

Winter Village of the Spokanes

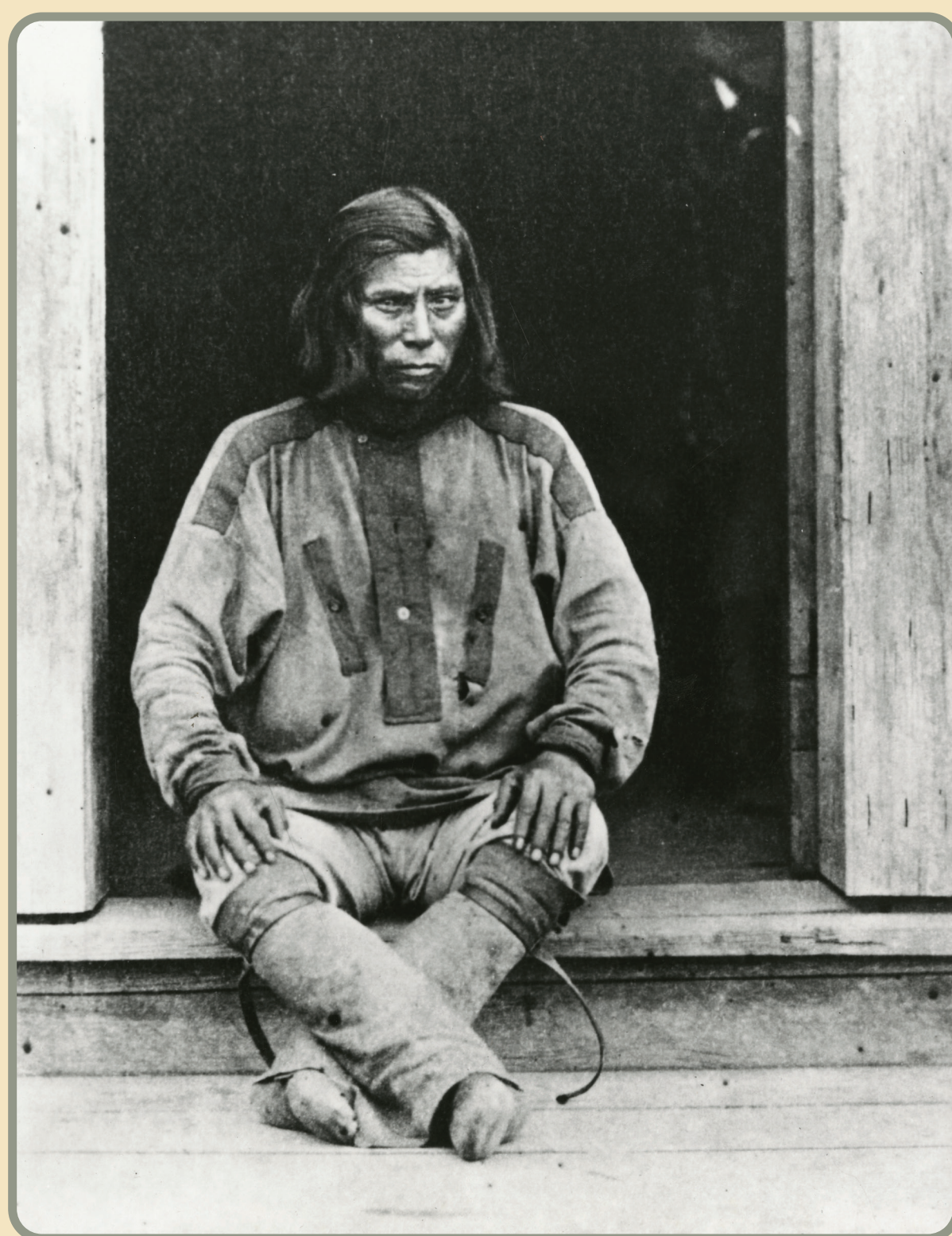
Research: Millwood History Enthusiasts.

For thousands of years, the Spokanes were a river people. They lived a semi-nomadic way of life hunting, fishing, and gathering all creator had made available to them. The Spokanes lived near the banks of the Spokane and Columbia rivers and their tributaries. Sixty percent of their diet came from these waterways in the form of salmon, steelhead, eel and shellfish.¹ Family groups traveled with the seasons. The men hunted game and women gathered roots, berries, nuts and seeds. They tanned animal hides and crafted various plant materials into mats, bags and baskets. In winter, the family groups came together into established winter villages.

¹ <https://spokanetribe.com/history/> (2021)

A Good Location

The river through present-day Millwood provided abundant salmon and other fish for eating and drying. The swift river water interacted with the aquifer beneath so seldom froze. The low, flat area now occupied by Inland Empire Paper Co. was close to the river, didn't flood and was sheltered from the prevailing winds. A low-water ford lay about a mile upstream. The fertile valley soil for miles around supported abundant bunch grass which nourished horses through all seasons.



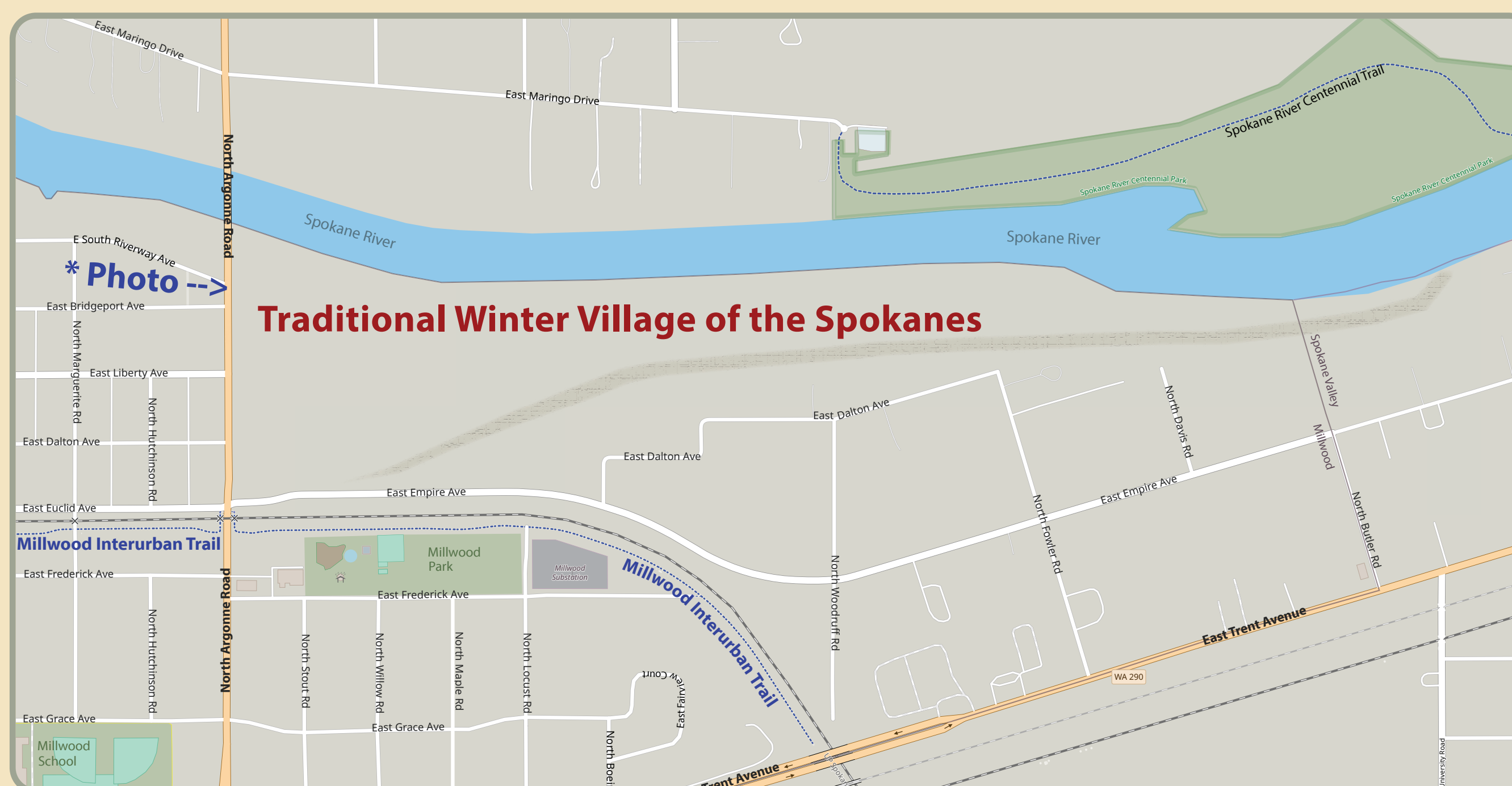
Spokane Garry, Fort Colville 1859*

In a memoir, John V. Campbell mentions a camp of Spokanes 2 or 3 miles downstream from Plante's in the winter of 1853 - 1854. He says that a lot of the tribe was wintering there including two chiefs, Spokane Garry and Big Star.

* Library of Congress Control Number: 2003668227
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Busy Settlement

An 1850's visitor to the area later described a vibrant settlement made up of numerous lodges and Indian encampments on both sides of the river. It stretched from where the paper mill now stands almost to today's Centennial Trail Denny Ashlock Bridge. The main village was on the flat east of the current paper mill buildings. At this place the women were "drying fish and meat, tanning hides, etc.," while the men were "fishing, gambling and racing horses." In the early 1880's, white settlers found remnants of sweat houses and drying racks. (C.W. Lees as told to Seth Woodard.)



Sweat house frame

Morigeau, Ellis, 1879-1944, "Indians -- Sweatbaths (#03)," Spokane Public Library, accessed August 21, 2023, <https://lange.spokanepubliclibrary.org/items/show/866>.



* This depiction (based on a 1910 photo) shows the site of the Spokanes' traditional winter village. The camera is facing east toward the main part of the village. The river is out of sight on the left.

"Spokane Valley -- Industries (#05)," Spokane Public Library