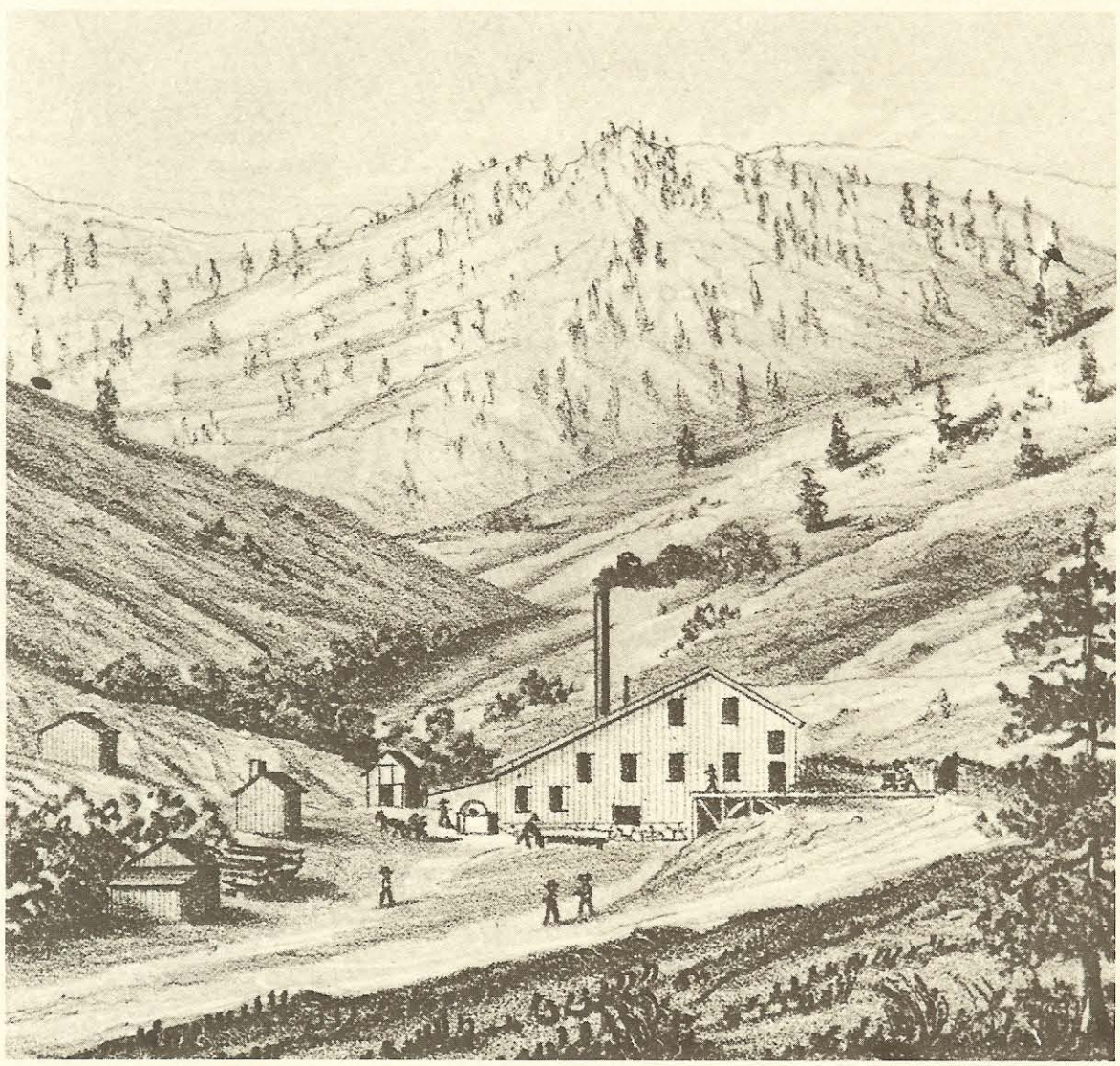
# IDAHO YESTERDAYS

Volume 15, Number 1
Spring, 1971
$1.25

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE IDAHO HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEW YORK & ORO FINO M. Co's MILL 15 STAMPS. 4½ M. E. of S.C.

# IDAHO YESTERDAYS

Spring Issue, 1971: Volume 15, Number 1

## CONTENTS

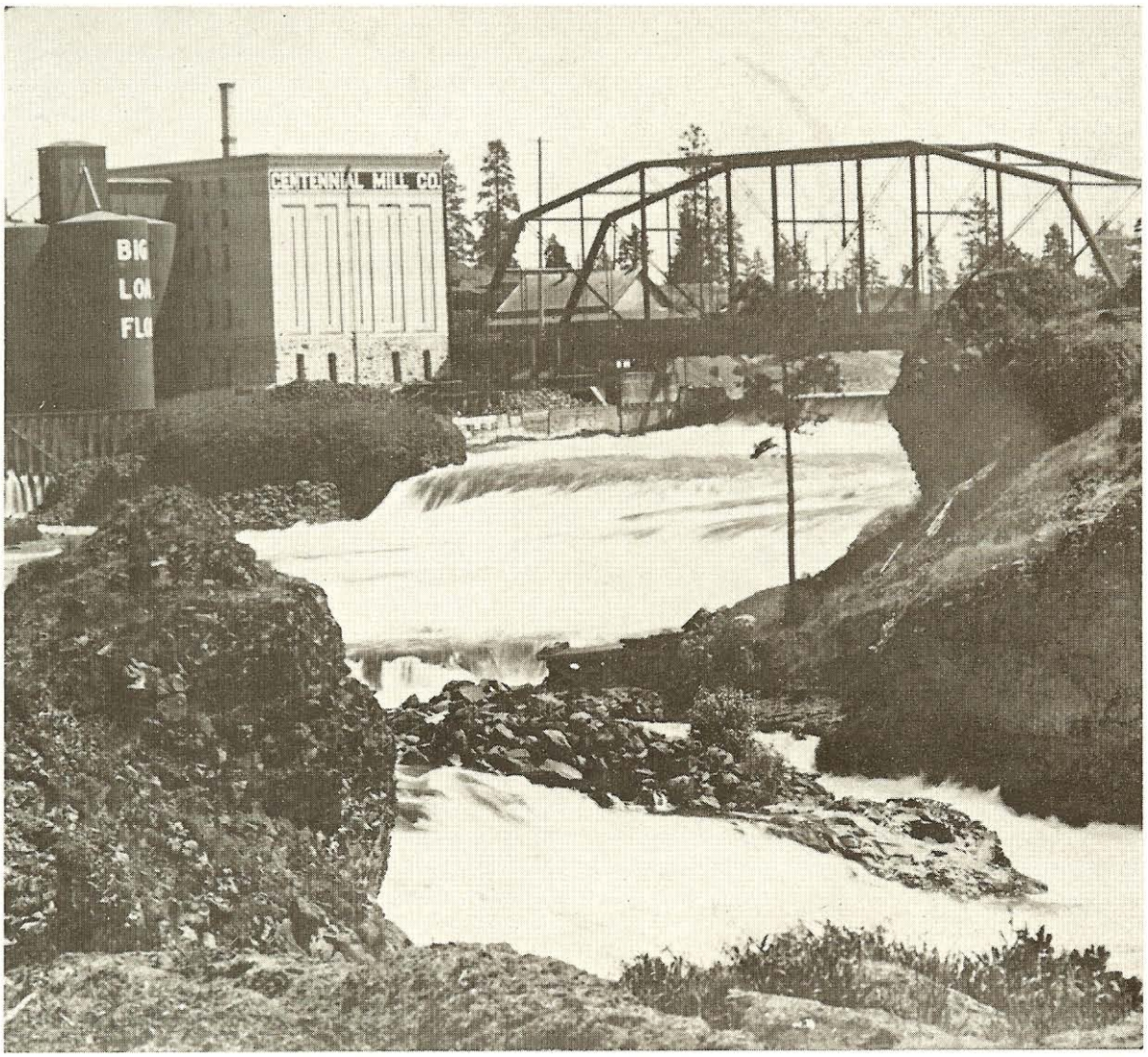


## COVER

Several major quartz mills, incuding the New York and Orofino Mining Company's fifteen-stamp mill on Sinker Creek, served the Owyhee mines around Silver City when W. J. Hill (page 10) published the **Owyhee Avalanche** there.

IDAHO YESTERDAYS is published four times a year by the Idaho Historical Society, whose headquarters are in the Idaho Historical Museum, 610 North Julia Davis Drive, Boise, Idaho 83706. Editorial and Production staff: Judith Austin, Judith M. Hayden, Arthur A. Hart, Merle W. Wells.

SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT BOISE, IDAHO




*Spokane Falls, shown above, has changed greatly in appearance with the growth of the city of Spokane since this picture was taken. Professor Kensel of Fresno State College prepared this story for the Spokane Centennial, which is celebrated this year.*

# SPOKANE: FIRST DECADE

## by W. Hudson Kensel

The birth of the city of Spokane was not spectacular, nor did its beginnings give promise of the important city it would become.[1] Spokane began when two cattlemen, who had been driven out of Montana by the Blackfeet Indians, decided that the area

around Spokane Falls was a likely place to fatten their herds of cattle and horses. The year was 1871, and J. J. Downing and S. R. Scranton, the cattlemen, squatted on a quarter-section of land on the south side of the falls.[3] From this humble beginning until 1881 Spokane Falls, as the tiny settlement came to be known, grew very slowly. In that year the Northern Pacific Railroad arrived and the future prospects of Spokane Falls brightened considerably. In the meantime, in the decade from 1871 to 1881 the small village struggled with its isolation and with the hardships of a frontier existence.[3]

The motives which impelled men to settle on the frontier are varied and complex. Idealistic notions about manifest destiny and the desire to exploit new lands and resources may have brought some men to the West. Sheer desperation with conditions in the East and the wish to escape the taxes and the confinement of more settled areas may have brought others. Whatever other motives there might have been, it is certain that very practical ones brought the first settlers to the falls of the Spokane River. Downing and Scranton probably were primarily interested in the water and abundant grass which the area could provide for their herds. Yet they were undoubtedly also aware of the potentiality of the falls for water power, for in 1872 they were not averse to selling an interest in their claim to R. M. Benjamin, a blacksmith, who proceeded to construct a water-powered saw mill.[4]

In the early spring of 1873 James N. Glover and his partner N. W. Matheny of Salem, Oregon, made a horseback tour of eastern Washington. In the course of their trip they stopped at the falls of the Spokane River. They were duly impressed with the scenery of the area and with the possibilities of water power development at the falls. But in addition to this, the men knew that the government survey for a northern railroad route, made some years earlier, ran right through the Spokane Valley.[5] In fact, though the partners may not have realized it, this valley was the only place for two hundred miles to the north or to the south where railroads could cross the mountains and reach the Columbia plateau on a reasonable grade.[6]

Glover and Matheny knew that in 1864 the Northern Pacific Railroad Company had received a government charter to build a main line from Lake Superior to Puget Sound over this northern route. Actual construction on the western end of the railroad had begun in 1870, and by 1873 the line had been completed from Kalama on the Columbia River to Tacoma. On the eastern end the line had been completed from Duluth to Bismarck by 1873.[7] Counting on the probability that this railroad would pass by the falls, Glover and Matheny were determined to buy out the men who held the claim there. Downing was willing to sell out and leave immediately, as he was discouraged with the place. Benjamin had failed to make all the necessary payments for his interest in the claim, and he left after receiving back his initial $400 down payment from Downing.[8]

Glover and Matheny put their new partner Scranton in charge at the falls and left for Salem, Oregon. In Salem they took on another partner, C. F. Yeaton, who had some experience in the mercantile business. By August, 1873, the partners had returned to the falls with some merchandise for the store they intended to build and some mill equipment for a large sawmill to be constructed at the falls. They found their partner Scranton, a suspected cattle thief, in hiding from the law and anxious to sell his interest and leave. He was promptly paid two thousand dollars for his interest, and the three remaining partners set to work constructing a sawmill, a store, and some new dwellings.[9]

There was a considerable risk involved in buying a claim at the falls. The partners bought only the squatter's rights in the land, and even these were dubious since the year before all odd sections along the proposed route of the Northern Pacific had been withdrawn and reserved for the railroad. Since no survey had been made yet to differentiate between even and odd sections, they did not know whether they were on railroad land or on government land which could be legitimately claimed. The question was not re-

solved until two years later, in 1875, when a survey party determined that the claim by the falls was not on railroad land.[10]

Even as the new settlement was getting started by the Spokane River, the American nation late in 1873 entered a period of depression. The depression was precipitated by the failure of the great banking firm of Jay Cooke and Company. This company had been financing the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and with its bankruptcy all construction on the road ceased.[11] This was a great discouragement to the partners at the falls, who had counted on the railroad to bring new settlers to their claim and to help develop the resources of the area. Glover, though dismayed at this setback, claimed in later years that he had held great expectations that the railroad would somehow be resurrected and would eventually come to Spokane Falls. His two partners reportedly were not so optimistic, and by 1876 both Matheny and Yeaton had sold out to Glover and left the country.[12]

Although James Glover was not the first settler at Spokane Falls, he is credited with being the father of the city. He alone among the first inhabitants seemed to sense the potentialities of the small settlement and its tributary area; and despite the difficulties and discouragements of the years from 1873 to 1879 he stayed on, confident of the future. He ran the sawmill at the falls and produced more lumber than the settlement could absorb. The business of his small store was mostly with the Indians, for few white settlers were in the region.[13] According to one estimate there were approximately 350 white settlers in all the country north from the Snake River to the settlement at Colville.[14] Glover exchanged cheap blankets, shawls, dress goods, and paints with the Indians for buffalo robes, marten, beaver, otter, and other furs. He stocked practical items of hardware such as nails and knives, a wide selection of groceries, and smoking and chewing tobacco. His few white customers had little money and traded with beef quarters or hogs. The settlers around were accustomed to saving up their money and then making a once-a-year trip to Walla Walla for their main annual supplies.[15]

By this time transportation routes in the Inland Empire had been well established, but the means of travel were slow and tiresome. Supplies had to be shipped in by freight wagons or pack trains over a hundred miles, from either Lewiston or Walla Walla. It was ninety miles to Colville, the county seat of Stevens County. To get to the county seat one first had to cross the Spokane River, as the settlement was on the south side. At the falls the only way the traveler could get across the river was to take a hollow log boat and swim his horse behind the boat, which was considered quite a risk. The more feasible alternative was to go down the river thirty miles to LaPray Bridge or up the river eighteen miles to Spokane Bridge. There was no ferry at the falls until 1879, and the first bridge was not built until 1884.[16]

In the nation at large the depression hung like a pall over the land until about 1879. Bankruptcies were common, factories closed, business slowed to a standstill. People who might have wanted to move West couldn't afford to, and the routes of travel were long and arduous. In 1875 the population at the falls numbered about fifteen, and it seemed as if activity would never revive. Crickets nearly destroyed the crops one year, and long, cold winters were hard on the stock. The Spokane Indians had been peaceful since the stiff punishment meted out to them by Colonel Wright after their uprisings in 1858. Nevertheless, lonely settlements on the frontier always had some anxiety about what the Indians might do. In 1877 the Nez Perce tribe had been ordered to move onto the Lapwai reservation. A part of the tribe refused and instead went on the warpath, massacring settlers on the Salmon River in Idaho. General O. O. Howard brought his troops into the Inland Empire and succeeded in subduing the Nez Perces. In the course of these troubles the settlers at Spokane Falls, fearful that the Spokane Indians might be incited against them by the Nez Perces, fortified a small island in the middle of the Spokane River and moved onto it for a time. The Spo-

kanes remained peaceful, however, and the ordeal was soon over.[17]

Despite the hardships imposed by the Indians, the crickets and the cold winters, the biggest barrier to further settlement in the Inland Empire was its isolation. In the days of the fur trader's frontier this in a sense was a blessing, because hard-to-reach areas kept out settlers who might occupy or destroy the habitations of fur-bearing animals. In the days of the ranching frontier, isolation was not a prominent factor because cattle and horses needed large, unoccupied areas for ranges, and they could be driven to markets under their own motive power. But by the late 1870's the farming frontier had definitely arrived, and the farmer was faced with the difficulties of transporting a bulky product over large distances by slow, crude, and expensive means.

The changes that were taking place in the Inland Empire are well illustrated in this passage from a volume on the history of Whitman County published in 1901:

> The earliest settlers of the county had but a poor conception of its real inherent values. They busied themselves with the care of their flocks and herds, giving no attention to agriculture, except that they raised a little wheat for their own consumption. . . . This was produced on the "flat lands" or narrow valleys, the original supposition being that cereals could not be grown on the hills. It was not till the year 1876 that the erroneousness of this idea began to be manifest. That year witnessed the first shipment of wheat from the Palouse country, the same being transported from Almota to Portland via the Snake River. . . . But as soon as it was demonstrated that the hills and uplands would produce wheat as well as the flats, the culture of breadstuffs received a great impetus and from that time forth the annual shipments of wheat increased rapidly.[18]

The knowledge that the Palouse hills and hilltops as well as the valleys might be utilized for wheat-growing may have been a great revelation to the farmers. Yet it was still a great source of frustration to them that they could not earn a fair return on their enlarged production of wheat because of the expense of transportation.

The federal census of 1880 gave official recognition to the new developments in eastern Washington and to the grievance that the lack of a cheap means of transportation presented:

> Over a large region east of the Cascade mountains, on the volcanic plateau lying on both sides of the Columbia and Snake rivers, settlements and wheat-growing are rapidly extending, and the region possesses a peculiar interest, inasmuch as wheat is grown there probably cheaper than in any other place in the United States, and is transported farther than any other wheat grown in the world. . . . In 1879 and 1880 the principal drawback to this region was the distance from market and the difficulties of getting the grain to the seaboard. . . . As transportation facilities existed in 1880, the transportation of wheat from Dayton to Waitesburg [*sic*] to Astoria or Portland, where it might be shipped, involved from ten to fourteen handlings, according to the way in which it was shipped, and the freights were from $11 to $14 per ton of 2,000 pounds.[19]

In the face of the transportation situation the settlers had to make the best of it. The Columbia River was the only commercially feasible route by which the produce of the Inland Empire could be sent to market. The Oregon Steam Navigation Company held monopolistic control of the Columbia route and could without reservation charge near-prohibitive rates. Traffic to the interior was channelled in and out of Portland and contributed to the growth and prosperity of that

[1]Information for the following account of the founding and early settlement of Spokane, 1871-1881, was derived largely from pioneer reminiscences published in Spokane newspapers. From among the reminiscences used, the greatest reliance was placed upon those of James N. Glover and H. T. Cowley. Both men were contemporaries of the period under discussion here, and were articulate leaders in early Spokane. Thus, both were in a good position to make full and accurate observations.

[2]Reminiscence by Mrs. J. J. Downing, *The Spokesman Review,* August 21, 1899, 8.

[3]Reminiscence by H. T. Cowley, *The Spokesman Review,* October 25, 1891, 22.

[4]Reminiscence by Mrs. W. P. Costello, daughter of R. M. Benjamin, *The Spokesman Review,* May 20, 1928, 7.

[5]Reminiscence by J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* March 13, 1917, 18.

[6]Wallace J. Buckley, "Geography of Spokane," (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Geography, University of Washington, 1930), 17.

[7]James B. Hedges, *Henry Villard and the Railways of the Northwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 25-26; J. N. Glover in *The Spokesman Review,* January 1, 1903, 1-2.

[8]J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* March 13, 1917, 18.

[9]*Ibid.,* March 14, 1917, 20.

[10]J. N. Glover, *The Spokesman Review,* January 1, 1903, 1-2.

[11]Hedges, 26.

[12]J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* March 24, 1917, 16.

[13]*Ibid.,* March 15, 1917, 22.

[14]H. T. Cowley, *The Spokesman Review,* October 25, 1891, 22.

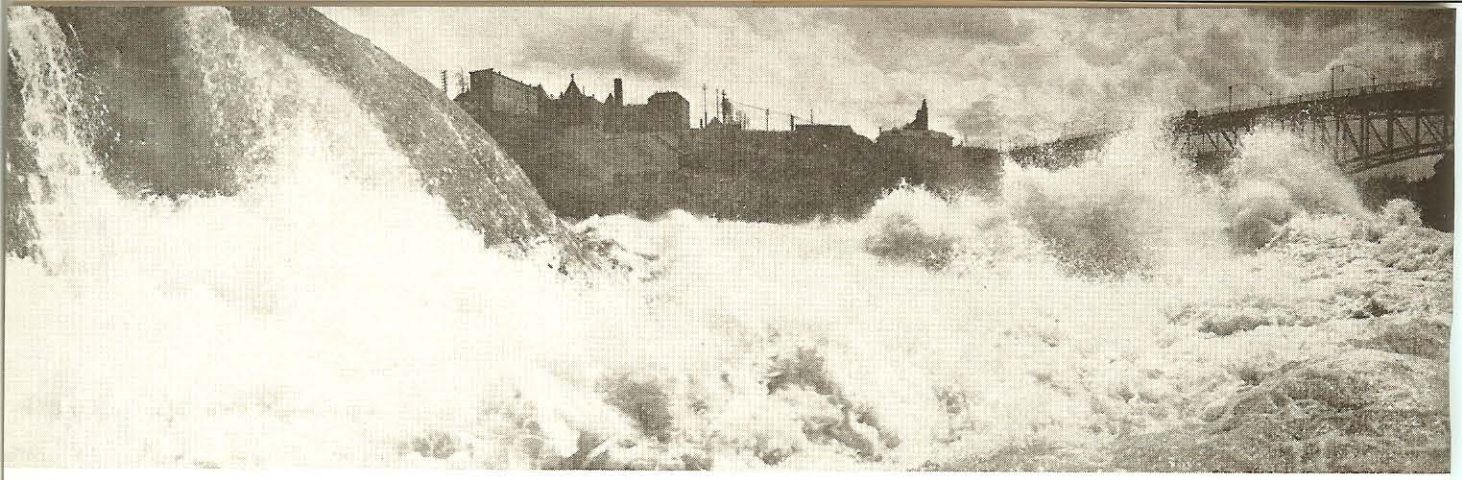
[15]J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* March 15, 1917, 22.

[16]H. T. Cowley, *The Spokesman Review,* October 25, 1891, 22; J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* March 20, 1917, 18; April 4, 1917, 20.

[17]H. T. Cowley, *The Spokeman Review,* October 25, 1891, 22; and *Spokane Daily Chronicle,* November 24, 1916, 28.

[18]*An Illustrated History of Whitman County, State of Washington* (Spokane: W. H. Lever, 1901), 104-105.

[19]U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880. Agriculture,* III, 75.



city.[20] But the reliance on water transportation inhibited the growth and prosperity of towns and farms in the Inland Empire.

It is no wonder, then, that a rumor that the Northern Pacific Railroad Company was about to recommence construction was greeted with enthusiasm by settlers of the interior. About the middle of 1879 the rumor was confirmed as a fact by Frederick Billings, new president of the Northern Pacific. The section of the railroad to be constructed in eastern Washington, known as the Pend Oreille Division, was to begin at Wallula on the Columbia and extend in a northeasterly direction to Lake Pend Oreille.[21] With this news settlers began to pour into the Inland Empire to take up land or to take part in the activities of newly emerging towns. In 1880 the federal census showed that Spokane Falls had a population of 350. Other towns in eastern Washington were beginning to grow. Dayton in 1880 had a population of 996, Colfax a population of 444, Waitsburg 248, Palouse City 148, and Wallula 142.[22]

Perhaps in another area of the United States this new growth might be at least partially attributed to the promotional activities of the railroad builders, who usually took an active part in promoting settlement in areas through which they expected to build.[23] Prior to 1881, however, no active colonization program was undertaken by the Northern Pacific to promote the sale of its northwest land holdings. In 1879 Henry Villard, who had just obtained control of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, bought 150,000 acres in the Palouse country from the Northern Pacific at a cost of $2.60 per acre. In the interests of settling the Inland Empire as quickly as possible and thus increasing the carrying trade of his newly acquired monopoly, Villard widely and actively advertised his Palouse acres.[24] This promotional program and the policy of the Northern Pacific to make its lands in the Pend Oreille Division available at the liberal price of $2.60 per acre brought settlers flocking into the land offices.[25]

Spokane Falls was among the towns of eastern Washington that began to benefit from the influx of settlers. In 1879 the first newspaper, *The Spokan Times* [*sic*], was established by Francis Cook. Cook had previously published a newspaper in Tacoma, and even while a resident of that city he was a vigorous booster of Spokane Falls.[26] His colorful editorials summarized the anticipations of the people of eastern Washington as they saw the railroad construction crews pushing across their lands. He stated on July 31, 1879, for example:

> Now, however, a new era is dawning, the era of railroads, and the accelerated development that surely waits upon reasonable rates of transportation. A few years of the transitory state that attends rapidly increasing immigration; a few years given for society to take upon itself conditions that attest permanency, and border life in this region will exist only in fast receding memory. What has seemed an age of waiting for railroad connection with the great world without, stands now upon the threshold of fruition and in this fruition the only essential element of prosperity to this people will be supplied. That they should be greatly elated at the prospect is not at all surprising, and that their most brilliant hopes of future prosperity wait only time and favorable condition for fulfillment is certain. . . .[27]

Spokane Falls did its best to live up to the spirit of Cook's editorials. In 1879 at least

a dozen new business buildings lined the main street. Among these were A. M. Cannon's newly established Bank of Spokane Falls and the California House, the town's first hotel.[28] Down by the river the major industries of the city—a sawmill and a flour mill—bustled with activity.[29] To cap this evidence of new vigor came state authorization for the organization of Spokane County with Spokane Falls as its temporary county seat.[30] That Spokane Falls thought well of itself and its future could not be doubted. But one of its neighbors to the south, Dayton, Washington, another aspiring railroad town, gives us an interesting outsider's view of Spokane Falls in 1879:

> There are between thirty and forty houses, of all kinds, in Spokane Falls city: and they are mostly new, and it has a thrifty appearance. Great hopes are entertained of its future; but whether it will ever amount to much depends upon circumstances. The water power is excellent . . . the climate is healthy . . . there is plenty of good timber all around. But the soil, for fifteen or twenty miles, every way, is comparatively worthless for agricultural purposes. Those living there hope and believe that the railroad will run there and make it a point; but this is by no means certain. If the town proprietors "pan-out" liberally, the railroad magnates may run the road there, but if they do not, they may make a town of their own just near enough to Spokane Falls city to kill it so dead it never can be resurrected.[31]

The *Dayton Weekly News* was at least half right in its prophecy, for the next year, in 1880, only sixteen miles from Spokane Falls the townsite of Cheney was laid out by a syndicate of railroad men. To make things worse, Spokane Fall's new rival captured the county seat that year in a hotly disputed election.[32] But the Dayton newspaper did not correctly predict that Spokane Falls would be killed by its rival. In 1886 Spokane Falls won back the county seat permanently and went on to greater growth and prosperity, while Cheney settled back to the near-oblivion of a small agricultural village.[33]

The year 1881 was the first big milestone in the history of Spokane. The fact that Spokane Falls was officially incorporated and had organized a municipal government would have made the year important. The fact that it could boast its first brick business building and a population of nearly one thousand would also add significance to the year 1881 in Spokane Falls.[34] But all these were mundane events in comparison to what the coming of the Northern Pacific to the city that year would mean. The railroad meant that Spokane Falls was forever emancipated from the isolation of her location. It meant closer ties with her hinterland and the chance to exploit the varied resources lying latent there. The Northern Pacific and the other railroads that would follow would bring a host of new farmers and town residents. They would carry the products of the Spokane country to the east, and returning would bring the manufactures and luxuries essential to a better life in the West. The eastern and western sections of the Northern Pacific were not joined until 1883.[35] But on June 30, 1881, the first train of the Northern Pacific arrived in Spokane Falls. James N. Glover, his faith vindicated, climbed on top of one of the cars and led the assembled crowd in three cheers.[36] The steel-plated angel of deliverance had arrived at last.

---

[20]Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, *Empire of the Columbia, A History of the Pacific Northwest* (2nd edition; New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 279-82.
[21]Eugene V. Smalley, *History of the Northern Pacific Railroad* (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1883), 230, 431.
[22]U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880. Population*, I, 362.
[23]Hedges, 112.
[24]*Ibid.*, 123-25.
[25]Francis H. Cook, *The Territory of Washington*, ed. J. Orin Oliphant (Cheney, Washington: State Normal School, 1925), 14. This volume contains editorials of Francis H. Cook from his newspaper the *Spokan Times*, as selected and edited by Oliphant. Oliphant also included a substantial introduction of his own in which he described the eastern Washington scene immediately before the coming of the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1881. The citation here refers to his introduction.
[26]Reminiscence by F. H. Cook, *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, June 15, 1914, 5. For the three years that he published his newspaper, Cook persisted in spelling the city's name without the final "e." A group of men, including J. N. Glover, who stood for the spelling with a final "e" went so far as to subsidize the founding of the *Spokane Chronicle* to publicly emphasize their opposition to Cook's spelling. With the termination of publication of the *Spokan Times* in 1881 and the incorporation of the city as Spokane Falls the same year, the argument over spelling was ended, officially at least. Nelson W. Durham, *History of the City of Spokane and the Spokane Country, Washington* (3 vols.; Spokane: S. J. Clarke Co., 1912), I, 341, 362; J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, April 4, 1917, 20.
[27]Editorial by F. H. Cook in the *Spokan Times*, July 31, 1879, reprinted in Cook, *The Territory of Washington in 1879*, 15.
[28]J. N. Glover, *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, April 3, 1917, 13 .
[29]*Ibid.*, March 26, 1917, 18.
[30]Durham, I, 373-74.
[31]*Dayton Weekly News*, July 26, 1879, 1.
[32]Durham, I, 374.
[33]*Ibid.*, 378.
[34]*Ibid.*, 374.
[35]Johansen and Gates, 311.
[36]From the *Spokan Times*, June 30, 1881, reprinted in Cook, *The Territory of Washington in 1879*, 39.