

Spotlight ON THE PAST



Kamloops Museum photos

REV. J.M. LEJEUNE, M.I., about 1920. (A correction to the previous article on the Chinook jargon: LeJeune arrived in Kamloops in 1882 and was placed in charge of the Indian Mission in 1891. He became a priest and moved to New Westminster in 1929 where he passed away in November 1930.)

'Queerest newspaper in world'

By Ken FAVRHOLDT
Curator/Archivist
Kamloops Museum & Archives

The Chinook jargon, the trade language between the Indians and the fur traders in the Pacific Northwest, was widely taught by the Roman Catholic missionaries to the native people.

At Kamloops, Father LeJeune actively promoted the Chinook to his following. Jean Marie Raphael LeJeune was a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate recruited by Bishop Durieu at the age of 24 to work in the Indian missions of B.C. As soon as LeJeune left France for the Pacific Northwest he began studying Chinook words given to him by Durieu.

LeJeune spent his first two years among the Sechelt and Stalo Indians and then, in 1882, was sent to Kamloops to serve the Thompson, Nicola and Shuswap Indians. LeJeune had a natural ability to learn Indian dialects, besides the Chinook jargon. He combined this knowledge with a talent for writing script and his education in the Duployen method of stenography and set about adapting Chinook into shorthand.

The Duployen shorthand system, invented by Emil Duploye and his brother, used 30 different characters. The shorthand enabled LeJeune to set down in phonetics the spelling of the Chinook jargon as well as other Indian languages just as they sounded. LeJeune further reduced the Duployen system to only 16 letters.

The symbols, he correctly guessed, would be more

compatible with the Indian languages than the English alphabet. Chinook itself was a very limited language with only a few hundred words.

Using this invention, LeJeune wrote and published books in many Indian languages, much in the shorthand, including prayers, hymns and religious tracts. His most interesting publication, however, was the "Wawa" (from the Chinook word "to speak", "to talk", "to call", "conversation", etc.)

Father LeJeune first taught Chinook adapted to shorthand to the Indians at Coldwater (near Merritt) in 1890. The "Kamloops Wawa", translated as the "Kamloops Echo", was LeJeune's idea of creating a regular publication that would teach those people who could speak Chinook how to read it.

The Wawa contained LeJeune's instructions, messages and stories written in shorthand characters applied to the Chinook jargon.

The first edition of the Wawa came out on May 2, 1891. It was produced entirely by LeJeune who wrote each page in pen and printed them on an old mimeograph in a room at the back of St. Joseph's Church (recently restored) on the Indian reserve. The four pages in the first issue were 7" high by 5" wide. Only 100 copies were made.

The papers were literally passed from hand to hand and in about a year 800 Indians could read the Chinook shorthand.

The Wawa was published for 13 years and seven months. The first few years, the publication was written entirely in Chinook. Circulation varied: from 1892-93 the Wawa was published weekly but after 1893 it was a monthly of 500 copies per issue.

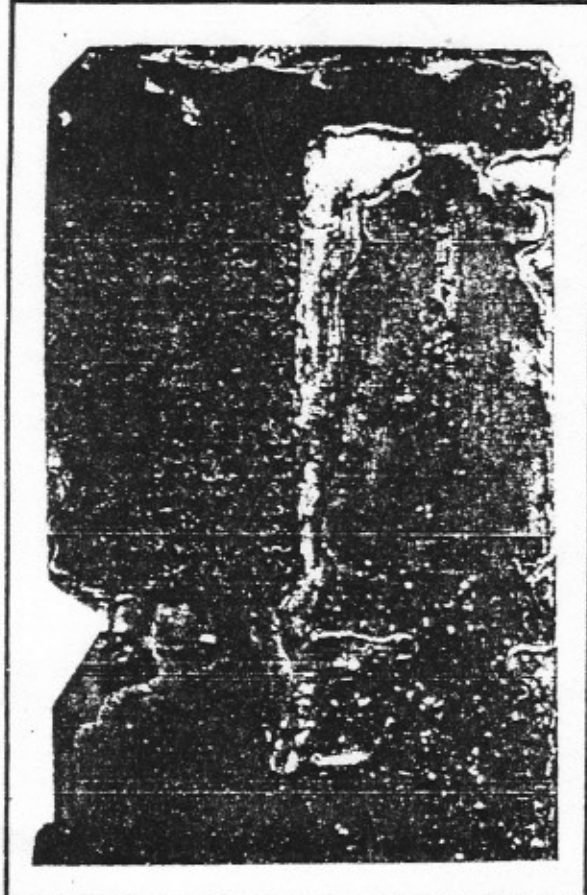
From September 1894 the newspaper was made using photo-engraving and printed back east. After 1898, the Wawa was printed at the offices of the Kamloops Standard and subscriptions were \$1 per year. At the height of its popularity 3,000 copies were printed. The June 1904 issue ran to 80 pages. The monthly format was discontinued in December 1904.

The Wawa gained international recognition in 1893 when a volume of the first 58 issues was exhibited by the Smithsonian Institution at the Columbian Exposition, the world's fair at Chicago, that year.

In 1904 LeJeune went to Belgium as a delegate to the Oblate General Chapter accompanied by two local Indians. They took part in a competition at the National Exhibition of Stenography in France where they won a diploma and several medals.

After 1904 LeJeune continued to publish some special editions of the Wawa until 1907. Although its existence was brief the Wawa made a real impact on the education of native people in British Columbia. It also aroused interest and curiosity among scholars and subscribers afar, becoming known as the "queerest newspaper in the world."

Copies of the Wawa are found in many archives around the world. The Kamloops Museum & Archives has an almost complete collection of this famous piece of our local history.



A PRINTING PLATE and the printed page of the Kamloops Wawa for September 1901, showing how the Chinook was adapted to shorthand. The Boxer Rebellion in China is reported here.