Melinda Marie Jetté

Betwixt and Between the Official Story

Tracing the History and Memory of a Family of French-Indian Ancestry in the Pacific Northwest

When she got ill, she went into the hospital and we used to go up to visit her a lot there. Some of the nurses were nuns and they all spoke French. She would rattle off French to them like you wouldn’t believe. Like that’s all she spoke was French.¹

IN THE EARLY SPRING OF 1931, Marguerite Jette (née Liard), an elderly woman of eighty, spent the last weeks of her life at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Portland. St. Vincent’s, founded by the Sisters of Providence, was then still staffed by missionaries sent out from the order’s motherhouse in Montreal. What was unusual about this particular patient was the fact she conversed with the nuns in French. Although Marguerite had been born and raised and had lived all her life in Oregon, French was one her native languages.² This was the result of her familial links with French Canada. Her father, step-father, grandfather, and husband had all been born in Lower Canada (Quebec).

Marguerite’s singularity in 1931 did not end with her French-Canadian heritage. Family photographs depict a stern-faced matriarch with high cheekbones and dark, coarse hair that hint at her Indian ancestry. Her Oregon family roots stretched back more than a hundred years to the initial phase of Euro-American colonization in the Pacific Northwest — when Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) fur traders and trappers exploited the region’s natural resources. Marguerite’s mother and grandmother were among several generations of Native and métis women who intermarried with French-Canadian men employed by the HBC. Both the men and the women played
Like her mother and her grandmother before her, Marguerite Liard Jette (1851–1931) wed at a young age to a French Canadian, Adolphe Jette. The marriage proved a successful partnership, and Marguerite’s grandchildren remembered her as a canny businesswoman and matriarch of the family.
crucial roles as laborers and cultural brokers in the fur-trade enterprise, albeit with second-class status. During the mid 1800s, Marguerite’s parents and grandparents witnessed the United States’ annexation of the lower portion of the Oregon Country, Anglo-American settlers’ rise to political supremacy, and the settlers’ institution of a regime of racial exclusion across the region. Raising a large family under the force of these processes in the late 1800s, Marguerite Jette and her husband Adolphe followed a complex path that led to the relative assimilation of their descendants into dominant Euro-American society by the time of Marguerite’s death in the early 1900s.

Although Marguerite Jette’s experience did not make it into the standard history books, the contours of her family’s history are part of a much larger continental story. The centuries-long process of Euro-American colonization necessarily involved ethnic intermixing in all of the contact zones where Natives and colonizers met and interacted. In recent decades, scholars have begun to explore the ways bi-cultural family and community histories complicate and deepen North American history — what Gary Nash has called “the hidden history of mestizo America.” Historians studying the West have underscored the intermediary position occupied by mixed-bloods in the fur-trade economy from the late 1700s through the early 1800s. By the late 1800s, the decline of the fur trade, the great Anglo-American westward migrations, and regimes of racial exclusion effectively marginalized these bi-cultural communities. The majority of those in the United States were faced with the choice of joining their Native kinfolk on Indian reservations, “passing” into the dominant Anglo-American culture, or perhaps, for a small number, migrating to Canada or more remote areas.

Recent studies on bi-cultural families and communities from Cherokee Territory to the Great Lakes and from the Missouri country to the Pacific Northwest suggest that those who assimilated into the dominant Anglo-American society — becoming “white” in the process — tended to down-
play, if not deny, their Native background. Given the force of racial bigotry and the episodes of racial violence in the American West, an outward (or apparent) acculturation into Anglo-American society was one of several strategies employed by bi-cultural families as they adapted to large-scale socio-economic changes over the course of the nineteenth century. The French-Indian families in the frontier regions of the West were thus not unlike ethnic immigrants in the East who actively devised family strategies as they responded to life and work conditions in the urban industrial environment.

This essay follows the historical trajectory of one Oregon family of French-Indian ancestry that assimilated into mainstream society over the course of four generations — the author’s own family. I have taken a multi-layered approach in tracing the experience of the Jettes. First, I reconstruct one narrative from the existing documentary record. I then examine the record of family memory through interviews with family elders recorded in the 1990s. After exploring how history and memory intersect, especially in relation to my own experience as an observer-participant, I connect this microhistory to regional and national historical events and developments.

In pursuing this project, I have discovered that although my family of French-Indian origin had more or less assimilated by the fourth and fifth generations, the process of acculturation was neither simple nor straightforward. Rather, several generations experienced a complex historical trajectory that has echoed, however lightly, down through the decades. This echo is preserved in the family’s generational memory — a kind of palimpsest that carries not only erasures but also a fragmentary “counter memory” to what might be considered the more celebratory “official memory” of the Anglo-American colonization of the Pacific Northwest. This counter memory suggests socio-economic mobility and struggle, racial exclusion and prejudice, and perhaps most important, the costs of assimilation into the dominant Anglo-American culture. While this case study is not representative of all families with French-Indian origins, it is suggestive of a larger experience that has been obscured by the more dominant Anglo-American discourses in the Pacific Northwest history. Given the relative absence of the “hidden history of mestizo” in the collective memory of “pioneer” Oregon, documenting the experience of this family of French-Canadian and Native ancestry is an important first step.

MARGUERITE JETTE’S DOCUMENTED family history in the Pacific Northwest begins one spring morning in 1827, when her maternal grandfather Joseph Rochbrune pushed off from the rapids at Lachine, Quebec, and
embarked on the long overland voyage that would take him to the Pacific
Northwest. The son of farmers (habitants), Joseph had been born in Rigaud,
Quebec, in 1805, and at the age of twenty-two, he signed an engagement
contract to work as a voyageur for the HBC.11 As Philip Goldring has pointed
out, the decision to work in the fur trade during the 1800s was the result of
personal, social, cultural, and economic factors.12 Personal motivations may
have been local difficulties (financial or judicial), political discontent, or a
thirst for adventure. Rochbrune’s home county of Vaudreil was traditionally
one of the most important suppliers of laborers for the fur trade when the
HBC combined with the North West Company in 1821.13 As a young man
from a relatively large family, he may simply have sought a brighter future.
The engagement contract he signed with the HBC guaranteed him a yearly
salary for three years with the possibility of re-enlistment.14

Rochbrune departed Lachine with the HBC brigade in late April or early
May, following the winter thaw, and arrived at Fort Vancouver in the Oregon
Country (then designated the Columbia Department) in the fall of 1827.
Aside from the last few years of his employment with the HBC, when he
served as a trapper with the Snake Party, his only other known assignment
was for 1830 and 1831, when he was stationed at Fort Nez Percés (later Fort
Walla Walla) in present-day southeastern Washington State.15 There, Joseph
met a Native woman who became his wife. Lisette, as she is known in the
Catholic Church registers, was “Walla Walla by nation.”16

On Joseph’s retirement from the HBC in 1839, Joseph, Lisette, and their
children settled with several other French-Indian families living in the
Cowlitz Prairie, thirty-five miles north of Fort Vancouver. Two years later,
the family migrated to the larger settlement of French Prairie in the Wil-
lamette Valley.17 There, they joined other French-Indian families who had
colonized fertile prairie lands that had earlier comprised the territory of the
Ahantchuyuk Kalapuyans. Joseph and Lisette remained together for some
twenty years, until Lisette’s death in the early 1850s. Aside from a series of
references in the local Catholic Church records and county land records, the
couple left limited traces of their presence in the Willamette Valley. He did
not file a land claim with either the Oregon Provisional Government during
the 1840s or with the U.S. federal government during the 1850s. Joseph Roch-
brune and his second wife, Marguerite Soulière, had two children together
and lived in French Prairie through the early 1870s, but there appear to have
been no Rochbrunes residing in the area by 1881.18

In the late 1840s, the Rochbrunes’ eldest daughter, the teenaged Celeste,
met Stanislaus “Tanis” Liard, a retired French-Canadian voyageur and
widower originally from St. Jacques, Quebec. He and his brother François-
Xavier Liard had signed their initial contracts with the HBC in the winter
This modern rendering of the Willamette Valley in 1834 shows the area, resettled by the French-Indian families, that came to be known as French Prairie (center of map). It was originally the territory of the Ahantchuyuk Kalapuyans. Champoeg (now a state park) was an important transportation and shipping site from the era of the fur trade through the era of the steamboat.
of 1832–1833 and were sent directly to the Columbia Department. After fourteen years in the employment of the company, principally in present-day British Columbia, the brothers, their Native wives, and their children settled in French Prairie in 1846. In 1849, a year after the deaths of his first wife Nancy Okanagan and his son François, Tanis Liard married Celeste Rochbrune, who was then about fifteen years old. By 1850, François-Xavier had apparently died and Tanis was in possession of the land his brother had originally claimed with the Oregon Provisional Government in 1847. Following the passage of the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, Tanis filed the necessary paperwork to secure a federally approved land claim: an application, a land survey, and his naturalization papers making him a U.S. citizen. Two of the oldest and most influential members of the French-Indian community, Étienne Lucier and Louis Labonté, attested to the residency and character of Tanis Liard. The only child of Tanis Liard and Celeste Rochbrune, Marguerite Liard, was born on the family’s dona-
tion land claim near St. Paul, Oregon, in 1851. In March 1852, some fourteen months after Marguerite’s birth, Tanis died at the age of thirty-seven. His widow, Celeste Rochbrune, was then eighteen years old.

Although Celeste Rochbrune found herself in a difficult position, several factors ensured the young widow would remain on the family farm. Having filed the paperwork for the federal donation land claim, Tanis Liard — though unlettered like the majority of his French-Canadian countrymen — left another crucial document to provide for his family. On December 29, 1851, he was “au lit malade” (sick in bed) when he dictated a will in French. It is clear from the text of the will that Tanis was a man facing the likelihood of his death. The purpose of the document was not only to “put his affairs in order” but also to “ensure a future for Celeste Laroque his wife.” This concern for his young wife was likely motivated by affection as well as a sense of duty, for Tanis wished to ensure Celeste a “future for the good care that she has given him and continues to give him.”

Tanis bequeathed one half of his movable property, immovable property, and animals to Celeste and the other half to his daughter Marguerite. He also instructed Celeste “to take his horse Blou, the cow, the bed, bedding, two suitcases, a table, the kitchenware, all the dishes, all the wheat in the barn and the pigs belonging to his wife for the support of herself and his child.” The dictation of his will set in motion a series of events that prevented the loss of the land claim. In April 1852, the executors of Tanis Liard’s estate, David Mongrain and Louis Bergevin, renounced their position and called on Narcisse Cornoyer — a leading figure in the French Prairie community — to act as sole executor. He was duly appointed to the post. It appears Cornoyer’s wife Mary Sophie Bellique had known Celeste Rochbrune when the two were children in French Prairie.

Cornoyer began the process of paying Tanis Liard’s debts in May 1852. The probate court selected Étienne Lucier, Louis Bergevin, and Firmin Lebrun to make an appraisal of Tanis Liard’s estate, which they valued at $2,243.76. This included the land claim, worth $2,000, and the family’s personal property. A sale was held and much of the family’s movable property and chattel was sold. Almost every item was sold for more than the appraised value, and the important items (such as farm equipment and animals) were sold for considerably more. The buyers were nineteen of Tanis Liard’s neighbors, and the sale netted $467.56. By 1854, Cornoyer had paid off Tanis Liard’s debts, totalling $624.11, which included probate costs, taxes, doctor’s bills for Liard’s illness, general merchandise accounts, promissory notes for cash, the land survey, and money due local resident Étienne Peltier for labor and goods. Cornoyer apparently paid the difference of $156.55, and there is no indication he was ever reimbursed.
What emerges from the papers on the settlement of Tanis Liard’s estate is the portrait of a family that was cash poor but rich in community ties. Cornoyer’s role as executor of the Liard estate was ultimately a boon for the widow Celeste Rochbrune and her infant daughter. Cornoyer was appointed the legal guardian of Marguerite Liard, and he ensured the family debts were paid without the loss of the donation land claim and then completed the application process with the federal government. In 1866, Celeste Rochbrune used the new Oregon’s Married Women’s Property Register to register Tanis Liard’s land claim in her own name. The federal land office finally issued the official certificate for the claim to the heirs of Tanis Liard two years later.

THE EXPERIENCE OF the Liard brothers and their families suggests a number of patterns for the French-Indian community in the Willamette Valley during the 1840s and 1850s. When the French Canadians retired, they claimed fertile lands in French Prairie, but they had limited resources to invest and provide for their families. Theirs was a cash poor, somewhat precarious, barter economy, and as a result, they had to depend on friends, neighbors, and merchants for credit, cash, and labor. Sickness, death, or some other ill fortune could result in severe economic hardship. Both Liard and Cornoyer used the Donation Land Claim Act and the legal system to protect the interests of Liard’s widow and infant daughter. The support of the local French-speaking community, especially the educated members, allowed Celeste Rochbrune to pay off the family debts and retain the homestead. Her next task was to find a new breadwinner to ensure a stable future for herself and her daughter. Celeste did just that, marrying eleven months after Tanis’s death. Her second husband, Honoré Picard, age twenty-six, was French Canadian, a choice consistent with long-standing family marriage patterns. Rochbrune and Picard eventually had eleven children, nine of whom survived infancy, and lived together on the original Tanis Liard donation land claim until Celeste’s death in childbirth at the age of forty-two, in 1876.

Marguerite Liard was a teenager living in French Prairie in the late 1860s, when, like her mother before her, she met a French-Canadian widower who would become her husband. Adolphe Jette was born Théophil Jetté on June 14, 1825, in Repentigny, a village on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River some fifteen miles west of Montreal. He was a man of humble origins. His parents were illiterate farmers, though the Jetté siblings (François, Désiré, and Adolphe) must have received some schooling because all three signed their names in the parish register at the wedding of the eldest, François, in September 1845. Sometime in 1849, the year he turned twenty-four, Adolphe
Jette quit his native Quebec for the United States. He likely left Lower Canada for the same reasons as hundreds of thousands of French Canadians during the nineteenth century; a shortage of cultivable land and underemployment, combined with economic crises in the province, gave many little alternative but to migrate south. In the United States, the California Gold Rush was just beginning and the great western migrations were in full swing. Adolphe may have been motivated by a desire for adventure or wealth, because he later proved both ambitious and hardworking. He must have had a fair amount of determination, wherewithal, and luck, for the journey from Canada to the West Coast was an arduous one. Adolphe traveled overland to New York, sailed shortly thereafter to New Orleans, and eventually made his way West via the overland trails. From Fort Laramie (Wyoming), Adolphe completed the final stage of the Oregon Trail by pack horse with a group of fellow French Canadians. Rather than traveling to California, the group set out for southern Oregon, where gold had recently been discovered, and they arrived in the Rogue River Country in 1852.

While in southern Oregon, Adolphe met his first wife, a Native woman, Julie Rogue, with whom he had three daughters (a son died infancy). In the late 1850s, the family migrated north to join the French-Indian community in French Prairie. Adolphe and Julie settled in St. Paul, solemnized their marriage in the Catholic Church, and had their daughters baptized. Over the next several years, Adolphe worked as clerk in general merchandise stores in St. Paul and Fairfield, and he also reportedly spent some time gold mining in Idaho. During this period, Adolphe and Julie witnessed the death of two chil-

Although this tintype from the family collection is unidentified, the author believes it to be a picture of Celeste Rochbrune, who lived from about 1834 to 1876.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Family Relationships</th>
<th>Dates and Details</th>
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| 1          | Joseph Rochbrune (1805–ca. 1870s) and Lisette Walla Walla (ca. 1814–ca. 1854) | Celeste Rochbrune (b. 1834)  
3 other living children |
| 2          | Celeste Rochbrune (ca. 1834–1876) and Stanislaus Liard (ca. 1815–1852) | Marguerite Liard (b. 1851)  
Celeste Rochbrune (ca. 1834–1876) and Honoré Picard (ca. 1827–1892)  
9 living children |
|            |                      | Adolphe Jette (1825–1917) and Julie Rogue (ca. 1840–1865)  
3 living children |
| 3          | Marguerite Liard (1851–1931) and Adolphe Jette (1825–1917) | Francis Amadeus Jette (b. 1880)  
8 other living children |
| 4          | Francis Amadeus Jette (1880–1983) and Mildred Reynolds (1886–1971) | Kenneth Reynolds Jette, Sr. (b. 1909) |
| 5          | Kenneth Reynold Jette, Sr. (1909–1954) and Dorothy Swisher (1911-1977) | Kenneth Reynolds Jette, Jr. (b. 1935) |
| 6          | Kenneth Reynolds Jette, Jr. (b. 1935) and R. Eileen Willett (b. 1935) | Catherine Eileen Jette (b. 1966)  
Melinda Marie Jetté (b. 1968) — seventh generation |
|            |                      | Hazen Joseph Jette (b. 1970) |
| 7          | Catherine Eileen Jette (b. 1966) and Daniel Gray (1951–1998) | Summer Jette-Gray (b. 1992)  
Catherine Jette and Donald Limbaugh |
| 7          | Hazen Joseph Jette (b. 1970) and Chieko Sone (b. 1972) | Chihiro Hazen Jette (b. 2008) |

*Includes direct lines to Melinda Jetté and siblings; various lines in later generations not included. Created by the author.
dren, and in 1865, Julie died of tuberculosis. Six years later, in February 1870, Marguerite Liard, aged nineteen, wed Adolphe Jette, age forty-five. Despite the age difference between the spouses, the marriage would not have been a complete surprise to local residents or their families. Marguerite’s mother and stepfather, Celeste Rochbrune and Honoré Picard, served as godparents to Adolphe’s daughter Minnie in 1861, and Adolphe stood as the godfather for the couple’s son John Picard in 1864.

What is perhaps most interesting about this union between the young Marguerite and the middle-aged Adolphe was that the marriage set her on a path to upward social mobility. Unlike the other French-Canadian men in her family, Adolphe was educated and earned his living in the mercantile business. Adolphe appears to have been an enterprising man entering the prime of his life. Marguerite may have been the first in her family to receive an education, and she may have had ambitions of her own. By all outward appearances, the marriage of Marguerite and Adolphe proved a true partnership, one marked by financial stability, the growth of a large family, and social respectability. The couple had ten children, nine of whom survived to adulthood.

Although most aspects of their marriage were unremarkable at the time, the couple’s quick legal action regarding the Tanis Liard land claim was likely surprising. Adolphe and Marguerite had been married but fourteen days when, on February 18, 1870, they filed suit against Honoré Picard and Celeste Rochbrune. In their complaint, Adolphe and Marguerite argued that Celeste and her daughter were the joint owners of the Tanis Liard donation land claim, and they asked for an equal division of the land. If this could not be done “without injury,” they requested the sale of the premises. They asserted that Marguerite was entitled to one-half of the claim as outlined...
in Tanis Liard’s will. It would not have been in the Picards’ interest to give Marguerite fifty percent of the property because they had debts to pay and a large family to support (in 1870, the couple had seven children). Perhaps Adolphe Jette had influenced Marguerite, and now as a married woman, she had a male to act on her behalf. Both appear to have been enterprising and upwardly mobile, so the lawsuit may have constituted the meeting of two minds, of two ambitious people willing to take the family to court.

The case of Jette v. Picard wound its way through the courts for a year and a half. The Jettes maintained that Marguerite was entitled to one-half of the land claim, while the Picards asserted that she was entitled to one-quarter at most. The confusion stemmed from an error in the original patent for the property, which has been issued to the “heirs at law of Tanis Liard.” There was no mention of the separate portions owned by his wife and daughter, each in her own name. In July 1872, the Marion County Court ruled that in accordance with Tanis Liard’s will, Celeste and Marguerite were the legates of his property. Since he owned one half of the donation land claim (131 of 263 acres) at the time of his death, his wife and daughter should each have seventy-six acres of his portion. The southern half of the land grant, which belonged to Celeste in her own name, was not considered part of the suit.

The Jettes did not accept the decision and appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court, which upheld the ruling of the lower court. The Jettes were ordered to pay court costs for the hearing, and in December 1872, the land was legally partitioned in accordance with the ruling. In May 1873, the Picards were still in possession of the land, which led the Jettes to try to force the Picards off Marguerite’s property and collect damages of $100. The two couples continued to fight over the land into the midsummer, with the Picards arguing that they had crops growing on the land and the Jettes asserting there were no such crops. An end to the court case (though perhaps not the family feud) came in June 1873, when the Picards were finally ordered to pay the Jettes $75.00 in damages for their wrongful detention of the land.

IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING Celeste Rochbrune’s death in 1876, the Picard family finances remained shaky, and by the mid 1880s, Honoré Picard found himself in the process of losing the family farm to local farmers from whom he had borrowed money (using the land as collateral). Then, in 1885, Congress passed the Slater Act (similar to the more well-known Dawes Act of 1887), which was designed to allot the Umatilla Reservation in eastern Oregon and reduce the size of the reservation in order to transfer so-called “surplus” land to local whites for farming and ranching. The allotment
By the mid 1880s, Marguerite and Adolphe Jette were operating several businesses at the relocated Champoeg town site (Newellsville, near bottom of map), depicted in this modern rendering of the area in about 1878. These businesses included a general merchandise store, a saloon, and a farm. The Jette homestead (still in the family) was also located at the new town site.

program called for an official census to be taken of the three tribes on the reservation: the Walla Walla, Cayuse, and Umatilla. Marguerite Jette’s Picard siblings somehow learned of the census and allotment program, and between June 1886 and June 1887, all nine traveled to the Umatilla Indian Reservation to be registered for the Walla Walla tribal roll. The Picard siblings and their children were all duly enrolled as mixed-bloods in the Walla Walla tribe and were eventually allotted a total of 2,048 acres.49

While the Picard siblings and their families sought to improve their fortunes by migrating to the Umatilla reservation in the mid 1880s, Adolphe and Marguerite Jette focused their energies on several businesses they ran on a large stretch of land along the eastern bank of the Willamette River at the relocated town site of Champoeg (also known as Newellsville). The couple’s businesses included a general merchandise and farm implement store, two warehouses, a grocery, and a saloon. During the late 1800s, Champoeg was an important shipping depot for the transportation of agricultural prod-
ucts out of French Prairie via river steamboats. Thus, by the turn of the century, the Jettes had greatly improved their socio-economic status, and Joseph Gaston, the general author of the celebratory *Centennial History of Oregon*, described Adolphe Jette as a small-town notable:

Although he has been offered many county offices because of his unusual executive ability he has declined them, feeling that all of his time and attention were needed to operate his business operations. Well known in this county where he has resided since pioneer times, he deserves public recognition in this volume for social qualities which have made him many friends, while his business record is most credible and enviable.  

Although the Jettes were firmly ensconced in the Willamette Valley during the 1890s, Marguerite Jette and her two elder children, Dolph (C.W.A.) Jette and Lillian Jette Bourgoyne, finally chose to file petitions with the BIA requesting that Marguerite and all of her children be added to the Walla Walla tribal rolls and that they be allotted land on the Umatilla reservation. Marguerite’s petitions contain information similar to that available in the existing documentary records, as well as some rather creative tales to explain her connection to the Umatilla Reservation community and why she had neglected to register for the original 1887 tribal census. Marguerite claimed that her grandmother Lisette Walla Walla had lived on the Umatilla
Reservation, which was incorrect — not only because Lisette had lived most her adult life away from the Walla Walla communities in the Plateau region, but also because she died before the reservation was created. Marguerite also claimed that she had been unaware of the 1887 tribal census even though all her half-siblings traveled to Umatilla to be registered at the time.

The BIA ultimately denied the petitions. Technically, the Jettes did not qualify for enrollment and allotment because they had not been included in the original tribal census of 1887. More importantly, however, although two of Marguerite’s Picard half-siblings and Narcisse Cornoyer (former Indian agent at Umatilla) had written statements supporting her petition, an affidavit from the headmen of the reservation was perhaps the key factor in local Indian Agent George Harper’s recommendation that the BIA reject the petition. The headmen stated under oath that “neither Mrs. Jette, nor her mother, nor her grandmother is known to or recognized by them as either Cayuse or Walla Walla Indian; that neither she nor her mother, nor her grandmother has ever lived among the Indians and [they] do not know anything about them.” In his letter accompanying Marguerite’s petition, Harper made the comment that “the affidavits of the leading Indians hardly needs any comment. The evidence of the Jettes is so flimsy that I fail to see where their rights to allotment here come in. I therefore recommend that they not be allotted.”
The 1890s were a period of economic instability in the Pacific Northwest as elsewhere in the United States. This was especially so for the Natives of the Umatilla reservation; they were being forced to transfer tens of thousands of acres to local white farmers and ranchers under the provisions of the Slater Act. The position of the reservation headmen denying Marguerite Jette’s request is understandable in the context of the times. In their judgment, Marguerite appeared to be one of the scores of Walla Walla mixed-blood interlopers who sought to benefit from the federal legislation that was designed to dispossess the tribes of their reserved lands.

Despite several appeals into the early 1900s, Marguerite Jette’s attempt to gain land on the Umatilla reservation was ultimately unsuccessful. In 1912, Adolphe and Marguerite moved to the Portland area to operate a new business, the Waucoma Hotel in Linnton. The aging couple’s decision to move to the outskirts of Oregon’s largest city was likely the result of several larger historical developments. By the 1900s, the railroads had siphoned off the steamboat traffic in the Willamette Valley, and they eventually became the chief means of transporting agricultural products to Portland. A flood in 1890 had damaged businesses and buildings at Champoeg, and the credit system used by the Jettes in their dealings with local farmers eventually forced them to close most of their enterprises in the town. The general store had run up an untenable amount of debt because many customers were unable or unwilling to pay their bills. In a parallel development, seven of the couple’s nine children married outside the small French-speaking community. By the late 1910s, all but two of the Jette siblings had left French Prairie and most had settled in the Portland area with their own families.

The Waucoma Hotel in Linnton was a boarding house for men who worked in nearby lumber mills. Marguerite ran the hotel from 1912 until 1925, when it burned to the ground. During this period, Adolphe Jette died in 1917, at age ninety-one. Following the loss of the hotel, Marguerite lived in the affluent Laurelhurst neighborhood of southeast Portland. She worked at St. Vincent’s hospital and died there in February 1931, at age eighty. The United States was then in the midst of the Great Depression, and these larger historical developments preyed on the social and economic stability of Marguerite’s family. At her death, Marguerite possessed several landholdings but no liquid assets. Her estate, which included twenty acres of land in Aurora as well as the Jette homestead in Champoeg, her home in Laurelhurst, the property in Linnton, two lots on the coast at Brighton Beach and Agate Beach, a few small shares in two corporations, and a number of promissory notes from her children and her Picard half-siblings, took five years to probate. In the end, there were not enough funds to pay for the fees related to settlement of her affairs. Family members who owed money to
the estate agreed to forego any inheritance as means of retiring their debts. Other individuals did receive some personal items, and portions of the real estate were bequeathed to them. Each of the remaining legates agreed to contribute $100 to cover the cost of closing the estate. At least one of the properties, the house in Laurelhurst, was lost to taxes.53

Although Marguerite Jette left a limited financial legacy at her death, due in part to the unusual circumstances of the Great Depression, the socioeconomic journey of her family over the previous hundred years provides a window onto large-scale historical changes that took place in the Pacific Northwest over that century. The documentary record reveals that three generations of Indian and métis women married French-Canadian men and raised bi-cultural families within an apparently close-knit French-Indian community in the Willamette Valley at French Prairie. Three generations sought to adapt to larger historical developments, including the British

*The Waucoma Hotel, Linnton, Oregon, is pictured here in about 1915. Polk’s Portland City Directory for that year had the following listing for the “Waucoma House”: “Mrs Marguerite Jette, Prop. Rate: Board and Room $5.50 Per Week, Single Meals 25 cents. Transients Accommodated.” The hotel burned to the ground in 1925.*

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North American fur trade, Anglo-American colonization, systems of racial exclusion, the rise of a commercial market in the region, and finally industrialization and urbanization.

The Rochbrunes, Liards, and Jettes struggled at various times while seeking land ownership, financial stability, and ultimately, social mobility. Although the first two generations were illiterate in the formal sense, members of the second and third generations used state policies and the law to their benefit. Additionally, the third generation of Marguerite Jette and her Picard half-siblings sought to reclaim their Walla Walla heritage amid economic difficulties in the late 1800s in order to take advantage of the allotment program on the Umatilla reservation. While there were family feuds and reversals of fortune over the decades, members of the third and fourth generations ultimately joined other Americans and migrated to the city, seeking better economic opportunities. In the process, they sought to retain their Catholic faith but drifted away from their French-Canadian and Indian heritages when the members of the fourth generation married outside French Prairie’s French-Indian community (their spouses were of English, Irish, and Germany ancestry) and moved to Portland.

While the state and local documents record one layer of the family history, the inner lives of the early generations of the Jette family and their importance to later generations are less visible; the written record includes little in the way of diaries or letters. It is this gap in the documentary record that I later investigated by means of oral history interviews with members of the oldest surviving members of the extended family (the fifth generation) during the mid 1990s. My own journey to the family research project was itself a result of the interplay between family memory and larger historical changes in American society and culture in the late 1900s. Although the Jette family members found themselves in an unsteady financial position during the Great Depression, my own direct ancestors remained and persisted in Portland for the next three generations. I was born there in late 1960s, the middle-child in a working-class/lower middle-class Catholic family. My father Kenneth Reynolds Jette, Jr., was a postal clerk and my mother Eileen (née Willett) was a teacher and later an office manager.

A seventh-generation Oregonian, I do not recall when I first became aware of my paternal family origins, yet my childhood in the 1970s coincided with a fortuitous moment in American history. Following the Civil Rights Movement and the ethnic nationalist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Americans were somewhat more inclined to examine the nation’s historical legacy of racial exclusion and white supremacy. And following the Bicentennial events and the phenomenal success of the mini-series Roots
(1977), the United States witnessed an explosion of interest in genealogy and family history, especially ethnic family history. As a child in the 1970s, I unconsciously absorbed a message that there was room for ethnic pride in American society and culture — it was okay not to be white (although in a twist of genetics, in physical appearance I was the “whitest” person in my family). Although I remember being fixed to the television for each Roots episode, equally important to me was the mini-series Centennial (1978), based on James A. Michener’s best-selling novel. Here was a product of popular culture that seemed to celebrate the contributions of French Canadians and their Indian wives in American history; the initial episodes featured the adventures of an intrepid French-Canadian fur trapper, Pasquinel (Robert Conrad), who entered a country marriage with an Arapaho woman, Clay Basket (Barbara Carrera).

These currents in American society and culture dovetailed with the dynamics of my own generational memory. During my childhood, my siblings, Jette cousins, and I would play at Champoeg State Park during family reunions and outings as older relatives reminisced about our ancestral roots in French Prairie. There were also occasional visits to Salem, to the home of my aged great-grandfather, Francis Amadeus Jette, a middle-son of Marguerite and Adolphe Jette, who (so the story goes) tended to disavow his Indian heritage. This informal education continued through my adolescence as my father, a history enthusiast who had majored in the subject in college, would occasionally recite the family genealogy and tell stories about his paternal ancestors. I do not recall his exact words, but I do remember their impact. These stories of family memory afforded me a special link with Oregon’s past. The secret knowledge that my ancestors “were here first” allowed me to see myself as different from other Oregonians. This linkage with Oregon’s history was special because it so contradicted the mythical discourse of the state’s founding by white, Anglo-American pioneers — the “heroes” of the Oregon Trail.

My formal education — completing a degree in history and French literature and a year of study in France and a semester in Quebec — later came to overshadow earlier memories and gradually infused a sense of ambiguity into perceptions of my ancestral origins. Family lore provided a linkage with the past, but the connection felt tenuous because the French-Indian heritage seemed so distant, so unrelated to the present. Unlike our forebears, my family spoke only English, we looked more or less Germanic, and we lived in the suburbs rather than in the countryside. As a fair-haired, light-skinned, hazel-eyed individual raised in the Portland area, I began to wonder about the real value of the distant and fragmented family history — then known only through my father’s stories and memories.
During my years away from academia, mulling over the decision to pursue graduate studies in history, I occasionally returned to the question of my family heritage. I would ask myself if it were possible to have a meaningful connection to my ancestors, seemingly so different from myself. In the end, I found I had a lingering desire not to forget the family history. This realization led me back to Quebec and to the study of the early French-Indian generations of my family. After completing an M.A. in history at Université Laval, I went on to pursue a doctorate at the University of British Columbia — all the while focusing my research efforts on French-Indian peoples in order to fill a gap in American history scholarship, especially Pacific Northwest historiography.

As part of the research for my master’s thesis, I interviewed four elderly Jette cousins in their eighties who were all born before between 1910 and 1915 and knew their grandmother Marguerite Jette during the last two decades of her life. My questions relating to the family’s French-Canadian heritage dealt largely with language use and language transmission. I asked the cousins whether their Jette parents and grandparents spoke French. Beth Jette answered in the affirmative, indicating that both of her grandparents and her father spoke French within the context of the family. As for the transmission of the language, Beth explained that she was exposed to French during the early 1910s, when her parents were living with Marguerite and Adolph Jette. She said she was told her grandfather always spoke French to her and that she understood him. This only lasted a few years, however, because Marguerite and Adolph later moved to Portland and Adolph died within a few years. In her immediate family, Beth remembered her father using informal French: “When we were kids, we had to use French at the table. If we wanted bread we had to say ‘passez-les le pain.’” When I pressed her for more details, she responded: “It was just table French, asking for things, politely, in French.”
Beth grew up in French Prairie in the early 1900s, and when she went to college in the 1930s, she sought to study French but discovered her French-Canadian background “didn’t make any difference” because she struggled in her French courses. Thus, by the 1930s, some hundred years after the first French-Indian families colonized French Prairie, the French-speaking community that had nurtured Beth’s great-grandmother Celeste Rochbrune and her grandmother Marguerite Jette no longer existed. The transition to English as the native language occurred during the early decades of the twentieth century, when Beth was growing up. During this period, the third generation became elders and the fourth generation came of age, married outside the community, and raised children, the fifth generation. Beth’s memories of this transition evoked for her feelings of regret at the loss of the French language, but her feelings appear to have been more personalized, shaped by her own experience. What is perhaps most important is the fact that when Beth was very young, Marguerite and Adolphe Jette, her French-speaking grandparents, moved to Portland to open the Waucoma Hotel. Since Beth’s mother did not speak French, when her grandparents moved away, she lost the opportunity to speak French on a daily basis.

Marian Jette’s recollections were complex and somewhat contradictory. She first stated that her mother, the second oldest of the Jette’s nine children, could understand French but could not speak it. Yet, Marian later said that “they” (some members of the family) “used to talk French quite a bit,” which means she may have been referring to her grandmother’s generation. Marian explained that she heard French in her grandmother’s house when she and her parents lived with Marguerite Jette in Linnton, and she offered a somewhat different scenario of language transmission. She said that as a girl in her grandmother’s hotel, she wanted her grandmother to teach her to speak French, but Marguerite responded, “No, We’re Americans now and [we] speak English.” From this point of view, the lack of transmission is attributed to the attitude of the older generations. Marian wanted to learn, but her grandmother impressed on her the value of assimilation. Like Beth, Marian expressed a desire to learn the language, but she explained that circumstances and family dynamics dictated otherwise. Marian and her parents lived for a time in the Waucoma Hotel in Portland and later moved to Washington State, and so she too eventually lost a daily connection with her French-speaking grandparent.

In each of the interviews, the narrators felt it important to talk about their grandparents’ character and value — although I did not directly question them about the subject. Beth and Marian described their grandfather as “good hearted” and “sympathetic,” an upright and honorable man in comparison with some other members of his local community. The two
cousins’ recollections of their grandmother were similar. They characterized Marguerite Jette as patient and educated, and they emphasize that she was a “canny business-person.” Here it should be noted that the two cousins were in near perfect agreement in their image of their grandparents, even repeating some of the same words, such as good-hearted and canny, to describe them. Beth and Marian wished to remember their elders in a positive light, as successful and well-integrated members of the community.

Like Beth and Marian, David Jette described his grandfather as an honest businessman who was respected by the community. In David’s view, Adolphe Jette also distinguished himself because he was “different” from the original French-Canadian settlers of French Prairie. Early in the interview, David related a personal experience that highlighted this difference between his grandfather and the older French-Canadian generations of the mid 1800s:

Occasionally some of the neighbors would mimic the old French-Canadians and their accent. And Dad said that Grampa Jette didn’t have any accent, that is that strong Canadian accent. He spoke good English. He was an educated man, you know. Maybe that is why he objected to that very strongly when I made mention [of what] some of the neighbors said. He said, “No, Grampa Jette didn’t talk like that.”

Later in the interview, David reiterated the view that his grandfather came from an educated family. Thus, his image of the family is one that sets it apart from the stereotype of the poor, uneducated French Canadian.

While David’s recollections are accurate in that Adolphe Jette was literate, they leave out another part of the story; Adolphe was the son of illiterate farmers. He and his brothers were the first to be educated within their immediate family.64 Marguerite Jette’s side of the family was almost certainly unlettered as well; both her parents and her grandparents were unable to sign their names. The tendency of the narrators to portray their grandparents in a positive light is perhaps not unusual. As Valerie Yow notes, family stories (or family myths) “serve a purpose, such as to reinforce a distinguishing characteristic of the family, to teach a family value, or to save a reputation.”65 It is clear from the interviews that the Jette cousins loved their grandparents and took pride in their accomplishments, wishing to remember their commitment to education, hard work, and social responsibility and respectability — all solidly middle-class values. The family memory for this fifth generation was thus a usable (or useful) past that tended to emphasize the positive aspects of the earlier generations experience in Oregon, one of socio-economic progress. Knowledge of their ancestors’ second-class status in the fur trade, illiteracy, financial struggles, and family feuds had receded into the background. The emphasis here on progress, respectability, and social responsibility is suggestive of nineteenth-century autobiographies and
celebratory histories (evidenced in Gaston’s *Centennial History of Oregon*), and also of the family stories prevalent in ethnic families that have persevered in the face of economic challenges and social prejudice.\(^{53}\)

I also wondered about the role of the Native heritage during late 1800s and early 1900s. I asked the elders if the family’s Indian ancestry was discussed within the family and, if so, how did the family feel about it? Did the family experience prejudice? For Beth, discussion of the Indian ancestry initially evoked conflicting emotions, the hurtful words of her classmates, and her parents’ attempt to counteract racial bigotry. She remembered the taunts she faced as a child growing up in French Prairie during the early 1900s, when local children would “holler . . . Indian” at her and her siblings. Her parents told her to be proud of her ancestry and not let the taunts get the better of her. Beth’s responses to my questions tended to be vague, which may have been the result of her age at eighty-five. I felt I had to coax the memories out of her, because she had difficulty providing precise details. And although my questions brought back troubling memories, Beth did attempt to provide some answers. When I inquired about the presence of any Indian cultural traditions in family, she responded: “She [Marguerite] never talked about old days to me too much. It was always, she always lived in the present and the future.” Beth’s recollections of her grandmother were an attempt to portray the past in a positive light. From this perspective, the absence of Native traditions was not considered a loss but was instead evidence of a dynamic, forward-looking family.

This characterization is somewhat at odds with another story Beth told later in the interview, with a remark made by my father and, as it turns out, with the documentary record. In discussions with my father while researching this project, he explained that his grandfather had told him that on occasion Marguerite Jette would take the train to eastern Oregon to visit “her people.” Later in my interview with Beth and Marian, Beth recalled that Marguerite once said that she had been denied the “benefits” of her Indian heritage because her Picard half-siblings had declared that she had no Indian blood, which had hurt Marguerite deeply.\(^{64}\)

While Beth’s recollections provided clues to a more complex and intriguing story regarding the family’s Indian heritage, her brother David’s memories differed. He remembered that the subject was discussed on occasion, but more than anything, it was taken for granted. David recalled that he did not experience prejudice but admitted that he may not have been attuned to it as was his sister. He also noted: “There was nothing to be ashamed of or anything like that; Subsequent to that time, why, they’re probably more proud of it than they were ashamed of it.” David essentially sought to minimize any chagrin the family may have felt. And yet, he did not completely
obscure the reality of prejudice because he used the word *ashamed* on two occasions, each time trying to negate it.

David was not able to offer any information about Indian cultural traditions in the family, but he did talk about the physical traces of this heritage, remarking that his grandmother, his younger sister, his eldest daughter, one of his brothers, and his nieces all “showed the Indian.” He explained that this meant they were short and had dark complexions. Since none of the other interviewees brought up this subject during the course of the interviews, I was struck by the frankness of David’s comments. A few weeks before conducting the interviews, I had attended a potluck and met a number of my relatives from his branch of the family. At the time, I was surprised to observe that a few of my distant cousins did indeed look part-Indian. They had no more cultural ties with our Native heritage than I did, but unlike myself, they were olive-skinned and dark haired and showed physical signs of our shared Native ancestry. I was also aware that ironically, as one of the stereotypically “ whitest” relatives in the family, I was perhaps the most interested our Indian heritage.

In contrast to her cousins Beth and David, Marian spent most of her childhood and adolescence in Washington State, where it was less likely that anyone would have known of her Native heritage. Marian stated that she did not encounter prejudice. For this reason, her recollections give voice to family lore rather than to personal experience. Nevertheless, there was a tension in her response as well. As a child, she was aware of her Indian roots and was “ always interested” in it. In talking with her mother, she learned a startling story that she narrated with some reservation. At an “Indian powwow” to which a group of white men had been invited, the men killed their hosts. Inverting the frontier stereotype, the tale depicts whites, not Indians, as violent and uncivil. When I asked who told the story to her mother, Marian speculated that her mother heard it from her parents, Marguerite and Adolphe Jette. Marian was unable to elaborate on the origin of the tale. Specific details have been forgotten, but the essential message remains: There were outbreaks of racial violence between Euro-Americans and Native peoples in frontier regions. The thought of interpersonal violence chilled us both and caused Marian to hesitate when relating the story. Perhaps this story raised a question that no one, including myself, dared ask at the time: Did the family’s white ancestors take part in the settler violence directed against Indian communities in the Pacific Northwest during the 1800s? Later, Marian recalled that her mother told her that Adolph Jetté was “friendly with the Indians.” Beth also emphasized that her grandfather was a peaceable man, that “he never did carry a gun. He didn’t believe in killing people. And he lived with the Indians along the way and just survived, without being belligerent.”
For Beth and Marian, their grandfather would not have taken part in the conflicts between Natives and Euro-Americans. Still, the family history and memory, and a fragmentary documentary record, hint at a complex story surrounding Adolphe Jette’s experience in southern Oregon at the time of the Rogue River War and his subsequent marriage to Julie Rogue. Catholic Church records from the early 1860s date the start of their common law marriage to 1853 (a year after his arrival in the region). At the time, Adolphe was twenty-eight and Julie may have been as young as thirteen or fourteen. Family lore has it that their meeting was a dramatic event. Adolphe Jette and a group of fellow French Canadians were saved by an “Indian princess” who awakened them in the night, warning them of an imminent attack by her kinsmen. The young woman joined the French Canadians on their hasty escape, and the men later drew straws to determine who would marry her. Adolphe picked the short straw, and the woman became his wife and was known as “Julie Rogue.”

The biographical sketch of Adolphe Jette in Gaston’s *Centennial History of Oregon*, for which Adolphe was interviewed, is the only known direct account of his years in southern Oregon. Adolphe chose not to refer directly to his first wife in the interview, but he did relate how his life had been saved by an Indian woman:
At one time they were surrounded by the savages for thirty days at the mouth of the Rogue River, but Mr. Jette became acquainted with the chief of the tribe and although the lives of some of his friends were taken he was saved through the entreaties of Chetsey, the daughter of the chief.69

A third version of the meeting of Julie Rogue and Adolphe Jette was recorded in the 1950s by Amanda Manegre Gunnoe. She was the youngest child of Dieu Donné Manegre, one of the young French Canadians who were with Adolphe Jette in southern Oregon.68 In this version, the French Canadians were en route to French Prairie after several years in California. Despite the dangers of the Siskiyou Trail, they decided to pass through the Rogue Country. While they were sleeping one night, a young Indian girl came to warn the party that “the Indians were coming at dawn to kill and rob them of their gold.” The men heeded her advice and quickly departed, allowing the young woman to accompany them because she feared for her life. She proved a useful guide, assisting the men in foraging for food and in navigating the Siskiyou Mountains. On the group’s arrival in French Prairie, the men sought to leave their traveling companion with the local Natives (Kalapuyans), but they would not have her. It was for this reason that the French Canadians drew straws, again with Adolphe Jette picking the short one.69

There is more to the story than a singular encounter between Euro-American miners and local Natives. Adolphe Jette and Julie Rogue were apparently caught in one of the last major events of the Rogue River War.70 In late February 1856, the surviving coastal bands launched an offensive against white settlements around Gold Beach in a final attempt to expel the outsiders from the region. This offensive included a series of well-organized attacks against settlers, miners, and the local Indian Agent Ben Wright, who was killed. The survivors fled across the Rogue
River to Fort Miner and remained holed up there until the arrival of regular army troops from California on March 21, 1856. Three separate sources place Adolphe Jette at the fort during the siege, including Gaston’s biographical sketch, a petition from the residents at Gold Beach, and a small, frayed newspaper clipping that describes a claim to the federal government made by Adolphe Jette. The petition from the Gold Beach residents was an appeal for guns and ammunition. Among the forty-four signatures on the document is one “A. Jetty.” Adolphe’s claim with the federal government was for $590 worth of goods destroyed in the Natives' offensive of late February 1856, and the claim included items loaned or sold to the local volunteer militia. Thus, although Adolphe was not listed in the Rogue River War Records, he apparently served as a supplier to the local settlers fighting in the conflict.

Adolphe was at Fort Miner during the month-long standoff, and it is likely Julie Rogue and their daughter Matilde were there with him. There were at least five white-Indian couples who sought refuge at the fort. Three of the Native women were, according to one soldier, “young and not bad-looking and had learned to dress in frocks,” while the other two were older and more traditional in their dress and appearance.

Edward O.C. Ord, writing in Harper’s Weekly under the pseudonym “Sergeant Jones,” recounted how the white settlers, especially the white women, mistreated the handful of Native women in the compound. The white women kept the Native women, who were the companions of local Euro-American miners, segregated in a separate dwelling. When the schooner Gold Beach arrived to evacuate the women and children at the end of month-long standoff, only Indian women who had legally married their partners were allowed to join the evacuees. Two of the miners, Charles Brown and Jack Smith, wed their companions, the two older women, while the other three men apparently did not. Ord noted that he could not help thinking that Brown’s “determination to cling to the poor brown woman for better or worse, while the prospect before them was all ‘worse’ and no ‘better,’ showed that there was some honest manhood in the rough fellow.”

At the close of the Rogue River War, Adolphe Jette and Julie Rogue had several options. They could migrate northward to the coastal reservation established for the surviving Natives, part ways, remain in the region, or migrate elsewhere. The intense racial bigotry of southern Oregon’s mining frontier combined with the viciousness of the recent war must have made it difficult for the couple to remain in the area. They initially moved south to Crescent City, California, for “one winter” (1856–1857 or 1857–1858), but Adolphe’s “business operations there were not very successful, netting him only a few hundred dollars.” The family finally settled in French Prairie,
where the first entries for the couple begin in Catholic Church records in November 1858, with the baptism of their newborn daughter Clotilde. It is likely the couple learned of the French-Indian community in French Prairie by word of mouth. In her memoir, Amanda Gunnoe attributed the migration of her father and his French-Canadian companions—including Adolph and Julie—to their desire for a suitable place to homestead:

After a few years of mining they started on the trail to Oregon. They had heard of the beautiful French Prairie from others who had left Oregon to join the Gold Rush. These men told them that the lush green grass grew waist high. It was good soil for farming and no land to clear, yet plenty of wood and timber nearby.

These three varying stories reveal much about the encounter between Adolphe Jette, a French-Canadian traveler and miner, and Julie Rogue, a local Indian woman, in the midst of the Rogue River War, a genocidal campaign that ultimately resulted in devastating populations losses, dispossession, and forced removal for the Natives of southern Oregon. It is reasonable to assume there is some truth to the tale that Julie saved Adolphe’s life. All the accounts agree on this, and despite Adolphe’s reticence to mention that his first wife was Indian, he does state unequivocally that “he was saved by through the entreaties of Chetsey.” Was Chetsey/Julie really a stranger? Did she actually awaken a group of slumbering white men in the nick of time? Or could she have rescued Adolphe after they had already become acquainted, after they had already begun living together? The sentimental attachment might explain Julie’s motivation, especially if she were pregnant or had already given birth to their first child, Matilde (1855). Perhaps Adolphe embellished the story of the couple’s meeting in order to make it dramatic and ultimately acceptable. All the versions of the story depict both Adolphe and Julie/Chetsey as admirable if not heroic—Julie for rescuing Adolphe and his companions and Adolphe for marrying the woman who saved them.

While family stories and other interviewees’ memories tended to underscore the heroism of French-Canadian and Native ancestors, Thomas Jette had the little to say about the Native heritage; this reticence was nonetheless instructive. His responses to my questions regarding the family’s Indian heritage were short and somewhat evasive. Thomas explained that he knew nothing of the Indian history of the family because he was told nothing, and he was unwilling to speculate about his father’s views on the subject. At another point in the interview, Thomas’s wife Rebecca, who was also present, voiced an opinion that was quite similar to my own: that Thomas’s father likely denied his Indian origins. Thomas’s words and attitudes underscore one tendency in the family—a forgetting of the Native heritage. What is
noteworthy here is that the forgetting was both passive and active. The Indian past has been allowed to fade from memory through lack of transmission from one generation to the next, and this silence was coupled with an unwillingness to remember, an unwillingness to even try to remember.

The narrators’ remembrance of their Native origins is contradictory. While they expressed a willingness to cooperate, their responses also demonstrate a certain amount of reticence and tension regarding the subject. Thomas, who explained that he had not been told about the Native heritage, perhaps had little to say because discussing the family’s Indian ancestry triggered painful memories. His unwillingness to speculate about his father’s attitude might be unspoken evidence of the racial prejudice experienced by members of the family, including his father and his aunts and uncles, who grew up in Oregon during the late 1800s. Thus, the disremembrance of the family lineage could be the result of trauma suffered by the family, a mechanism for coping with the social stigma of Indian ancestry and interracial mixing (miscegenation) within the context of the emergence of a system of white supremacy in the Pacific Northwest beginning in the 1840s.

The other three interviewees evidenced a desire to transform the past into something positive and meaningful. Beth, Marian, and David expressed an interest and a sense of pride in their background. They usually succeeded, but on occasion, a story or personal memory would surface that revealed a tension in the cousins’ conception of their family history. These points of contention were largely related to the encounters between Native Americans and Euro-Americans in Oregon. While family members carry some traces of their Native heritage in their memory and in their appearance, tangible links with the Indian past are non-existent. There is no presence of Native traditions and only limited knowledge of that family lineage. What remains is vague and fragmentary. The family lore would seem to carry, above all else, the memory of having forgotten a complex, perhaps painful history of interracial marriage, racial bigotry, and progressive assimilation over several generations. This absence in the family memory stands in contrast to the Native communities throughout the state, who have sought to recuperate and preserve their history and memory in response to over a century of assimilationist policies.

Unlike the similarities in the interviewees’ description of their grandparent’s responses to the queries about their grandmother’s ethnic background tended to diverge. Their answers revealed an inability to completely explain the identity of their grandmother, who was part Indian, part French Canadian, and had lived all her life in western Oregon. In the following passage, Beth attempted to define her grandmother as American, but Marian’s comments made this difficult:
Melinda: When you think of your grandmother Jette, what would you say her ethnic background was?
Beth: I think she was American.
Marian: She was part Indian too.
Beth: I know, I know. Actually she was part Indian. But in the way she felt, she was American.
Melinda: That’s how you would say she felt about herself? That she was American?
Beth: Yes.
Marian: I don’t know where the French came in on her side.
Beth: Her father was French.

When I asked David what he considered Marguerite’s ethnic background, his view differed from that of his sister. He first reaction was to associate her with her Native ancestry. She was “low-speaking” like Indians. For David, this is what distinguishes Indians, that they “never speak loudly” (this he viewed as a positive trait). When I questioned him about Marguerite's French-Canadian background, he admitted she was French Canadian and that she spoke French, but he did not elaborate.

At this point in the interview, I became frustrated with David’s response, probably because I wished he would provide a clearer portrait of Marguerite Jette and how she saw herself. I now believe that I wanted a better understanding of my métis great-great grandmother, who, in the old family photographs, looks so strikingly different from myself. In reading over the transcript, I think I wanted him to clearly define his grandmother, to explain how she chose to identify with one aspect of her heritage. And so I pressed him again, asking him how Marguerite Jetté would have identified herself in terms of ethnicity. David’s response was unexpected. He resisted categorizing (or more correctly my attempt to categorize) his grandmother. David responded:

I don’t think she felt ashamed or anything like that. She was a self-assured person that made her niche in society and the world and she was satisfied with that. I don’t think she was a person that was apologetic in anyway.

Of all the narrators, Thomas had the least difficulty in describing his grandmother. He offered an interesting reflection. He described her as “foreign”: “She didn’t seem to be like other kids’ parents. She had a little different quality. And I think it was this French sort of thing, effect that she was.” Thomas was very certain of this image and comfortable with it. When I asked what she considered her ethnic background, he replied, “she would have thought of herself as pretty French,” and when I asked about his perception of his grandmother, he said, “I just thought French-Canadian, that was what I thought.”
Through their memories, the elders have created an image of their family’s past that generally portrays it in a positive light. The grandparents were respected and active in their community, and they sought acculturation and social mobility. There was a more circumscribed memory of the older generations, who suffered from the intense racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice prevalent in the Pacific Northwest during the 1800s and early 1900s. When confronted with inquiries about the ethnic background of their métis grandmother, the interviewees faced difficulties in conceptualizing her mixed ancestry. The elders remembered Marguerite as they wished her to have been, and these images corresponded to some degree with their own personal experiences. Beth, who admitted to suffering prejudice, wanted to describe her grandmother as American, even when she was challenged by the questions of her cousin Marian. David, who downplayed any prejudice the family may have suffered, associated Marguerite with his idea of a soft-spoken, admirable Indian. Thomas wished to overlook the Indian ancestry and so presented his grandmother as French. What emerges is the portrait of an individual who defies definition. Like a chameleon, her identity changes according to the perspective of the observer. This mutable representation is actually a reflection of the family’s image of itself: American, yet also French and Indian when such heritage is remembered.

My elder relatives passed on their memories to me, and in so doing, they taught me a number of things I had not anticipated learning. Through the interviews, I came to comprehend memory. It is elusive, often unreliable, and sometimes exasperating because it is by nature distinct from history — from knowledge of the past based on the documentary record. Memory allows us to re-invent and re-interpret who we are and thereby gives form and substance to our identities and meaning to our lives. Memories are troublesome, comforting, and on occasion they aid in healing the wounds of the past. Such was likely the case for our family, which, over the course of four generations, assimilated into the dominant Anglo-American society. The elders thereby impressed upon me the complexity of human experience. Their recollections did not always fit into the questions and categories I had set out for research, analysis, and discourse. The real-life experience of the family and the record of this experience — memory — sometimes foiled my efforts to define it.

The interviews were not a one-way process. I provided my relatives with information they were unaware of or had forgotten. This exchange of memories and information cemented a positive rapport, which allowed them to feel comfortable enough to relate their memories, even those that were conflictual. Providing the elders with information may have tarnished their recollections. Although I was not so aware of it at the time, I could
not be completely objective in my questioning. The interviews do reflect my interest in the French and Indian heritage and therefore likely demonstrate what the elders could remember (when asked) and less what they did remember as a matter of course. My conclusions must be tempered by the observation that ordinary remembrances of the family’s French and Indian ancestry are somewhat less defined.

At the start of this research project, I was loath to admit that it was inextricably linked with my own personal search for identity. I believed that I essentially wanted to learn about my family as well as examine how individuals remember their mixed-blood ancestry. Fortunately, instinct later dictated that unless I honestly addressed the issue of my desire for self-knowledge, my research would lack credibility. I had hoped to make some startling discoveries or develop a newfound sense of identity, but the outcome was not so spectacular. If anything, I find that this research has led to a greater sense of ambiguity about my own identity, though an ambiguity tempered with some understanding.

Tamara Hareven has written that one of the motivations in the “search for generational memory” is the desire to connect the experience of one’s forbears to larger historical events. This is really the crux of the issue. Having lived in France and Quebec, I am keenly aware of my “unmarked ethnic” American-ness or “whiteness.” I do not feel a sense of ethnic kinship with French Canadians or Native Americans. I possess no tangible cultural ties to the world of my Native and métis grandmothers, nor my francophone grandfathers. My family no longer speaks the languages or remembers the cultures that defined them five generations ago. Even if I wanted to (and I am not certain that I would), I cannot undo generations of assimilation. I have come to see that I regularly benefit from white privilege because of my appearance, which was not the case for my French-Indian ancestors who faced racial, ethnic, and religious intolerance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is ironic and disturbing that the same white supremacy that shaped the historical experience of my distant ancestors paved the way for the white privilege that outwardly benefits me.

Who I am stems in part from generations of my family’s experience in the Pacific Northwest — and also from the complex memory of that family history. I cannot forget my ancestral origins because it is their memory that ties me to the land, to the West, and ultimately to America. My French-Canadian grandfathers crossed the continent; my native and métis grandmothers joined their destinies to those of the French-speaking voyageurs. They were active participants in the encounter between two cultures, Euro-American and Native American, which was at times intimate and at times violent.
These generations colonized the West and the path they chose (or had to choose) was assimilation. As their descendant, I am American, but I still feel a strange nostalgia for something I never knew. The nostalgia is rooted in a loss, in an absence of an ethnic or a class identity. As previous generations of my family became “white” and as I became more a more educated “knowledge worker” in the current post-industrial economy, I became disconnected from both my own historical past and from other Americans who are more rooted in an ethnic, class, or community identity. This is the ironic and disturbing cost of assimilation for Americans of European ancestry: privilege and disconnection.

Therein lies the value of this ancestral past: it binds me to America, yet offers an alternative to the historical myths and popular images of mainstream culture that reinforce both the privilege and the disconnection. After assimilation, after the waning of ethnic distinctions, what remains is memory. For myself and for my siblings (and perhaps for other Americans with similar backgrounds) it is our family memory that gives us a slightly different identity if not a distinct culture. This memory is composed of both what we remember and the traces of what we have forgotten. It is a lore refracted and transformed through time and through lives lived. As such it allows for the possibility that each generation may rediscover and reinvent the ancestral past in its own way. For me, the tension between history and memory provided an impetus to become a historian and to unearth the historical experience of those who lived betwixt and between in American history: the French-speaking peoples in the American West and the French-Indian communities born of Euro-American colonization.
The author presented an early version of this article at the 59th Annual Pacific Northwest History Conference, and she would like to thank all her colleagues who attended the talk and supported the project, especially Katrine Barber, Donna Sinclair, Kimberly Jensen, William Lang, and Eliza Canty-Jones. The author would also like to thank Mary C. Kelly and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this article. The project would not have come to fruition without the steadfast support of the Jette family.


2. In addition to French and English, Marguerite also reportedly spoke Chinook Jargon as did many members of the French-Indian community in French Prairie during the 1800s.


4. Martha Harroun Foster’s research on the Métis of Montana demonstrates an alternative history to this scenario for a minority of bi-cultural families. See We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).


9. I have drawn these terms from Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn, Introduction to Representations Special Issue: “Memory and Counter-Memory” 26 (Spring 1989): 1–6. Zemon Davis and Starn cite the work of Michel Foucault and Pierre Nora, among others, on collective memory.

11. Parish Register, Sainte Madeleine de Rigaud, vol 1, 1802–1811, Les Archives Nationales du Québec, Quebec City [hereafter ANQ-Q]; Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg [hereafter HBCA], B.239/g/7, folio 37, Abstract of Servants Accounts, Northern Department, 1827. Joseph Rochbrune was also listed as “Joseph Laroque” in various HBCA, Catholic Church, and government records.


14. At the time, HBC officials believed the Columbia Department required canoe men specifically recruited from the St. Lawrence region (as opposed to Scotsmen hired in Europe). As a result, from 1821 to the 1850s, at least half of the new engagés from Lower Canada were sent to the Pacific Northwest. Joseph Rochbrune was among those dispatched directly to the Columbia Department. See Goldring, Papers on the Labour System, 3:31.

15. The HBC Abstracts of Servants Accounts for York Factory (North Department) do not list district postings for the Columbia employees prior to 1837. The Columbia Department Abstracts do not list postings from 1827 through 1829, and the ledgers from 1831 to 1835 are non-extant. The ledger for 1830, however, places Joseph Rochbrune at Fort Nez Percés. HBCA, B.223/g/2, folio 16.


17. Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest: St. Paul [hereafter CCRPNW-SP], vol. 1, ed. Harriet Munnick (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1979), 30. French Prairie, the original territory of the Ahantchuyuk Kalapuyans, was named after the French-Indian families that settled there. Located in the mid Willamette Valley, it is bounded by the Willamette River to the north and west, the Pudding River to the east, and what remains of Lake Labish (Lac labiche) to the south. The five major towns of French Prairie were Butteville, Champoeg, St. Paul, St. Louis, and Gervais. The original Champoeg town site located on the river was washed away in flood in 1861 and is now a state park.

18. The documentary record for Joseph Rochbrune, Sr., and his second wife, the French-Cree widow, Marguerite Souliere, end in 1873, when he was the witness at the marriage of his son Joseph Rochbrune, Jr. Celeste Rochbrune’s other siblings also “disappear” from the documentary record in the late 1800s. The records for Joseph Rochbrune, Jr., end with the deaths of his wife and child in 1874. Veronique Rochbrune died in 1871, at age twenty-six. The records for Helene Rochbrune end in 1881, with the birth and death of her son Joshua Woods. John Rochbrune died in 1881, at age twenty-one. At this time, Joseph Rochbrune, Sr., and Marguerite Soulière may have moved to more remote areas in Douglas County in southern Oregon, because several of Marguerite’s children by David Dompierre migrated there in the 1870s and 1880s. See CCRPNW-SP, Annotations, 26.

19. Tanis Liard spent his entire career (1833–1846) in New Caledonia (British Columbia), and his final year at Thompson River (Kamloops). François-Xavier served as a voyageur with the Snake Country and the Southern Party expeditions (1833–1845). HBCA, B.238/g/13-g/27.

20. Like Tanis, François-Xavier Liard lost his son in the measles epidemic of 1847–1848. This is the final time he is mentioned in the Catholic Church Records. He was not enumerated in the 1850 census for Marion County; however, two of his daughters, Adeline and Marguerite, were listed as borders at the convent school of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in St. Paul. In 1852, Marie Anne Nez Percé, the widow of François-Xavier Liard, gave birth to a baby girl, Felicité. In the Catholic Church Records, Marie Anne is listed as the “widow of Liard,” and the father of the child is “unknown.” Following Felicité’s baptism, Marie Anne and her daughters disappear from the documentary record.


22. Marion County Probate Court Records [hereafter MCPCR], Stanislaus Liard File, Case 55, Will, December 2, 1851, Oregon State Archives [hereafter OSA]. The will was written in French by an individual with some training in the law. It was likely composed by two of the three witnesses, I.O. Chevrefils or Hercule Lebrun (the initials of the third are illegible). Lebrun was a literate man known to have assisted his neighbors in matters of the law. See CCRPNW-SP, Annotations, A-58.

23. MCPCR, Stanislaus Liard File, Will, December 2, 1851.


25. When Marguerite Jette petitioned for an allotment on the Umatilla Reservations in the 1890s, Mary S. Cornoyer signed an affidavit stating that she “had known Mrs. Jette’s mother, and went to school with her; that Mrs. Jette’s mother’s name was Solicite (sic) Rochbrune.” Bureau of Indian Affairs, Letters Received-Land, 1881–1907, Petition of Marguerite Jette for Allotment on the Umatilla Reservation, February 15, 1898, enclosed in letter from Indian Agent George Harper to the Commissioner, March 9, 1898, Number 12355-1898, Record Group 75, NARA.

26. Etienne Peltier was paid for bartering the family’s oats and wheat, likely because of Tanis Liard’s illness and death.

27. The guardianship order is contained in the Stanislaus Liard Donation Land Claim File. The Marion County Probate Court Papers for the Matter of the Guardianship of Marguerite Liard, Case 60, were found to be missing in November 1907.

28. Marion County Married Women’s Property Register, 1859–1897, August 15, 1866, 26, OSA. The clerk signed Celeste’s name for her (rather than have her make her mark), and Honoré signed his mark to the register.

29. Following Celeste’s death, Honoré Picard and his children were evicted from their portion of the original Tanis Liard land claim in the mid 1880s, because of a lawsuit filed by Adolphe and Marguerite Jette in the early 1870s, mortgage loans against the property secured from local farmer Casper Zorn during the 1870s, and finally, a lawsuit by filed Casper Zorn. See Marion County Circuit Court Records [hereafter MCCCR], Jette v. Picard, Case 2124, 1870, OSA; MCCCR, Zorn v. Picard, Case 4065, 1885, OSA.

30. Parish Register, Purification de la bienheurese vierge Marie de Repentigny, vol. 4, 1812–1830, ANQ-Q. The Jette family in Oregon progressively dropped that accent on the second “e” in the late 1800s. It is only present in the Catholic Church records. I have used the accent on my surname since my first sojourn in Quebec in the early 1990s.

31. Joseph Gaston, The Centennial History of Oregon, 1811–1912, vol. 3 (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912), 646–47. Adolphe Jette was a seventh-generation descendant of the Frenchman Urbain Jetté. Urbain was a native of St. Pierre de Verrin, then in Anjou, now in the department of Sarthe. In 1653, he was living in the village of La Flèche when he was recruited as an indentured mason and emigrated to New France, where he worked for five years to complete his contract before receiving a land concession of fifteen arpents in Ville Marie (Montreal) in 1659. That year, Urbain also married Catherine Charles, a “fille du Roy” whose emigration from Charenton (near Paris) to New France has been sponsored by the King of France. Urbain Jetté was apparently originally christened with surname
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signed his name “Adolphe Jetté.”

Éditions de L’Université d’Ottawa, 1979), 425, 565.

In volume 6 of the Repentigny parish register, 1835–1861, Théophile/Adolphe Jette signed his name “Adolphe Jetté.”


35. Ibid., 647.

36. According to family lore, all of Adolphe Jette and Julie Rogue’s surviving daughters eventually died of tuberculosis like their mother. This is also reflected in family photographs from the late 1800s. They lived with Marguerite and Adolphe and were well liked by their younger half-siblings.

37. *CCRPNW-SP*, vol. 2, 121, 146.

38. The Jette family history sketch in Harvey McKay’s *St. Paul, Oregon* (based on the 1970s recollections of my great-grandfather Francis “Frank” Jette) notes that Marguerite Liard attended school in Vancouver, Washington, before the Civil War, when General Ulysses S. Grant was stationed there, but I could not confirm this through Sisters of Providence school records for their female academy (located at the Sisters of Providence Archives in Seattle). David Jette speculated that Marguerite Liard received an education because Narcisse Cornoyer had been her guardian following her father’s death. See Harvey McKay, *St. Paul, Oregon, 1830–1890* (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1980), 130–33. Marian Jette remembered hearing that as a child her grandmother dreamed of living in a big house like the Robert Newell house in Champoeg. Adolphe and Marguerite later lived in the house for some years in the early 1870s before purchasing the Jette homestead in Champoeg.


40. Stanislaus Liard File, Certificate 3223, Patent, March 31, 1868, Record Group 49, NARA. To remedy the situation and strengthen the Picards’ position, Honoré went to the U.S. land office in Oregon on February 28, 1870, ten days after the Jettes filed their complaint. Petitioning on behalf of his wife, Honoré asked that the patent be changed so as to reflect Célesté’s right to one-half of the land claim in her own name and also one-half of Tanis Liard’s original share because she was his direct legal heir. The land office administrator certified the application in September and sent it to Washington, D.C., for final approval. The new patent was issued in May 1873 and delivered to the Picards in February 1874. Stanislaus Liard File, Certificate 3223, Application for Re-adjudication, February 28, 1870 and Corrected Certificate, May 5, 1873.


42. *MCCCR, Jette v. Picard*, Finding of the Supreme Court, September 1872; *Jette v. Picard*, 4 Or. 296 (1872).


45. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Census Rolls, 1885–1940, Umatilla Reservation, 1887, Record Group 75; Bureau of Land Management, Records of Oregon State Office, Schedule of Allotments to Indians on the Diminished Umatilla Reservation, 1893, Record Group 59, NARA-Seattle.

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47. Gaston, *Centennial History of Oregon*, 647.

48. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Land Division, 1881–1907, Petition of Marguerite Jette, February 15, 1898, enclosed in Number 12525–1898, Letter from Umatilla Indian Agent George Harper to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, March 9, 1898, enclosed in Letters Received, Number 23753-1902. Record Group 75, NARA-Washington D.C.

49. Petition of Marguerite Jette, February 15, 1898.

50. Petition of Marguerite Jette, Affidavit of Umatilla Reservation Headman, February 21, 1898. The inquiry was made with the assistance of translator Donald McKay, who also signed a statement attesting to his translation.

51. BIA, Letters Received, Land Division, 1888–1907, Number 12525–1898, from Umatilla Indian Agent George Harper to Commissioner, March 9, 1898, enclosed in Number 23753-1902, RG 75, NARA.

52. Marian and Beth Jette, interview by author, July 8, 1995; David Jette, interview by author, July 22, 1995.

53. Multnomah County Probate Records, Marguerite Jette, Case 33365, 1931, Multnomah County Courthouse, Portland, Oregon.


59. I have elected to use first name pseudonyms and the last name Jette for these four family elders in order to provide some privacy to the individuals and their families. All four were born between 1910 and 1915. Three of the family members are now deceased, and the fourth resides in an assisted living community. Beth Jette and Marian Jette, interview by author, July 8, 1995; David Jette, interview by author, July 22, 1995; Thomas Jette, interview by author, July 29, 1995. Unless specifically needed, I have not footnoted the quotations from the interviews, but rather clearly identified the
interviewees when their words are cited. As agreed at the time of each interview, the interviews and transcripts will be donated to the Oregon Historical Society Research Library, as will a manuscript of this article with the actual names of the interviewees.

60. David and Thomas Jette did not have any memories to recount about French language transmission within the family.

61. The register for Adolphe's home parish (La purification de la bien heureuse vierge Marie) in Repentigny, Quebec, attests to this. I consulted volume 4 (1812–1830) and volume 6 (1844–1861).


64. This information from my father and the Jette cousins led me to delve into the records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) where I discovered that the Picard siblings had migrated to the Umatilla Reservation during the 1880s and that Marguerite Jette had first attempted to be added to the Walla Walla tribal rolls some ten years later.


66. This is the short tale I heard from my father and my paternal relatives. When I interviewed Beth and Marian Jette, Marian recounted the legend in quite similar terms. In her version, unlike the version from my father, she did not refer to the Native woman as an “Indian princess.”

67. Gaston, Centennial History of Oregon, 647. While biographical sketch makes no mention of Adolphe Jette’s first wife, Julie Rogue, there is a direct reference to the Native ancestry of his second wife, Marguerite Liard. The name Chetsey might refer to the region of Chetco River, which originates in the Siskiyous, and was home to an Athapaskan band whose name was rendered “Che-at-tee” in the 1853 census conducted by Port Orford Indian Agent Joseph Parrish. Since Adolphe Jette used “Chetsey” in his interview for the Gaston sketch, perhaps his first wife was a member of that band. See Stephen Dow Beckham, Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 138.


69. Gunnoe, “The Pichet-Manegre Family Tree,” 193–95. There is perhaps an alternative scenario. In the late summer of 1853, after some months of armed conflict between whites and the Natives of southern Oregon, attempts were made at a peace agreement. Twelve Indian women took it on themselves to serve as envoys between the groups, and their efforts led to an accord on September 10, 1853, by which some Indian bands ceded land to the U.S government and a reservation was established at Table Rock in the Takelma homeland. According to Nathan Douthit, “in later years these Indian women, some of whom were married to white men, continued

Francis “Frank” Jette, 1880–1983

Courtesy of the author

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to live among white and were respected for the role they played in helping to avert a massacre.” Douthit, “Joseph Lane and the Rouge River Indians: Personal Relations Across a Culture Divide,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 95:4 (Winter 1994–95): 495.


71. Oregon Territorial Government Records, Military Department, Petitions, Petition of the Residents of Gold Beach, January 28, 1856, OSA; “Bill for Reds’ Raid Awaits Payment,” n.n., n.d., Papers of Norman R. and Gertrude Jette, Champoeg, Oregon. The article was likely written in the early 1900s.

72. Adolphe Jette is not listed in the Rogue River War Records at the Oregon State Archives. These include the Jacksonville Oregon Volunteers Hospital Patient Record, 1855–1856; the enlistment rosters for Marion, Jackson, and Curry Counties; and the claims and supply records. Contrary to the impression given in the Gaston sketch, Adolphe and Julie would not have met during the standoff at Fort Miner in 1856, which was three years after the commencement of the couple’s common law marriage and one year after the birth of their first child.


74. Ibid., 525.

75. Gaston, Centennial History of Oregon, 647.

76. CCRPNW-SP, vol. 2, 98.


78. As in other quarters of the United States during the Jacksonian era, Anglo-American settlers in the Pacific Northwest instituted a system of racial (and gender) exclusion as they colonized the region. In 1845, the original organic law of the Oregon Provisions Government excluded non-white (and female) electors. The Oregon state constitution, produced in September 1857, officially limited suffrage to white male citizens. Following the constitutional convention, the voters of Oregon approved a referendum to prohibit slavery and at the same time, they voted to deny residency to free blacks. During this period, American Indians, African Americans, and Asians were denied equal treatment and equal rights under the law, including discriminatory lands laws. The racial attitudes of the now white majority were reinforced in 1866, when Oregon barred marriages between whites and blacks, Chinese, Hawaiians, and persons more than one-half Indian. The mid to late nineteenth century was also marked by periodic warfare between Natives and Anglo-American settlers in the Pacific Northwest. This began with the Whitman massacre in 1847 and continued with the Rogue River War and the Yakima War in the 1850s, and the Modoc War, the Bannock War, and the Nez Perce War in the 1870s. For anti-miscegenation laws in the later 1800s, for example, see Peggy Pascoe, What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
In January 1859, a group of French Prairie (male) settlers sent a petition to the territorial legislature asking that mixed-blood citizens (“half-breed Indians”) be given the civil rights they were denied under current state law. The petition was signed by 150 male citizens, including prominent American, French Canadian, and immigrant settlers such as Robert Newell, George Laroque, François-Xavier Matthieu, Narcisse Cornoyer, and Michel Laframboise. Approximately forty signatories were French Canadian, including Adolphe Jette and Honoré Picard. The petition brings to light the grievances of the French-Indian community and other bi-cultural families in the Willamette Valley, explaining how persons of half-Indian ancestry were subject to unjust treatment before the law because current statutes forbade them from testifying in cases involving white men. Thus, the state’s law operated “very unjustly on the party excluded” and “furnished to criminals and fraudulent debtors an opportunity from escaping liabilities.” For this reason, the settlers requested the state law be changed to allow mixed-bloods to testify in court. The petitioners also addressed the subject of suffrage, stating that there was a “large class” of people of one-half Indian ancestry who owned property, were intelligent, and competent to vote. Extending suffrage to this group would improve their condition and put an end to “jealousies” existing between them and their fellow citizens. A few days after they submitted the petition, Representative Steven introduced two bills, one (H.B. 93) that would “extend the right of suffrage to half-breeds” and a second (H.B. 94) that would “remove incompetency of half-breeds in courts of justice.” They did not pass. See Oregon Territorial Government Records, Legislative Petitions, “Petition to Allow Half-Breed Indian Voting, 1859,” OSA; Journal of the House of Representatives of the Territory of Oregon: During the Tenth Regular Session, 1858–1859 (Salem, Oreg.: Territorial Printer, Asahel Bush, 1859).


81. Tamara Hareven, “The Search for Generational Memory,” 242. Hareven defines generational memory as “the memories which individuals have of their own families’ history as well as more general collective memories of the past.”

82. This notion of an “unmarked ethnic” American-ness or “whiteness” is influenced by Richard D. Alba, Italian Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985); and Alba, Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

83. Although I outwardly benefit from white privilege, as a member of the sexual minorities community, I have some understanding of emotional and psychological toll of belonging to a marginalized group. During the same period that I was delving into the biography of my bi-cultural métis great-great-grandmother, Marguerite Jette, I was myself was going through the process of coming out as bisexual. Thus, my own experience of being “betwixt and between” leads me to view my ancestors’ lives with a mixture of empathy and scholarly curiosity.