

November 14, 2003

News from Hanford Reach National Monument

Live Theater at Hanford Reach

Honoring the Memories: the Human Landscape of the Hanford Reach National Monument

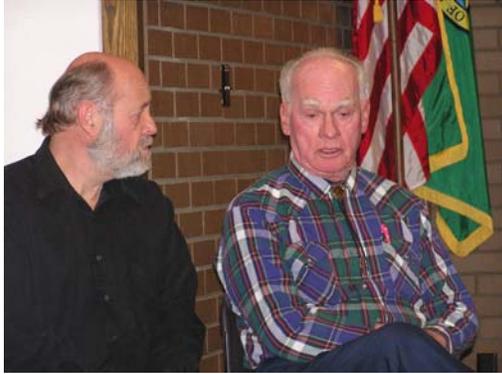
The production, “Honoring the Memories: the Human Landscape of the Hanford Reach National Monument,” was one phase of a challenge grant formulated by cultural resource manager Jenna Gaston as part of oral history research on the monument.

“Somewhere over the rainbow or maybe it was under the rainbow.....”

The North Central Washington Playback Theatre Company witnessed an ethereal event driving from Wenatchee to Richland for Sunday’s cultural history performance; a beautiful double rainbow whose ends spanned about 8 miles, reconnecting the former hamlets of White Bluffs and Hanford, in a prophetic reunion. Pioneers gathered November 16th at the Richland Public Library to relive stories of the short-lived towns prior to their forced government eviction for the Manhattan Project in 1943. A packed house listened intently as pioneers gave accounts of traveling dirt tracks thru the desert for miles, promises of water, jobs and even street cars to lure them to the desert. The audience watched the story come to life as the live, improvisational theater actors played back the feelings and details in sometimes poignant, sometime humorous vignettes. The veteran community actors moved as a team to weave an entertaining and fluid story with few props. Colored scarves, wooden boxes and a lot of body language kept the audience’s imagination flowing. In one scene, the blue scarf served as river water and the green one, the verdant crops it encouraged. A talented musician added critical audio elements such as a school bell, the clip clop of a horse and a fiddle rendition of “Somewhere over the Rainbow” for the story from an elder named Dorothy.

There was no lack of “volunteers” as the theater “conductor” asked for stories. Younger generations, or even the pioneers themselves, would goad one of the elders to statesmanship. Although stories (not people!) have a tendency to ramble, the conductor always knew how to reign in the story teller and tie up loose ends for the stage reenactment. But often those tangents provided delightful snippets of humor on stage. As one audience member put it, “This really made it come alive, not only in their oral expression, but in visual interpretation.”

Playback Theater is designed to honor the contribution each individual has made in their own way to our history. The production was so successful that the White Bluffs/Hanford Pioneers have requested the second grant-funded performance be held at their annual reunion next summer.



A LIVE THEATER PERFORMANCE

Towns and Villages of the Hanford Reach

Before the Manhattan Project

as told by the residents and relations of WHITE BLUFFS, HANFORD AND PRIEST RAPIDS

Priest Rapids

With only days to leave, the families of White Bluffs, Hanford, and Richland were forced in 1943 to vacate their homes and communities. And before them, Native Americans endured their own losses of traditional lands, fisheries, and villages where they had lived for thousands of years.

In this special performance, former residents and relations will share their stories of growing up along the Columbia in an era that knew hard work, difficult times, and strong bonding to one's neighbors and places.

The performance is dedicated to the parents, pioneers, and Native peoples of the Priest Rapids Valley and Hanford Reach.

2:30 pm Sunday, November 16th, 2003
Richland Public Library Gallery

Oral history honored and spontaneously brought to life by the
NORTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON PLAYBACK THEATRE COMPANY
 in conjunction with White Bluffs/Hanford Pioneers and the Hanford Reach National Monument