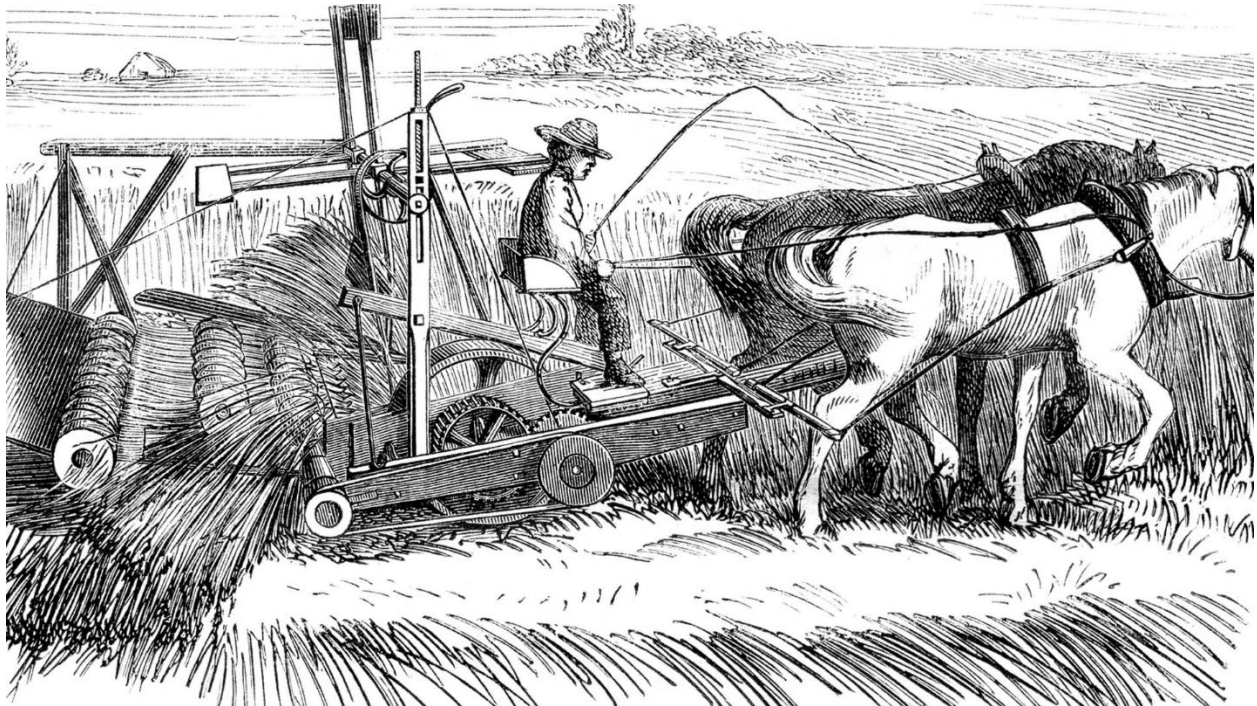


HBC Fort Colvile and the Civil War

Too often we think of a period as frozen in time remembering a few specific images and stories associated with a historic topic. Time doesn't stand still. In the period of the existence of Hudson's Bay Fort Colvile, 1825 to 1871, a generation or two passed, not just here in Kettle Falls, but everywhere. The Industrial Revolution had already taken hold in England before fur traders like George Simpson and Archibald McDonald were even born. Granted that the lives of native people's changed dramatically with the establishment of HBC Fort Colvile, but the lives of people in England had already begun to change as well.

Great Britain was the first country to industrialize because it had large deposits of coal and iron. These resources were vital to the development of the steam engine and other machinery that powered the Industrial Revolution. The knives, traps, guns, beads, pots and pans that were the stock of the fur trade came from an industrialized nation. Not only did England have ore and energy, it had machines to make more machines, factories to make them in; a workforce that moved into the cities and a fleet of ships that could navigate the world using accurate watches, sextants and a detailed chart of the heavens.



McCormick's Reaper

The new nation of the United States soon had all of these things too, plus vast areas of arable land. The early colonies in America also had slave labor that made it possible to farm the land with vast wealth accumulating to slave owners in the South. Much of the

industrial revolution affected the textile industries. The cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney in 1793, plus spinning machines and mechanical looms changed textiles from a cottage industry to a commodity powerhouse. The value of slaves had been declining until they became critical to the mass production of cotton. The export of cotton, mostly to the factories in England, was the main economic asset of the Confederacy. 75% of the world cotton supply came from the southern United States.

Thomas Jefferson and other leaders realized that the United States would benefit from acquiring more land. In 1803 Napoleon was willing to sell it to them although technically the French only controlled the tiny southern tip of the Louisiana Purchase. The Louisiana Purchase gave Napoleon money he wanted for wars in Europe and the United States land it wanted for more agriculture with only Indian Tribes standing in the way.



To explore the new territory, Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark west in 1804. They used maps drawn by David Thompson, who also invented the Columbia Boat, a major product of Hudson's Bay Fort Colville. The land west of the Louisiana Purchase and north of Spanish territories was jointly occupied by the British, Americans and numerous Native peoples. Between the time when Thompson had Spokane House established in 1810 and when George Simpson ordered the post personnel north to Fort Colville in 1825, the United States

barely avoided a civil war with the Missouri Compromise of 1820. It allowed slavery in the new state of Missouri and outlawed it in the new state of Maine. Oddly, it ordered that no other new states could have slaves north of the 36° 30' parallel even though the 36° 30' parallel was on the southern border of Missouri. The compromise held for another 34 years.



The US went to war with Mexico from 1845 to 1848 gaining land on the southern border of the United States and making it available for slavery. The principle area involved was the independent state of Texas. Adding Texas as a slave state would upset the free/slave balance in the senate. Ralph Waldo Emerson predicted that “Mexico will Poison Us” and indeed it did.

During the war, expansionist president Polk had the Oregon treaty ratified. It established the 49th parallel as the border between the United States and Canada on June 15th, 1846. This move eliminated conflict with the slave-free country of Canada while waging war with anti-slavery Mexico. It effectively quashed the Hudson’s Bay Company’s effort to govern what is now Washington State and it cut off Fort Colville from an outlet to the Pacific down the Columbia River.

Meanwhile, machinery in the North such as McCormick’s Reaper, changed grain farming radically. An 1844 visit to the prairie states in the Midwest convinced McCormick that the future of his reaper and of the world’s wheat production lay in this vast fertile land rather than in the rocky, hilly East. In 1847, with further patented improvements, he opened a factory in the then small, swampy, lakeside town of Chicago. The first year, 800 machines were sold. (Wikipedia) Soon the US was feeding England.

With the reaper, wheat farmers could harvest as much as they could sow. They wanted more land to farm wheat without slaves. The South wanted more land to farm cotton with slaves. The tensions that became the American Civil War were founded in these technologies. They came to a head with the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

Southern states had taken control of the House of Representatives due to the 3/5th rule of 1787. It determined that three out of every five slaves were counted when determining a state's total population for legislative representation and taxation even though they could not vote. The Democrats, mostly from the South, supported slavery. The Whigs, mostly from the North, opposed slavery. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. It was drafted by Democratic Senator Stephen A. Douglas intending to open new lands to develop and facilitate the construction of a transcontinental railroad. However, the Kansas-Nebraska Act effectively repealed

the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The act replaced the 36 1/2 parallel northern boundary for slave states with a doctrine that allowed new states to choose for themselves whether to become a slave or free state. Pro and anti-slavery factions flooded into Kansas which was then still a territory to swing the vote. Fighting broke out prompting the term "Bleeding Kansas."

Many native tribes had already been forced to move west into what became the territory of Kansas. The government attempted to buy them out and move them south to reservations in Oklahoma. Those who didn't move were subject to attacks, invasions and diseases brought on by white American settlers.

The Whig party split between southern pro-slavery and northern anti-slavery factions and fell apart. A new party, the Republican Party, arose. Its candidate for president, John C. Fremont lost to Democrat James Buchanan. Two days after Buchanan's inauguration in 1857, the Supreme Court decided in the Dred Scott vs Sandford case that the U.S. Constitution did not extend American citizenship to people of black African descent, and therefore they could not enjoy the rights and privileges the Constitution conferred upon American citizens. The decision is considered the worst in the Supreme Court's history, being widely denounced for its overt racism, judicial activism, poor legal reasoning, and crucial role in the start of the American Civil War four years later. (Wikipedia).

In the following year of 1858, Indian wars broke out in Eastern Washington Territory over many of the same problems that Natives had in Kansas Territory. With new long-range rifles that would later play a role in the Civil War, General George Wright crushed native resistance at Four Lakes near Spokane. In 1859 the army established Military Fort Colville

to protect settlers a few miles away from Hudson's Bay Fort Colville. Many soldiers would soon leave to fight for the Confederacy during the Civil War.



(The next article in this series will look at the military men who played roles in Washington Territory in the West and the Civil War in the East.)