

Information concerning the Establishment of Fort Colville

Author(s): William S. Lewis

Source: *The Washington Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Apr., 1925), pp. 102-107

Published by: University of Washington

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40474904>

Accessed: 09-12-2019 02:29 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*University of Washington* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Washington Historical Quarterly*

## INFORMATION CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FORT COLVILLE\*

The Hudson's Bay Company's Trading Post at Kettle Falls, Washington, was named Fort Colville presumably in honour of Mr. Andrew Colville, who was a member of the Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company at the time the Post was established.

Its beginning are indicated in the letter from Governor George Simpson dated at Columbia Forks Spokane River encampment, 10th April, 1835, and addressed to Mr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor, who was then in charge of the Columbia District. The instructions of Mr. George Simpson were:—

“A most serious expense and inconvenience is annually incurred Spring and Fall in transporting the Spokane Outfit and Returns between the Forks and Establishment which would be avoided by removing the Post to the Kettle Falls, this is a more desirable situation in regard to Farming, Fish, provisions generally as also in respect to Trade, and many other points of view, we have therefore determined that the Establishment shall be removed after the arrival of the Brigade and Mr. Work should be instructed to proceed thither direct with his Outfit and to send an Express to Mr. Birnie from Walla Walla apprising him of his arrival in order that everything may be in readiness to commence transporting the property across without delay; indeed I think Mr. Work himself should proceed by land from Walla Walla leaving the Brigade under the charge of Mr. Dears or of Mr. McLeod if you approve of an arrangement I mean to suggest in regard to him.—The six men from your Establishment who assist in working up the craft and wait the arrival of the Express Canoe should be directed to employ themselves in transporting Building etc., together with Cartier and St. Martin and any other retiring Servants that may be coming out, until it is time for them to be at the mountain to meet the York Factory people about the 20th, October.—We mean to line out the Fort en passant and Mr. Birnie is directed to send two men immediately across to plant 5 or 6 kegs of Potatoes.”

In a letter to Mr. John Work at Spokane House dated at Columbia Lake 16th April, 1825, Governor Simpson writes:—

“The Dr. will no doubt have informed you of the reasons that induced me to alter your destination for this season and I trust

---

\*This information was secured by Mr. Lewis principally through the courtesy of Richard Benson, Acting Secretary of the Canadian Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, in the executive office of the company, 208 Main Street, Winnipeg.—Editor.

the chance will be agreeable to you.—I have lined out the site of the new Establishment at the Kettle Falls (to be named Fort Colvile) and wish you to commence building and transporting the property from Spokane as early as possible.—you will be so good as to take care of them the produce to be reserved for seed *not ate* as next spring I expect that from 30 to 40 Bushels will be planted.—Pray let every possible exertion be used to lay up an abundant stock of Fish and other provisions country produces as no imported provisions can in future be forwarded from the coast.

“The Spokans will not be pleased at the removal of the Fort, you must secure the Chiefs with a few presents besides fair words.—

“Do me the favor to collect all the seeds, Plants, Birds and Quadrupeds you can (even mice and Rats) and let them be forwarded by the Ship of next season to Micholas Garry Esqr. care of Williams Smith Esqr., Secretary H. B. Coy, London.”

Although Governor Simpson addresses John Work in regard to the removal of the Post from Spokane to Kettle Falls, the latter is not to be in command at Fort Colvile, the charge of this establishment being actually given to Chief Trader John Warren Dease, as will be seen from the following extract of letter to Chief Factor John McLoughlin from Governor Simpson dated York Factory 11th July, 1825:—

“Mr. Black is intended to relieve Mr. Dease at Fort Nez Perces and he will assume the immediate charge of that Establishment accordingly; Mr. Dease remaining there for a few weeks to make that gentleman thoroughly acquainted with the nature of the Trade and to furnish him with every information respecting the Post that may be considered useful.—Mr. Dease will afterwards proceed to Fort Colvile and assume the charge of that establishment where Mr. Birnie will in the mean time remain while Mr. Work goes to the Flat Head Post and Mr. Dears to the Coutonai Post.”

The Summer Establishment of Fort Colvile was to consist of Chief Trader Dease and four men.

As evidence of Governor Simpson's impression of Fort Colvile as a Farming centre the following further remarks from the last mentioned letter will be of interest:—

“Fort Colvile is well adapted for a Farming Establishment and from what I have already seen of Mr. Dease's neatness of arrangement in that way I entertain confident hopes that under his management it will become a very important auxiliary to us

in the way of living.—Indian Corn, Pease, Wheat and Barley I am satisfied would thrive there, Potatoes in any quantity may be raised and the country is so well adapted for the rearing of Hogs that I expect he will very soon be able to furnish any quantity of Pork we may require.”

It would seem that some doubt existed in the mind of Mr. McLoughlin as to the possibility of moving the Post from Spokane to Kettle Falls in the year 1825, for in writing to Mr. John Work he states, that, while it is to be hoped that the removal has begun, yet he, Mr. Work, will have to be guided by his own judgment and the circumstances in which he is placed as to whether he can remove to Kettle Falls in the Autumn. Mr. Work must have informed John McLoughlin as to his inability to carry out the desired removal, for in September the latter writes:—

“Since you find it impossible to move the Spokane establishment this season to the Kettle Falls you will take the necessary measures to do it next Spring before the Brigade comes down. I was not aware the spot selected was on the south side of the Columbia. You will raise no buildings on it till the Express comes in, and I hope by that time it will be known whether we ought to build on the north or south side.”

Eventually the property from Spokane was removed to Kettle Falls in the period 7th March and 22nd March, 1826, and in the letter dated Athabasca Portage 16th October, 1826, Mr. John Warren Dease writes:—

“Since I had the honor of addressing you last Spring, nothing of any particular moment has occurred worthy of notice, the day after Mr. McLeod left me I took my departure for the Kettle Falls to which I had three Trips made before we got up the property, it took us twelve days. I without delay sett all hands about erecting a store for the security of our Goods etc., which was fortunately effected before my Men left me for to join the Brigade going down.

With regard to our Agricultural pursuits our Seeds of different kinds were sown in good time in fact as early as the Season would admit of, every thing came up well with the exception of Indian Corn and Wheat, the latter was damaged on the way in, and the former had not come to maturity of course neither fit for seed, our Barley which was stored before I came off yielded 14 for one, 24 bushels of Potatoes were planted and were thriving well, but unfortunately a kind of ground mice got among them and had destroyed more than half before I came off for this place,

other vegetables such as cabbage, turnips, etc., I can not complain of, the Cattle brought from Vancouver were safe when I came off and thriving well the pasture about being excellent. With respect to our Summer I can not complain, I was visited by the lower Kootonais who brought me some Furs, and seem highly pleased at having a Fort to which they can resort to do trade. The Indians of the Lake brought in tolerable hunts and I expect will do well when Traps become more common among them, in the Fur way the Flat head and Kootonay trade stand much as last year, but not near so good in provisions, which I have every reason to regret as Salmon is scarce all over which is attributed to the height of the Waters."

In the July 1827, writing to John Warren Dease, Governor Simpson says:—

"We are glad to learn that Fort Colvile promises to become such a useful Post, both in point of returns and provisions, and we are satisfied that it would be highly advantageous to its interests that you passed another year or two there."

He continues:—

"We regret that you have not gone on with the Buildings and improvements at Fort Colvile, and beg that they may be continued . . . . there is no probability of a boundary line being determined for many years, in the meantime the article in the Treaty of Ghent which provides that the country shall be left open to the subjects of both nations, is what we mean to regulate ourselves by."

Mr. John Warren Dease made a report of Colvile District in April 1827, from which the following extracts may be of interest:—

*"Limits of the Department.* The roving mode of life the natives of this district lead renders it impossible to define exactly their limits, however, to give a tolerable idea of it, they Hunt or go about from the Saint Poilish river which is a small distance below Spokane River where it empties into the Columbia to the Rocky Mountain and from thence Eastward to the Piegian Lands on the Missisourie Southward as far as Henry's Forks in the Snake Country, the Columbia below this joining a kind of Boundary line between the Indians hereabouts and those of Okinagan.

*"Nature of the Country, Soil and Vegetable Productions.* The nature of the Country is generally speaking Woody, however, here and there fine Plains along the little Rivers in low grounds fine Meadowland. The Timber is of different kinds, white and red Pine, Cedar, Larch, Birch, Soft Maple, etc., etc., some of which grow to a very large size. The soil in many parts fit for cultivation. Nutritive roots and fruits of different kinds grow Spontaneous. Considerable Mountains and High Hills line the Columbia and Flat Head Rivers. The animals hunted for Food are Deer of different species, Mountain Goat, and Buffaloe.

*"Means of Subsistence.* Fish, Deers, Meat, Roots, Berries and in case of Starvation Moss.

*"Number of Indians.* The Columbia Lake Indians 34. Kettle Fall Indians 54. Grand Rapid Indians 62, Saint Poils 91. These 4 tribes inhabit the country from above Columbia Lakes to Saint Poil River below what is called Spokane Forks. The Spokane Indians separated into 3 more tribes amounting to 222 men inhabit the country along the river of that name. The Pendant Doreilles Lands are at a Bay of that name and along Flat Head River, they may be in number 250 men. The Flat Heads, another Tribe of about 150 claim the lands about Bitter Root River and hunt between that and the Snake Country as far as Henry's Forks. All these tribes are part of one nation the rest of them are about Okinagan. The Kootonais Nation are divided in two tribes called Kootonais and Flat Bows. Their Hunting Grounds are McGillivrays River to the Peigen Lands. Gaur Dalenes another Nation divided into several Tribes in number about 150 men Hunt back of Spokane.

"The Kootonais whose numbers I forgot to mention may be 150. So that the three nations who occasionally visit our District Establishments may amount to about 1200 men."

Within three years of its establishment, the control of Fort Colvile seems to have passed to John Work, as, in April 1829 he wrote a report, in answer to questions submitted by Governor Simpson, dealing with various points of natural history, climate, surroundings, habits and customs of the native, etc. Therein he gives the number of the Indians in the district thus:—

*Information Concerning Establishment of Fort Colville* 107

	Men	Women	Children	
			Boys	Girls
Lake Indians -----	34	38	25	41
Kettle Falls Indians -----	96	110	61	74
Sinapoilish Indians -----	91	77	24	26
Spokans Indians -----	222	241	111	130
Coeur d'Alens Indians -----	157	112	60	75
Pendant d'Oreilles -----	203	248	207	185
Kootenais Indians -----	182	215	118	115
Flat Heads Indians -----	150	180	164	169
Nez Perces Indians -----	440	495	255	260

---

	1575	1716	1025	1076
--	------	------	------	------

---

Total -----				5391
-------------	--	--	--	------

WILLIAM S. LEWIS.