

Lowbrow Northwest

Lowbrow Northwest is a suite of twenty gouaches painted in response to the writings of Stewart Holbrook, Northwest historian, journalist, celebrity, and chronicler of local folklore, active from the 1930s through the 1950s. Holbrook wrote vernacular history, akin to folk songs. Tales of disasters, the notorious, the eccentric, the obscure, and the forgotten. Some of the figures in the suite are historical, others are inventions.

—March 24, 1998

Historical Characters:

Mary Cook: Madame, proprietor of the Ivy Green during the late 19th century in Portland, Oregon. Renowned for blowing smoke rings and attending to her own bouncing.

Elizabeth Smith (Liverpool Liz): Madame, owner of the Senate Saloon, with a trap-door in the ceiling for passing drinks up to the johns. Could be trusted with safe keeping of a logger's or sailor's money.

Nancy Boggs: Madame, owner of a floating saloon and brothel before both sides of the Willamette were one municipality. Floated towards one shore or the other depending on police attention. Anchored in the center of river when both sides were too hot.

Franz Edmund Creffield (Joshua the Second): 1902, self-proclaimed prophet, sex-cult leader, "Church of the Bride of Christ." Tarrred and feathered in Corvallis. Oregon State Prisoner #4941, two years served for adultery. Moved commune to Yachats in 1906. Murdered on a Seattle street, May 7, 1906, by the brother of one of his wives, who in turn murdered her brother, in like fashion.

Opal Whitely: Emerged from logging camps near Cottage Grove, Oregon. One book author of best-selling childhood diary excerpted in the *Atlantic Monthly*, 1920, whose authenticity was later called into question. Junior Christian Endeavor leader. Confided in Douglas fir trees, crows, pigs, woodrats, dogs, and "the fairyland around us." Believed herself to be the daughter of Henri de Bourbon-Orléans. Celebrity, dropped into obscurity.

John McLoughlin: Chief factor, Hudson Bay Company, moved operations from Fort George (Astoria) to Fort Vancouver, 1825. Called the Father of Oregon, named Oregon City, "Supreme ruler of a Savage Kingdom." Became U.S. citizen, retired at Oregon City on his steadily shrinking claim.

Joe Knowles: Originator of circulation stunt for Hearst newspaper, test of man vs. nature. Entered the Siskiyou forest naked for 60-day period, July 20, 1914. World War I breaks out two weeks later, pushing his test out of the headlines.

John Turnow: Pioneer son of Western Washington, preferred the company of fir trees, crows and jays, wildman. September 3, 1911, murdered his two nephews, subject of two-year-long manhunt, eventually killing four more pursuers, left no tracks, thought to have eluded detection by traveling in the trees. Shot dead April 1913.

King Crimp (Bunco Kelly): Procurer of sailors by any means necessary (force, coercion, drugging, etc.) during the era of clipper ships. Active on Portland's waterfront during the 1880s.

Miss Fern Hobbs: Lawyer, secretary to the governor, Oswald West. Sent by West to Copperfield, Oregon, town on the Snake River, which catered to uninhibited appetites of workers on nearby construction projects. Hobbs demanded resignation of entire city council made up of saloon owners, declared martial law January 2, 1914. Town folds.