Chapter 2

First contacts between native Northwest people and Europeans

One summer day around 1810, a Spokane Indian grandma and her granddaughters were out picking berries when they heard something crash in the bushes nearby.

They went to look, and there was a man with pale skin and a big beard. "Eek, eek!" they yelled. They had never seen a man who was so pale, and who had hair on his face. Then the man, who looked quite confused, took off his hat. "Eek!" the women cried even louder. The man was bald! They had never seen anyone who was bald.

Illustration by Nguyen Tran

And that's why one of the words in the Spokane language for White people means "upside down face."

This is just one of many stories about how Indians and European explorers, fur trappers, and traders first met. Another happened even earlier, in 1792.

In that year, George Vancouver, an English sea captain, came to explore the northwest Pacific coast. His ship stopped at an island near what is now the city of Seattle. A little boy and his family saw the ship, and probably visited with Vancouver when he came ashore.

That little boy must have been amazed to see a big sailing ship and all those strange-looking men. That boy grew up to be Chief Seattle, who is now famous around the world as a leader for peace, justice for Native peoples, and respect for nature. Both Chief Seattle and Captain Vancouver now have cities in Washington named after them. (Captain Vancouver also has another city and a huge island in Canada named for him.)

image 1943.42.62963 courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA

Captain Robert Gray's ship, called *Lady Washington*, is greeted by local people as it nears the Columbia River. In 1788, this was the first ship from the United States—a very new country—to land on the Pacific coast.

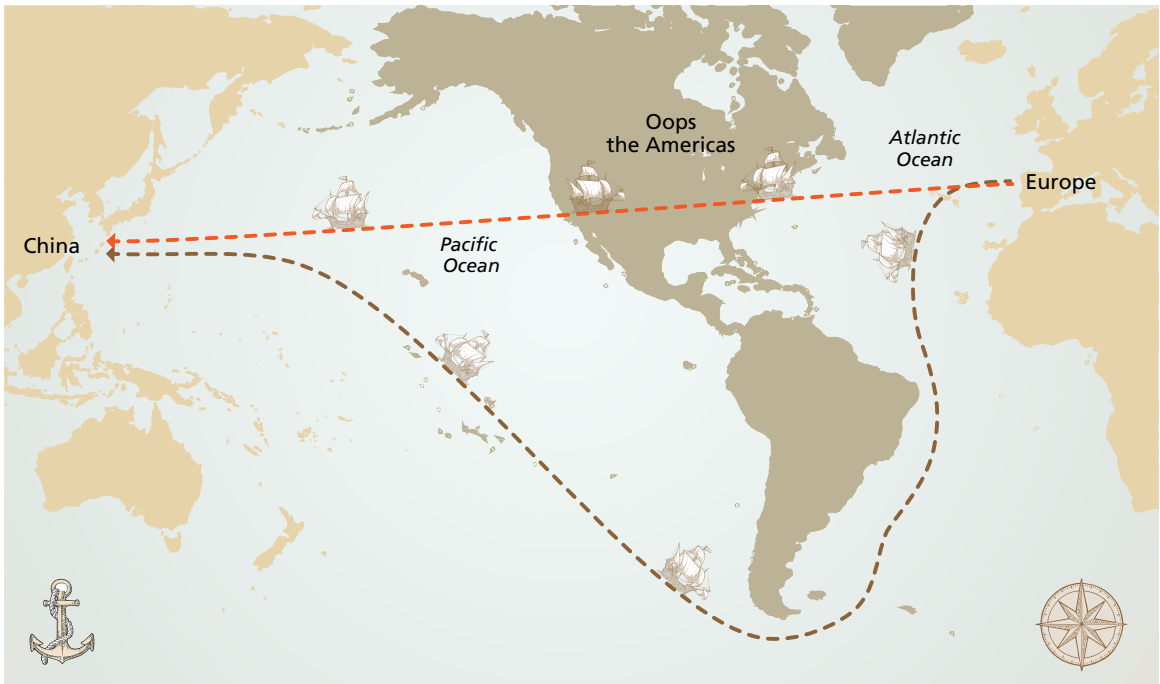
This bronze medal of Captain George Vancouver was made in 1912.

These first contacts between people from different cultures were usually friendly, because Indian societies were glad to meet people who wanted to trade and visit. They could not have imagined that the explorers they met were just the first wave of the vast numbers of people who would come after them.

The Northwest Passage that didn't exist

When Europeans first learned how to navigate and build ships that could explore the world, they didn't know that North and South America even existed. They thought if they sailed west, the first land they'd come to would be China. Finding a huge continent between Europe and China was a big surprise.

The explorers wanted to sail from Europe to China and other Asian countries to buy silk, spices, and other goods. If they could find a fast way to get there, they could make a lot of money selling those things back in Europe.



This map shows the problem: If you wanted to sail from Europe to China, North and South America are in your way! No wonder explorers were looking for a shortcut through the middle of North America.

Before this, European traders had traveled to China and other counties in the Far East by going east, across land. That route was long and hard, and they had to pay to cross through some of countries along their way.

Like other explorers who came before him, Vancouver was looking for a way to sail straight from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. It took a long time and it was extremely dangerous to sail all the way around South America. Explorers kept hoping they could find a waterway that crossed all the way through North America. They called what they were looking for the "Northwest Passage."

Long before Vancouver came to North America, explorers from Spain had also tried to find the Northwest Passage. One of them sailed up the Pacific coast in 1550, but he turned around because the weather was bad and he couldn't find a place to land. Almost fifty years later, another explorer—Juan de Fuca—did the same thing. He saw the entrance to what we now call the Strait of Juan de Fuca, but he didn't stop there. (A later explorer named the strait after him.)

Spain and the Doctrine of Discovery

In the late 1700s, more people from Spain came to North America. In 1775, a Spanish ship landed on the Washington coast at what today is Point Grenville. A few men came ashore and because they were Catholics, they planted a big cross. They also buried a bottle next to it with a note inside claiming the land for Spain.

The head of the Catholic Church, called the Pope, had written that it was the right of Spain—and before that, its neighbor Portugal—to claim ownership of any land they found that was not occupied by Catholics. This belief was called

Illustration by Nguyen Tran

Under the Doctrine of Discovery, Catholic explorers also had the right "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue" the people of any land who were not Catholic.

the "Doctrine of Discovery." The Pope wrote that Catholic explorers also had the right to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue" the people of any land who were not Catholic. Other European and American explorers believed in this doctrine too. Not all of them were Catholics, but they were all Christian. Many of the newcomers thought all Native peoples should become Christians.

This basket was probably made about 1915 by a Squaxin Island tribal member named Mrs. Cooper (we don't know her first name). Julia Hull, a White woman, bought it from her and passed it down to her niece, who donated it to the Washington State Historical Society.

Not all European Christians thought that way. When they came to America, some of them thought that European and Native cultures and religions would create a new, blended society. They hoped the new society would be the best of both worlds. Some people from Europe also joined tribal societies and adopted their spiritual beliefs and ways of living.

Exploring by sailing ships and the beginning of the fur trade

Captain Cook, an Englishman, first landed at Nootka Sound, on what is now Vancouver Island, in 1778. He was delighted to find that the Indians there had sea otter furs that he could sell for high prices in China and back home in

Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture/Eastern Washington State Historical Society

Indians from many tribes fished at Celilo Falls on the Columbia River for thousands of years, but the falls and a nearby Indian village are now under a huge lake created by the building of the Dalles Dam in the 1950s.

England. When people in England and other European countries learned of this, more ships started coming.

In 1790, another ship from England landed at the same place. When the ship sailed away, Dr. John MacKay stayed behind to manage the fur trade with the Native people. When another English ship came the next year, MacKay had a chance to return to England. However, by then he had married a Native woman and he chose to stay and be part of her society.

Ships from other countries came too. Between 1785 and 1789, 16 ships sailed from England, and others came from Spain, Russia, and the brand-new country called the United States of America. Some just wanted to trade for furs; others wanted to claim land for their countries. Some wanted both. Most of them wanted to explore the Strait of Juan de Fuca more to find out if it was the opening to the Northwest Passage.

By 1789, the English and the Spanish were arguing over which would be the only country to trade for those furs, to claim the Northwest, and to find that Northwest Passage.

That's why the English government sent George Vancouver to the Pacific Northwest in 1791. They hoped he could work out an agreement with the Spanish that would prevent a war.

Vancouver had other jobs too: He was good at making maps, and the English government wanted better maps of the Northwest and the Pacific coast. They also wanted to know more about the plants and animals as well as the Native societies.

image courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, NA3984

See the tall poles in this picture? Indians hung nets between them, and ducks flew into the nets and were trapped. This sketch was drawn in 1792 by J. Sykes, who was a crew member on an early explorer's ship.

When he was near the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Vancouver met Captain Robert Gray, an American who had been there a few years before and had returned to trade for furs and to explore more. Captain Gray had found the mouth of the Columbia River where it flows into the sea, and he named it after his ship. He sailed up the river as far as he could, and claimed it for the United States. He was disappointed that it wasn't the Northwest Passage. On an earlier voyage, he found what is now known as Grays Harbor.

After his visit with Captain Gray, Vancouver explored and mapped the Strait of Juan de Fuca and a lot of Puget Sound. He gave English names to many of the islands, mountains, and other features. Puget Sound is named for one of his officers.

At Nootka, Vancouver met with explorers from Spain. They tried to settle the conflict between their two countries over who would control the fur trade. The Native leader there, a man named Maquinna, hosted their meeting and

A ship just like the original *Lady Washington* (called a replica) was built by the Grays Harbor Historical Seaport in 1989. It has been in several movies, and many students and adults take tours of it. Some even get to sail on it.

photo by Miso Beno, from Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

Who gets to name things?

Explorers like George Vancouver replaced many of the original names of mountains, rivers, and villages. But many original names still exist too, though most have changed just enough to make them easier for non-Indians to pronounce. Some Indian names are also used to identify cities and counties.

Here are just a few examples:

Snohomish	Spokane	Chewelah	Klickitat
Yakima	Cathlamet	Enumclaw	Omak
Wapato	Walla Walla	Tonasket	Snoqualmie

Today, people from the Puyallup Tribe, and many others who care about history, want to restore Mt. Rainier's original name, which was Tahoma or Tacoma. George Vancouver named it for Admiral Peter Rainier, who served in the British navy and never came to this part of the world.

served dinner. He wanted to be able to trade with everyone. Vancouver was frustrated because they couldn't settle the problem, but he thought they at least had a good meeting. He decided to leave a final solution up to his government back in England.

Then, because winter was coming, he sailed south again. When he came to the mouth of the Columbia River, he sent the smaller of his two ships to explore it. To counter Captain Gray's claim to it, he ordered his ship to sail farther upstream than Gray's did, so he could claim it for England.

The toll of European diseases

Vancouver kept a journal in which he wrote about what he saw and learned as he traveled. He wrote that there were many Native villages around Puget Sound that were empty and overgrown with grasses and shrubs. He said he saw

A quick history of European explorers

1550s

Spanish ships begin to sail up the coast of North America.

1592

Juan de Fuca sails past the entrance of what is now called the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

1775

Bruno Heceta arrives at Point Grenville and claims land for Spain.

1785-1789

Sixteen British ships come to the Northwest to trade for furs.

1788

British Captain Cook lands at Vancouver Island.

1788, 1792

American Robert Gray comes to trade furs, enters what is now called Grays Harbor and explores the Columbia River.

1790

Spain gives up its claims to land in the Pacific Northwest.

1792

British captain George Vancouver surveys Puget Sound and names it for one of his crew.

1790-1804

Fifty American ships come to trade furs but only nine British ships come.

1804

Lewis and Clark expedition arrives in Washington State.

more empty villages than ones where people still lived. He also met Native people who had scars from a disease called smallpox. Some had lost sight in one eye from it. He concluded that a lot of Native people had probably died from smallpox.

Smallpox, measles, and other diseases had swept across America from east to west soon after Europeans first came to the Americas. People who lived in Europe had developed some resistance to these diseases, but the diseases were deadly to Indians. When Indian people visited and traded with each other, the diseases spread across the country. That's how smallpox and other diseases from Europe arrived in the Northwest ahead of the European explorers. We will never know how many Native people in the Pacific Northwest died from them.

Lewis and Clark's big adventure

In 1804, Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, sent about 30 men on a journey to explore the American West and to find their way to the Pacific Ocean. The men were led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.

image courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, object NPG.71.36, detail

William Clark

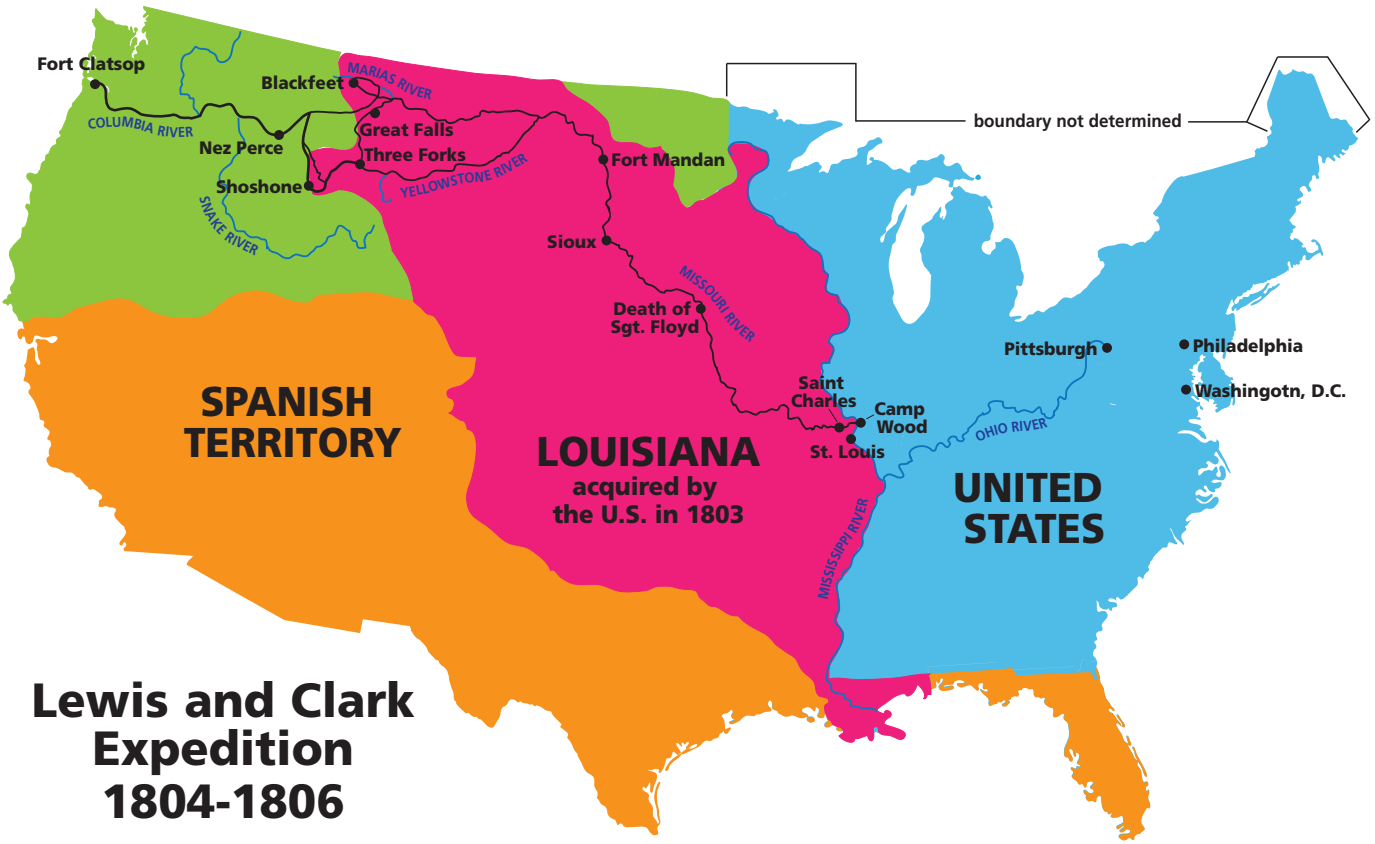
Portrait of Meriwether Lewis, circa 1807, by Charles Willson Peale; image in the public domain.

Meriwether Lewis

Jefferson had just bought a huge piece of land (see map) in the middle of America that France had claimed. It was called the Louisiana Purchase, and Jefferson made it part of the United States.

Jefferson thought that if Lewis and Clark could make it to the Pacific coast, the United States could claim land all the way to the Pacific Ocean. He didn't exactly say that, though; he said he wanted to find the Northwest Passage and learn more about the plants, animals, and geography of the west.

Lewis and Clark and their party set out across the country. First they traveled up the Missouri River. Then they crossed vast grasslands, and climbed up and through mountains. They came to a place where the rivers started to flow west, toward the Pacific, rather than east. That place is called the Continental Divide.



Several of the men in the group had Native American mothers and White fathers — usually men who were fur trappers. Some of them spoke one or more Native languages. One of those men brought his Shoshone wife, Sacagawea, who had traveled a lot and knew her way through much of the land. She also spoke several Native languages. One man on the journey was an enslaved African American named York who "belonged" to Clark.

All along the way, they relied on Sacagawea and Indian tribes to help them find their way. Indians had trails they had used for thousands of years.

When they reached what is now Washington State, Lewis and Clark and their group were among the Nez Perce Tribe. Their territory included the southeast corner of our state and part of Idaho and Oregon. Lewis and Clark had just crossed a rugged mountain range and were very tired and hungry.

At first, the Nez Perce weren't sure the White people were humans because they were so hairy and dirty and they hadn't seen people with beards and body hair before. They also thought York must be in charge, because he was the tallest and looked different than the others. The Nez Perce thought about killing them all, just to be safe. Sacagawea may have told them these newcomers were harmless. So the Nez Perce decided they could be friends.

The Columbia River was full of salmon when Lewis and Clark came.

image courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA

The Nez Perce showed Lewis and Clark's men how to make canoes out of big logs. Then they showed them the way to the Columbia River. The Nez Perce traveled down the river with them as far as The Dalles and took care of their horses until the explorers returned the next spring on their way back home.

image courtesy U.S. National Park Service

Sacagawea saves the day

As a Shoshone child, Sacagawea and her tribe lived in an area that's now part of Idaho. When she was about 10 or 12 (no one knows for sure), she was kidnapped by a rival tribe called the Hidatsa and taken to their homeland in what is now North Dakota. She worked in their fields growing squash, corn, and beans. As a young teenager, she was sold to a French fur trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau and became his wife.

Lewis and Clark spent their first winter camped in North Dakota. That's where they met and hired Charbonneau and Sacagawea to be part of the expedition. They knew Sacagawea spoke at least two Native languages, and that she had traveled through the Rocky Mountains and knew her way to Idaho. Lewis also thought that having a Native woman along on the trip would be a symbol of peace.

During that first winter, while they were still camped in North Dakota, Sacagawea gave birth to a baby boy. When they started west in the spring, she strapped him to her back. At one point, a canoe they were traveling in capsized (sank). She handed her little boy to someone and dived in the river to rescue the journals and other important things that were sinking. And that was just the first of many times she saved the day. Later, she dug up roots to eat when they were without food, picked berries, and—just as Lewis had thought—spoke with the Shoshone tribal members in their own language to bargain for horses the men needed.

In fact, one of the Shoshone men she spoke to turned out to be her brother, whom she had not seen since she was kidnapped years earlier. That was a very emotional meeting.

For many years after the expedition, Sacagawea was not much remembered. But in the late 1800s, when women started to campaign for the right to vote, they wrote about her as an example of how brave and capable women are, and how much they had contributed to this country. That's when she became very famous.

People tell two different stories about what happened to her after the trip was over. One story says she died a few years later, in 1812; another says she lived to be 100. Like so much else in American history, we may never know for sure.

photo courtesy Ed Hamilton

Ed Hamilton, sculptor
Geoffrey Carr, photographer
Sculpture site: downtown Belvedere overlooking the Ohio River, Lousiville, Kentucky
Cast bronze 8' high on man made monolith 4' high
Dedicated 2003

York:
Finally recognized after 200 years

York was a tall, strong African American who was enslaved by the family of William Clark. The two men grew up together, and York was Clark's personal servant. When the Lewis and Clark expedition was organized, Clark decided that York should come with them.

York was a very good hunter and, unlike most of the men, he could swim. These skills made him an especially important member of the team.

His size, dark skin, and curly hair also made him stand out from the rest. He was the first African American many Indians had ever seen. However, some historians think that the Indians along the Pacific coast probably saw African or African Americans before, because some of them were on the crews of the ships that had explored the area.

When the expedition returned home, all of the men except York were rewarded with extra pay and land. York asked Clark for his freedom in return for his service on the trip, but Clark refused. Many years later, Clark claimed that he had freed York some years after they returned, but no one is sure if this is true.

For many years, York's role in the Lewis and Clark expedition was ignored, but during the events that marked the 200th anniversary of the trip (called a bicentennial), York got more recognition. There are now statues honoring him at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, and in Louisville, Kentucky, where York was born.

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This photo from1900 shows Indians who gathered at Nespelem to honor the famous Nez Perce War that took place in 1877. In that year, Chief Joseph led the fight to stay on land promised to the tribe in an 1855 treaty. The U.S. Army drove the Nez Perce all the way to Montana before they surrendered.

All along the journey down the Columbia River, Lewis and Clark met and traded with tribes. They gave tribal leaders special medals and told them of the "Great Father," President Jefferson. Some Natives liked the idea of having a "Great Father" who would protect them and trade with them. Others weren't so sure. What would that mean in the future?

When they finally got to the mouth of the Columbia and saw the Pacific Ocean, everyone in Lewis and Clark's party was worn out. Their clothes were falling apart and they all had fleas from the Native dogs. But they were thrilled to reach their goal.

When they finally reached the Pacific Ocean, it was fall. It would be too cold and snowy in the mountains to head back east until spring. So they voted on where to spend the winter. York and Sacagawea voted with everyone else. This was the first time in the United States that an African American and a woman were allowed to vote along with White men. They all chose a spot on the Oregon side of the Columbia River.

What do you suppose Lewis and Clark are thinking as they gaze into the distance? And what do you suppose their Native American companion is thinking of them? The person who drew this picture must have been wondering about all that too.

image 2005.22.2 courtesy Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma, WA

Nez Perce territory

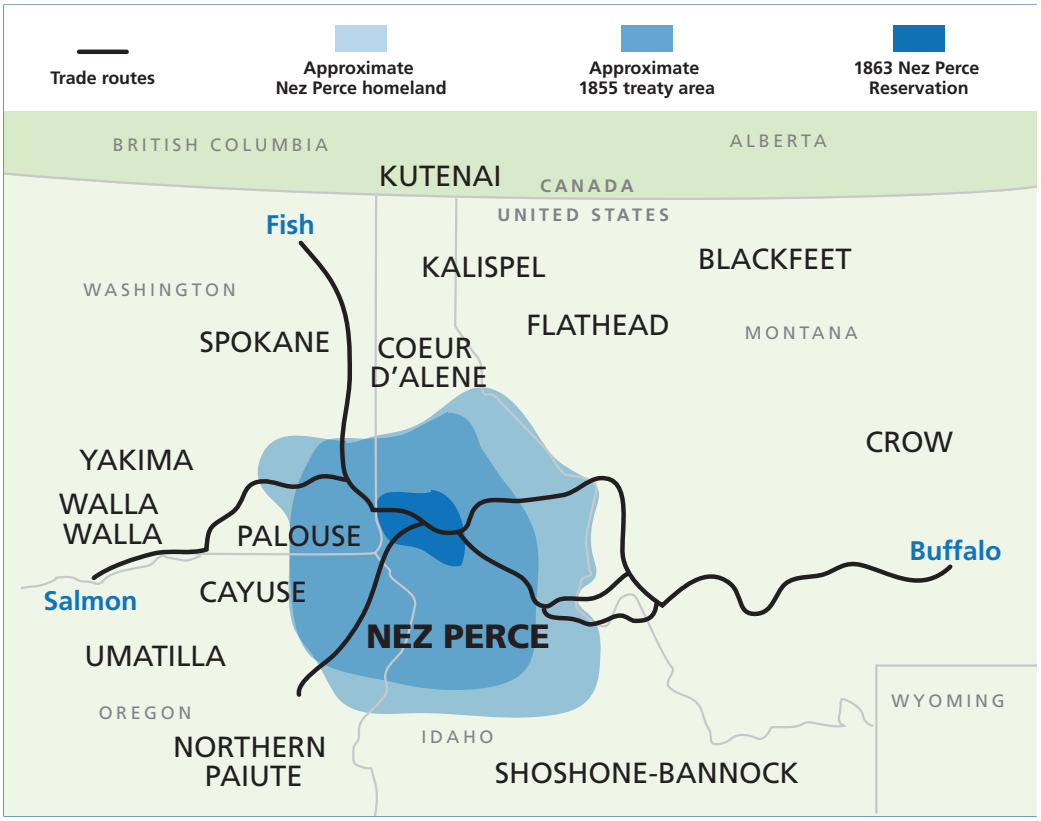


image courtesy Washington State Digital Archives, # AR-07809001-ph003146

We don't know when this picture of two Umatilla girls on a horse was taken. It was donated to the Washington State Archives, which houses all kinds of historical records and documents.

The next spring, Lewis and Clark's group traveled back to Missouri. President Jefferson was very pleased. He could now claim all the lands they traveled through.

When Lewis and Clark visited the Northwest, Indians didn't know that 50 years later thousands of settlers would come and take over almost all of their land. When that happened, many Indians felt that the coming of Lewis and Clark had been the "beginning of the end" of their traditional way of life.

The fur trade part I: The beaver hat fashion craze

The Lewis and Clark journey made the fur trade grow faster. But it had already been going on for a long time.

Starting in the 1600s, people in Europe were excited when explorers who went to North America came home with lots of furs. At first it was mostly sea otters, but later people came back with other animal furs. The most important were beaver furs.

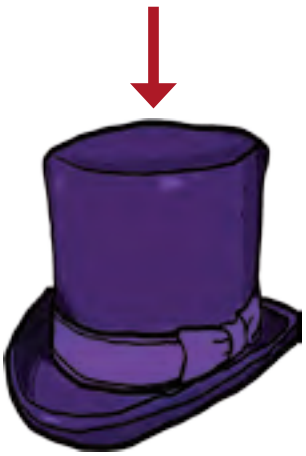
Beaver hats were a big fashion item, especially in England. They cost a lot and were worn by rich people. They were also worn by people who wanted other people to think they were rich. Some of those hats were called "stovepipe hats" because they were so tall. (Those hats look silly to us, but there are probably things we wear that will look silly to people of the future.)

It was not a good time to be a beaver. In Europe, trappers had killed all the beavers they could find. Then they went east across Russia and killed all the beavers they could find there. They were running out of beavers when they discovered there were a lot of them in America.

The American fur trade mostly started on the east coast of Canada. Men from France and England headed into the country to find and trap them. New French and English companies were created. They bought the furs from both Native and European trappers and shipped them to Europe and Asia.

The fur trade had a big impact on Native people. Many became full-time trappers. They really liked the cloth, metal pots, tools, and guns they could get from the Europeans.

An unlucky beaver could become a beaver hat.



Illustrations by Nguyen Tran

French and English trappers started on the east coast, but soon they traveled farther and farther west. They were rugged men who liked adventure. Many of them learned Native languages and made friends with people whose lands they passed through. While some of them married into tribes and stayed, others married and then moved on, leaving wives and children behind.

So the fur trade in Washington came from both the east, over land, and from the west, by sea and ship. One of those fur trappers who had headed west might have been the "upside down face" that the Spokane grandma met. Or he might have been a trapper who came on a ship that landed somewhere on the Washington coast.

The fur trade part II: The Hudson's Bay Company

The Hudson's Bay Company was a large English fur trading company. It had been trading furs on the east coast of Canada for a long time. In 1821, it took over a rival company that had been trading furs in Washington.

The Hudson's Bay Company had forts in several places in the Northwest, from Alaska down through Oregon. Some of them had been built earlier by the rival company Hudson's Bay took over.

The Hudson's Bay Company built Fort Vancouver on the north side of the Columbia River. At that time, the British and American governments were arguing

image courtesy National Park Service, Fort Vancouver National Historic Site

Fort Vancouver, on the north side of the Columbia River.

A canoe piled high with furs

Illustration by Nguyen Tran

about where the northern border of the United States would be. Would the Columbia River be the border, or would it be farther north? Building a fort on the north side of the river was the British way to push for a border farther north.

The Hudson's Bay Company forts did more than trade furs. They also planted farms, where they grew a lot of the food the company's workers needed. They had another fort and farm near Spokane. In 1833, they built a third fort in the Nisqually Delta, near the south end of Puget Sound.

The Hudson's Bay Company figured out how to send furs over land all the way to the east coast. They learned the route from the Native people and became really good at traveling in canoes. They paid Native people along the way to help them carry their canoes around waterfalls and across land from one river to the next. By 1839, they could go all the way across the country in three months and ten days. At the time, everyone thought that was really fast. (Today people can get on an airplane and fly across the country in about five hours.)

For a long time, the people who worked at the Hudson's Bay trading forts were the only non-Indians in Washington. The fact that they were here made other non-Indians think it would be safe to move here.

By 1846, the British and American governments finally agreed that the border between the lands they claimed would be at the 49th parallel—where it is today. (Spain had given up on claiming land in the Northwest much earlier.)

Some settlers had already been coming here, but once they knew for sure that this area would be part of the United States, thousands more started to flow into Washington State.

image courtesy Tacoma Public Library, #37926

This photo was taken in the 1880s on the Tacoma waterfront. It shows settlers next to Indians and their canoes.