

Diversity in people and pioneers marked Valley

By Jayne Singleton
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Before the influx of the early pioneer Europeans, the Spokane Valley was the ancestral homeland of the Coeur d'Alene and Spokane Tribes. Chief Saltese lived at the lake that bore his name, Saltese Lake. Quin-mo-see lived at what became Spokane Bridge. Tecumseh and Wildshoe lived around the shores and hills of Liberty Lake.

The tribes weren't nomadic other than to cross the Rockies for traditional buffalo hunts. They had cattle, horses and raised hay and grain. Pow-wows and gatherings were held on the Spokane River, often times at Quin-mo-see's place. Tribes from all over the Inland Northwest attended to share stories, trade goods, play games, race ponies, see relatives and sometimes find a bride. Their purposeful way of life was soon to change. The Indians way of life didn't fit with the ideas of the expanding United States government, and land was claimed by early settlers. As more land was taken, Indians were without purpose in some cases, and they were written up in the local papers as lazy and a nuisance that must go.

The discovery of gold in the Kootenai mines, silver in North Idaho and the Homestead Act of 1862 were catalysts that led to cultural clashes over land. The Act granted ownership of 160 acres to a person who stayed on the land at least five years and could show improvements. The Homestead Deed was usually signed by the President of the United States. The lure of free land brought many early pioneers who staked claims on land the Indians had inhabited for centuries. Farmers were followed by shopkeepers and merchants. Schools and churches were built and communities developed. Word of new settlements, available

land and open spaces reached the ears of the immigrants in the Midwest and eastern United States.

The first immigrants to settle the Spokane Valley came from many places and many nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Small ethnic communities developed around farms and orchards. Germans arrived from Minnesota and settled in the Otis Orchards and Trent areas. Familiar names such as Stegners, Pringles, Blessings, Ulowetzs, Stitzs, Zimprichs and Rauschers cleared the land into truck gardens, orchards, hay, homes and barns. Irish and Scottish immigrants also bought or homesteaded land in the areas. Murrays, Cowleys, Sweeneys, Corrigans, Kinneys and others arrived in the early 1900s.

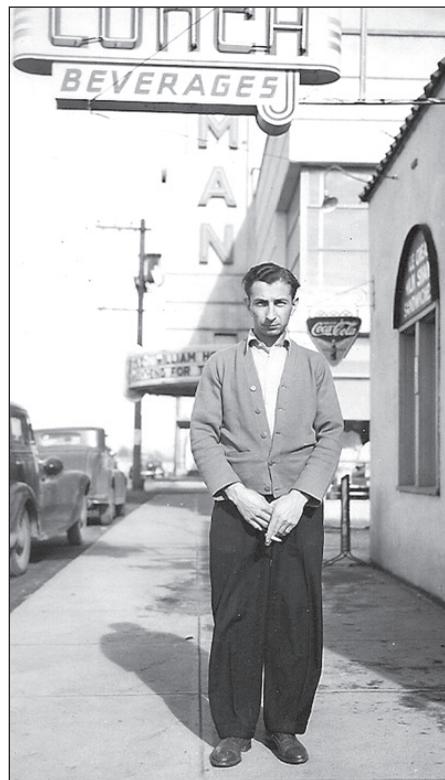
Clearing Spokane Valley land of the rocks deposited by floods and glacial action was the first order of business before cultivation. One could tell if the farmer was German because the "harvested" rocks would be stacked up in cone-shaped piles in the center of the field. The Barth brothers built a stone windmill tower which can be seen today between Arden and Campbell Roads. Irish farmers used the rocks to build fences around their property. This practice defined their perimeters and many also constructed stone houses that still stand today.

Early pioneers to the Opportunity area were typically English and Scottish. Most had orchards, such as the Pierces, Cresses, Emersons, Goodrichs and Smiths. Rock houses and rock walls were also constructed with the ever prolific crop of rocks. There are many rock houses on Valleyway Avenue and a few rock walls still intact.

The communities of Dishman, Chester and Vera were generally developed by hard-working Italians and Greeks. Guariscos, Gerimontes, Bascettas, Ferrantis, Falcos, Scarpellis and many more Italian families cleared the rocks, worked the land and often had fruit and vegetable stands along main roads in the Valley. Folks from Spokane frequently drove or rode out to the Valley for produce and berries.

The Bascetta brothers also had a construction business and built many of A.T. Dishman's buildings, including the Dishman Rollerdom and the Dishman Boxing Ring. Anthony (Tony) Pasquale had a store and tavern in Dishman on the Appleway. His son, Jan, later ran the businesses. Tony's Tavern was a gathering place for the Italians of the Valley, and Tony encouraged others to join the Sons of Italy Club to share their heritage and culture.

Greek pioneer families in the Valley include the Manos, Menegas, Deliganes, Bourekis, Velonis, Maglaris, Arger and Salinas names. Early Greek immigrants often worked for the railroads or picking fruit and vegetables before establishing their own farms or businesses. Nick Karras had



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THE SPOKANE VALLEY HERITAGE MUSEUM

At left: Jan Pasquale stands in front of the Midway Café in Dishman in about 1940.

Above: An anonymous Italian woman picks beans in the Porter family bean field in Vera.



This membership card in the Greek American Club belonged to Jan Pasquale. The Pasquale family owned Tony's Tavern in Dishman. George Manos, whose signature is on the card, was also a Valley man.

an apple orchard and warehouse in Otis Orchards; others were truck farmers. Some established coffee houses, and in 1932, the Greek community established the Greek Orthodox Church. Later an eternal resting place for Greek Americans called Holy Trinity Lawn was dedicated near the Riverside Mausoleum. The Ambassador Club was an architecturally beautiful building and gathering place for some of the Greek community and was located near Park and Sprague Avenue. Both the music and food were reported as very good. The large white house located in front of Office Depot on Sprague Avenue was once the home of a Greek family that also ran a store near the property. Greek Americans were invited to join the Greek American Club located in downtown Spokane.

Historically, accepting diversity was a foreign concept in the Spokane Valley. I have been told many stories of discrimination, ethnic slurs and other insulting treatment experienced by Indians, Greeks, Italians, Chinese, Germans, Irish and others in

schools and workplaces. Many of these early pioneers worked very hard to survive while contributing to the growth of the Spokane Valley. Their sons and daughters and descendants experienced a better life because of their ancestors' dedication to the opportunities that America and the Spokane Valley offered.

As diverse as the early pioneer immigrants were, they all shared a common experience: clearing the rocks from the land to cultivate it. Many of us that garden in the Spokane Valley complain about the rocks -- yet without the rocks, the soil wouldn't be as warmed by the sun, nor would it be as aerated. Clearing individual rocks we notice that all are not the same but all have a purpose and contribute to the greater good. Perhaps we learn to accept diversity by clearing "rocks."

Jayne Singleton is executive director of the Spokane Valley Heritage Museum. For more about this article or other aspects of history in the Spokane Valley region, visit the museum at 12114 E. Sprague Ave. or call 922-4570.

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