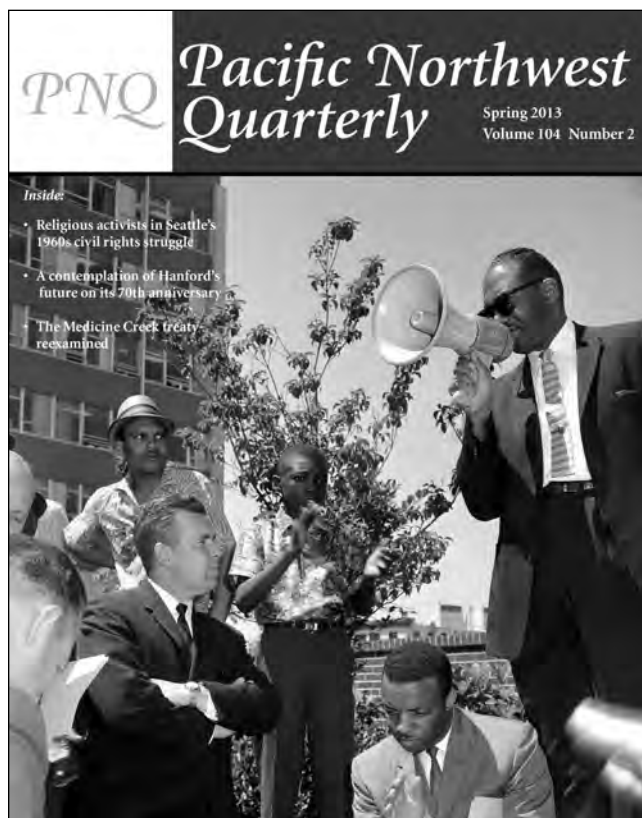


The Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, University of Washington

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OFTEN IDEALIZED AS “ECOTOPIA,” the Pacific Northwest has a rich, complicated, and contested history. The site of the Whitman massacre, the Leschi uprising, anti-Chinese riots in the 1880s, the massacre of IWW members at Centralia, the spotted owl controversy, and the WTO protests, the region has witnessed waves of conflict over who belongs here, how the landscape

should be used, and how the region’s wealth should be divided. Part of a Pacific-looking culture for millennia, the region eventually attracted the interest of Spanish, British, Russian, and eventually American traders. The region’s resources — furs, whales, fish, timber, hydroelectricity — have played crucial roles in the histories of the region’s many native peoples as well as in the histories of Russia, Britain, the United States, and Canada. One of the last regions of the contemporary United States to be firmly connected to the American east, the history of the region has been strongly shaped by its Pacific location, its varied geography and environmental resources, an enduring Native presence, and European, Asian, and Mexican diasporas. Established in 1990, the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest promotes research and study of the region’s history and the history of the North American West more broadly.



The Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest supports scholarly publishing on the region. Pictured here is a recent issue of the *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*. Photo courtesy Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, University of Washington.

From Regional to Transnational History in Ecotopia

The idea for a center devoted to regional history emerged in the late 1980s. At that moment, the field of American history was contending with the challenge of the “New Western History” and the broader recognition that the West had been relatively neglected in serious historical scholarship. Scholars such as Patricia Limerick and Richard White were insisting that the history of the region needed to be told as something other than the westward pioneering of white Americans, and that, moreover, the history of the West was central to the history of the nation. At the time, the History Department at the University of Washington, like most departments, emphasized the study of Europe, East Asia, and more traditional fields of American history (colonial New England, the Civil War, foreign policy). Rich library and archival holdings on the Pacific Northwest housed at the university and other local archives were little known and

rarely used. John Findlay, a professor of Western U.S. history at the University of Washington, sought to draw more attention and resources to the study of the American West. Findlay laid the groundwork for the center and became its first director. Housed within the History Department at the University of Washington, the center has provided a focus for humanities' scholarship across the campus that addresses Seattle, Washington State, and the region. The center defines the region broadly, as encompassing the North American Northwest — including western Canada and Alaska — as well as the connections between the region and other places.

Initial support for the center came from funds already within the University of Washington's History Department. Mrs. Margaret Pettyjohn, a descendent of early Euro-American migrants to Washington Territory and graduate of Whitman College in Walla Walla, left her estate to the three leading regional universities: University of Washington, Washington State University, and the University of Idaho. Mrs. Pettyjohn had dictated that her gift be used to establish a fund in memory of John Calhoun Smith, a relatively obscure representative to the first territorial legislature of Washington State. Pettyjohn also directed that the funds should be used for research and scholarships devoted to the history of Washington and Idaho during the territorial period. That money, housed in the History Department since 1978, became the seed for a center devoted more broadly to regional history; in the intervening years, several additional donations and bequests have augmented the initial funds.

When the center was first established, the scholarly focus lay on the New Western History and social histories of the multiple ethnic and racial groups in the region; in addition, John Findlay brought his own interests in Western urban history

and the history of atomic bomb production to the center. In recent years, under the directorship of Moon-Ho Jung, the center has developed a focus on issues of race and empire in the region; recent scholarship supported by the center has placed the Pacific Northwest within a broader history of American colonialism and empire. In the coming years, the center will also emphasize the material, environmental, and commodity histories of the region as well as its pacific connections. In line with the recent shift in historical scholarship away from nationalist histories and toward histories that are transnational, comparative, and even global in their framing and scope, the center will highlight the region's entanglement in a wider Pacific World — a world that includes not only California and Hawaii but Polynesia more broadly as well as east and southeast Asia and western Latin America. Tied at various moments to the Pacific world through imperial networks of exploration and exploitation as well as through migration, climate, environments, radical and conservative movements, culture and ideas, and economic and material flows, the Pacific Northwest's history is undeniably transnational, and the region's ties to the West and the Pacific have been central to its histories.

The center has pursued its goals of scholarship and knowledge dissemination in a variety of ways. Perhaps most important, we support graduate study in the history of the region through a variety of fellowships and research and travel grants. Our support has led to outstanding dissertations in fields such as Native American history, Asian American history, Latino, labor, and gender history. The center has also been an early and avid supporter of research in environmental history, supporting projects on the environmental history of Seattle, the Klondike Gold Rush, and the salmon crisis. Several of these dissertations have, in turn,

gone on to generate prize-winning articles and books in the field, helping to make the University of Washington one of the country's most influential institutions in the production of historical scholarship on the American and Canadian wests. In addition, the center supports faculty research through annual travel grants and through an endowed professorship in Pacific Northwest History, the John C. Smith Professorship, which is currently held by Professor John Findlay. The center also welcomes Fulbright and other externally funded scholars who are pursuing research on Northwest topics.

As part of its efforts to support scholarship on the Northwest, the center hosts a variety of conferences, bringing together graduate students and senior scholars to explore themes in Pacific Northwest and Western U.S. history and culture. To date, our conferences have addressed the Nikkei experience in the Northwest, Native American treaty rights, the literature of the Pacific Northwest, the impacts of the Canadian-U.S. border, the history and legacies of atomic bomb production, and the legacies of American imperialism in the region. Most recently, in 2013, we hosted the conference "Empires of Capital: Race across the Atlantic and the Pacific," bringing together scholars with similar interests working in different regions of the continent in order to offer a comparative perspective on the region's history.

The center regularly brings leading scholars to the University of Washington campus to discuss current work in Western and Pacific Northwestern History. Recent topics addressed by visiting scholars have included the problem of empire in the Pacific Northwest, the Civil War in the American West. And among recent visitors have been Pekka Hamalainen, Richard White, Elliott West, Lisa Lowe, Ari Kelman, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and Julie Greene.

A key goal of the center since its founding has been to support and promote the publication of scholarly work on the region and its history, a mission that only grows in importance given the pressures on scholarly publishing. Since 1990, the center has housed and supported the *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, the leading scholarly journal devoted to the history and culture of the Northwestern region (including Alaska and western Canada). The PNQ has one of the longest publishing histories of any journal in the West, having begun in 1906, and is recognized as one of the country's premier regional historical journals.

In conjunction with the University of Washington Press, the center edits and publishes an outstanding series in Western history and biography: the Emil and Kathleen Sick Book Series. Emil Sick, an early twentieth-century capitalist, made his fortune in the beer business, first in Canada and later in the American Northwest. Sick came to Seattle in the 1930s, buying exclusive rights to sell the now iconic Rainier brand beer in Washington and Alaska in 1934. Perhaps best known locally for his ownership of Seattle's Pacific League baseball team, Sick renamed the team, formerly the "Indians," the "Rainiers" — not as a gesture of anti-racism, but as a marketing tactic. Sick was also a serious local philanthropist, raising money for a local historical museum, the city's first blood bank, and many other causes. In 1966, the Sick's son donated money to the University of Washington to establish the book series to honor his parents' interest in local and regional history.

To date, the Sick series has published more than twenty books, several of which have been award winners and which remain widely read decades after their initial publication. Among titles in the Sick series, are Donald Meinig's classic, *The Great Columbia Plain* (1968, 1995), Thomas Cox's *Mills and Markets*

(1974), Carols Schwantes' *Radical Heritage* (1975), and Quintard Taylor's *Forging a Black Community* (1994). Among recent titles in that series is Andrew H. Fisher's *Shadow Tribe: The Making of Columbia River Indian Identity*, which won the Western History Association's Robert G. Athearn Award (2011) for the best book on the twentieth-century West. In 2012, the Sick series published Lissa Wadewitz's *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits on the Salish Sea* (2012), winner of the Western History Association's Hal K. Rothman Award and the North American Society for Oceanic History's John Lyman Award.

Finally, the center has long been an active supporter of K–12 teaching in and about the Pacific Northwest, through periodic summer teaching institutes and through its website. The center launched one of the earliest efforts to use the Internet as a way to reach a broader audience when, in the late 1990s, it began posting curricular materials aimed primarily at secondary school teachers; in 2001, the center was awarded a Washington State Governor's award for excellence in teaching. The center's curriculum packets include both interpretative essays, primary source documents, as well as questions and recommendations for further research. The topics of

those packets range from Native American treaties, to the environmental history of Seattle and Spokane, to the Cold War and Red Scare in Washington State. The most recent packet, currently in preparation, will address Seattle's gay and lesbian history. The center's website also hosts a survey course on Pacific Northwest History, taught by Professor John Findlay, as well as a course on regional literature.

At the present moment, the University of Washington History Department holds six different faculty with serious interests in Western U.S. history, with additional faculty located in American Indian Studies and American Ethnic Studies. Moreover, the Department has many outstanding faculty specializing in East and Southeast Asia. Those strengths — in the U.S. West and the Pacific World more broadly — combined with the center's commitment to supporting innovative research on the region, bodes extremely well for the future of Western and Pacific history in Seattle.

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