students. "*As presenters, we do our very best to make our presentations with the clothing, the tools and the technologies of the time, because there's been a lot of myths about the fur trade.*" All this takes a lot of research, personal time, money and investment. Mark also initiated a way for fellow descendants of fur traders to get in touch with each other by putting their name and that of their ancestor on a large white board.

Past president of the Washington Museum Association, Steve Anderson, introduced **Angus McDonald of the Great Divide**, the name of his subject and his book, so titled because there were many Angus McDonalds in the fur trade, but only one with the enthusiasm, charisma, skills and fidelity to his Nez Pierce wife and family of our Angus McDonald, the last and longest-serving Chief Trader at HBC Fort Colvile.



The family feeling continued as Alix Christie, author of **Shining Mountains**, followed with more stories of Angus

McDonald, her great, great, great uncle. "*He took over just as the trade was really coming to an end, and the conflict with the Americans was beginning. In this tumultuous period, gold was discovered. The miners started flooding into the native lands. Governor Isaac Stevens arrived to claim the land for American settlement. Then came the treaties and the battles we all know about between the US Army and tribes, including the Yakima, Palouse, Spokane and Coeur d'Alene.*" McDonald's skills as a mountain man and a businessman earned him respect among the chiefs. Being proud of his role as a peacemaker and Fort Colvile's role as a sanctuary, McDonald pointed out that only Fort Colvile of all of the Hudson's Bay forts had never been attacked.

After the Canadian Border was established, McDonald tried to hang on to the property at Fort Colvile but ultimately was unsuccessful. Christie's favorite comment is that at the end of the fort's occupation the Americans called it "*Mac's old pile of logs*."



Arnie Marchand, Okanogan Tribal Elder and author of ""**The Way I Heard It**" and **STIM AN S KW IST** "What is Your Name", advised us that this was a commemoration, not a celebration of the 200 years since HBC Fort Colvile was founded. Later in the gathering after the teleconference had been turned off, he spoke again to point out that Indians like himself share the blame for decimating the beaver population. Colonialism cuts both ways. It is initiated with technology and capital from the colonizers but engages the target population to do much of the work and support the effort. That is a theme which we continue to see today and is food for further thought.

These six presenters brought us nearly half-way through the conference. Even after discussions of the other speakers are described in further detail, it would be wrong to think that everything that can or should be said about the beginning of our local culture's encounter with the French, English and Spanish immigration ends here. If you want to see and hear more, share your ideas with us, Joe.Barreca@gmail.com.