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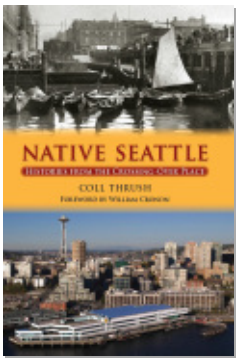
Native Seattle

Thrush, Coll, Cronon, William



Published by University of Washington Press

Thrush, Coll and William Cronon.
Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place.
University of Washington Press, 2009.
Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/10411.

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Access provided at 4 Dec 2019 00:46 GMT from University of Washington @ Seattle

2 / *Terra Miscognita*

In the words of one descendant of the Denny Party, as Seattle's founders are typically called, the story of the city's origin "is an oft-told tale yet is ever new." Indeed. In the century and a half since the landing of Arthur Denny and his compatriots on the beach at Alki Point on 13 November 1851, Seattle's creation story has been reduced, reused, recycled, and reenacted in books, plays, speeches, and art. Often, the telling of the story says more about the moment of the telling than about the event itself; we will encounter many such recountings throughout Seattle's Native histories. The basic story, however, has remained the same. Seattle historian Murray Morgan captured the scene best in his 1951 "history from the bottom up," *Skid Road*. In this perennially popular tale of the politics and personalities of Seattle's first century, Morgan described the arrival of the twenty-four settlers on a rainy beach:

> Three of the four women cried when the brig's boat put them ashore on the salt-smelling beach. Portland had been rude and the ship awful, but this was worse: the only habitation was a log cabin, still roofless, and the only neighbors a host of bowlegged Indians, the men wearing only buckskin breechclouts, the women skirts of cedar bark, the children naked. The sky was low and gray, the air sharp with salt and iodine, the wind cold; but soon the women were too busy to weep.

Morgan's version of the story has it all: the miserable passage on the schooner *Exact*, the dismal weather, the crying women, the unfinished cabin. And most importantly, the story has Indians. Possibly dangerous, certainly alien, their presence makes the story all the more dra-

matic. It is in this moment—in the tense introduction between two peoples—that Seattle's urban history begins. And to no small extent, it is the moment when, according to the standard version of Seattle's storyline, local Indian history begins to end.[1]

Seattle's creation story is not even really a story at all, but rather a snapshot. Certainly, the Denny Party's overland journey from Illinois is part of the back-story, but it is really the singularity of the landing at Alki Point, across Elliott Bay from present-day downtown, that is the mythic point of beginning, in which longer processes are collapsed into a frozen moment in time. In this respect, Seattle's creation story is like many others. In a 1991 essay about evolution and baseball, for example, natural historian Stephen Jay Gould argued that stories about beginnings "come in only two basic modes. An entity either has an explicit point of origin, a specific time and place of creation, or else it evolves and has no definable moment of entry into the world." In his account of the differences between the sport's gradual evolution from a "plethora of previous stick-and-ball games" and the more mythic story of Cooperstown, Gould noted that "we seem to prefer the . . . model of origin by a moment of creation—for then we can have heroes and sacred places." The same is true for American history more broadly: we love our Mayflowers, Lexingtons, and Fort Sumters. They are discrete moments chosen out of the complexity of the past and designated as the place where one thing is said to end and another to begin.[2]

In Seattle, where the heroes are the Denny Party and the sacred place is Alki Point, that snapshot in place and time has literally been turned into a shrine of sorts. At the Museum of History and Industry, the city's official repository of its past, a diorama displays the events of that blustery November day. Comprising wax figures, handmade miniature clothing, shellacked greenery, and a painted beachscape backdrop, the diorama was created in 1953 by local doll maker Lillian Smart to commemorate Seattle's recent centenary and to celebrate the museum's opening. It includes all the stock characters and props of the city's founding myth: a roofless cabin at the forest's edge, tiny handkerchiefs lifted to wax faces, and children's heads turned warily toward Chief Seattle and a few other Indian men. The tableau made manifest the story that Seat-

tle residents had already been telling themselves for decades, and within a few months of the diorama's unveiling, its sponsors—the Alki Women's Improvement Club and the West Seattle Business Association—claimed that "thousands of Seattle residents, tourists, and school children have stood in front of it, admiring its beauty and realism, and paying silent homage to Seattle's founders." For more than two generations of Seattleites, visiting the diorama has been a kind of urban pilgrimage. Still on display at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Smart's powerful visual distillation of the city's creation story is the image that most likely comes to many local residents' minds when they think of Seattle's founding.[3]

Not unlike baseball's creation story or the origin myth of the nation itself, with its providential Pilgrims landing in that single sacred moment at the place they named Plymouth, Seattle's creation story is also one of predestination. For all the drama of crying women, threatening skies, and strange Indians, Seattle's future seems a done deal. Civic booster and local historian Welford Beaton, for example, reiterated the title of his book *The City That Made Itself* by claiming that "Seattle started deliberately." Nearby titles on any local library shelf express the same sense of nascent destiny, of future greatness born in those first moments at Alki. Outdoing Beaton, Mayor George Cotterill's *Climax of a World Quest* reads Seattle's twentieth-century future back onto the voyages of explorers like Vancouver, Cook, and even Magellan. In local mythology, the arrival of "Seattle's Pilgrims" is deliberate, planned, and preordained, sprung like Athena from the collective forehead of Arthur Denny and the other members of his party. As for the indigenous people encountered in the creation moment at Alki Point, their future was also foretold, written in disease and dispossession. The powerful story of the "vanishing red man," as we shall see, both informed the Denny Party's journey to Puget Sound in the first place and has informed the telling of their landing at Alki ever since. It is one of the foundational pillars of Seattle's standard civic narrative, in which one kind of history (Indian) begins to decline the moment another history (urban) starts its ascent.[4]

But beginnings and endings are rarely clear in history, and the events

that we call history were rarely as deliberate or discrete as we imagine them to be from our vantage point in the present. Like most creation stories, whether of a sport or of a nation, Seattle's origin myth obscures more about actual historical events than it reveals. First, it renders invisible a complex local indigenous landscape of stories reaching back to the ice age, of villages made wealthy by river and prairie and tideflat, and of numinous forces beyond human understanding. Second, by compressing the landing of 1851 into a single moment, it ignores earlier processes of empire and ecology that set the stage for city making on Puget Sound. Third, it obscures the ambitions and imaginations of the Denny Party themselves, ascribing to them motivations and knowledge that are more ours than theirs. Finally, it sets urban founders and indigenous people—and, through them, urban and Indian history—in opposition, as seemingly alien to each other as the two groups that met on the beach that November in 1851.

But if we widen our view beyond that one day of that one year on that one beach, Seattle's creation story takes on a very different form, looking more like Gould's blurry account of baseball's actual evolution. Rather than a single moment of creation, in this version of the story urban founding on Puget Sound becomes a complex, contingent process in which indigenous worlds are misapprehended, empires vie for dominance, and future city fathers change their minds and make mistakes. And most importantly, in this other kind of creation story indigenous people and places are at the center of the telling and have everything to do with getting to the place called Seattle. Well before the city's mythic moment of birth, Seattle's urban and Indian histories were already being bound together in a landscape rich with contested meanings and possibilities.

Before the arrival of the *Exact* and the Denny Party, perhaps in the 1830s, a young man named Wahalchoo was hunting sea ducks off a promontory of open grassy spaces among wind-stunted trees, known to him as Prairie Point. He was looking for more than scoters and scaups; Wahalchoo had been fasting and was also in search of spirit power. He found it there near

Prairie Point, if only briefly. While retrieving spent arrows, he spied a vast longhouse deep in the green waters, surrounded by herds of elk and with schools of salmon swimming over its cedar-plank roof. This, Wahalchoo knew, was the home of a power that brought wealth, generosity, and respect to those who carried it. With its help, Wahalchoo could become a great leader. He went home to find his father, who could help him obtain the power, but the older man was away, and when Wahalchoo returned to Prairie Point, the waters were clear but empty. The longhouse beneath the waves had disappeared, and Wahalchoo was left to seek power elsewhere.[5]

Indigenous people like Wahalchoo (who would, some twenty-five years later, make his mark on a treaty under the Christian name Jacob) moved through landscapes that were dense with meaning. The proof is in the names. Prairie Point, which would become Alki Point in 1851, was but one named place on a peninsula bordered on the west and north by deep salt water and on the east by a meandering river and its estuary. The headland that brooded to the east of Prairie Point was Low Point, while to the south along the outer shore, a creek called Capsized came pouring out of the forest near a place called Rids the Cold; south of there were headlands called Tight Bluff and Place of Scorched Bluff. Together, these place-names map the indigenous landscape: open places among the forest, cliffs tightly crowded with brush or blackened by mineral deposits. They are also the closest things we have to photographs of the pre-urban world; by the time landscape photographers arrived in Seattle, most of these places had been utterly transformed.

But photographs, like dioramas, are static, and the world around Prairie Point was not. Thrust out into the currents and storm paths of Puget Sound, the point's sand and stone were built up in one season, then swept away in another; before the seawalls and bulkheads of the modern era, the promontory constantly shifted, sometimes subtly and at other times abruptly. Similarly, the indigenous landscapes of what would come to be known as Puget Sound country were changing long before the arrival of the Denny Party in 1851. Some of these changes were slow, others catastrophic, as Prairie Point snagged overlapping nets of power, knowledge, and ecology over the course of centuries. When

Arthur Denny and the rest came to Alki Point, which they called New York, they intruded upon a world already in the midst of profound changes. New networks of trade, imperial reconnaissance, and, most important of all, epidemic disease each served as preludes to the founding of an American city.

The first written records of the lands and waters around the future Seattle come from 1792, when British explorer George Vancouver and his crew sailed into the inland sea aboard the *Discovery*. Like most European explorers, Vancouver spent little time trying to ascertain indigenous peoples' own knowledge of their world. His journals contain few Native words and say little of the region's indigenous geography; instead, they are filled with names like Whidbey and Rainier. They are examples of what geographer Daniel W. Clayton has called "imperial fashioning," in which indigenous places were reinscribed with European nomenclature and incorporated into the colonial geographies of European nation-states. Even the name for the sea itself—given in honor of Vancouver's subordinate Peter Puget, who had diligently surveyed so much of it—transformed the inland sea, whose indigenous name simply meant "salt water," into a British waterway with an Anglo-Norman pedigree. It transformed the undifferentiated space of *terra incognita* into place, or "space with a history," emptying it of its indigenous history—at least on official maps—and making it part of a North America littered with historical references to European people and places. This was also one of Seattle's first kinds of urban history, in its linking of indigenous places like "Puget Sound" to imperial centers such as London. But underneath this refashioned landscape lay another geography; for virtually every imperial Puget there was an indigenous counterpart, even if Vancouver and his men simply could not, or would not, see it. It was less *terra incognita* than it was *terra miscognita*.[6]

For the *terra* here already included an urban history of its own. When Wahalchoo returned home for help in obtaining wealth and power, he went, not to some hovel in the wilderness, but to a proud village called Place of Clear Water, with a great cedar longhouse that was one of the largest indigenous structures in North America. Not far away, just around Low Point from the place where Wahalchoo had gone diving for power,

was another settlement: Herring's House, made up of several longhouses and a larger house used for winter ceremonies. Neither settlement was just a "village," a term that may connote primitiveness and transience. Instead, these were places where elite families coordinated social alliances, religious observances, and resource distribution. Although not large in terms of population—both Herring's House and Place of Clear Water likely had only several scores of residents each—they and other indigenous winter settlements functioned as towns in relationship to their territories. Natural resources, political power, and spiritual force circulated through these settlements in ways reminiscent of the networks enmeshing larger urban places in other parts of the world—Captain Vancouver's London included.[7]

Each of these winter towns, along with nearby seasonal camps, resource sites, and sacred places, was linked into a broader geographic community through webs of kinship, trade, and diplomacy. Throughout Puget Sound, these larger communities (many of which would become known as tribes through relations with the American federal government in the nineteenth century) were typically organized around watersheds, and there were three such groups in the territories that would someday become Seattle. Herring's House, for example, was part of a larger constellation of communities whose members called themselves the People of the Inside Place, after the location of their main settlements inland from the Sound. Their name for themselves would be anglicized as "Duwamish." A second group, known as the Hachooabsh, or Lake People, and usually described as a band of the Duwamish, lived in towns ringing a vast, deep lake behind the hills fronting Puget Sound. A third group, with connections to the first two as well as to the people of Place of Clear Water (who are now known as the Suquamish), was the Shilshoolabsh, the People of Tucked Away Inside, who took their name from their main settlement on the tidal inlet that the Americans would call Salmon Bay. These three indigenous communities—the Duwamish, the Lakes, and the Shilsholes—each had their own towns, with names like Place of the Fish Spear and Little Canoe Channel, and each town in turn had its own hinterland of prairies and cemeteries, fish camps and hunting grounds. These local geographies were

themselves connected through trade and kinship to communities as far away as the arid interior plateau of the Columbia River and the coast of Vancouver Island, knitting the entire region together in a complicated indigenous weave of towns and territories.[8]

When *Discovery* came into Salt Water in June of 1792, that weave was already fraying. With few exceptions, Puget Sound country seemed "nearly destitute of human beings" to the Englishmen. Vancouver wrote that "animated nature seemed nearly exhausted; and her awful silence was only now and then interrupted by the croaking of a raven, the breathing of a seal, or the scream of an eagle." After several encounters with Native people, one reason for the silence became clear: smallpox. "This deplorable disease," Vancouver wrote, "is not only common, but it is greatly to be apprehended is very fatal among them, as its indelible marks were seen on many." Blind eyes, pockmarked skin, and other ravages familiar to any urban European were clear evidence that the scourge of *Variola* had visited the local people, and indeed, at least one major epidemic had already swept through the region. Likely extrapolating from his own experiences in the great cities of Europe, Vancouver imagined what had been lost as his expedition came upon the remains of Native communities where "since their abdication, or extermination, nothing but the smaller shrubs and plants had yet been able to rear their heads." Vancouver and other Europeans tended to see indigenous North Americans as "people without history," but the evidence of that history, in the form of fallen-in roofs and prairies unburned by their cultivators and reverting to forest, was everywhere.[9]

Dramatic changes like those caused by Comes Out All Over, as smallpox was known in the local language, were nothing new to the indigenous people of "Puget's Sound." Their ancestors had arrived some ten millennia earlier, just as vast glaciers were retreating from the region, and their creation stories describe a chaotic post–ice age world where rivers flowed in both directions, the earth shifted, and brutal cold harassed the people until Dookweebathl, the Changer, brought order to things. It would take millennia for the climate to stabilize and for salmon and cedar, the two most important benefactors of later indigenous life, to colonize the region, while volcanic eruptions, massive earth-

quakes, and catastrophic mudflows routinely punctuated Native history with episodes of devastation. For the hierarchical societies living on the shores of Salt Water, change produced anxiety: the word *dookw*, "to change" or "transform," is the root for a host of concepts including worry, dissatisfaction, anger, infirmity, and ferocity. At the same time, it is also the root of the words for "yesterday" and "tomorrow"—an indication that change was a constant in indigenous life before the arrival of Europeans and that the "people without history" were people with a past.[10]

Few of these changes, however, had consequences as dramatic, widespread, and permanent as the introduction of smallpox and other diseases into the local ecology. The microbial intrusion, followed not long after by that of Vancouver and his crew, presaged—indeed, facilitated—the coming of an even greater change: the settlement of the country by people of European descent. The voyage of the *Discovery* had little direct impact on the people of Salt Water, but in places like London and Boston and Washington, Vancouver's accounts inspired ambitious Britons and Americans to establish a permanent presence in the region, encouraged by accounts of a dwindling indigenous population. The first Americans came in 1841, when the United States Exploring Expedition, led by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, sailed up the Sound. The "Ex. Ex.," as the expedition was known, was among other things tasked with strengthening American claims to lands north of the Columbia River, still held jointly by Britain and the United States. Not surprisingly, the mission included naming. As the crews of Wilkes's sloop of war *Vincennes* and its attendant brig *Porpoise* carefully mapped the bays and inlets, they added a new set of names to Puget Sound's growing imperial geography. That summer, Prairie Point obtained its first English-language name when it was christened Point Roberts after the Ex. Ex.'s physician.[11]

Like Vancouver, Wilkes found that the landscapes of Puget Sound "savoured of civilization." As for the indigenous residents, their apparently small numbers suggested that the "Indians of Puget Sound," as they had been named, were unlikely to stand in the way of white settlement, and even if they did, new waves of disease were "rapidly thinning them off." The real threat for Wilkes and for the Congress that

sent him came not from indigenous people but from the British, who were establishing a year-round presence at Fort Nisqually on the southern Sound. As facilitators of the highly dynamic fur trade, Fort Nisqually's Hudson's Bay Company factors were always looking for new places to build, and for a short time Prairie Point was a candidate for one of these outlying bastions of mercantile capitalism. An 1833 survey by Fort Nisqually physician William Tolmie provided the first written description of the point ("flat and dotted with small pines, and the soil . . . mostly sand") and the first mentions of its surrounding environs and the "Tuomish" Indians, who he noted were "miserably poor and destitute of firearms." But despite the apparent friendliness of the local people—some surely led by Seeathl—it was a bad place for an outpost, with poor soil and no freshwater. With the signing of a treaty between Britain and the United States in 1846, the issue became moot; British influence at Fort Nisqually faded, although the fort's presence continued to have far-reaching consequences. During an outbreak of dysentery and measles in the winter of 1847–48, Native people from all over Puget Sound, including the territories in and around the future Seattle, traded there and took the microbes home with them.[12]

Despite wave after wave of disease—at least five separate epidemics by 1850—indigenous people remained the dominant presence around Salt Water, as Samuel Hancock, one of the first American settlers on Puget Sound, learned when he stopped at Prairie Point in 1849. "A great many Indians came from their houses to the beach here, to ascertain where we came from," he wrote, adding that they seemed "well disposed" toward him. Hancock traded with the people, exchanging tobacco and looking glasses for clams and salmon. Although buffeted by strengthening storms of change during the early nineteenth century, symbolized by new place-names, new diseases, and new things to buy and sell, Prairie Point was still very much an indigenous place when Hancock visited. The place where the *Exact* would drop anchor two years later was still more Salt Water than Puget Sound. Nothing illustrates this more than the word Hancock used to describe the growing number of white settlers in the region: he called them Whulgers, using the indigenous

word for Salt Water to describe those who thought they were coming to Puget's Sound.[13]

WHILE ARTHUR DENNY IS UNANIMOUSLY credited with being the father of Seattle, that title could just as easily go to a forgotten figure named George Brock. A resident of the Willamette Valley at the western end of the Oregon Trail, Brock appears only briefly, not unlike one of Shakespeare's plot-driving apparitions, in the story of the Denny Party's journey west. When the Denny and Boren families arrived at the confluence of the Burnt and Snake rivers, Brock was there, and in the shadow of bunchgrass-covered hills blackened by summer wildfires, he warned Arthur Denny that the best Willamette land was already spoken for but that another region ideal for settlement lay just to the north. In his memoirs, Denny recalled that his attention "was thus turned to the Sound, and I formed the purpose of looking in that direction." Brock's bit of rumor and speculation—he apparently had never seen Puget Sound—effectively and suddenly diverted the two Illinois families. As they labored up the difficult Burnt River Canyon toward the Columbia, they were now on their way not to the oak-dotted prairies of the Willamette but to the timber-shadowed shores of Salt Water.[14]

But if Arthur Denny seems to have been easily swayed by the shadowy Brock, his group did not rush headlong into unknown territory. Instead, their tentative, incremental steps toward settlement reflect the cautious, mindful demeanor for which Seattle's founders were renowned. In September 1851, as family members lay bedridden with fever in Portland hotel rooms, Arthur Denny interviewed Thomas Chambers, a Puget Sound settler in town on business. Chambers provided Denny with his first firsthand account of the territory to the north, including the indigenous inhabitants, who he said were "friendly and they were glad to have the Bostons—as they called the Americans—to come." Chambers's testimony cemented Denny's intentions to lead the group to the Sound. Meanwhile, Arthur's brother David and new compatriot John Low headed to Olympia, a tiny settlement built around tideflats

at the head of the Sound. There, they met two men who would make the landing at Alki Point possible: Leander Terry, who was also looking to settle on the inland sea, and Captain Robert Fay, a retired whaling captain who wanted to hire local Indians to catch salmon, preserve it at Point Roberts, and load it onto ships bound for San Francisco. Fay offered Denny, Low, and Terry seats in his open scow, and on 25 September, the four men came ashore just inside Low Point, around the headland from where Wahalchoo had dived for power years before. There, they found scores of Indians waiting. Among them was the headman who had agreed to procure indigenous workers for the venture: Seeathl.[15]

His business arrangements complete, Fay left Terry, Denny, and Low to explore the area. Land reconnaissance was largely out of the question thanks to a bewildering landscape of tideflats, salt marshes, and dense forest, so after hiring two indigenous men from the camp to serve as guides, the three Americans headed up the Duwamish River by canoe. Had Low, Terry, or Denny been able to converse with their guides in Whulshootseed instead of a crude combination of hand signs and Chinook Jargon, they might have learned the ancient and practical names of landmarks on the river: shortcuts, trailheads, backwaters. They might have learned the names for the river's abundance: salmon-drying frames, duck nets stretched between tall poles, fine carving wood. Their guides might not, however, have told them of the numinous places along the river and its delta: a boulder carved with shamanic power spirits, the home of a malevolent spirit that took the form of a fingerless hand rising from the water, the ruins of an ancient fish weir dating to the time of the Changer. More than just a resource territory, the valley of the Duwamish was also a place rich with stories and powers, but the guides apparently shared none of this knowledge with their charges, and even if they had, they would likely have been misunderstood. This was not only because of the vast differences between English and Whulshootseed, but because the settlers and their guides also spoke two mutually unintelligible languages of landscape. Where indigenous people saw spirits and nets and carving wood—the wealth of the land as it was and had been—Denny and the others saw the wealth of the land as it could and would be,

expressed in words like "arable," "improvement," and "export." And so after their reconnaissance was complete, David Denny penned a note to his brother, decreeing that the valley of the Duwamish had "room enough for one thousand travelers." The decision to found a city had been made, and Low caught Captain Fay's next scow back to Olympia, on his way to Portland with the news. If any moment must be named as the birth of Seattle, then surely this was it.[16]

In fact, though, some of those thousand travelers had already arrived, and they and their indigenous neighbors helped prepare the way for the rest of the Denny Party. A month before Denny, Low, and Terry arrived at Seeathl's fishing camp, Luther Collins, Henry Van Asselt, and Jacob and Samuel Mapel had joined some seven hundred Indians camped at Low Point before setting out to stake claims in the valley of the Duwamish. While Denny and Terry set to building a cabin, with Native workers paid in bread for their assistance, local Indians and whites made their presence known. On one day, for example, Collins and a Native man known as Nisqually John drove a team of oxen past on the beach; on another, "Old Duwampsh Curley" and several other Indians came to visit, offering Denny and Terry a meal of roast duck. Not long after, Terry hitched a ride to Olympia in Collins's scow to gather the rest of the party in Portland. David Denny was left "alone" to continue work on a cabin for his family and their cohort.[17]

When the thousand-travelers note arrived in Portland, Arthur Denny and the rest of his party, healed from their bouts of ague and joined by the Bell family from Indiana, booked passage on a two-masted schooner called the *Exact*. On 5 November, they left Portland, crossed the Columbia's murderous bar, and headed north along the coast. Along with the families bound for David Denny's cabin at Alki, the *Exact* carried other settlers hoping to establish homes on Puget Sound and miners, many straight from the California goldfields, on their way to the Queen Charlotte Islands far to the north. More than a week later, on 13 November, the twenty-four "Pilgrims" made landfall at Prairie Point and were greeted by a very grateful David Denny, who was suffering mightily from a fresh axe wound on his foot. Then came the famed moment of creation: the crying, the rain, the anxious meeting with Seeathl and his people.[18]

The date may be the same, but the historical circumstances of this urban founding bear few similarities to the singular, deliberate, and preordained landing described in Seattle's traditional creation story. Instead, the story of the Denny Party's arrival at Alki Point is one of rumors and abrupt changes in plans; of illness and accidents; of Native towns and other settlers who got there first. Most importantly, the story has active Indian players: the labor contractor Seeathl, the guides who took the first members of the Denny Party up the river, even Nisqually John and Old Duwampsh Curley. Their presence and agency set the story, not in an emptied-out wilderness, but in a still densely populated indigenous world. The process of getting to Alki—of founding an American city on Salt Water—had depended in no small part upon indigenous people and places. The process of getting along *at* Alki would as well. This would prove to be the greatest mistake made in apprehending the topography of *terra miscognita*: the idea that founding a city could take place without the presence—indeed, the tolerance—of indigenous people.

When the Denny Party landed at the point, they called it neither Prairie Point nor Seattle. Instead, the tiny American outpost was christened New York. Over time, it would come to be known as New York–Alki, a moniker meaning "New York by-and-by" or "New York eventually" in the local lingua franca of Chinook Jargon. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the metropolis at the mouth of the Hudson River was the *ne plus ultra* of American aspiration, the model to which new cities on the nation's urban frontier aspired. It was the commercial capital of the nation and reached out with steamers, railways, newspapers, and retail houses into the rapidly expanding antebellum nation. More than simply the economic center of the country, though, New York was also its cultural hearth. While some critics had begun to describe New York as a "wicked city," it was more commonly lauded as the driver of American progress, its success the result of a refined, cultured urban environment that stimulated the nation's intellectual and social development. The founders might have chosen a different name for their

hopeful settlement just three or four decades later, after waves of immigration, exposés of urban violence, and new attitudes about the perils of modern urban life had changed the meaning of New York. But to a tiny clutch of families in a half-finished cabin on a Puget Sound beach in 1851, Gotham must have seemed the apotheosis of urban ambition.[19]

Leander Terry and his younger brother Charles were from upstate New York and had likely had firsthand experiences with America's premier city. But for the majority of Seattle's founders, the frontier towns of Illinois shaped their vision for Puget Sound's New York in ways a distant Gotham never could have. In 1850, when the Denny and Boren families left home for Oregon, Knox County, Illinois, was in the midst of an urban revolution. Permanent white settlement in the area had begun only in the 1830s, but by midcentury the forests of sugar maple, basswood, and wild cherry were giving way as families headed by men with stolid biblical names like Israel and Azel and Hiram established farms and feedlots. Life on the farms revolved around the young town of Abingdon, whose limestone buildings and prim grid of streets sat on high rolling ground above a tributary of the Spoon River. Town life in Abingdon, a satellite of St. Louis, was orderly: liquor violations, morals charges, and murders were virtually unheard of, and judges handed out one hundred percent conviction rates for such disorderly acts as "wantonly" burning prairies. (We might ask if it was the fire itself or the wantonness with which it was lit that was so criminal.) "Court days" were a primary form of entertainment in this straitlaced town, and the Cherry Grove Seminary, founded by Cumberland Presbyterians, was the dominant cultural institution. It was from this buttoned-up Protestant world that Seattle's "Pilgrims" came.[20]

But if Knox County seems to us almost stereotypically midwestern, it was in fact part of the "Old Northwest," and its orderliness and peace stood on foundations of chaos and war. In 1850, Abingdon was on St. Louis's urban periphery, but only twenty years earlier, it had been at the edge of the *pays d'en haut*, a vast region crisscrossed by trade networks. These networks, along which furs and other commodities made their way, reached between the centers of European and Asian society and

indigenous communities like those of the Coiracoentanon, who lived along the banks of what they called the Amaquonsippi and what Americans would call the Spoon. By the eighteenth century, what had been a "middle ground" of accommodation had become what historian Richard White has called a "world of fragments," as European empires and indigenous nations vied for power. The violence of the period led many Coiracoentanon to leave the valley of the Amaquonsippi for refugee settlements to the south. The last local conflict, known as the Black Hawk War, saw the end of indigenous tenure in what could then become Knox County. With treaties only a quarter century old nullified by war, the surviving Coirancoentanon had by 1832 "disappeared forever from this locality" according to one early writer, with "none of the whites knowing when or where they went."[21]

The result was that the Dennys and other settlers of 1840s Knox County had very little contact with Native people, although evidence of the indigenous past lay all around them. Settlers regularly came across earthen mounds, flint arrowheads, and the ruins of wigwams as they plowed and felled. Indians also remained part of local memory in accounts of war. Social power in Knox County typically sprang out of the Black Hawk War, whose veterans and organizers translated their military leadership into civilian political careers, and so the foundations of Abingdon's new urban order actually lay in chaos and violence. The Lows, from nearby Bloomington, Illinois, and the Bells, from more distant Edwardsville, Indiana, had all likely had similar experiences in American towns built in the former *pays d'en haut*; William Bell's father, for example, had been a ranger during the wars of American expansion. The Denny Party brought with them both visions of urban order (and perhaps resigned expectations of war with a "doomed" race) and very little firsthand experience with Native people.[22]

On Puget Sound, those visions and expectations collided with the realities of settling in Puget Sound. They collided, first, with the fact that Indian people were not about to disappear with the arrival of the urban frontier and, second, with the dawning reality that, while war was always a possibility, for the most part indigenous people were planning to participate in the creation of that frontier. Founding a city in

the Pacific Northwest meant living alongside Native men, women, and children. Almost immediately after the *Exact* put the settlers ashore, for example, Indians came to live with them. Arthur Denny recalled the scene:

> Soon after we landed and began clearing the ground for our buildings they commenced to congregate, and continued coming until we had over a thousand in our midst, and most of them remained all winter. Some of them built their houses very near to ours, even on the ground we had cleared, and although they seemed very friendly toward us we did not feel safe in objecting to their building thus near to us for fear of offending them, and it was very noticeable that they regarded their proximity to us as a protection against other Indians.

Denny's account paints a radically different picture from Lillian Smart's creation story diorama. Instead of twenty-four settlers on an empty beach, with perhaps a handful of Indians on hand, we see those same twenty-four whites as pale faces among hundreds of darker ones. Denny's account also speaks to the reasons Native people came to New York–Alki—out of curiosity, to trade, or in fear of increasingly common raids from northern Indians. Regardless of the reasons, by a few weeks after the founding, New York–Alki was no longer just an American settlement. It was also an indigenous one.[23]

Arthur Denny and the others should not have been surprised. Although they had had only one direct interaction with Indians on the overland journey, a furtive skirmish with some Shoshoni men on the Snake River, other experiences farther west made it clear that city founding in the Northwest would include Indians. The early growth of Portland, for example ("quite a thriving town . . . even at that early period" in Arthur Denny's own words), was fueled largely by its new sawmill. When the mill opened in 1850 on the bank of the Willamette, local indigenous people established a new settlement adjacent to it within weeks, where they made up a significant portion of Portland's population and the mill's labor force. Similarly, the "embryo city" of Olympia at the head of Puget Sound consisted of "about a dozen one-story frame cabins,

covered with split cedar siding, well-ventilated and healthy, and perhaps twice as many Indian huts near the custom house" when David Denny and John Low met Lee Terry there.[24]

Within a few weeks of its founding, New York–Alki looked much the same. It was a biracial place. To use the language of the day, it was a place of Bostons and Siwashes, the former a reference to the city of origin of many of the first Americans on Puget Sound and the latter a derogatory term derived from the French word *sauvage*. With little experience other than tales of war, the settlers were forced to amend their ambitions in light of their new, and seemingly precarious, circumstances. Likewise, indigenous people who had left for Prairie Point but who had arrived in New York–Alki had to come to terms with the new rules of engagement represented by white settlement. Facing each other across linguistic and cultural chasms, the indigenous and white residents of Prairie Point/New York–Alki mystified each other. Native practices were often inexplicable to the settlers: despite complaints from one of the settler wives, for example, one elderly indigenous woman insisted on throwing her used tea leaves at table legs whenever she visited the cabins. Meanwhile, settler children caught herding garter snakes into a brush fire were sharply admonished by Indian neighbors, who said it would bring a flood. (Soon after, according to a Denny descendant's own account, there was in fact a downpour.) Indigenous men and women found the newcomers, and in particular the Boston women, equally strange. They crowded into the crude cabins to watch the women cook and clean; several memoirs tell of Mary Denny and Lydia Low enlisting harsh words or a hot skillet to maintain some semblance of privacy. During those first few weeks, Americans and Indians each made attempts to reach across divides of language, belief, and etiquette.[25]

Sometimes, it worked. When some laundry disappeared soon after the setters arrived, Arthur Denny spoke to Seeathl, who admonished the other Indians present and oversaw the swift return of the missing garments. On another occasion, one of the white women fed a sick indigenous child, whose father, a "hard case" dubbed Old Alki John, gave her a tin pail in return. Although she refused his gift—more likely an actual payment, and her refusal thus a minor affront to Native ideals

of reciprocity—the two families had nonetheless established a bond. Also during that first winter, a woman named Ooyathl, one of the wives of Seeathl, died suddenly. David and Arthur Denny built a cedar coffin for her body, which was "wrapped . . . in so many blankets that it would not go in." Helping give Ooyathl the high-class burial her status demanded helps explain the close connections between the Denny families and the families of Seeathl in decades to come, with David Denny a particular favorite of many Native people in and around Seattle.[26]

But attempts at accommodation did not mean there were no tensions. The male members of Denny Party in particular saw themselves as the intellectual and moral leaders of New York–Alki, no matter the number of their indigenous neighbors. During that first winter, they made it clear that a new political order, with them at the top, was emerging at Prairie Point. When a "very white" Indian woman named Seeayay came to the settlement to escape an abusive husband on the Puyallup River to the south, David Denny advocated on her behalf. She later married the son of Old Alki John (just plain Alki John), and as a result, David Denny became known as the "Law-Man" among local indigenous communities. Meanwhile, when an altercation between Indians visiting from the Green River and the Cascade foothills threatened to turn violent, Arthur Denny stepped in and kept them apart until tempers died down. (While the indigenous disputants likely saw him as an impartial outside moderator, in keeping with local legal tradition, Denny surely interpreted their acquiescence as a sign that the Indians sought order—in particular, *his* order.) Other performances of white authority were less subtle. When the *Vincennes*, the same ship that had been part of Wilkes's expedition, arrived at New York–Alki during that first winter, it repeatedly fired cannon that had once been used in a massacre in the South Pacific. The booming reports made "a strong and respectful impression upon the hundreds of Indians . . . while to the settlers, noticing the effect upon the Indians, it was music of a delightful character." During the same months that an American minority learned to live among an indigenous majority, that minority made it clear who planned to be in charge in the years ahead.[27]

At the same time, indigenous people exerted their own influences

over the urban beginnings of New York–Alki. When the brig *Leonesa* arrived, exchanging staples like flour and sugar for wooden piles to help build San Francisco, it was Native men who cut most of the trees and floated the lumber out to the ship. Indians also brought bushel after bushel of potatoes to the settlement as supplies ran low during the winter, gathering them from gardens in their own towns. And just as the name New York was followed by a Chinook Jargon suffix, the first commercial venture in the settlement, set up by John Low and Charles Terry in November, had a name drawn from the hybrid trade language. The New York Markook House (*markook* or *makook* meaning "trade") kept "constantly on hand and for sale at the lowest prices all kinds of merchandise usually required in a new country." Indeed, New York–Alki was a new country, for Native and settler alike.[28]

Despite the symbolism of events like Ooyathl's burial and the firing of the ship's cannon, both intended to make lasting (if conflicting) impressions upon local Indians, the founding of New York–Alki does not register prominently in the oral tradition of local Native peoples. In fact, it does not register at all. Among the many indigenous accounts of nineteenth-century history in central Puget Sound, there are virtually no stories about the Denny Party and the little settlement on the point. Clearly, what is so important to Seattle's civic place-story is much less so in Indian country. Perhaps the landing at Alki was just one more arrival of settlers during a period when similar foundings were taking place on the shores of Salt Water; perhaps it is overshadowed by other events of the 1850s: the treaties and the resulting conflict that settlers would name an "Indian War." And of course, not all stories survive. Nor do their keepers.

But perhaps the most obvious reason that the Alki landing is not part of local indigenous oral tradition is because the settlement of New York–Alki was a temporary arrangement. And so in the late winter of 1852, Arthur Denny, Carson Boren, and William Bell set out to circumnavigate Elliott Bay in search of a permanent location for their homesteads. Since selling piles and timbers to passing ships was "the only dependence for support in the beginning" as far as Denny could see,

"it was important to look well to the facilities for the business." The new site had to meet four requirements: a deep harbor, a supply of freshwater, fine stands of timber close to the shore, and feed for stock. As the three men explored the shores of Elliott Bay, they circulated through another arc of the landscape, but the indigenous places around Elliott Bay were largely invisible—save one. One Denny descendant described their arrival at the spot, using modern landmarks to orient her readers:

> In the afternoon as they paddled south, the explorers discovered that the high bluff gradually dropped from a height of forty feet to the level of a little tide stream with meadow grass on its banks, which we know as Yesler Way. North of this was a knoll at the foot of Cherry Street. South of the stream was a low wooded section, and half hidden therein were the ruins of an Indian hut. The distinct shore line ended rather abruptly and merged into tide flats at what is now the foot of King Street, making a point at low tide and an island at high tide.

The three men decided that this place, known as Little Crossing-Over Place to Seeathl and his people because of a trail leading into the backcountry, was to be their new home.[29]

Soon, it would become Seattle. On 23 May 1853, plats for the town of Seattle were officially filed. By then, the settlement had grown into a small hamlet, including figures like Henry Yesler and David "Doc" Maynard who would become key players in Seattle's urban drama. Although the Whulshootseed name for the site was now familiar to many of the settlers, the "awkward and meaningless" word meaning Little Crossing-Over Place was never considered as a name for the town, while Duwamps and Duwamish River, two other options used briefly during 1852, were considered ugly and unflattering.[30] Instead, the community leaders chose to name their town after Seeathl, who had played such a vital role in life at New York–Alki. Historians have debated Seeathl's reaction to this; some say that he was indifferent, others that he was horrified by the decision and even went to Olympia to protest it, and still more suggest that he may have given the name willingly as he approached

the end of his life. Regardless of what he thought, the naming of Seattle is typically portrayed in civic historiography as a critical turning point: a handing over from the indigenous to the urban.[31]

Indeed, well before the day when Bell, Boren, and Denny decided that Little Crossing-Over Place would be their new home, the indigenous world of the Duwamish, Lakes, and Shilsholes had been irrevocably transformed. The ruined longhouse at Little Crossing-Over Place, overgrown with wild roses (and, according to oral tradition, only one of several that had once stood there), spoke to the abandonment of towns in the wake of epidemics and slave raids. In Whulshootseed, similar words described both houses and human bodies: house posts were limbs, roof beams were spines, walls were skin. Just as sweeping a house and healing a body could be expressed with the same verb, related words spoke of illness and the falling down of a home, and so the ruins were testaments to loss. Meanwhile, on a nearby bluff above Elliott Bay at what is now Spring Street, a cemetery adorned with tin and trade beads spoke of the epidemics and the traders who had brought them. Read like a text, the landscape seemed to tell of the passing of Indians from Puget Sound, and so the naming of Seattle seems the end of an era.[32]

But, of course, the story is much more complicated than that. When the plat for Seattle was filed in May 1853, it showed a grid of straight lines not unlike the layout of Abingdon or one of the other towns from which the Bostons had come. On the ground, however, the landscape would not be easily transformed into a model of Cartesian harmony. Arthur Denny could attest to that. "The front of our territory was so rough and broken as to render it almost uninhabitable at that early time," he recalled. "I dug a well forty feet deep in the bottom of the gulch and only got quick sand with a very limited amount of water. Direct communication with the bay, by which we received all our supplies at that time, was next to impossible, owing to the height of the bluff." *Terra miscognita*, in the form of gullies and springs, sand and slopes, would exert its own agency over Seattle's growth, forcing urban visions to accommodate local realities.[33]

So would the people of Little Crossing-Over Place and Herring's House and Clear Water and all the other Native towns. Just as Vancouver's Puget

Sound had not erased Salt Water, just as Wilkes's Point Roberts and the Denny Party's New York–Alki had only partially obscured Prairie Point, Seattle would not entirely replace Little Crossing-Over Place. In naming settlements like Seattle, Europeans and Americans sought to claim them and turn the abstract spaces of wilderness into places—into Home. But such efforts were never completely successful. Instead, the day-to-day realities of settlers and Natives meant that the newcomers would have to contend with the people and places they sought to replace. Rather than being emptied of their meanings, places in and around the young town would collect new meanings as settlers accreted their own experiences onto sites with existing indigenous histories. For Seattle, that meant that the coming years would be a time of gathering—of new stories about place, about race, and about the boundaries between cooperation and conflict. Seattle's urban Indian history was just beginning.