



Behind the Scenes at the Keller Heritage Center

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Stevens County Historical Society

From the Pages of History... The LaPray Bridge

by Janet Thomas

The first Europeans to arrive in this area were trappers and traders and originally came from England, France and Scotland.

David Thompson, who has been credited with exploring the entire Columbia River, arrived at Kettle Falls in the summer of 1811. He was with the fur trade and Kettle Falls became the site of the Fort Colville Trading Post. The rivers and Indian trails were the only means of transportation—by boat, on foot and by horseback.

Commerce was already thriving at the Falls when these Europeans arrived. They hoped to use the area near the falls to establish trade with the Indians. Shortly after opening the fort and beginning trading they began to raise crops and selling them. They built a grist

mill and began making and selling flour.

A community developed around the Falls and Fort and included both Europeans and Indians. This began in 1826 and continued until people began to arrive as part of the Western Migration across the Oregon Trail, then heading North. There was nothing between the Oregon Trail and Kettle Falls and its surrounding community. They settled in the area and down the Colville Valley as men from the Fort left the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and married Indian women, .

The gold strike miners arrived in the valley in 1855, followed by Francis Wolfe who brought in the first merchandise in from the south by wagon in 1856. He started at The Dalles and went through the Walla Walla Valley. He

crossed the Snake River at the mouth of the Palouse River by lashing canoes together, continuing up the Spokane River, Walker's Prairie and then on up through the Colville Valley. He was making the wagon tracks that would later be used by Major Lougenbeel in 1859 when he came to establish the military post.

Fort Colville of the Military was built in 1859 and the Walla Walla Colville Military Road became the main road to and through the area. The amount and kind of traffic generated from the military building a fort would require a method to effectively cross the Spokane River. The spot selected was just a few miles upriver from where the Long Lake Dam would later be built.

John E. Smith's article in the Washington Historical Quarterly in 1916

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Rambles from the Curator

by Becca Gordon

Our wonderful volunteers have been hard at work on our new displays and the new facelifts to many existing displays. At this time, I am happy to report that all of the construction has been completed. Now we are in the process of cleaning and putting the displays back together. A huge thank you goes out to Raj Sahota, Marvin Ray, Larry Fine, Janet Thomas, Katie Tolin, and Bruce Bailey for their efforts on this extensive project. I also need to thank Connie Richart for all of her hard work cleaning, rearranging, and updating the General Store, Dress Shop, and Hat Shop.

In Mr. Keller's room, the wall light fixtures are currently being repaired. A new light is also being created to replace the one

that has been missing for many years. In addition, new, matching light shades will be installed on these fixtures. Revival Lighting of Spokane is completing this work for us.

At this time, I am very pleased to announce the appointment of a new Assistant Curator to our staff. Michael Waits of Kettle Falls is our new Assistant Curator for Firearms Restoration and Preservation. Michael will be in charge of the preservation and maintenance of our extensive gun collection. He will also be helping me with general preservation projects as they come along.

As far as supplies and artifacts needed, I am still seeking large, white, 100% cotton

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President's Message

by Janet Thomas

When the museum closed after the Christmas Tour I would never have dreamed that I would barely recognize it when we opened in the Spring. So much has changed and it is all wonderful.

Katie Tolin and Brue Bailey did a fabulous job with the Library. Saj Sahota continued to do great work but now has a full time job and had to leave. We will be forever appreciative of the work he did. Also, some of the great ideas for the display case renovation came from Raj. Marvin Ray did his usual hard work all winter and he and Raj made a great team. Connie Richart came in to clean and clean she did. I guess all that handling of artifacts rubbed off on her because she turned into a display maker also. Becca has been working to get the displays put back together.

Marvin has for many years taken care of the gun and military displays. This year he got some support. Michael Waits has joined the curatorial staff to work on the restoration and preservation of the guns.

Cleaning is next. The Nichols family and their cousin Juanita Bronson did a cleaning project and Katie Tolin and Kathy Phillips also did some cleaning and window washing. Rose and I cleaned in the Learning Center. Maybe the carpet cleaning fairy will show up. There is plenty of cleaning for everyone.

The other day I arrived at the museum and noticed a pair of geese on the cupola on the carriage house. They were there a second day, in the snow, and again another day. Maybe they will nest on the grounds this year.

May is History Month – here and elsewhere. The museum is opening May 1 and the County has again declared it as History Month. The Colville Chamber of Commerce has named April as History Month and invited me to be the opening speaker. I think I got more out of it than they did as I got the chance to think Why History? and found some good answers, making the hard work we all do worthwhile.

Rambles Continued...

sheets, dish and flatware sets for the Keller House, and children's and men's clothing. In addition, I am seeking wigs to replace the ones we currently have that are in very sad shape. If anyone has an old dress form or two they don't want anymore, I could use a few more of these as well. Please contact me at 509-684-5968 or SCHS_Curator@hotmail.com.

News Bits...Take Note!

By Janet Thomas

May 9th is the **Family History Conference**. We are a co-sponsor and have had two of our staff working on the planning committee. It is held at the LDS Church behind McDonalds and anybody interested in family history could benefit. This is the Historical Society's 3d year so-sponsoring.

There will be speakers on various subjects as well as small group classes on a variety of subjects. They tried to find something for everyone. You don't need to be an expert to attend – beginners welcome.

For those of you who get geared up for family history work and have local ancestors don't forget we have a research

and reference library in the museum.

Mill Creek Collectibles

Although guests sometimes confuse Mill Creek Collectibles with one of the main street displays, it really is a charming small Antique and Collectible shop.

There is a nice collection of books of local interest, note cards, prints, and lots of collectible items. You don't have to pay an entry fee to shop there. Just tell the tour guide that you just want to shop – and besides, Historical Society members don't have to pay an entry. Tell your friends!

Leno's Diary

By Glendine

The Museum's 2009 display of the Leno Prestini paintings will be called his "diary".

Leno painted for himself and expressed his feelings in those paintings. Work, war, romance, music, friends, alcohol, and view of life are expressed in bold colors of red, yellow, orange, bright blue. There are few examples of Leno's writing, so his paintings are his diary.

Battista Prestini was Leno's brother. He wrote extensively about the life of Leno and his friends. Included here are some quotes from Battista's manuscripts at Stevens County Historical Society Museum. The Heritage Network will publish a book and video in 2010. In August 2010 there will be a full display of Leno Prestini's art and memorabilia. The Heritage Network is coordinating all displays.

Battista Prestini writes:

"We made a sail boat. Sail made from cement sacks and rudder of iron but balanced like plane rudder. For a keel

we got a water proofed Glue Cid that were being made for coffin cover and held in place with strap iron. Every change in wind and boat speed would play a different tune. Many turn over before we learned to sail it.

"Then came the depression so Leno took a job on a sheep train going for Chicago and spent a week unloading and loading sheep from Spokane to Chicago stockyards.

Later went on bum riding freight trains wound up in San Francisco and took a job as mess boy on board an oil tanker the Frank Drum and went to Hawaii,

"Leno became interested in diving after seen a round diving helmet made by a man named Fox from Spokane. We constructed our own out of hot water tank. Leno decorated it with an octopus head and we experienced fogging of faceplate so we put in double glass.

"Then came talk of diving for gold so next experiment was with underwater flashlight, a six cell enclosed in alumi-

Leno Prestini, Continued.....

num cylinder with a few e-tegukere head to hold glass and a model T radiator cap to seal end. Worked very good when focused at 6 feet.

“On deep dives we became very cold with open helmet so we decided to build a full suit. We order balloon cloth from Goodyear Co and from it we constructed a suit and a new helmet from crème can. Exhaust valve was a sediment bulb from a model T gas tank it was brass and we drilled vent holes. Our pump was a beer barrel pressure pump with one large cylinder and one small. Hand operated our air hose was regular rubber garden hose. We displayed our suit and helmet at Spokane Sportsman fair held under S P viaduct. We even tried to locate

some one drowned at a lake outside of Colville. But water was too dirty and we were short of experience.

“Someone said that gold could be found in Z Canyon so we decided to try diving and we use a suction pump. Our search for suction pump found us a 2 -inch centrifugal and an old 4 cylinder Chevrolet engine. So our big expedition to Z canyon started. Loaded al equipment into a truck and month food supply. Trail down to canyon was so steep we used pontoon boat as sled and loaded all equipment and diving suits and put a horse in front to pull it. Everything went fine until we hit a steep bank and everything went down hill. Canned goods and all but we made it at last.

“We set up our sluice box, suction pump and fired up her engine put on diving suit and entered water with suction hose. We knew that there was gold here because we had panned small specks of copper colored gold from the black heavy sand. Our equipment worked fine for a few minutes then no more material come through. When Leno returned from dive we got the sad news. The suction worked fine for only a few minutes than nozzle would gather a cluster of small rocks and sand and shut off the suction. We tried different things by pounding nozzle on rocks. We could clear it but only for short time. shutting off engine would help but after a week of trying our food ran out so we returned home.”

LaPray Bridge continued...

describes the establishment of the ferry. Smith lived in the area at the time and subsequently recounted his memories. “At the crossing of the Spokane River, Bill Nix had established a ferry, Nix had come up from The Dalles with Lougenbeel’s Command for the purpose of establishing the ferry; the troops helped him put it in.”

An article in the Olympia Pioneer and Democrat, October 14, 1859, has a notice which indicated the intent of J.R. Bates and F. J. D. Wolfe to apply to the next session of the Territorial Legislature for a charter to build a bridge across the Spokane River.

It was not built as anticipated. In the 1860-61 legislative session W.J. Terry and William Nix of the Spokane Bridge Company were granted the right to build the bridge. They apparently did not build it either, as in 1862 J.R. Bates received the right to build the bridge and in the meantime to run a ferry until it was completed.

Again the bridge did not get built. It seems that he then sold his right to Terry and Nix. James Monaghan went to work for them running the boat. Finally Nix and Monaghan became partners and got yet another authorization in 1866. Finally, in 1867 the bridge was completed and there was a bridge across the Spokane River. Another account says, “In 1859 and 1860 J. R. Bates operated the ferry at the Government crossing on the Spokane river. He sold out to W.J. Terry and William Nix, and on September 20, 1860, James Monaghan was employed by them to take charge of it, he at that time being 20 years old. The legislature, on January 11, 1861, granted them a charter to build a bridge. This ferry afterwards became the property of James Monaghan, who built the first bridge in 1865, at this crossing.”

Eventually Monaghan became the sole owner but sold it to Joseph LaPray in about 1875. It was then known as the LaPray Bridge. It became an important crossing for many years. Eventually a small community called Curby came into existence at the end of the Bridge.

Both Curby and the LaPray bridge, no longer a toll bridge, faced the fate of being flooded by the backwater of the Long Lake Dam. The Spokesman Review, February 15, 1914, told of the fate of the bridge. Within a few feet of the quickly rising water, fast action resulted in it being salvaged. It was originally to be dismantled but time ran out and it was floated on logs to its new location. It was taken to a spot near the end of Northwest Boulevard in Downriver Park.

First a ferry and finally a bridge, the first thoroughfare in the area, stood for many years until finally other routes became more important. Ultimately, the bridge was no longer necessary and moved on to another life.



LaPray Bridge, c. 1895

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How to Reach Us

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Museum Hours:

May & September: 1 PM to 4 PM
June, July, August: 10 AM to 4 PM (Mon.-Thurs.)
1 PM to 4 PM (Fri.-Sun.)

October through April: Museum & Keller House Tours
By Appointment.

Research Library Hours:

Wednesday: 10 AM to 1 PM
Thursday: 1 PM to 4 PM (limited services)

If you need other hours, please call the museum to arrange a different time.