Fur Trade Daughters of the Oregon Country:
Students of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, 1850

Shawna Lea Gandy, Portland State University

Sponsor
Portland State University, Department of History

Advisor
Katrine Barber

Date of Award
2004

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
Master of Arts (M.A.) in History

Department
History

Physical Description
1 online resource (v, 221 pages)

Subjects
Catholic Church -- Oregon Territory -- History, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur -- Oregon -- History, Women -- Education -- Oregon Territory, Métis women -- Oregon Territory

DOI
10.15760/etd.2715

Abstract
Ethnicity, religion, class, and gender are important elements in determining the cultural texture of society. This study examines these components at an important junction in the history of the Pacific Northwest through the lives of students enrolled in two girls' schools established by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDN) in the Willamette Valley in the 1840s. These girls, predominantly métis daughters of fur-trade settlers and their Indian wives, along with their Irish and Anglo-American classmates, represent the socioeconomic and cultural transformation of the region as the mixing that gave rise to the unique intermediary culture referred to as "fur-trade society" succumbed to American political and social domination. The primary interest of this study is the process of acculturation facilitated by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the effect of this acculturation on the métis students.

By using a sample of students drawn from the 1850 United States Federal Census of the Oregon Territory, documents relating to the fur trade, Catholic Missions, and early settlement, and standard genealogical and biographical sources, this study compares the two SNDN schools through an analysis of their academic and cultural purposes and ethnic lineage, socioeconomic class, and religious affiliation of other students. Furthermore, as a test of the success of their religious training and acculturation, this study examines the socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics of marriage partners and the students' religious affiliation as adults, and looks for evidence of métis ethnic identity.

The resulting analysis uncovers a two-tier system of education that mirrored the bipartite social structure of fur trade: the SNDN tailored the educational offerings at the two schools to serve the different needs of their discrete populations of settlers. Subsequent to their schooling, servant class métis girls most often retained paternal religious and
ethnic ties, while officer class daughters show less attachments to their Catholic religious roots and chose more ethnically diverse spouses. Finally, the exogamous marital patterns of both groups discount the presence of strong métis ethnic identity.

Description
If you are the rightful copyright holder of this dissertation or thesis and wish to have it removed from the Open Access Collection, please submit a request to pdxscholar@pdx.edu and include clear identification of the work, preferably with URL

Persistent Identifier
http://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/16954

Recommended Citation
https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/2717
10.15760/etd.2715