

Scholarly history shares real-world lessons

“In Defense of Wyam: Native-White Alliances & the Struggle for Celilo Village” is written by a university professor and published by an academic press. It is wrapped in an unassuming gray cover. And if, despite that lackluster first impression, a reader does crack the book open, the first thing he or she will confront is a rather dry “Note on Terminology and Sources.”

In short, there is no attempt to sell this to the general public.

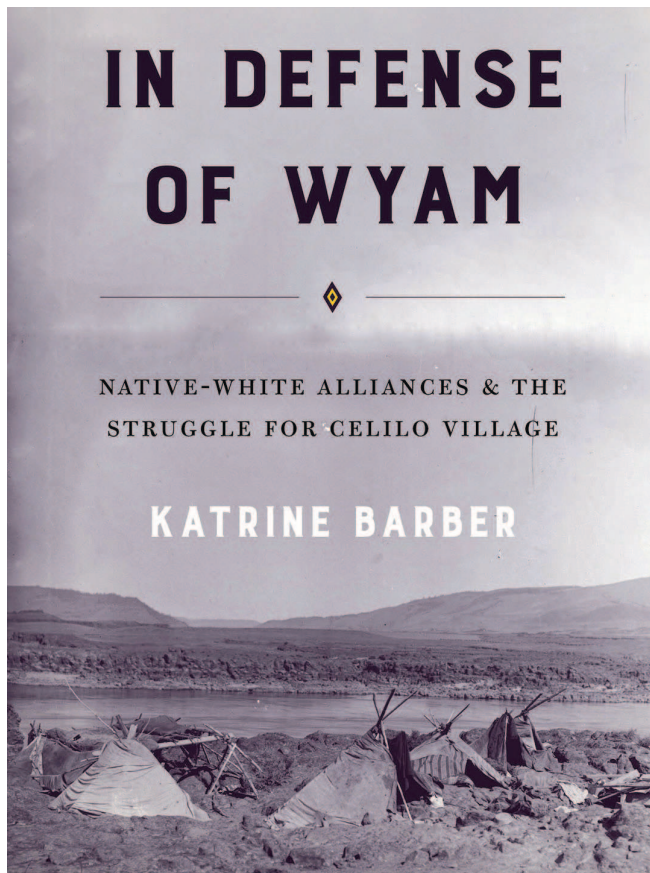
And yet, this book — through its patient scholarship and quietly delivered but perceptively wrought observations — presents some truly eye-opening perspectives on cultural practices and historical events that continue to have an impact on our society and the landscape we live in today.

Author Katrine Barber is a history professor at Portland State University. Her previous book, “The Death of Celilo Falls,” chronicled the impacts that the mid-20th century construction of The Dalles Dam had on both Native American and predominantly white communities that lined that previously dynamic stretch of the Columbia River known as Celilo Falls.

More than a decade later her new book, “In Defense of Wyam,” follows up with a more particular focus on two of the key players who were involved in the fight to preserve the homes of Celilo Village, an ancient fishing village along the river that had the distinction of being Oregon’s oldest continuously inhabited site.

The advocates behind this effort were two women.

Flora Thompson was the wife of elderly Wyam Chief



In Defense of Wyam

Katrine Barber

UW Press — 248 pp

\$24.95

might not have been successful at stopping the building of the dam, Barber writes, but it did create an important mid-20th century legacy of cross-cultural social and intellectual networks.

The author acknowledges that sometimes “[n]ative peoples and their white allies spoke past one another on issues of place, sovereignty, and entitlement” and that “these networks too often were built on irreconcilable notions of the region,” but it is worth noting that together they gave voice to concerns about federal policies concerning assimilation and displacement of Native tribes, and likewise to the environmental consequences and cultural costs of federal infrastructure projects that drastically revised the landscape

Tommy Thompson, who wasn’t enrolled with area reservations, and so wasn’t covered by the agreements the tribal governments negotiated with the U.S. government concerning the damming of that portion of the river. Flora, much younger than her husband, was his tireless spokesperson, advocating on behalf of saving Celilo Village, the longstanding home of the Chief and his people.

Martha McKeown was the descendant of a prominent white pioneer family. She was a writer and an active member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and other women’s groups. McKeown used those connections and pushed her organizations to move beyond more conventional

women’s clubs activities and to advocate for the preservation of Celilo Village.

The collaboration that these two women engaged in

and its ecology.

Thompson and McKeown may have lost some important fights, but this book asserts it is worth knowing that environmental interests, women’s political ambitions, and Native sovereignty historically intersected in com-

mon cause.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com

Crossword Answers

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