

WAS THERE A PRINTING PRESS IN WASHINGTON IN 1844?

On March 19, 1844, a Catholic missionary at Cowlitz, in what is now the State of Washington, wrote a letter to the secretary of the diocese of Quebec, and in that letter made reference to what may possibly turn out to have been the earliest printing equipment ever brought to Washington. The missionary was J.-B. Z. Bolduc, his letter (preserved in the archives of the archdiocese of Quebec) was addressed to Rev. C. F. Cazeau, the passage referring to the press is translated as follows from the French of the original:

"I am on the eve of receiving the goods and the printing equipment of which you informed me in your last letter. If there is type enough, I shall try to print a little dictionary of the Chinook jargon on which I am working at this moment, and I shall send you some copies of it. I do not ask for any goods this year, for I still do not know to how much will amount the goods which I expect shortly."

Jean-Baptiste Zacarie Bolduc and Antoine Langlois, two French Canadian Catholic missionaries, set out from Canada late in 1841 to join two priests, Francis Norbert Blanchet and Modest Demers, who had gone into the far west in 1837. Bolduc and Langlois arrived at Willamette in September, 1842, and Bolduc soon afterwards went to Cowlitz for the winter. He was still there in the spring and summer of 1844. The mission establishment to which the name of Cowlitz was given was described by a contemporary writer¹ as forty-five miles upstream from the mouth of the Cowlitz River. This would place it somewhere in the neighborhood of the village of Cowlitz in Lewis County, but I lack information as yet as to the exact location of the mission.

It is clear enough that Bolduc was expecting the arrival of some printing equipment in the spring of 1844 and that he had in mind the printing of a little dictionary of the Chinook jargon "if there is type enough." That is the full extent of our information, for the present at least, about this press. Of Bolduc we know that a little volume entitled *Lettre et Journal de Mr. J.-B. Z. Bolduc, missionnaire de la Columbie* was printed at Quebec by the senior Frechette in 1843.² But of his dictionary of the Chinook

¹ P. J. de Smet, *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-6*. (New York: Edward Dunigan, 1847), p. 19. De Smet was in the lower Columbia River region in the summer of 1844.

² James Constantine Pilling, *Bibliography of the Chinookan Languages* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1893), p. 8.

jargon, or of any printing whatever on his press at Cowlitz (if, indeed, he ever received it), there is no record known to me.

It is worth noting, in this connection, that Rev. P. J. de Smet, who visited the missions on the Columbia River in the summer of 1844, and in 1847 published a book about these missions and their work, mentions Bolduc several times but says nothing about his having a press. It seems hardly possible that this writer would have omitted mention of so unusual a phenomenon as a printing press in operation among the Indians of that almost inaccessible region at the time of his visit.

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