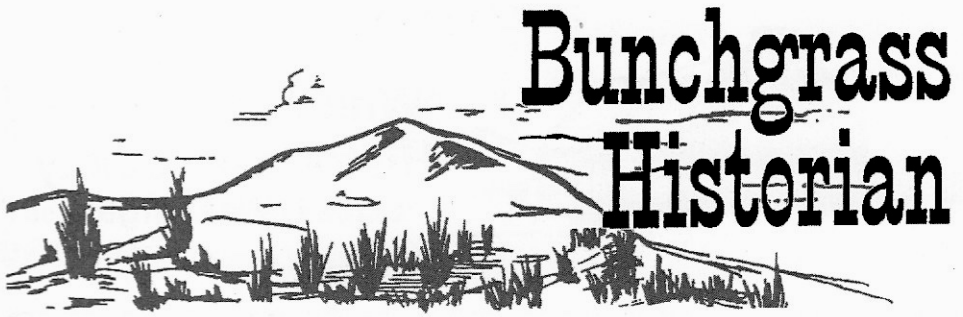


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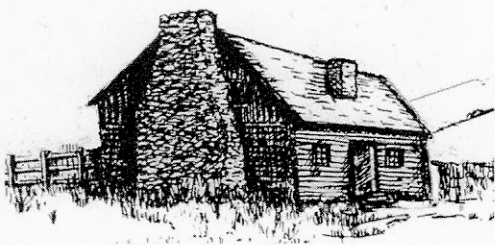


Start of the Sack Fight W.C., Photo by Burns 10-6-11 *25

ELINOR MCCLOSKEY, RETIRED LIBRARIAN, SHARES TALES

THE GREAT WSC "SACK FIGHTS"

COLESTAH: MEDICINE WOMAN, WARRIOR, AND REFUGEE



Whitman County Historical Society Colfax, Washington

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COVER

A Burns photograph of the Sack Fight of October 6, 1911. This view of Roger's field shows at the bottom edge the seated attendees, in middle distance the twenty sacks lined up in the center of the field, and beyond the field Silver Lake. The freshmen on the left and the sophomores on the right are both running towards the sacks as the contest begins.

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FROM THE EDITOR

The article on Elinor McCloskey is a story of a woman’s life that so well describes the life of a woman in twentieth-century Pullman. Elinor’s story has been recorded by her good friends Karen Kiessling and Sue Hinz who are helping her during the last phase of her life. They got **Sally Elder** to write up her stories and memories, which will be preserved in the WCHS Archive. Sally was the editor of *Palouse Magazine: the magazine about the history, times, places and people of the greater Palouse*, which she published from 1998 until 2009. This article is a short selection that tells of Elinor’s life and its impact upon Pullman.

Robert King’s article in this *Bunchgrass* is another one inspired by his collection of artifacts; in this case the postcard on page 12. Bob always follows the story of the artifact to its ultimate end. Few can match his persistence and ability to ferret out the entire story.

Kathryn E. Meyer, a highly skilled writer, talented researcher, and experienced historian, has prepared for us an article that touches on topics too often overlooked in the past. A warrior woman is all but ignored in most the literature and attention is focused almost exclusively upon her illustrious husband. You should recognize Kathy Meyer as co-editor with Debbie Sherman of our Newsletter, now published only in electronic form and available at <whitmancountyhistoricalsociety.org> and began in that format with Vol 50/1 in February 2023. Vol 50/2 currently online.





Elinor and Gordon McCloskey in the yard at Skyline Drive

ELINOR MCCLOSKEY, RETIRED LIBRARIAN, SHARES TALES

By Sally Elder

Elinor McCloskey, retired school librarian and storyteller, has as many personal tales up her sleeve as the scores of volumes that line her own bookshelves. Today her literary tastes include art, astronomy, children's literature, foreign language, geology, the classics, and travel, as well as local, regional, and worldwide history. She also enjoys sharing humorous pictures of cats, squirrels, and birds that visit her Skyline Drive home. Elinor smiles when she quotes her favorite grandmother Flora (Stevenson) Haven, "Everyone to their own taste, said the old lady as she kissed her cow."

Elinor's story began June 18, 1933, in the Manhattan Borough of New York City. She was the only child of Gordon "Mac" and Florence (Haven) McCloskey. They had met while students at Lock Haven Teachers College in Pennsylvania. The family lived and worked in different parts of the country. Elinor attended several nursery and elementary schools in Ridgewood, New Jersey, and McLean, Virginia, before her father's career prompted a move to Alabama, and then to Atlanta, Georgia. Of that time in her childhood, Elinor recalls hearing negative comments that she was "a Yankee living in the South."

Elinor's childhood memories include her father's return from business trips, when he often brought her dolls—something in which she says she really wasn't interested. A self-described tomboy who loved to climb trees, she says, "It wasn't until about third grade that he began to bring me books," which fueled her interest in astronomy and geology. She notes that she and her parents were a family of readers.

In 1947 the family moved to Pullman when Elinor's father accepted a faculty position with the Washington State College Department of Education. They first lived in a house on Charlotte Street on Pullman's Military Hill. Mac had decided to move the family upward—as it were, aspiring to greater heights—literally! He envisioned and designed a two-story, pumice-block house with a basement and attached garage to be sited on the mostly untamed Sunnyside Hill. Elinor recalls that her father contacted Pullman attorney Frank Sanger, who was developing part of Sunnyside Addition, convincing Washington Water Power to put in service. Mac purchased property on Skyline Drive, and the two became good friends.

The adventure continued, as a March 9, 1948, building permit was issued to Gordon McCloskey to build a home at 315 Skyline Drive for \$13,000. Over time Pullman adjusted that street's numbering, which changed the house address to 515, and then to 335 SW Skyline Drive. The clock had begun ticking on construction, most of which was undertaken by Mac and his teenage daughter. According to area



The McCloskey house on Skyline Drive, Pullman. It still stands today at 335 SW Skyline Drive.

newspapers, many folks were building their own homes to combat the local housing shortage; however, several reports focus on the work of an education professor and his 15-year-old daughter—citing the structure as a “landmark” being one of the first houses to be built on Skyline Drive.

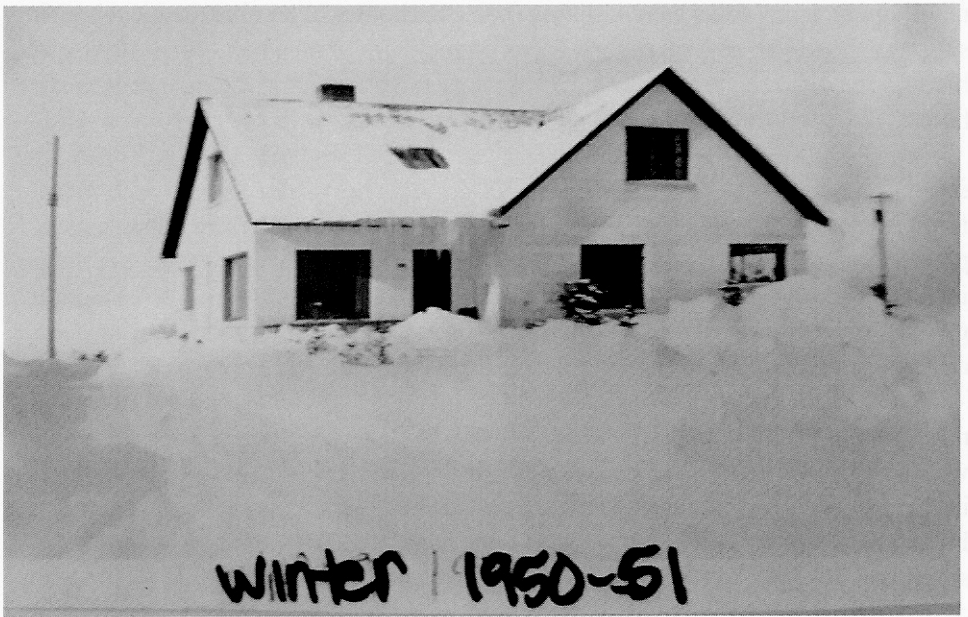
Recently, while perusing a scrapbook of newspaper stories, Elinor says she is surprised it was only a nine-month project. News stories also note that the family celebrated its success by moving into its new home before Christmas as a present to itself. Elinor recalled in recent years when the windows were reframed inside and replaced, and the window sills finished. “I must admit,” she said, “the guys were a little more professional than a 15-year-old girl who had no idea what a glass cutter was.”

For a decade there were few homes on Skyline Drive, and the road was a mixture of dirt and gravel. The wind blew and the snow drifted, Elinor says, and it was a wonderful place to play and be a child. Countless hours were spent playing in the old Pioneer cemetery. “What we called Sandy Falls—now called Sunnyside Park— was my favorite playground in spring. There was enough water to float small boats downstream. We built small dams and did other things kids and water do. Growing up on Skyline was really the best of both worlds. You were in town, but only a two-minute walk from the country. The Skyline neighborhood and all the people there were the best.”

At first the family didn’t have a telephone, Elinor says, because her father didn’t want the disruption. When he came home from work, he headed to his upstairs den to write poetry or paint, or to his basement shop to create art from wood, which he collected in his travels. Elinor well remembers the family introduction to winter on Skyline Drive. The first year in the house was very messy. Their surroundings were buried in snowdrifts, and then a Chinook swept through and quickly melted the snow into deep puddles. Leaning forward, Elinor demonstrates how she tried to walk to school bent over to keep the wind from blowing her down Sunnyside Hill, while also negotiating the water in the street that came halfway up her boots. Elinor recalls that walking from Skyline Drive to campus “was quite a stroll. Many people on that street walked back and forth to WSC.”

One particularly rainy day comes to mind and Elinor tells of a taxi that wasn’t working and her long, soggy walk home. Once there, she loudly expressed her dissatisfaction at not having a way to call for assistance. Soon after, a telephone was installed. Skyline Drive was still attracting new residents who were in house-building mode. Elinor recalls the water tower was in place and was a popular “make-out” spot for guys and girls. She says, “There was a lot of banging on our door at night” from guys who had gotten up there, but then needed help to get their cars unstuck.

Mac grew a vegetable garden on their Skyline property so he could go home from work and relax by pulling weeds. Elinor says he gave up the garden fairly soon as he tired of taking care of the whole field. At the bottom of the property



The winter of 1950-51 in Pullman.

was a road where horses and cows wandered. The property owners boarded “critters—mostly dogs—and when a dog was bored, it would run along and stir things up, and there were the dog ‘serenades.’” When those property owner died, Elinor said, “We did more with the field.” Elinor says an early duck pond existed at what is now Sunnyside Park. She recalls walking by and the ducks and geese would get out of the pond and start pecking at her. Asked about the squirrels and birds, she says they arrived later.

Elinor was a staff member of Pullman High School’s student newspaper *Hi Times*, active in chorus and drama, and graduated with the class of 1951. At WSC, Elinor was a four-year member of the *Chinook* yearbook staff and a member of the Delta Gamma sorority. She recalls that as a Delta Gamma, “We were required to keep our room at a certain level,” with four girls to a room. “The housemother was busy keeping the house in sanity, and worked from morning to night; closing time was 10 p.m.” In 1955, Elinor graduated with a bachelor’s degree in education.

Another of Elinor’s passions is music. She says she always wanted to take piano lessons and started when the family was in Washington, DC. In Pullman, her “years of lessons” continued at Washington State College with a yearly recital. She says preparation for a performance required a lot of work to best represent the student and the teacher. Elinor recalls practice time at “Agony Hall” as competing with various other students who simultaneously emitted disharmonious noises by pounding the ivories in hopes of honing their musical ability. At her Delta Gamma

sorority, Elinor would play soothing musical selections before dinner to calm down the girls from their busy day. Elinor recalls her best friend Kathleen Samuelson “was a superb piano player. I knew I was good. We both liked piano, and were together a great deal. She played piano sixteen times better than I ever could!”

During her first teaching job in Selah, Washington, Elinor says she was excited to share her love of music with her students. She recalls taking them into the activity room and playing different kinds of piano music to see their reactions, for example, to a Chopin piece that sounds like raindrops. “Again, the magic of playing that one piece captivates you and them when you’re playing for you and the kids.” She says she was thinking this will be interesting, so many different kinds of music to which to introduce the kids. Among Elinor’s memories of teaching in Seattle’s Lake City neighborhood and Kirkland are pictures of her and her class in local newspapers. Her career also took her overseas to Baumholder American Elementary School in Germany. She recalls, “They offered a job where we could get paid, have a place to live and an opportunity to travel on weekends.”

Elinor earned a master’s in Librarianship from Denver (Colorado) University in 1958 and a Doctorate of Education from Teachers College Columbia University in New York City in 1966. Her father was an alumnus of Columbia. Asked about her decision to move from teaching to library science, Elinor says it was a different way for the students to interact with her.

After 26 years as an educator, Gordon McCloskey retired from WSU in 1973. His retirement was noted with a variety of celebrations and kudos from faculty and community residents alike. Appreciation of Gordon’s woodworking and writing poetry were honored by many friends and his Pullman colleagues. In 1979, Gordon dedicated his book of poetry, *With Love and Anger*, to “Florence and Elinor, and companions I owe thanks.” Elinor recalls it was a sensation with the locals. The book met with much acclaim—including a column in the local newspaper by longtime friend Dick Fry, WSU News Bureau Director. Over the years, Gordon and Florence’s active support of Pullman schools earned them the honor of “Mr. and Mrs. Levy.” He helped with public relations in all levy elections, and was instrumental in passing levies to build Memorial Hospital, and the fire and police department buildings.

In 1995, Elinor retired as Albuquerque, New Mexico, Public Schools District Coordinator of Library Services and returned to Pullman. Since her father passed away in 1988, and her mother in 1997, Elinor has continued her family’s tradition of public service in the community. She has served as president of Friends of Neill Public Library, secretary and treasurer of the Pullman League of Women Voters, and membership vice president of the local branch of the American Association of University Women. A member of Pullman Memorial Hospital Auxiliary from 1999-2000, Elinor is a lifelong member of the WSU Alumni Association. She also served on the WSU Foundation Palouse Area Gift Planning Marketing Advisory Council in 2004-05.

Elinor has been active in Pullman's Fortnightly book club, which was established in 1893. She has also taken part in the Neill Public Library's Seasonal Storyhour. "I like storytelling," she says. "There is a positive feeling that goes between you and that group. The magic is to start and get connected to this group sitting here that seems to say 'just try to show me something.' With kids it's palpable...they are so enamored with what the story is doing to them. Most of the time something reaches out and...you get absorbed, make the story yours...You're so into that story it's a form of magic for you. It takes over, a silent feedback really begins to take hold." She recalls after one storytelling receiving hugs from half the class.

Leafing through a family scrapbook, Elinor sees a picture of herself dressed in a serape and says the family "celebrated with Christmas breakfast and opened gifts. Mac did a lot of wood work so that was a lot of the gifts, and I'd bring in some things." Gordon's longtime hobby of creating wood art—including several pieces decorated with pebbles from the Susquehanna River of his childhood in Pennsylvania—adorned the family home as well as being gifts presented to long-time friends and colleagues. Asked how the family celebrated birthdays, Elinor says, "We generally had a special supper, special menus, sometimes go out for a meal. We always acknowledged birthdays, we were just not a family that did a lot of celebrating." She recalls when World War II had started and the family was leaving Alabama, her mother said they should have a party in the back yard. "It was the biggest birthday party I ever had," Elinor says. "It was the end of, I think, third grade." Guests included "the boy I had a crush on and another boy who had a crush on me. I'd say half of the third grade was there."

Family pride shines through as Elinor reminisces about the family's efforts to secure property and build one of the first houses in their neighborhood. She says as a child she was hyperactive and her parents tried to make sure there was green space near their home so she had that area to play. One day her mother noticed surveyors working nearby. When her father came home from work, her mother sent him out to talk to the workers, who represented future development. In 2005, Elinor donated a conservation easement to the Palouse Land Trust that will ensure a childhood playfield be preserved in a natural state for children and small mammals and birds to enjoy, and to maintain a buffer between Sunnyside Park and the homes on Skyline Drive.



THE GREAT WSC “SACK FIGHTS”

By Robert E. King

One of the annual sporting events held at Washington State College at least from 1911 until World War II pitted the Freshman class male students against their Sophomore class “elders” in a number of competitive athletic contests. Many events were ones familiar to us today, including Tug-Of-War, over Silver Lake or “Lake de Puddle,” a Sack Race, an Obstacle Race, and a Pillow Fight. Each contest was chosen and its rules revised by the upper classmen every year. But one popular WSC Freshman-Sophomore class contest is much less familiar to us today. It was the annual “Sack Fight.” This event like the others pitting the two lower classes against each other, had that year’s rules printed in the *Evergreen*, with the upper classmen enforcing the rules and officiating at the contests.

This past summer I was given a postcard, copied here, showing a WSC “sack fight” in progress on “Class Day” in 1914. The picture had been made by Artopho Studio in Pullman with copies sold locally as photo postcards, which were quite popular at that time. This one was sent on October 3, 1914 to my great-aunt Anna (Scott) King (1898-1999), by a friend who was a student at WSC.

Anna later attended WSC and in 1924 married my great-uncle Carl C. King (1895-1971), a 1920 WSC graduate. He is remembered as a member of the 1915 WSC Football Team that won the first Rose Bowl Game in Pasadena in 1916. Both Carl and his two brothers, Ervin E. King (1894-1941), my grandfather, who graduated from WSC in 1917, and Raymond M. King (1899-1932), a WSC graduate in 1921, likely were players in some of the “sack fights” of this time.

The “sack fight” shown on the postcard occurred on Friday, September 25, 1914. Pullman’s newspaper, the *Pullman Herald*, printed earlier that morning, told that the “sack fight” was scheduled for that same afternoon at Rogers Field on the WSC campus. It was again part of the annual Freshman-Sophomore classes’ competitive events on Class Day. The caption on the back side of the 1914 postcard sent to my great-aunt explained how the “sack fight” was played that day:

“This shows the beginning of the sack fight. Twenty sacks filled with straw were lined up in the middle of the field with 40 freshmen on one side of the field and 40 sophs. on the other side. At the shot they charged on the sacks in the center of the field, and endeavored to carry them on across to the other side. Of course having 4 men to each sack this was a rather difficult task. The team that succeeded in getting the most sacks over the opponent’s goal was declared the winner. The freshman won 56 – 55. Time was 40 min.”



The postcard with the Artopho photograph of the 1914 Class Day Sack Fight which was acquired by the author recently and gave rise to this investigation of the Class Day events and the sack fights. Note these sacks are much smaller than those on the facing page from 1911.



A Burns photograph at the start of the October 6, 1911, Class Day sack fight; here labeled "Frosh-Soph Supremacy Bowl". Photo courtesy of the Esther Pond Smith Collection of the WCHS.

The 1914 sack fight rules were printed a few days earlier in the *Evergreen*. They made it clear that sacks taken across the goal were to be immediately returned to the center of the field by the officials, who were not to be interfered with. Also: “Tennis shoes must be worn and slugging or unnecessary roughness will disqualify.” Further, the game in 1914 was to be played in “two halves, the first to be of 15 minutes duration and the second to be of 10 minutes duration, with 10 minutes intermission.” (*Evergreen*, Sept 22, 1914, p. 3)

Three years later, the October 26, 1917 edition of the *Pullman Herald's* October 26, 1917 edition described what happened the prior day during that year's “sack fight.” It added more details as to how this annual sporting contest was played:

“Perhaps the most grueling of all the field events was the sack fight, in which both sides carried great sacks of straw from the center of the gridiron to their respective goals, hampered in their efforts, however, by the numerous active goal-defenders of the opposition. The sophomores proved more elusive in the first half and lead their rivals by five points ... In the last half the frosh came back strong and when the dust had settled the game was found to be a tie: 28-28.”

WSC's “sack fights” seemed to have lasted up to WWII, with one mentioned in the *Evergreen* in the fall of 1941. However, the final one may have been two years later. The *Evergreen* carried a notice of a “sack fight” between the Kiwanis and Farmers. It was part of the half-time program during the popular appearance of the Harlem Globe Trotters, and occurred at a Friday night campus performance in late December 1943 (*Evergreen*, Jan. 4, 1944, p.3). How this final sack fight compared to the first sack fights of the 1910s isn't certain. In any case, these must have been exciting events that the enthusiastic participants and spectators would have remembered fondly as part of their WSC fun over a century ago.



COLESTAH (CIRCA 1838 TO 1865) MEDICINE WOMAN, WARRIOR, AND REFUGEE

By Kathryn E. Meyer

Colestah, a member of the Yakama¹ tribe, was one of the five wives of Chief Kamiakin,² the leader of an alliance of tribes that fought white intrusion into Washington Territory during the Columbia Plateau War (1855 to 1858).³ She is described as a medicine woman and a warrior; and she was also a refugee, a farmer, and a gatherer of wild foods. The youngest of his wives, she was said to have been his primary confidant, as well as his favorite of the five.

She was the youngest daughter of Chief Tenax, of the Klikitat, who once inhabited lands that now make up Klickitat and Skamania Counties in the south-central region of Washington State. They were traders and often served as intermediaries between native groups who lived on each side of the Cascade Mountains. After their defeat in the Klikitat War of 1855, they ceded their lands to the United States and most moved onto the newly created Yakima Indian Reservation.⁴

Neither Colestah's birthdate nor the year of her marriage to Kamiakin is known. She probably joined Kamiakin's family sometime in the mid-1850s, a year or two before the birth of her older son Tomeo in 1856. Kamiakin would have been in his mid-50s at the time, while she may have been as young as 14 or as old as 30, but most likely she was 18 or 20. Her three older sisters—Kem-ee-yowah, Why-luts-pum, and Hos-ke-la-pum—were already married to Kamiakin, as was their cousin Sunk-hay-ee, who was his first wife and also his cousin.⁵ When Kamiakin married Kem-ee-yowah, he was entitled to buy her younger sisters as his wives, too—which he obviously did, probably marrying them in sequence in the 1830s and 1840s. Thus, it is likely that Colestah was too young to marry at the time of her older sisters' marriages—so she married him at a later date.

Colestah may not have been bothered by age difference between her husband and herself, a gap of 25 to 30 years—or more. She had probably grown up knowing that she would eventually become his wife and may have been used to the idea—or even excited by it. Kamiakin was, after all, the most prominent of the Columbia Plateau chiefs. He was very rich as well, and owned many fine horses. He always rode a magnificent white “pacer,” a racehorse of impeccable breeding and training. In 1841, an American lieutenant named Robert Johnson described him in his diary, which is the earliest written portrayal of the chief. Kamiakin, he said, was “one of the most handsome and perfectly formed Indians” he had ever met.⁶ Other white travelers who encountered Kamiakin in the 1840s and 1850s described him as standing nearly six feet tall and weighing around 200 pounds. He dressed impres-



Courtesy L.V. McWhorter Collection, WSU MASC

Tomeo, son of Colestah

sively, usually in finely decorated buckskin but often in colorful robes of European cloth—and sometimes even in European-style jackets. He almost always wore an eagle feather in his hair, a symbol of personal freedom and high ideals. His bearing was dignified, even imposing, yet he was courteous and hospitable.⁷

It was not unusual among the Plateau peoples for relatives to marry. In particular, the type of marriage practiced by Kamiakin and his wives is termed “sororal polygyny” by anthropologists. Its practice made it possible for families to retain control of lands and wealth without diminishment, and it strengthened kinship ties, making it easier to maintain any political power families might have enjoyed.⁸ Despite the arranged nature of this type of marriage, Kamiakin was deeply attached to all five of his wives. When Catholic missionaries, whose religious views stipulated strict monogamy, tried to convert him beginning in the 1850s, he accepted many of their ideas and practices, such as observance of the Sabbath and Catholic baptism for his children; but for more than two decades he refused formal conversion because it would have required him to repudiate all but one wife. He was not baptized until the day before his death in April of 1877.⁹

The Columbia Plateau peoples also frequently married outside of their own tribes and bands, apparently recognizing the necessity for new bloodlines to energize their communities. For example, Kamiakin himself was born near Starbuck, in modern-day Columbia County, in the southeastern corner of Washington. He was the oldest child of T’siyyak, a Palus warrior and champion horse racer. His mother was Com-mus-ni, one of the two daughters of the Yakama chief Wiyáwiikt.¹⁰ She was raised in the Yakima area of central Washington. Kamiakin spent about half of his childhood with his mother’s people and the other half with his father’s. Although the many different bands in Eastern Washington spoke different dialects of the Sahaptin and Salish languages, people were often bilingual, the result of encountering each other during rounds of seasonal hunting and gathering, and the resulting intermingling of families. Fixed places of residence were not common at this time; and most tribes in Eastern Washington, Northern Idaho, and Eastern Oregon were semi-nomadic. They wintered in one place, usually returning to it year after year, but spent the rest of the year in seasonal rounds of hunting and gathering. For example, they fished for salmon along the Columbia and Snake Rivers and their tributaries, dug camas root on the hills and plains, and picked huckleberries in the mountains. As a result, most groups encountered each other and were often interrelated.

Kamiakin, however, tried to alter this pattern for his people. As a young adult, he focused on family and agriculture, living and farming mostly at his home camp twelve miles outside of the present city of Yakima. To support his large family, he adopted European farming practices and built one of the first irrigation systems in Washington.¹¹ His efforts were motivated in part by his desire to see his people adopt a more sedentary way of life, which he believed would prevent conflict with settlers who had begun arriving in Washington Territory in the 1840s. By the 1850s,



Chief Kamiakin, sketch by Gustavus Sohon, 1852.

he had become the leader of his tribe.

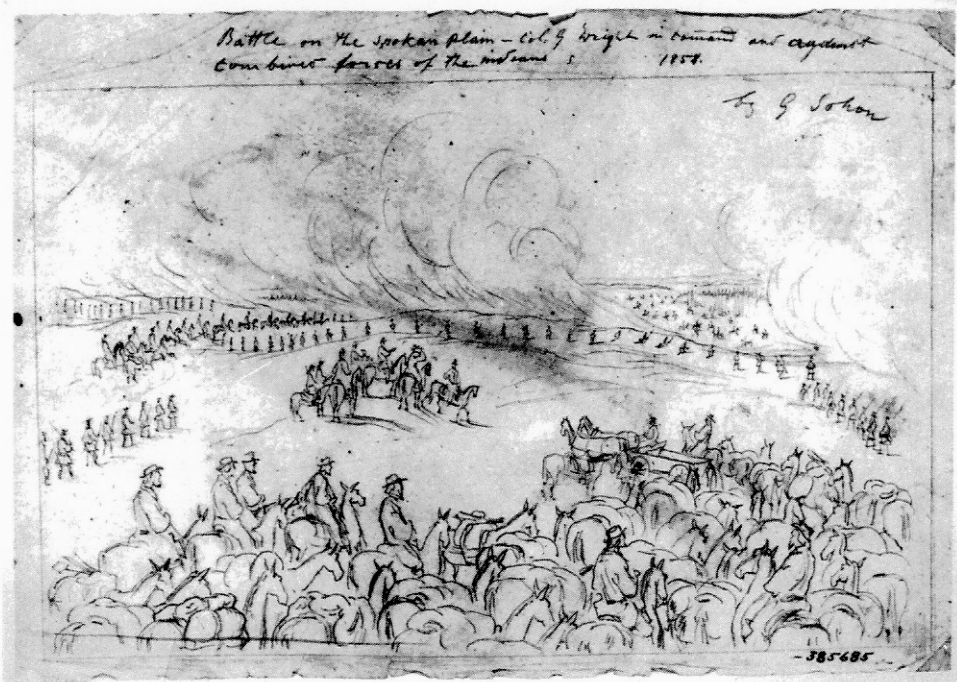
In early 1855, Kamiakin refused to sell any Yakama lands to representatives of the United States government when they came calling. The government persisted, however. On 9 June 1855, at the Walla Walla Treaty Council, Kamiakin and chiefs from the Umatilla, Cayuse, and Walla Walla tribes were forced to relinquish over six million acres of native lands. By this time, Kamiakin had become convinced that Americans could not be trusted to respect the tribes' boundaries. When he resisted signing the treaty, territorial governor Isaac Stevens (1818-1862) told him that refusing would mean the Yakamas would "walk in blood knee deep."¹² Kamiakin signed, but he soon regretted doing so and reluctantly began to form a coalition of Columbia Plateau tribes to fight white incursion into tribal lands. Thus, despite a lifetime devoted to peace, Chief Kamiakin became famous primarily for uniting his people for the purpose of war.

Colestah married Kamiakin just as war were looming, or perhaps just after it had begun. As the newest member of Kamiakin's family, she was probably welcomed by his other wives—three of whom, after all, were her older sisters. According to custom, each wife had her own lodge—or at the very least her own fire—which probably would have prevented conflicts between the wives. Moreover, either husband or wife could leave at any time, and wives who left were entitled to an equitable portion of any property the immediate family owned. Children always went with their mothers. None of Kamiakin's wives left him, however.¹³ He appears to have taken his duties as husband and father very seriously.

Kamiakin's family seem to have valued Colestah's skills as a medicine woman (*twati*)—it was believed that, using her spirit power, she could restore health and cure disease. Some historians claim that she was a seer—medicine women were often reputed to have psychic powers—but there are no records of any visions or predictions attributed to her. Colestah was also credited with the ability to change bitterroots into shells and huckleberries into glass beads.¹⁴ It is likely that she may have practiced sleight-of-hand, perhaps to entertain children.

In addition to her domestic skills, Colestah was a proficient horsewoman. She was not unusual in this; photographs taken in the last half of the nineteenth century show that many—if not most—native women in the Inland Pacific Northwest could ride. The vast majority, however, were not warriors. Nevertheless, Colestah fought alongside her husband in the final battle or battles of the Columbia Plateau War. In fact, she had sworn to fight to the death alongside Kamiakin. She may have fought in the Battle of Four Lakes on 1 September 1858, and she definitely fought in the Battle of Spokane Plains four days later. In preparation for battle she dressed as befitted a chief's wife: she wore her finest buckskin dress (which was decorated with red beads), braided her hair tightly, and donned a red headscarf.¹⁵ Armed with a stone war club, she fought next to her husband until he was wounded.

The Battle of Spokane Plains began at around 6:00 on the morning of 5



Battle of Spokane Plains, September 5, 1858, sketch by Gustavus Sohon.

September 1858 and ended in the afternoon. The opposing forces were more or less equally matched. Led by Colonel George Wright (1803-1865), between 500 and 700 mixed infantry and cavalry faced a coalition of about 500 Coeur d'Alene, Kalispel, Spokane, and Yakama warriors. A running battle, the fighting ranged across more than seven miles, beginning about ten miles west of what is now the city of Spokane. By mid-morning, Wright's forces had gradually forced Kamiakin's into pine woods near Deep Creek, where Howitzer fire hit a large branch that dropped onto Kamiakin. The impact toppled him off his horse, and when the branch either struck his head or broke his shoulder—or perhaps both.¹⁶

Somehow, Colestah and a few other warriors managed to get Kamiakin back to their camp at the mouth of the Spokane River, approximately 30 miles northwest of the battle. Since they had a head-start of several hours, they were able to break camp well before nightfall, when Wright's men reached the river. Kamiakin's group slowly trekked eastward, their progress hindered by the presence of women and children, as well as by the gravely injured chief.

The winter of 1858/59 and the following year were difficult for Colestah's family. After three years of fighting, the American army had won. The Yakamas lost ninety percent of their lands, and most survivors were confined to reservations.

Kamiakin's family, along with a few others, had escaped that fate but were considered outcasts as they trekked through Northern Idaho and across the Bitterroot Mountains and toward the Rockies. Along the way, Colestah nursed her husband back to health. They were turned away by tribes in the Pend Oreille region, as well as by the Flatheads and Kalispels in Montana—all of whom feared retaliation by the United States government if they gave refuge to Kamiakin. Finally, they were allowed to set up a winter camp in the Bitterroot Valley near the present-day town of Darby, Montana. It was described by Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, SJ (1801-1873), who had founded the Catholic mission at Cataldo, Idaho, among others. The priest, who knew Kamiakin personally, had gone in search of him, only to find him in a wretched and starving camp. "Kamiakin, the once powerful chieftain, who possessed thousands of horses and a large number of cattle, has lost all, and is now reduced to the most abject poverty," wrote DeSmet.¹⁷ He attempted to persuade Kamiakin to return to Washington Territory, but Kamiakin refused.

By 1860, the refugees had spent some time hunting along the Canadian border and may have crossed into British Columbia and/or what is now Alberta for a time. Neither the military nor agents of the U.S. government attempted to follow or harass them. Gradually, Kamiakin and his wives and children inched west, briefly stopping near Coeur d'Alene. They finally returned to Washington, where they attempted to live independently—free from interference by the tribes, the new reservations, and federal and state government. On land that had once been controlled by his father, they settled on the Palouse River between the future sites of St. John and Endicott in modern Whitman County. The spot came to be called "Kamiakin's Crossing." There they farmed, hunted, and continued their seasonal rounds of gathering. It should be remembered that in 1860 there was not a single permanent white settler between the Snake River and Fort Colville.¹⁸ In 1864, Kamiakin's group relocated to a spot east of Rock Lake. He continued to resist moving onto the Yakama Reservation, despite government offers of full amnesty, a farm, and \$500 in annual income.¹⁹ He would never live on the Yakama Reservation, he said, because he did not recognize its legitimacy.²⁰

Either before or shortly after the move, Colestah gave birth to her second son, Tomomolow. She died the following year. It is tempting to ascribe the cause of her death to problems related to childbirth or the poor nutrition she suffered while a refugee—or both—but there is no way to know for certain. She was sick for at least a year following the baby's birth.²¹ The place of her burial is unknown. Tomomolow grew strong, but he did not live past the age of 6. In 1870, he drowned in Latah Creek while playing in the water.²²

Although Kamiakin advised his grown children to relocate to the Colville Reservation²³ after its creation in 1872, he himself did not move again. He fell ill in July of 1876, gradually became bedridden, and died the following April. He was 77.²⁴

Kamiakin's wives were the mothers of a total of thirteen children: two daughters, ten sons, and an infant whose gender is unknown:

Sunk-hay-ee (died circa 1877)

daughter, Yam' naneck (Catherine), 1837 to 1907

Kem-ee-yowah (died c. 1901)

son, We-yet-que-wit (young Kamiakin), circa 1840 to 1886

daughter, Yumasepah (Mary), died 1920

son, Tespaloos, 1858 to 1933

infant (presumably stillborn or died young)

Why-luts-pum

son, T'siyiyak, c. 1854 to 1901

son, Lukash (Luke), 1858 to 1886

son, Sk'ees

son, Sk'olumkee, 1867 to 1949

Hos-ke-la-pum (died c. 1877)

daughter, Kiatana (Lucy), 1862 to 1946

son, Piupiu K'ownot (Cleveland), 1870 to 1959

Colestah (died c. 1865)

son, Tomeo, 1856 to 1936

son, Tomomolow (Tomolio), 1864/65 to 1870

1 Note the difference in spelling between "Yakama" and "Yakima." The former refers to the tribe and to the reservation, while the latter refers to the town, county, and river.

2 For biographies of Kamiakin, see Richard D. Scheuerman and Michael O. Finley, *Finding Chief Kamiakin, the Life and Legacy of a Northwest Patriot* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2008); and Andrew J. Splawn, *Ka-Mi-Akin, the Last Hero of the Yakimas* (Portland: Kilham Printing, 1917). For a good overview of the Columbia Plateau War, see Cliff Trafzer and Richard D. Scheuerman, *Renegade Tribe: The Palouse Indians and the Invasion of the Inland Pacific Northwest* (Pullman, WSU Press, 1896); and for an eye-witness account, see Lawrence Kip, *Indian War in the Pacific Northwest: The Journal of Lieutenant Lawrence Kip* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

3 Also called the Yakama War, although many other groups allied and fought with the Yakamas.

4 Now governed by the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

5 Also called Sal-kow, she was the daughter of Kamiakin's maternal uncle Teias, chief of the Kittitas Valley band. Sunk-hay-ee supposedly married Kamiakin circa 1825, but her first child was not born until 1837.

6 Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842*, Vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), 453-56.

7 Theodore Winthrop, "XI. Kamaikain," *The Canoe and the Saddle; or Klallam and Klickitat* (Tacoma: John H. Williams, 1862); and Christina McDonald McKenzie Williams, "The Daughter of Angus MacDonald," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 13.2 (April 1922): 108.

8 Splawn, 16; Scheuerman and Finley, 17. Note that sororal polygyny was practiced by at least 40 Native American tribes during the nineteenth century.

9 For a lengthy description of Kamiakin's conversion, death, and burial, see Scheuerman and Finley, 110-113.

10 Also called Weowicht.

11 "Kamiakin's Gardens" are now a historical site on Ahtanum Creek, a tributary of the Yakima River. There, sometime in the 1840s, Kamiakin's people dug an irrigation ditch that was half a mile long. Known to white settlers in the area as "Kamiakin's Ditch," it provided water for growing corn, pumpkins, potatoes, and squash. It may or may not have been the earliest irrigation in the state of Washington—at about the same time

the Methodist missionary Marcus Whitman also dug an irrigation ditch at Waiilatpu, near Walla Walla. See Rose M. Boening, "A History of Irrigation in the State of Washington," Part I, *Washington Historical Quarterly* 10.1 (October 1918): 259-276.

12 Andrew D. Pambrun, *Sixty Years on the Frontier in the Pacific Northwest* (originally published in 1893) (Fairfield: Ye Galleon Press, 1978), 95. Note that Pambrun was the translator for Stevens and Kamiakin. See also Clifford E. Trafzer, "The Legacy of the Walla Walla Council, 1855," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106.3 (Fall, 2005): 398-411.

13 Splawn, 397-398.

14 Scheuerman and Finley, 17.

15 Carl P. Schlicke, *General George Wright: Guardian of the Pacific Coast* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). 171-172.

16 For an excellent account of the battle, see Scheuerman and Finley, 83-86

17 Letter from DeSmet to A. Pleasanton, 25 May 1859, cited by Robert I. Burns, *The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Northwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 342.

18 Scheuerman and Finley, 95.

19 The purchasing power of \$500 in 1860 would be roughly equivalent to just over \$18,000 in 2023.

20 Scheuerman and Finley, 94.

21 Scheuerman and Finley (180) believe that she died in 1867, although oral accounts put her death at 1865 (96).

22 Interview with Emily Peone, Scheuerman and Finley (1982), 100.

23 Now governed by the Colville Confederated Tribes.

24 For the story of the defilement of his grave, see Kathryn E. Meyer, "The Desecration of the Grave of Chief Kamiakin," *Bunchgrass Historian* 45.1 (April 2019): 17-21.



Photograph courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society of a woman and baby on horseback, labeled in their collection as a "Nespelem Woman with baby, 1885"



A Burns photograph on the October 6, 1911 Class day event, The label reads: "W.S.C. Freshmen waiting for the contests." Photo courtesy of the Esther Pond Smith Collection of the WCHS.



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