

THE CHANGING

Pacific Northwest

INTERPRETING its PAST



EDITED by

DAVID H. STRATTON and GEORGE A. FRYKMAN

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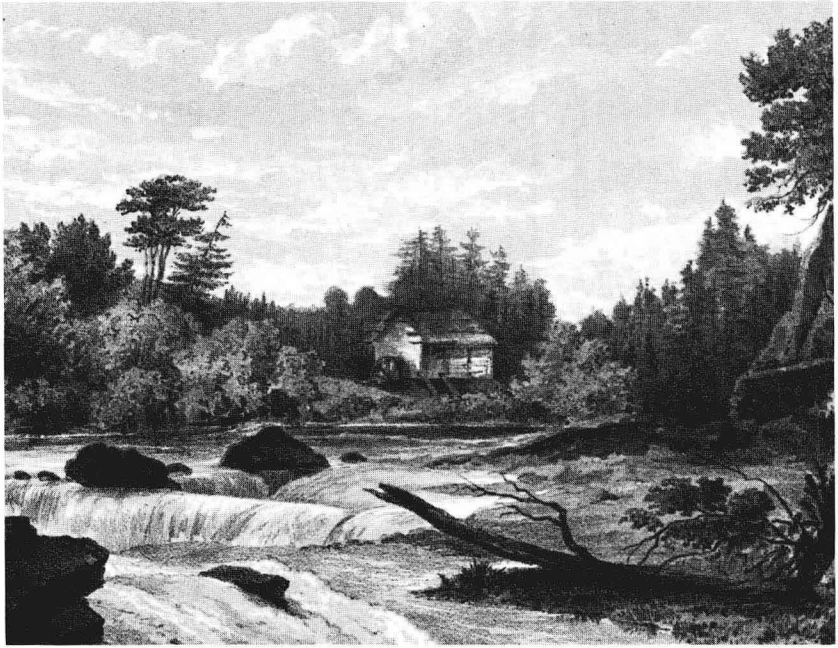
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THE CHANGING

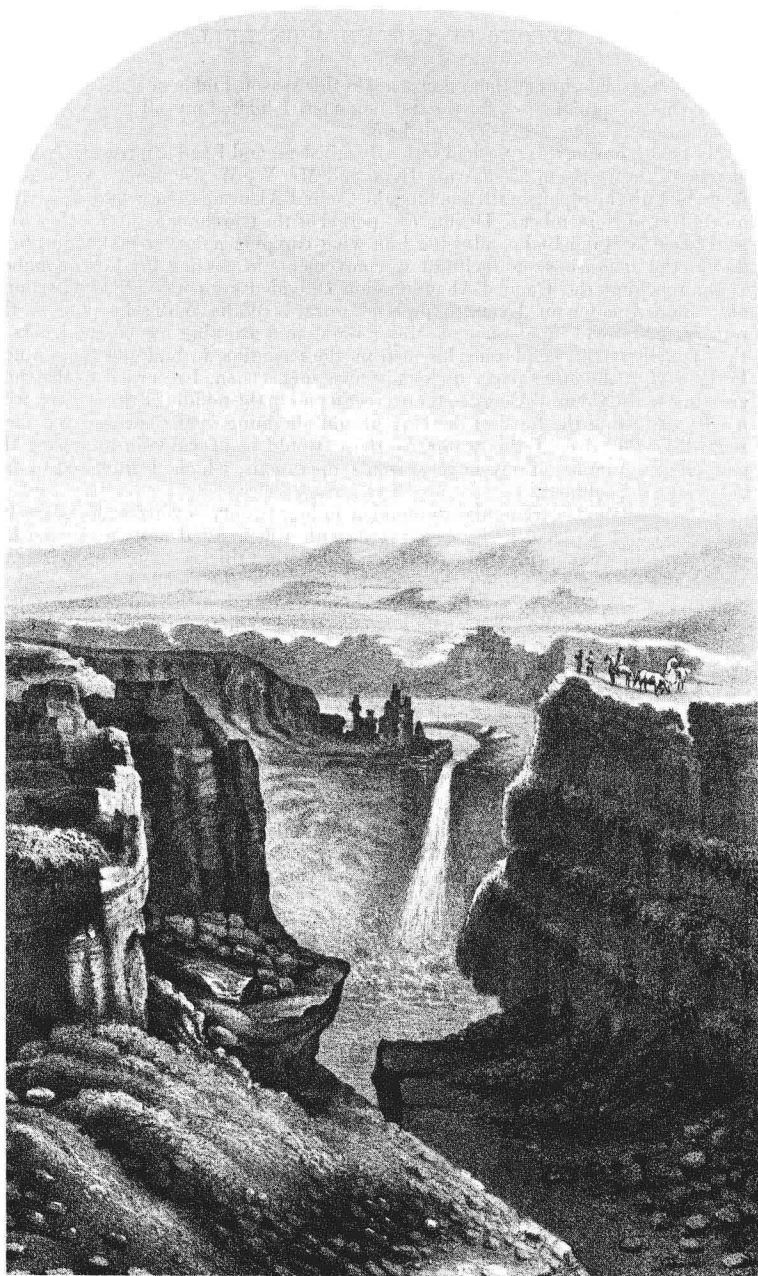
Pacific Northwest

INTERPRETING its PAST

**Sherman and Mabel Smith Pettyjohn
Lectures in Pacific Northwest History**



Hudson's Bay Company mill, from the *Pacific Railroad Reports*.
Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Library,
Pullman, Washington



Palouse Falls in Washington Territory, a lithograph from the Mullan Road Survey, drawn by Gustavus Sohon.
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Introduction

The Pacific Northwest, once regarded as an “American Siberia” of dense forests and stormy coasts, is a relatively new region in the nation’s development when compared with older sections, such as New England or the South. Perhaps for that reason Northwest history has been slighted and thus offers an unusually fertile field for investigation. In addition, the broad expanse of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, western Montana, and—in the context of a “Greater Northwest”—Alaska has experienced dramatic changes in the past four decades. Spectacular economic and population growth marked the wartime years of the 1940s as the beginning of a new historical period, comparable in significance to the “New Northwest” introduced during the transitional decade of the 1880s. This pattern of change, although with less acceleration, has also characterized the years from the 1940s to the 1980s. It will probably continue, if for no other reason, as the population increases due to attractive living conditions and as industry and commerce follow in the wake of human migration. Yet even among those who already live in the Northwest, knowledge and understanding are woefully inadequate about the economic, social, and political milieu which should have a bearing on the formation of this emerging society. At this particularly opportune time scholars and the general public alike need to explore new approaches for interpretation of the region’s past.

Fortunately there are many signs of increasing interest in Pacific Northwest history. One of these hopeful indications is the Pettyjohn Distinguished Lecture Series at Washington State University, Pullman. The estate of Margaret Pettyjohn, a long-time Walla Walla area resident and patron of historical organizations, provided WSU with an endowment designated for the promotion of Northwest history. The University of Washington and the University of Idaho also shared in the estate of Miss Pettyjohn, whose family farmed a large acreage near Prescott, Washington. She died in 1978. In memory of her parents, both pioneers of Walla Walla County, WSU established the Sherman and Mabel Smith Pettyjohn Distinguished Lectureship of Pacific Northwest History.

During the week of October 27-November 1, 1980, the WSU History Department started using these funds by bringing noted historian Norman A. Graebner of the University of Virginia to the Pullman campus as the first Pettyjohn Distinguished Lecturer. In conjunction with his week-long visit, the department sponsored jointly with the National Endowment for the Humanities a two-day research symposium (October 30-31) entitled “A Changing Historiography for the Pacific Northwest,” in which Graebner delivered the keynote address. He was joined for the symposium by a group of regional scholars and interested individuals from the general public who assessed current historical writing in the Northwest and identified future research priorities.

Besides the Pettyjohn Lecturer, eight other persons presented major papers or addresses and a three-member panel consisting of an architect and two archaeologists conducted a discussion on the value and use of nondocumentary sources. Nine other participants served as primary discussants for the major presentations, thereby providing a "bridge" for questions and comments from the audience. Among those gathered from all six states of the "Greater Northwest" were academic scholars, professional or public historians, officials of five state historical societies (Oregon, Washington [two societies represented], Montana, and Idaho), and the editors of three regional historical journals (*Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, *Montana Magazine*, and *Idaho Yesterdays*). The relatively small attendance (about seventy-five) fostered informality, lengthy exchanges of information, and frank evaluations—in short, a thorough airing of the problems and advantages of regional history.

All but one of the essays in this anthology were delivered in the symposium, and all have been revised in varying degrees. The chapter by Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., originated separately as the Fall 1982 Pettyjohn Distinguished Lecture. In the symposium's keynote address Norman A. Graebner not only views the Northwest Coast as an American region but also as a coveted prize in nineteenth-century international diplomacy. The other essays fall into three broad categories, beginning with *the nature of the region*. Richard Maxwell Brown suggests a wholly new interpretation for the "nature" of the Pacific Northwest, linking its character and social development to the influence of climate. Josephy's account, which comes next, challenges scholars and other modern-day Americans to recognize Indian spiritual systems as key forces in the pervasive historical theme of Indian-white relations. In the essay on Alaska's painful experiences Claus-M. Naske points out the reasons why that far northern state must be accepted as an integral part of the region and the nation, rather than as an obscure appendage.

A second category contains essays that address some of the questions posed by the studies of *social history* and *political culture* that are providing new interpretations of regions as well as of ethnic and minority groups, including women. Ronald H. Limbaugh discusses the complex problem of political elites in early Idaho and, by implication, in other western territories, a matter of special importance to Washington, Montana, and Alaska as well, since they, too, endured lengthy territorial apprenticeships. In the essay by Michael P. Malone (with Dianne Dougherty) the authors contend that political elites are the natural product of a particular culture and environment, with Montana serving as a prime example. The burden of Carlos A. Schwantes's chapter is that stereotyped images of western laboring groups as merely violent men should be replaced by dispassionate investigation of their institutions, which will be more fruitful than simply concentrating on certain bizarre and murderous episodes. Susan Armitage then surveys the development of women's history as a subfield in Pacific Northwest studies and explains why historians must always ask the question: "What were women doing while men were doing the things they deemed important?" A concluding category, represented by Robert E. Burke's sage observations on editing, explores the ways to establish *standards of publication* which should be met by editors and authors who want to develop new themes of regional history.

In addition, the following symposium participants made important contributions to this project either as primary discussants or by presiding over sessions:

William L. Lang, Editor, *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*; the late Robert Hitchman, President, Washington State Historical Society; Terrence O'Donnell, Oregon Historical Society; Judith Austin, Editor, *Idaho Yesterdays*; Patricia Roppel, historical writer, Ketchikan, Alaska; Kent D. Richards, Central Washington University; Patricia Jones, Indian Education Coordinator, Pullman School District; Norman H. Clark, Everett Community College; William S. Greever, Siegfried B. Rolland, and Roderick Sprague, all of the University of Idaho; Virginia Guest Ferriday, architect and historic preservationist, Portland; and Margaret Andrews, James F. Short, Jr., Allan H. Smith, and Richard D. Daugherty, all of Washington State University. Several of our colleagues at WSU also gave us special assistance in the symposium: Glenn Terrell, WSU President; Edward M. Bennett; Clifford E. Trafzer; John Slaughter, Academic Vice President and Provost; and Andrew J. Gregg, who served as Symposium Coordinator. John Alexander Williams and Katherine Abramovitz, Division of Research Programs, National Endowment for the Humanities, provided helpful advice and evaluation for the symposium. Stuart B. Bradley of Chicago, McMurray, Black & Snyder, Attorneys at Law, gave generous support to this publication. At the WSU Press, Fred C. Bohm, Editor in Chief, J. D. Britton, Project Editor, and Sharon White, Designer, worked their special miracles with the publication process. We acknowledge the individual efforts of those named here, but hold ourselves accountable for any missteps in the overall project.

David H. Stratton
George A. Frykman

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The Northwest Coast in World Diplomacy, 1790-1846

EDITORS' NOTE

Few first books have had the great scholarly impact of Norman A. Graebner's *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (1955). In what came to be called the "Graebner thesis," he challenged fundamental Turnerian dogmas by arguing that American objectives of expansion in the 1840s were not agrarian and territorial, as Frederick Jackson Turner had maintained, but rather maritime and commercial. More specifically, Graebner contended that neither migrating pioneers nor the spirit of Manifest Destiny determined the course of diplomacy that culminated in acquisition by the United States of both Oregon and California. Instead, he asserted that two generations of American presidents and statesmen steadfastly pursued the major goal of obtaining the harbors at San Diego, San Francisco, and Puget Sound as gateways for commerce with Asia. With this initial book Graebner not only contributed a significant reinterpretation of Manifest Destiny, but stimulated a great deal of lively discussion among his fellow historians as well.

In the essay presented here Graebner reviews the broad framework of events and diplomatic exchanges that preceded the Oregon Treaty of 1846. His emphasis, as in *Empire on the Pacific*, rests on the primacy of the sealanes and trade. Thomas Jefferson had grasped the commercial importance of the Pacific Northwest coast even before the United States became a successful competitor for the sea otter trade in the 1790s. By the 1840s Great Britain and the United States were struggling for dominance of the coast. Yet American diplomats had long since established a traditional claim at the 49th parallel, principally because Juan de Fuca Strait and Puget Sound lay south of that line. President James K. Polk, despite the cries of his party for 54-40, became convinced, as Graebner puts it, that seaports "were all that mattered." In the end the president could claim little credit for the equitable diplomatic settlement of 1846. Both Britain and the United States, nevertheless, were well served by the Oregon Treaty in the distribution of lands and harbors; and the commercial interests of both nations were pleased with the peaceful results.

Norman A. Graebner has written extensively on American diplomatic history. Besides *Empire on the Pacific*, he is the author of *The New Isolationism* (1956) and *Cold War Diplomacy* (two editions, 1962 and 1977). He has also edited several works, including *Ideas and Diplomacy* (1964), *Manifest Destiny* (1968), and *Freedom in America: A 200-Year Perspective* (1977), and has contributed numerous articles to historical journals. Graebner received a B.S. degree (1939) at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, an M.A. (1940) at the University of Oklahoma, and a Ph.D. (1949) at the University of Chicago. He has taught at Iowa State University and the University of Illinois, and is now Compton Professor of History and Public Affairs at the University of Virginia. In the fall of 1980, when he presented this paper, Graebner served as the first Pettyjohn Distinguished Lecturer at Washington State University.

THE CHANGING PACIFIC NORTHWEST



Chevalier Lapie's map of the Oregon Country in 1821.
Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

The Northwest Coast in World Diplomacy, 1790-1846

N O R M A N A. G R A E B N E R

When Great Britain and Spain clashed over the possession of Nootka Sound in 1790, the Great Northwest hardly seemed worth the quarrel. For a half-century Europeans in numbers had sailed that coast in search of adventure, empire, sea otter skins, and the fabled Northwest Passage. They found adventure and fur; they discovered no passage and built no empires. For hundreds of miles to the north of San Francisco Bay they encountered a rugged coast, with rocky beaches, impermeable sand dunes, and forested headlands terminating frequently in towering cliffs that jutted precipitously from the sea. So devoid was the region of inviting coves and harbors that as late as 1790 explorers had not yet charted large portions of the shoreline between Spanish California and the Columbia River. North of the Columbia and along the shores of Juan de Fuca Strait early travelers found the coastal regions more attractive. What made these landscapes more pleasing to the eye was their gradual ascent from the generally low-lying, wooded shoreline to the crest of the coastal ranges. North of the Fraser River, wrote Captain James Cook in 1778, the coastal areas "had a very different appearance to what we had before seen." There, he noted, the mountains ran directly into the sea, creating deep inlets rather than gentle valleys along the shore. Early voyagers found the upper coasts of Vancouver Island equally forbidding.¹ Despite its grandeur, the Northwest coast in 1790 remained largely untouched. Mariners had scarcely entered, much less explored, its two most promising waterways, the Columbia River and Puget Sound. Even as an unspoiled wilderness the region seemed to belong to the past.

If eighteenth-century maritime activity in the Northwest had achieved little, it managed to give the region a momentary importance.² Spain claimed the Northwest under the Papal Bull of 1493 and the Spanish-Portuguese Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494; together these documents divided the New World between Spain and Portugal. Before the mid-eighteenth century Spanish explorations north of Cape Mendocino had been halting and inconclusive; they had hardly solidified, much less extended, the Spanish Empire in North America. Spanish power in the Pacific could not hold its own against the pirates and privateers that preyed on Spanish shipping. Indeed, the Spanish hegemony over the west coast of North

America was illusory and would endure only as long as that country faced no direct challenge from its European rivals. That challenge became inescapable when Vitus Bering, a Dane in the tsar's service, explored Russia's Asian coastline and, in 1728, discovered the strait that bears his name. Bering later organized an expedition which, in 1741, reached Chatham Sound south of Sitka in the vicinity of 55° north latitude. The expedition discovered portions of the Aleutian chain and took a bountiful harvest in sea otter skins. Russians now invaded the western Aleutians in search of pelts; they did not return to the coast of North America until the end of the century. Once established, the sea otter trade dominated the commerce of the North Pacific. Always, however, the Europeans relied on the natives who possessed the endurance, skill, weapons, and vessels required to pursue the prey.

Spain responded to suspected European encroachments by dispatching a series of expeditions to the northern Pacific to take formal possession of the coastal regions. On his return trip from the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1774, Juan José Pérez Hernández passed Vancouver Island and became the first European to sight Nootka Sound. When Captain James Cook, the noted English mariner, entered the Sound four years later, he purchased spoons taken from the Spaniards. Knowing that Spain claimed the Northwest coast, Cook did not take possession. After its discovery, Nootka Sound, with its large native population and its abundance of fur-bearing animals, became a center of European activity in the Northwest. Detecting the possibilities in the fur trade, British and American merchants invaded the region in large numbers. Soon such Yankees as John Kendrick and Robert Gray reached Nootka to begin their fur-trading activities. John Meares, the British sea captain, visited Nootka in 1788. To strengthen British claims, he sought and received permission from the local chief to build a house. After conducting his business, Meares dismantled the building and loaded the lumber onto one of his ships.³ Conscious of the British and American presence at Nootka, and troubled by continuing reports of Russian movements down the coast, Spain between 1788 and 1790 dispatched further expeditions to the North Pacific to observe the Russians and take possession of additional locations along the distant shores.⁴

During 1789 the Spanish government decided to occupy Nootka and assert its special claims to the Northwest coast. To carry out this mission Spanish officials in Mexico selected Don Estéban José Martínez, an experienced mariner who had previously visited the North Pacific. Spain would now establish a permanent settlement at Nootka and remove the Russian, British, and American menaces to Spanish authority. At Nootka Martínez, finding no trace of British settlement, proclaimed the region Spanish. Kendrick and Gray had no desire to quarrel about titles; Gray believed that Spain had a better right to the coast than any other nation.⁵

Nor did British seamen aboard the *Ifigenia* at Nootka challenge Spain's claims. Nevertheless, Martínez distrusted the British. He soon discovered that the *Ifigenia*, although sailing under Portuguese registry, was actually a British vessel with instructions to resist seizure by a Russian or Spanish ship—clearly a rejection of Spanish sovereignty. Martínez seized the *Ifigenia*, held the crew on a Spanish warship, and finally sent the vessel with its officers and crew to Macao. Soon other English vessels arrived. After asserting Spanish claims to Nootka, Martínez sent them on their way. Then, in June 1789, the British seaman, Captain James Colnett, arrived at Nootka. When Martínez informed him that he commanded the garrison at Nootka in the name of the Spanish king, Colnett retorted that the Northwest coast belonged to Britain because of Captain Cook's discoveries. Suspecting a British plot to take control of Nootka, Martínez arrested Colnett, seized his ships, and sent him and his crew to San Blas.⁶ Spanish officials wanted no trouble with the British; they ordered Martínez back to Mexico.

Accounts of the clash at Nootka drifted into London, embellished and distorted by the state of anti-Spanish sentiment in Britain. The Nootka controversy at last presented Britain an opportunity to demolish Spain's New World claims under the Papal Bull of 1493 by establishing the principle that Spain had no rights to territory that it did not colonize. British diplomacy, if successful, would break Madrid's economic and political monopoly in Spanish America. To coerce Spain, weak internally and isolated from its traditional ally, France, the British government charged that the Spanish seizures at Nootka in time of peace were an insult to Britain and an offense against the law of nations. Britain acknowledged no Spanish claims to sovereignty along the Pacific coast.⁷

As the crisis mounted, John Rutledge, Jr., described to Thomas Jefferson in Paris the burgeoning war spirit in the House of Commons:

As soon as the house rose, I went amongst the members I was acquainted with, afterwards dined in company with others, and in my life I do not remember to have been amongst such insolent bullies. They were all for war, talked much of *Old England* and the *british Lion*, laughed at the Idea of drubbing the Dons', began to calculate the millions of dollars they would be obliged to pay for having insulted *the first power on Earth*, and seemed uneasy lest the Spaniards should be alarmed at the British strength, ask pardon for what they have done and come immediately to terms.⁸

Against British power and bellicosity Spanish claims based on the prior discovery and occupation of Nootka had no chance. In the Nootka negotiations British and Spanish officials found no bases of agreement in their disparate claims, but the British had the naval power to force a Spanish capitulation. In the Nootka Convention of October 28, 1790, Spain awarded the British exclusive dominion over Nootka Sound. It agreed to reparations for the seizure of the British vessels and recognized the British right to settle and conduct commerce in America wherever Spanish claims lacked the support of actual occupation.⁹

To conduct its delicate negotiations at Nootka, which were required to fulfill the terms of the Nootka Convention, Spanish officials in Mexico City chose the able Juan Francisco de la Bodéga y Quádra. By agreeing to abandon Nootka, they hoped to secure a fixed boundary between British and Spanish claims in the Northwest. They ordered Quádra to occupy a suitable harbor on Fuca Strait to protect Spanish claims to the coast between Juan de Fuca Strait and San Francisco Bay. By establishing good relations with the natives, Spanish leaders hoped to capture control of the remaining trade in sea otter skins. Quádra reached Nootka in April 1792, four months before the arrival of the British commissioner.¹⁰

The British admiralty commissioned George Vancouver to survey the Northwest coast north of 30° and then proceed to Nootka Sound to meet Quádra and there accept the Spanish concessions defined in the Nootka Convention. Vancouver, in command of the *Discovery* and accompanied by the tender *Chatham*, passed Cape Mendocino on the California coast on April 17, 1792, after a long voyage around the Cape of Good Hope and through the southern Pacific.¹¹ On April 27 Vancouver recognized Cape Disappointment, but accepted without question Meares's conclusion that no river existed in the vicinity. Soon thereafter, Vancouver approached Robert Gray's *Columbia*, sending Peter Puget and his naturalist Archibald Menzies aboard. Gray had left Nootka that spring, sailed southward almost to the northern boundary of California, then turned northward again. Vancouver assured Gray that his expedition was concerned with exploration, not furs. As Vancouver sailed northward toward Fuca Strait, Gray followed, entering the inlet since known as Grays Harbor. After trading with the Indians, Gray moved southward with the intention of entering a large river below Cape Disappointment that he had noted in April. On May 12, Gray crossed the bar and sailed into the river that he named the Columbia.¹² Meanwhile Vancouver emerged from Fuca Strait to begin his six-week task of charting the inland waters of Puget Sound. From Puget Sound Vancouver sailed through the Strait of Georgia and reentered the Pacific at Queen Charlotte Strait, demonstrating again that Vancouver was an island.¹³

When Vancouver reached Nootka, he found Quádra in an uncompromising mood, determined to contest British rights along the Northwest coast. Quádra argued that Meares had established no British claims with his small hut which did not exist when Martínez arrived in 1789. Quádra defended Martínez's behavior toward Colnett whose vessel, he said, had a Portuguese rather than an English registry. Colnett, he added, had received good treatment at San Blas, and his officers and crew, while held, received the wages of the Spanish navy. Thus Spain had nothing to deliver up, no claims to satisfy. Nevertheless, to avoid trouble the Spaniards withdrew to their new settlement at the mouth of Fuca Strait. Vancouver informed Quádra that he came to carry out the Nootka Convention, not