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# CONFLUENCE

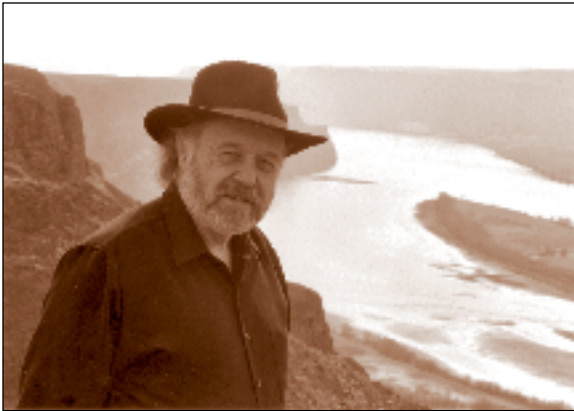
*Publication of*

Wenatchee Valley Museum  
& Cultural Center

Vol. 36, No. 1

Spring 2020

Courtesy of Bill Layman



Wenatchee Valley Museum Simmer A-072

Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center #86-24-439



## Rock Island Has Cultural Significance

Wenatchee Valley  
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 & Cultural Center

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**From the Director**

*Keni Sturgeon*

One of the most important roles a museum plays is to help give its community a better sense and understand of place. A museum’s collections, exhibits and programs function together to convey a community’s past that is simultaneously part of its memory, part of what make the place distinctive, and part of how the community thinks about its future.



As you can see from the articles in this edition of *Confluence*, the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center has been honored to have Bill Layman contributing to the creation of our shared understanding of this place for decades.

Bill has dedicated much of his life to documenting and sharing Columbia River history. He has published several impactful books on the river and its past, curated three exhibitions for the Museum, and in 2002 established the Native River Fund (NRF) after the publication of *Native River: The Columbia Remembered*.

The initial purpose of the NRF was to develop and maintain collections of exhibit-quality photographs and associated materials that related to the heritage and history of the Columbia River. These materials were designated for the use and benefit of people within the Pacific Northwest and American Indian peoples whose lands encompass the Columbia River.

Since its founding, NRF has helped ensure the publication of several books and exhibits featuring a variety of aspects of Columbia River history. Another significant outcome of the Native River Fund’s various projects has been the creation and/or enhancement of positive relationships between the region’s Native American people and our museum.

Bill Layman made this *Confluence* issue possible by sharing his files (documentary and photographic) and his stories with Chris Rader. Bill and tribal elder Randy Lewis’s new book, *Rock Island of the Columbia River: The Foundation of Our Lives*, will be published at the end of this month, the same time as this edition, which is not by chance. Thank you Bill!

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*Cover: Bill Layman at Rock Island; petroglyph and historical sketch of petroglyph; Rock Island before being covered by water impounded by dam.*

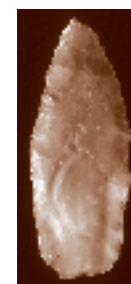
**Native Americans Revered Rock Island**

*by Chris Rader*

Thump THUMP! Thump THUMP! The heart of the dreaded water monster Spexman beat steadily within the heart-shaped island, as he surveyed the Columbia River. Spexman had been terrorizing other Beings for a long time, back to the age of giant mammals like the Mammoth and Sasquatch. In the words of tribal elder Randy Lewis (K’ayaxan),

He lay just below the water’s surface. Anything that came down the Columbia and Wenatchee rivers, he grabbed and devoured. He took everything. Herds of animals would disappear when they came downriver. Entire runs of fish were devoured when they came through. Everything that came downriver was his.<sup>1</sup>

Then the Creator caused a native woman to give birth to twin sons, an unheard-of phenomenon. These boys, Red Star and Blue Star, were the Animal People’s hopes for defeating Spexman. Raised in a cave in Moses Coulee to be safe from the monster, the boys were given powers by each animal. They learned from Shrew and Mole about the power of things growing underground; Cricket and Grasshopper shared their jumping songs and medicine songs to show how to move through daylight and darkness; Elk gave them strength; Field Mouse imparted knowledge about seeds and grain foods; the Ant people nurtured them.



When the time is right, Red Star and Blue Star emerge from the cave. They meet Coyote, who gives them stones carved into long, sharp spear points. Then the two boys split up, one on each side of the Columbia (above Rock Island). Suddenly Spexman peers up from the water. He spots Blue Star standing by the shore – a nice, soft, tasty morsel! The monster dives down and swims across the river. But the boy is gone.

At that moment, Red Star yells at Spexman: “Over here, over here!” The monster turns, dives and swims across the river. “What? He’s gone!” Again, Blue Star taunts him from the opposite bank. Spexman chases him; he disappears; his twin reappears across the river; Spexman pursues him in confusion. How can a mere human boy be in two places at once?

Then the twins throw their spears at Spexman. The monster screams as his eye is torn out. He pursues his enemy up the river, leaving blood and body parts along the way. Finally, Hummingbird and Sparrow dive at Spexman and rip out his other eye. Blue Star and Red Star quickly spear Spexman’s soft belly, killing him. The monster sinks into the water and turns to stone. His head rests a few miles above his Rock Island heart.



Courtesy of Steven Lehi

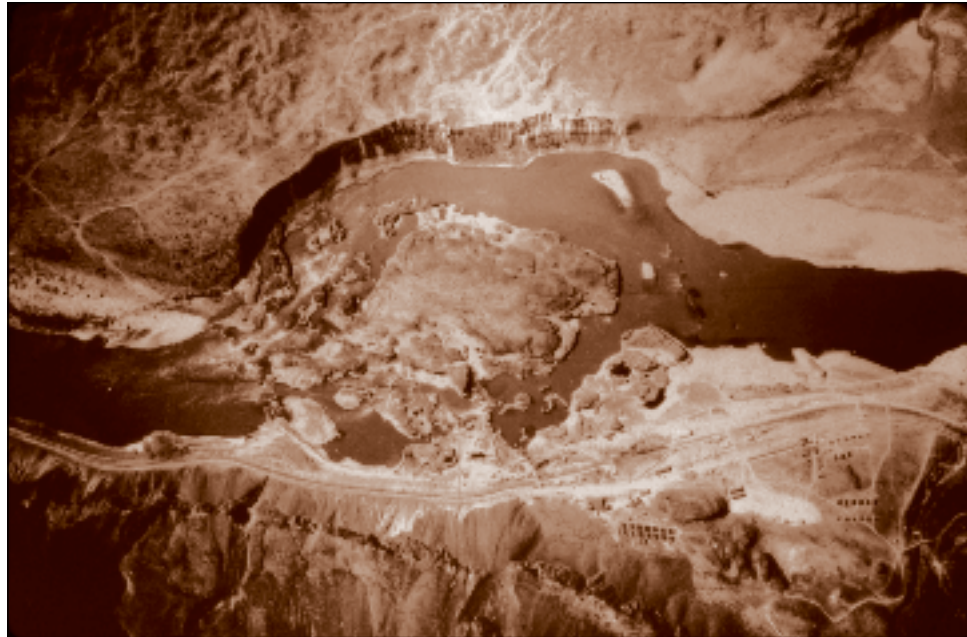
*This photo of Spexman’s head, near Rock Island, was taken before the Columbia River was dammed. Its rocky base is now under water.*

This story, told in detail in Randy Lewis and Bill Layman’s illustrated book *Red Star and Blue Star Defeat Spexman* (for sale in the Wenatchee Valley Museum’s gift shop), instructed and entertained countless generations of native peoples living along the Columbia River. Especially in winter, when days were short and cold, families passed numerous stories along to children. The heroes and villains of the stories often were animals: Eagle, Otter, Beaver, Blue Jay, Coyote. The stories brought to life rock formations such as the Two Bears (now known as Saddle Rock) and the Salmon People (Peshastin Pinnacles), and instilled a respect for ancestors, the Animal People and the Creator.

For thousands of years, native people living on both sides of the Columbia heard these legends and nurtured a respect for the earth and its creatures. Sometimes, as we will see in coming pages, their reverence took form in pictures carved into or painted onto rock. Hundreds of these images were carved into the basalt on Rock Island.

**Prehistoric Rock Island**

Prior to completion of the Rock Island Dam in 1931, this island was sacred both to the Sinkiuse-Columbia (or Moses Columbia) and the Wenatchi-P’squosa peoples. These Native Americans did not set strict territorial boundaries; they considered the land to be a natural resource shared by all. But the Sinkiuse-Columbia homeland, on the east side of the Columbia, is generally considered to stretch from Crab Creek to about Orondo,



This 1930 aerial photo by William Brubaker shows Rock Island. Some indigenous people, viewing it from a cliff, thought it was shaped like a heart.

centering on Moses Coulee (named after the noted Chief Moses, 1829-1899). Wenatchi-P'squosa villages were located on the west side of the river, from Colockum Creek to above the mouth of the Wenatchee River and up that river to Lake Wenatchee. (See *The Confluence*, fall 2019.) For the purpose of this article, we shall assume both of these Salish-speaking bands were active on Rock Island.

Before being flooded by the dam, the island was about a mile long and a half mile wide. It was the largest of numerous rocky outcrops in the Columbia, 12 miles below today's city of Wenatchee. The rocks formed treacherous rapids in the fast-moving river, which were an excellent place to trap, net, gaff or spear salmon swimming up the river to spawn. Salmon was the basis of the diet of Columbia River people, and the Rock Island site became a gathering place for fishing and trade.

People lived in pit houses on the upper part of the island, above high water. The late Wenatchee amateur archaeologist Dr. Russell Congdon, in an undated 15-page monograph titled "Rock Island," said there were 40 or more of these house pits occupying a prominent position "on the silt flood plain near the middle of the flat – close to the main fishery and having a wide view of the main river channel looking up stream."

These house pits were all large, well formed, evenly spaced and much weathered. A much larger "house pit" occupied a central position in the up stream border of the group. Its appearance, shape and

weathering were the same but its actual depth was about 6 feet and its diameter was about twice that of the other house pits. Another group of pits occupied a low, somewhat rocky ridge nearer the west side of the island. There were five of these. They were smaller and showed much less weathering. Little sand and trash had blown in and some remnants of the roof and side timbers remained in the pits, which appeared to have been less than 5 feet deep originally.

Congdon speculated that up to 450 people may have lived on the island in the winter, with additional temporary shelters being set up during the warmer months. He wrote of a large prehistoric burying ground in the center of the highest part of the island. He noted, "In view of the much washed, channeled appearance of the surface of the island, it seems quite likely that earlier burials would have been washed away successively by recurring floods."

A large village called N'Kawa'xtctn (Living on the Banks), above the eastern shore of the river at the mouth of Rock Island Creek, was home to hundreds of Sinkiuse-Columbia for thousands of years. The village and the island itself were a major trade center for Northwest tribes. For many generations dried salmon, copper,



Dwellings made from tule reeds woven into mats were commonly used by Columbia Plateau tribes. This photo shows two Wanapum homes in the 1930s, further down the Columbia River from Rock Island.

Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center #83-67-121

beaver pelts, buffalo meat, beads, shells, etc. changed hands and people enjoyed stick games, singing, dancing and general socializing.

When Canadian fur trader and explorer David Thompson canoed down the Columbia River in July 1811, he and his crew stopped on the east side just above the Rock Island rapids. Spotting two horsemen, he invited them to smoke. This led to an invitation to visit the village and a stay that lasted several hours. Thompson noted homes made from tule rushes and two very large tule mat lodges. He paced off the length of one of them, measuring it at 240 feet. He estimated 120 families living in the village, and (with many of them being children) thought there could be as many as 800 people.

When we passed, and put ashore below them, they were all dancing in their Lodges, to the sound of their songs.... We sent to them to come and smoke, five steady looking men came, sat down near us and smoked... they did not know what to make of us.... Their attention was strongly fixed on our persons, especially on those who had let their beards grow; on our dresses which were wholly of woolen or cotton, their clothing being of leather. On our Guns, Axes Knives and making of a fire.... A fine looking man came and sat close to me with strong curiosity in his face; after eyeing me all over, he felt my feet and legs to be sure that I was something like themselves.<sup>2</sup>

This was the first time the native people at Rock Island had encountered men of European descent. Unfortunately, it was contact with Europeans (from about 1750 on) that brought the smallpox and other diseases that decimated native populations throughout the West.

In the late 1800s steamboats and the Great Northern Railway brought many changes to Rock Island; we will visit these in the article beginning on page 12. However, well into the 20th century and even after the dam was built, descendants of the Wenatchi-P'squosa and Sinkiuse-Columbia continued to visit the sacred island.

### Contemporary native memories of Rock Island

Randy Lewis, an elder of the Colville Confederated Tribes with Wenatchi-P'squosa, Methow and other native roots, spent part of his boyhood living on Wenatchee Heights with his grandparents, Jerome and Agnes Miller. Wenatchee Heights has a view of Rock Island, and Randy sometimes visited the island area with his grandfather. They would not disturb the remnants



Randy Lewis

Photo by Chris Rader

### Dr. Russell Congdon on Rock Island

(from an undated monograph lent to Bill Layman by Russell's son, Richard Congdon)

Probably, very few Columbia River Indian villages were ever as favorably situated in relation to a rich and unending supply of salmon as the prehistoric, middle Columbia village on Rock Island. It was surrounded by rapids with all sorts of fishing sites, and there were big runs of salmon destined for spawning beds in 7 or more tributary rivers farther upstream.

With such potential wealth on every hand, it might seem that hunting and gathering would have lost some of their usual, vital importance, especially in a trading center, but probably this was not so here. About three easy river miles below Rock Island Rapids was Colockum Creek, which drained a vast game range in the mountains to the west. Here, heavy winter snows forced the elk down the valleys and onto the low foothills near the river where they could feed on the wind-swept ridges....

Ultimately, the only important cultural material that was not lost to the floods was the very extensive accumulation of petroglyphs in a riparian location at the upper end of the island, overlooking the bountiful east channel. This site is believed to have been the theater of important ceremonial activities such as the first salmon ceremonies and pre-hunting rituals.

of ancestors they found, such as hunting cairns built up against the cliffs, but young Randy absorbed the significance of the site.

In a series of interviews conducted by Bill Layman in 2018, Randy said his grandfather referred to the island as "the heart."

The island was the shape of the heart, or symbolically, it was the heart of the people, or it was the heart of the area. And it truly was the heart; it supplied the region, a vast area with both a food resource, ceremonial grounds, a place in which many hundreds of people for thousands of years lived, so it was home.... For many miles it was a valuable fishing resource, one of the largest on the Columbia River and for my people, the P'squosa people....

(My grandfather) used to fish there along with his grandmother, cousins, relatives. They would fish on the island. He said he would sleep right in a little sandy bank there; the petroglyphs were along there. He said, "I was surrounded by them, by people, old time people." He said, late at



night into early morning, they would start singing, they would start talking between them, the stones. He said that's how powerful this was, this spot.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis said his grandfather showed him how to use a pestle to pound salmon in a depression in the island rock, to remove oils and preserve the fish. His great-great grandmother processed fish and eels on Rock Island.

She had her drying racks on Rock Island. She had drying racks, Grandpa said, for a hundred feet. She had eel racks, she dried eels on. I asked him once, "How many salmon?" He said thousands. I said, "Yeah, right." He said, "I caught them, I know." He would sleep there on that island and he got to know the rock images that the old-time people left....

And he said the sun would heat those rocks throughout the day, and at nighttime he would sleep there because it would stay warm, the rocks above would generate heat down on him. Sometime in the early morning, he said he would wake up to the sound of people talking, and it was the rock images talking to each other, singing. He said the first time it scared him, but he got used to hearing these voices.<sup>4</sup>

His grandfather's experiences with the rock images, before Rock Island was inundated by the dam, made a profound impression on Randy Lewis. Lewis told an

audience at the Wenatchee Valley Museum on October 10, 2018 that his grandfather would lie there, listening to the stones talking back and forth.

He said, "I could hear voices all morning as I lay there. I would hear people singing, talking from thousands of years ago." He would listen to them. He said they were sacred to him. They were holy to him. And always he told me, when you go by you talk to them. You touch them. You tell them who you are because these are our First Ancestors, old-time people from where we come from. And he said, "If you ever see them being endangered, do whatever you can to save them."

The story of these petroglyphs, and the effort to preserve and honor them, begins on the next page.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Randy Lewis and William Layman, *Red Star and Blue Star Defeat Spexman*, 2018.
2. *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America: 1784-1812*, The Champlain Society, 1916.)
3. Bill Layman interview with Randy Lewis, Aug. 15, 2018.
4. Bill Layman interview with Randy Lewis, Aug. 28, 2018.



These rock images have been accentuated by chalk, a practice frowned on today.

Wenatchee Valley Museum &amp; Cultural Center #A-142 Simmer

## Rock Island Petroglyphs Are Prized

by Chris Rader



Courtesy of Bill Layman

Susan Evans and Bil Layman were happy to move to the Wenatchee area in 1979.

When Bill Layman and his wife, Susan Evans, moved to Wenatchee in the fall of 1979, they noticed a group of rocks in front of an old Great Northern Railway steam locomotive parked on South Wenatchee Avenue, near the bridge crossing the Columbia River. Into these basalt rocks were carved images of birds, animals, geometric figures. Layman and Evans were intrigued. The petroglyphs had been removed from Rock Island, a dozen miles downstream from Wenatchee, just before a hydroelectric dam flooded the island in 1931.

Who knew how long ago the images had been carved? Hundreds, perhaps thousands of years ago? What meanings did the rock decorations have to the carvers? What was Rock Island's place in the lives of indigenous peoples?

"I could sense those rocks calling out to him," Evans says of that first encounter. "And Bill has devoted much of his life to studying and reflecting on Rock Island, its rapids and petroglyphs, over these past 40 years."

Layman was born and raised in Ohio, and Evans in Seattle. Each earned master's degrees in mental health counseling. They met at a seminar in Milwaukee and married in 1976, then moved to Wenatchee three years later to set up individual private counseling practices. Layman had always been interested in history, and encounters with those petroglyphs kindled a deep sense of connection with the indigenous peoples

who have inhabited the mid-Columbia region for thousands of years.

He began investigating the rather awkward placement of the 11 petroglyph-studded rocks in Locomotive Park and learned more about their original location: Rock Island. They had been "rescued," a half century earlier, by the Columbia River Archaeological Society (CRAS). The rocks had been excavated shortly before the island was inundated by waters impounded by the dam. The businessmen, doctors and orchardists of CRAS had recognized Rock Island's uniqueness, and vowed to conserve as much of it as possible.

Before being flooded, the Rock Island site (officially designated by the state as 45 DO 301) consisted of a large island approximately a mile long and a half mile wide. Many rocks protruded from the river upstream and downstream from the island, creating fast-moving rapids. The rapids were so loud they could be heard on a still night in Wenatchee, 12 miles away. (The Salish-speaking natives raised at Rock Island were said to have loud voices!) The rapids were a barrier for salmon swimming upstream to spawn. The salmon would be visible to fishermen as they struggled up waterfalls, and as they rested in pools and eddies. Among tribes of the Columbia Plateau, Rock Island became a center for fishing and trade. It also was one of the largest petroglyph sites in the state of Washington.

One CRAS member, Harold Cundy, counted 350



Courtesy of Bill Layman

Rocks with petroglyphs, excavated from Rock Island in 1931, were displayed in Wenatchee's Locomotive Park for years before being moved to the North Central Washington Museum (now the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center).



An unknown photographer takes a picture of images etched into rock at Rock Island c. 1931.

petroglyphs (carved or etched images) on the island in 1923. This was an astonishing number of images – and Cundy hypothesized that the site may have held as many as 500. There were also a smaller number of pictographs (painted images).

#### Exact meanings unknown

One cannot know for certain why so many images were carved into the island's basalt. Many call petroglyphs "rock art" – but that term connotes a creative impulse. Could figures represent actual events, such as journeys or hunts, and thus be considered journalism? Or were they carved as hopes, dreams, visions?

For many years, Bill Layman has been accumulating a large body of research on Plateau Indian People and the images they left on rocks. One of his sources has been anthropologist Luther Cressman, who in 1937 asked this question:

When does a thing such as one of these designs on the rocks become art? There is certainly a wide range of variation in the quality of the different designs. Many are clearly identifiable, while others are simply a series of rambling or involved lines. The fact that the present-day observer can recognize what the aboriginal artist put on the surface of a column of basalt does not mean at all that we understand why he put it there.<sup>1</sup>

Rock images dating back thousands of years are found on every continent except Antarctica. Interpretation of these images by non-natives is not recommended. But native peoples sometimes share their observations with non-natives, and some general

hypotheses have emerged regarding some of the functions of rock images. These include recorded visions or dreams used in puberty rites or by shamans; traditional stories of ancestors; appeals to spirit guardians; gathering of strength and power; records of weather disturbances; and celebrations of achievements such as successful hunts. In some cultures, rock images are believed to have been made by "Little People," spirits, or the Creator.

Members of the many bands comprising the Colville Confederated Tribes, whose lives centered on the Columbia River and who spoke a common Salish language, shared a religious

belief in individualized animal powers, or guardian spirits. Anthropologist Walter Cline, writing about the Okanogans, noted: "The guardian spirit taught its protégé a song, either in the initial vision or in a later dream.... Only people with strong power painted picture on rock. One did not do this until he had sung his power song at his first winter dance."<sup>2</sup> This applies to other Columbia Plateau residents including the Wanapum, a Sahaptin-speaking group who created many petroglyphs further down the Columbia River.

Humishuma, or Mourning Dove, a noted Okanogan-Colville writer, was asked by the Columbia River Archaeological Society to look into her people's knowledge of the Rock Island images. "As told to her, it was a place along the line of general travel where messages and general information was left for others that came that way. Her people used a special earth pigment paint in making these pictures."<sup>3</sup> Mourning Dove also stated that Elders had told her the writings were made to record the finding of one's "shoomesh," or power.<sup>4</sup>

Anthropologist James Teit (1864-1922), who extensively studied and advocated for Interior Salish peoples of the Pacific Northwest, wrote that art on rocks was very often the result of a puberty rite of passage. He said initiates attempted to absorb and retain mysterious forces or powers of Nature.

They went through exercises, purified, supplicated, slept, prayed, fasted and held vigil at or near these places so as to obtain as much as they could of this power. At the expiration of the training ... the novice painted pictures

on cliffs or boulders nearby (or at) these training places.... The paintings made were largely in the nature of records of the most important of the novice's experiences whilst training, such as things seen in peculiar or striking visions and dreams, things obtained or partially obtained as ... guardians etc., things wished for or desired to be obtained, things actually seen during training or during vigils which were considered good omens, actual experiences or adventures of the novice, especially those in connection with animals etc.<sup>5</sup>

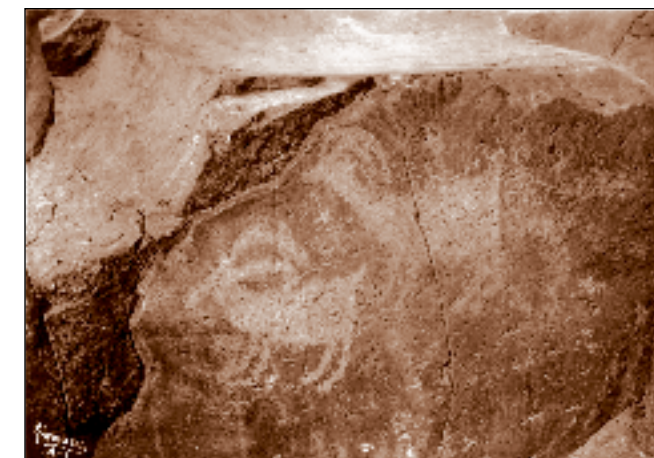
This may have been the case in many of the petroglyphs at Rock Island, but we will not speculate as to the meanings or motivations behind the images found there. Descendants of Native Americans having a history at the island consider it to be special, even sacred ground. Randy Lewis, of Wenatchi-P'squosa heritage, said his grandparents would take him to the site in the 1950s.

I asked my grandma, "Why do we go back, always?" She says, "Because you have to show your face there, we have to be present in our old place." It was kind of a pilgrimage, our mecca, our Jerusalem. These stones are our tablets of God.... Some of them (areas on the island) were vision quest sites, where you got your power, your spirit, your medicine.<sup>6</sup>

#### Rock Island petroglyphs

The images appear to be of humans (some with spears or bows and arrows), deer, elk, mountain sheep, mountain goats (with curved horns), horses, the sun, geometric patterns and abstract designs. They were mostly found on the high ground at the north part of the island. Early 20th-century non-Indians who found their way to the island were undoubtedly captivated by these hundreds of images, often grouped together in "panels." But some vandalism occurred, including modern initials etched next to the drawings, and the Columbia River Archaeology Society took action.

The CRAS, formed in 1920, was a small group of Wenatchee-area men (and, later, women) who were interested in Native American artifacts. Many of them had collections of arrowheads, spear points, knives, pipes, mortars, pestles and so on that they displayed to one another. (This was before federal, state and tribal governments passed laws against the collecting and selling of artifacts.) In January 1921 the club voted to place a sign at Rock Island "requesting the public to help preserve the Indian paintings and etchings there."<sup>7</sup> In 1923, when the road between Wenatchee and Quincy was rerouted closer to the rapids, CRAS placed more signs and unsuccessfully petitioned the state to protect the site as a "government monument." Yet vandalism continued.



WVMCC #A-001 Simmer



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In 1928 the Puget Sound Power & Light Company announced its intentions to construct a dam across the Columbia River, at Rock Island. Society members were concerned. What would become of the rock images? CRAS members met with Lester Coffin, manager of Puget's Eastern District, and spoke strongly against the loss of the rocks. They drew up a resolution of protest to be sent to the Federal Power Commission and the state hydraulic engineer.



CRAS members in 1935, from left: Adam East, Alan May, Dr. James Winstanley, K.P. Sexton, Dr. Ales Hrdlicka (Smithsonian), Ralph Wood, Dr. John Gahringer, Art Freese.

Coffin, whose family had a large ranch on the Columbia below Rock Island, assured CRAS that the company would remove “such rocks as the Society desired and place them in Wenatchee.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, he said, PP&L would furnish an expert photographer to film the rock art at the site and give the photos to CRAS. The photographer was Wenatchee resident Alfred Simmer.

Another invaluable record of the Rock Island petroglyphs was made in the late 1920s by CRAS member Harold Cundy. A flour salesman for the Wenatchee Milling Company and its successor, Centennial Flour Mills, Cundy had a keen interest in archaeology and a talent for drawing. While other Society members headed to the Columbia River banks with collecting buckets, Cundy brought pencils and paper. His friends took home artifacts; he collected drawings.

Stopping at small-town grocery stores along his central Washington sales route, he would fill his orders. “That’ll be four sacks of Peach Blossom, and, by the way, did you get a chance to talk with your friend about those Indian picture writings? I’d sure like to see them.” Upon learning of one, he drove his Model T Ford along the rutted back roads of Washington to a specific boulder, rock shelter or outcrop. There he set to work making pencil sketches and notations, often on the back of company stationery. Back home, using inks and watercolors, Cundy enhanced these sketches, bringing yet another level of attention to the day’s work.<sup>9</sup>

In his quest to record rock art images Cundy traveled all along the Columbia River, Okanogan River and Lake Chelan.

He found sites near springs, trails and watercourses, and rock art panels in caves and shelters, on faces of

basalt columns, large boulders, and glacial erratics. He noted examples of superimposition among both pictographs and petroglyphs and observed that many of the pictographs found north of Wenatchee had shown evidence of repainting.

Cundy believed rock art was, at times, created to mark events holding special significance. From the local Indians, he learned that other images were made to leave specific messages at trail junctions. Still others were said to be idle markings to pass time.<sup>10</sup>

Cundy made many trips to Rock Island before the dam was completed in 1931. He sketched the rock figures he found there, meticulously noting their dimensions and locations. He

published a book of his drawings in 1939 and presented it to the Washington State Historical Society in Tacoma; his sketches, field notes and papers are now in the Wenatchee Valley Museum’s collection.

### Memories of a loss

In January 1931, PP&L’s Les Coffin informed the archaeological society that the company was ready to remove “20 to 30” petroglyph-bearing rocks from the island as soon as CRAS would mark them. Society members complied, and within two months the rocks were salvaged and placed on the property of the Gemstone Silica Company, about three miles east of East Wenatchee.<sup>11</sup>

The Columbia River Archaeological Society had the intention of incorporating the rocks into a large commemorative fountain and/or to face the walls of a museum building. Neither of these goals came to pass – but the society’s efforts to save what petroglyphs it could, and to document the original site through 142 Simmer photographs and numerous Cundy drawings, have been invaluable aids to our honoring Rock Island.



Two of Harold Cundy’s drawings of Rock Island petroglyphs.

WVMCC Cundy collection

CRAS morphed into the North Central Washington Museum Association (now the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center) in 1939. The new museum moved into the Carnegie building in Memorial Park that had formerly housed the Wenatchee Library. In 1944 two of the petroglyphs were placed on cement balustrades at the entrance to the building, but were put into indoor storage in 1960 following extensive vandalism.

Six other petroglyphs were loaned to the Chelan County PUD and displayed at the Rocky Reach historical gallery. Eleven more were rather insensitively displayed in a Wenatchee city park (see previous article), and five stored in the museum basement.<sup>12</sup> The park petroglyphs later made their way to the museum collection.

The museum moved to its current location on South Mission Street in 1978. A few years later, Bill Layman approached director Dr. Bill Steward with an offer to curate an exhibit on the second floor to display and honor 12 petroglyphs. Working with members of the Colville Confederated Tribes and historian/educator John Brown, he arranged the stones and wrote text to explain their significance.

The exhibit was dedicated on Oct. 24, 1984 in a public ceremony that included the slide show “Rock Art of Washington State” by Forest Service archaeologist Rick McClure, an honoring of Harold Cundy’s daughters, and remarks by three tribal council members from the Colville Confederated Tribes: Mary Marchand, Moses George and Andy Joseph, Sr. Each expressed gratification that their ancestors’ history was being preserved at the museum. Twenty tribal members in all attended the ceremony.

In dedicating the new exhibit, curator Layman said: We wish to appreciate the valued place Rock Island Rapids was.... We wish to honor those individuals among us who remember the islands and rapids.... With our elders passing, no one of us will have seen this part of the river in its great natural state. It will be the work of coming generations to place it well in our children’s minds.<sup>13</sup>

Decades later, in a column in *The Wenatchee World* on October 9, 2018, Layman summed up his dedication to this history. “My work has been to assemble the knowledge of how Rock Island might be seen and understood as a fundamental and living presence in our region,” he wrote.

The most recent manifestation of Layman’s loving regard for this sacred site is in his new book, co-authored with Randy Lewis, titled *Rock Island of the Columbia River: The Foundation of Our World*. Published by the Wenatchee Valley Museum and its Native River Fund, the book is a tribute and honor song to Rock Island and to those who received power and sustenance from that place. It is available for purchase in the museum’s gift shop and other locations throughout the region.

### Bill Layman: Rock Island History-Keeper

William Layman is a local historian and educator who has devoted four decades of his life to telling the story of our place. He has authored several ground-breaking books on the once wild and free Columbia River including *Native River: the Columbia Remembered*; *River of Memory: The Everlasting Columbia*; *Red Star and Blue Star Defeat Spexman*; and the brand-new *Rock Island of the Columbia River: The Foundation of Our World* (the last two co-authored with Wenatchi-P’squosa elder Randy Lewis). In 2017 he produced *Inundated Pictographs and Petroglyphs of Wanapum and Priest Rapids Reservoirs*, detailed volumes for Grant County PUD. This research of numerous rock images of Central Washington stands as an invaluable legacy to Plateau People.

Bill’s activities in documenting local history also include curating three exhibits for the Wenatchee Valley Museum; facilitating two permanent historical sculpture installations (Coyote Leads the Salmon and Alexander Griggs Walking to Work); co-chairing the museum’s award-winning float “Coyote Brings the Salmon” for the 2008 Apple Blossom Parade; numerous journal articles and historical videos/DVDs; and coordinating the Playback Theater, whose purpose over a ten-year period was to listen, honor and render regional real-life stories enacted by improvisational actors and musicians. Thank you, Bill!

### ENDNOTES

1. Keo Boreson, “Rock Art of the Pacific Northwest,” University of Idaho, 1976.
2. Walter Cline et. al., “The Sinkaietk or Southern Okanogan of Washington,” *General Series in Anthropology, No. 6, Menasha, Wis., 1938*.
3. CRAS minutes March 3, 1927.
4. William D. Layman, “Drawing with Vision: Harold J. Cundy’s Pioneering Investigations into the Rock Art of North Central Washington,” *Columbia magazine*, Spring 1998.
5. *James Teit’s Notes on Rock Painting in General*, compiled by Grant Keddie, 1982.
6. Cary Rosenbaum, “Our Jerusalem,” *Tribal Tribune*, Sept. 28, 2018.
7. CRAS minutes, Jan. 6, 1921.
8. CRAS minutes, Jan. 1929.
9. Layman, “Drawing with Vision,” *op. cit.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Mike Lynch, “Save the Picture Rocks!”, no date [c. 1985].
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13. Wilfred R. Woods, “Talking It Over,” *Wenatchee World*, Oct. 1984.

### ADDITIONAL SOURCES

William D. Layman, “The Rock Art of Rock Island Rapids: An Historical Overview,” presented at 10th annual symposium of American Rock Art Research Association, Boulder City, Nevada, May 1984.

William D. Layman, “Preserving Our Native Heritage,” *The Confluence*, Winter 1985-86.

## Rapids Posed a Challenge

by Chris Rader

When David Thompson wrote about his voyage down the Columbia River in 1811, he did not specifically mention how his 10-person canoe managed to pass through the rapids at Rock Island. (He did describe his visit to the native village on the east bank, as detailed on page 5.) A few other fur trading voyageurs and explorers survived terrifying trips through the long, foaming stretch of surging water. The recorder for the Wilkes Expedition in 1841 wrote of “eddying waters (that) foamed in their fury. The descent, of course, required all the skill and coolness of the bowsman and steersman; the vessel was tossed on the surging waters, with the surf and spray continually dashing over her bows...”

Major W.A. Jones described the rapids in 1890:

At Rock Island Rapids the river has cut around both sides of a large island of rock. The channel, however, on each side is very much obstructed with reefs, rocks, and points sharply projecting from the shore. The result is a waterway so much restricted at all stages as to dam up the waters to such an extent that they escape over



Courtesy of Rich Congdon and Bill Layman

Some considered the left (east) channel of the Rock Island Rapids, above, easier to navigate than the right channel during low water.

lines of very steep slope and amidst great masses of reef, rocks, and high projecting islands.<sup>1</sup>

Alfred Downing, topographical assistant to Army Lt. Thomas Symons on a survey assignment at Camp Chelan, had a harrowing experience in the rapids in July 1880.

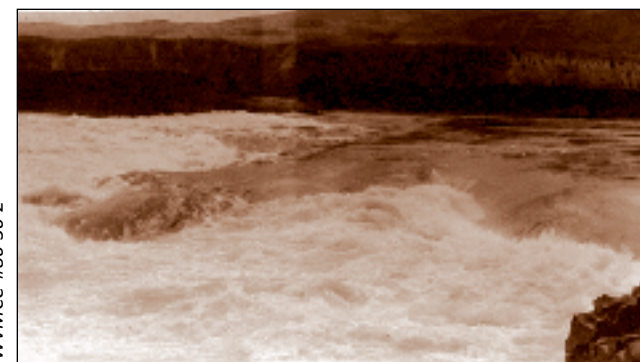
Traveling overland from Moses Coulee to the Columbia below Lake Chelan, Downing was overcome by the hot sun and nearly died from sunstroke. Before ascending to the lake, the party camped along the Columbia for a few days. One evening, probably in a headache-induced daze, Downing found himself drifting down the river in a small boat with no oars. No one noticed he was gone. He drifted downstream all night, generally in the center of the river (a mile in width in some places), passing through numerous small rapids that swamped the boat and compelled him to continuously bail out the water with his hands. By dawn he had drifted 55 miles to the Rock Island Rapids.

Here the boat instantly swamped and capsized. I succeeded in clinging to the keel of the boat and in that manner passed through nearly two miles of the angry rapids, my head being out of the water, and body at full length on the keel. As the force of the water would roll the boat over and over like a log, I found myself every few moments totally submerged, and drowning in that manner was but a question of minutes. At this crisis I threw myself from the boat and attempted to swim to the rocky shore, but was immediately drawn under by the suction and only by the most desperate efforts did I find myself at the surface



Courtesy of Bill Layman

This sketch of the dam placement at Rock Island, based on a map drawn by Alfred Downing in 1881, shows the scale of the island and its neighboring rocks.



WVMCC #86-30-2

The tumbling waters of Rock Island Rapids caused many a boat to capsize.

again, and still more desperate struggling and swimming to reach the rock-bound shore....

I experienced the greatest difficulty in getting out of the water on account of the loose rocks not being sufficiently heavy to bear my weight, and the water being very deep in shore. More dead than alive I finally drew myself out.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately for him, some Native Americans had seen his struggle and took him to their camp to rest, eat and dry out. Twelve days later he was reunited with the Symons party at Ritzville. The following year, on a different assignment – to survey the navigability of the Columbia between Kettle Falls and Snake River – Symons and Downing safely canoed through the Rock Island Rapids by “lining” (tying thick ropes between the rocks and the boat) through the west, or right, channel.

### Paddling the entire river

Accounts of two separate trips along the entire Columbia River 40 years later also illustrate the difficulties in navigating through those rapids. Lewis Freeman embarked from the headwaters in British Columbia on Sept. 29, 1920 with three other men in “a big double-ended boat specially built for rough water.” During the 1,250-mile trip (when the water level was low) he changed boats and companions several times, paddling solo for the last 250 miles. He described the voyage in an engaging book titled *Down the Columbia*, published

Lewis Freeman, Down the Columbia



Lewis Freeman and Andy Kitson pull oars on the Columbia River in 1920.

the following year. It includes a quick snapshot of Wenatchee.

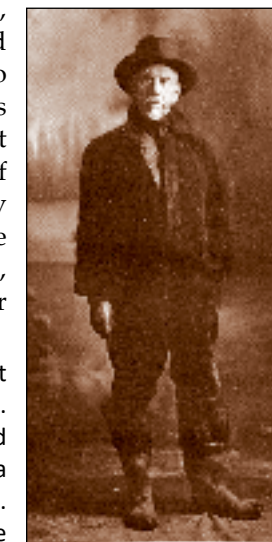
Three-quarters of the way to the ocean, Freeman and his photographer-companion Len Roos “came suddenly upon the open valley of the Wenatchee, the nearest thing to a plain we had seen in all the hundreds of miles from the source of the Columbia.” They spent the night in a nice hotel and admired the banks, tall buildings, mills and fruit warehouses in the town of 8,000. But the next morning, as they proceeded down the river, their opinion of the lively, ambitious people of the small city was clouded.

“There is a long and lofty highway bridge spanning the Columbia half a mile below Wenatchee, which fine structure also appears to be used on occasion as a city dump,” he wrote. The fast-moving current carried them under the bridge just as several people were tossing items from it. Freeman and Roos were unable to avoid the “second-hand barrage, that Niagara of things that people didn’t want,” which included a sewing machine, “wash-boiler,” a trailing length of burlap, a bag of cinders, and entrails from a slaughterhouse that landed smack on the boat.

The men stopped above the Rock Island Rapids to wash the skiff and to study the watercourse. Having read Symons’ account of navigating through the right channel and nearly capsizing at its lower end, and having received advice from an old river captain that lining the left channel would be easier, Freeman chose the latter route. He devotes eight pages to describing this harrowing journey, which included falling into the swirling water partway through.

M.J. Lorraine was more economical with his prose in his 1924 book, *The Columbia Unveiled*. It details what he says was the first solo trip down the entire river since David Thompson’s – in 1921, the year after Freeman and friends made their voyage to the ocean. Lorraine, who was 68 years old, built a 17-foot rowboat at the headwaters of the Columbia and successfully plied it to the river’s mouth. He reached Rock Island in October, more than three months after starting his journey.

Rock Island Rapids are about three-fourths of a mile long. There are two channels, divided by a great, bare mass of basalt a half mile long and fifty feet high. The right hand channel skirts the base of the high bench on which



M.J. Lorraine in 1921

M. J. Lorraine, The Columbia Unveiled

I stood; its upper end has only a swift current, but its lower end is filled with numerous protruding rocks and although the breakers were not as tempestuous as some I had come through, the protruding rocks cause such a crooked channel that weaving a way among them was doubtful...

(The entrance to the left-hand channel) is guarded, on the left, by a considerable point on which are several isolated, jagged, upstanding rocks fifty feet in height. It is at its lower end, where it is divided into three branches, that the left-hand channel presents a problem to the navigator. The left branch terminates in a dangerous cascade; the middle one looks runnable, if it can be followed, but as part of its current draws strongly towards the cascade, there is no certainty that an oarsman can overcome its influence and keep to the right of the foaming mass. The branch on the right is the safest of the three.

Lorraine decided to run the left channel's right branch without lining or portaging – and made it through without harm.

#### **Few steamboats survived Rock Island Rapids**

Captains of steamboats that had been plying the lower Columbia River since the 1850s were leery of attempting the Rock Island Rapids. Certainly there would be economic advantages to running the steamers to Wenatchee and into Okanogan County, with their promise of agricultural development, but few wanted to brave the narrow, rocky passageway at Rock Island. Commerce, however, was a great motivator for Tacoma businessman Thomas L. Nixon, who had purchased a large mine in upper Okanogan County.

Needing transportation to haul his ores to the nearest railroad in Ellensburg, Nixon had two steamboats built in Pasco. He hired the intrepid steamboat captain William P. Gray to pilot the little *City of Ellensburg* up



The steamer *Selkirk* was wrecked at the Rock Island Rapids in May 1906. Few steamboats attempted to run the dangerous rapids.

through the Rock Island Rapids to access the upper part of the Columbia River. Gray and his crew used four ropes to anchor the small steamer to rocks as it chugged upstream through the rapids in July 1888. This feat was followed by the *Thomas L. Nixon*, a larger and heavier barge-like boat than the *City of Ellensburg*. Her difficulties in lining through the rapids convinced other steamboat men not to attempt the passage – and those two steamers finished out their days north of the rapids.

In 1893 the Great Northern Railway, a private transcontinental line owned by John J. Hill, finished building tracks from St. Paul, Minn. through Wenatchee. and over Stevens Pass to Seattle. The railroad terminal in Wenatchee now gave farmers northward along the Columbia and Okanogan rivers an economical way to transport their goods to a national market. More steamboats were needed, so Captain Alexander Griggs organized the Columbia & Okanogan Steamboat Company. It built 15 steamers in Wenatchee and conducted a brisk business in transporting goods and passengers through 1915. (See *The Confluence*, Winter 2007-08.)

#### **James Keane's vision for Rock Island**

Pioneer James Keane, a mining engineer, homesteaded a small plot of land about a half mile above the Rock Island Rapids in 1886. He built a large, attractive white house and then returned to California to sell his mines and pick up his wife and children. Two years later he acquired a whopping 11,000 acres at Rock Island through federal homestead, pre-emption and desert acts. Most of it was situated on the flat above the basalt ridge north of the Columbia. He started cultivating the land and brought in a large herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle. He also began breeding horses.

Unfortunately, Keane's livestock were victims of the devastating winter of 1889-90. By Christmas, five feet of snow lay on the ground in Chelan and Douglas counties. A short January thaw was followed by temperature dips to 30 degrees below zero, which created a thick crust on the snow. Animals couldn't move through the snow or dig down to find grass. The Columbia froze over; people ran out of food. Tens of thousands of cattle froze to death or died of starvation. Keane lost 2,000 cattle, virtually his entire herd.

In 1890 James J. Hill was planning construction of his railroad. He originally intended to cross the

Spargo et. al., Pioneer Dreams



James Keane



A train crosses the Columbia River on the bridge at Rock Island in the early 1930s.

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Cascade Mountains through a pass at the west end of Lake Chelan, and thought the Rock Island area would be a good place for division headquarters. Hill persuaded Keane to lay out a town site, called Hammond (just east of the present town of Rock Island), that would be settled by railroad men and farmers. Keane was pleased with the idea. He invested \$16,000 into the project, building a road up Rock Island Creek to Waterville and financing a few small businesses at Hammond, including a flour mill.

But Hill commissioned another survey of the Cascades and decided that Stevens Pass, west of Leavenworth, would be a better route for the Great Northern. He switched the route, crossing the Columbia a mile above Hammond and making Wenatchee and Leavenworth the logical towns for railroad development. After railroad workers finished building the bridge, in 1893, they moved away and Keane's little town – all but the Hammond Flour Mill - sank into obscurity. Hill eventually reimbursed Keane for his losses.

The new town of Rock Island slowly began to develop around the railroad bridge, as James Keane and others invested in buildings at this new site. Keane's mill handled the wheat grown by many Douglas County farmers. He later designed and implemented a large chute that allowed threshed wheat to be poured into a hopper and conveyed downhill to the railroad tracks at Rock Island. The chute, 2,600 linear feet of galvanized piping, was used until 1941 and handled more than 10,000 bushels a year.<sup>3</sup>

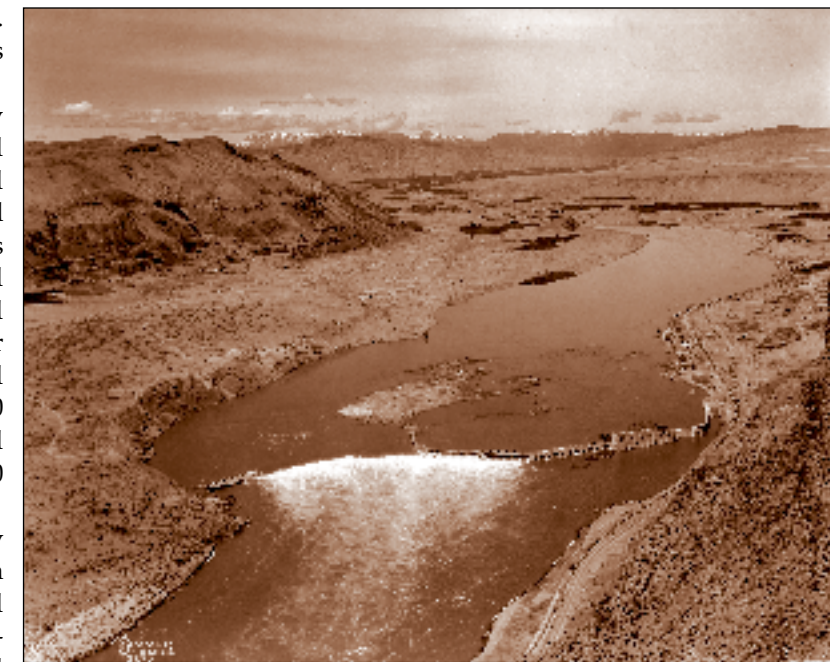
Construction of the Rock Island Dam by Puget Power & Light brought a population boom in 1930. The city was incorporated that year with 421 residents. The 3,800-foot-long dam and powerhouse provided low-cost hydroelectric power for the region. Additional construction 20 years

later expanded capacity to power the Alcoa aluminum plant on the Chelan County side of the river. The hydro project is now operated by Chelan County Public Utility District.

Rock Island's population rose to 861 in 2000 and an estimated 1,052 in 2019. A silica plant (now defunct) provided employment from 1948 to the mid-1990s. Many of the town's residents now work in nearby East Wenatchee or Wenatchee; others are employed at the dam, nearby orchards, the golf course, gravel pit, concrete plant, salvage yard and other small Rock Island businesses.

#### **ENDNOTES**

1. Major W.A. Jones, Annual Report to Chief of Engineers, 1890.
2. "Alfred Downing's Misadventure on the Columbia River in 1880," Northwest Discovery journal, June 1983.)
3. Luke Ellington, "The City of Rock Island," douglaspudd.org.



Rock Island Dam was the first to be built on the Columbia River in the U.S. The water trapped behind it has covered most of the island.

Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center #86-24-12





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## Coming Up at the Wenatchee Valley Museum



- "Get Lit!" Pet Collar Series:** Wednesday, March 4
- First Friday Reception, Opening of Regional High School Art Show:** Friday, March 6
- Wells House First Friday:** Friday, March 6
- Environmental Film, "Albatross":** Tuesday, March 10
- "Get Lit!" Pet Collar Series:** Wednesday, March 11
- Regional High School Art Show Awards:** Saturday, March 14
- "Get Lit!" Pet Collar Series:** Wednesday, March 18
- A Night at the Museum:** Saturday, March 21
- Environmental Film, "Canoeing the Arctic":** Tuesday, March 24
- Spring Break Camps:** Monday, March 30 - Friday, April 3
- First Friday Reception:** Friday, April 3
- Environmental Film, "The Beaver Believers":** Tuesday, April 14
- Super Summer Adventure Camps:** June 22 to Aug. 21 (*see photo*)

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