

2-28-2018

## The Alvin M. and Betty Josephy Library of Western History and Culture

Rich Wandschneider  
*Josephy Library of Western History and Culture*

### Recommended Citation

Wandschneider, R. (2018). The Alvin M. and Betty Josephy Library of Western History and Culture. *OLA Quarterly*, 23(3), 48-55. <https://doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1909>

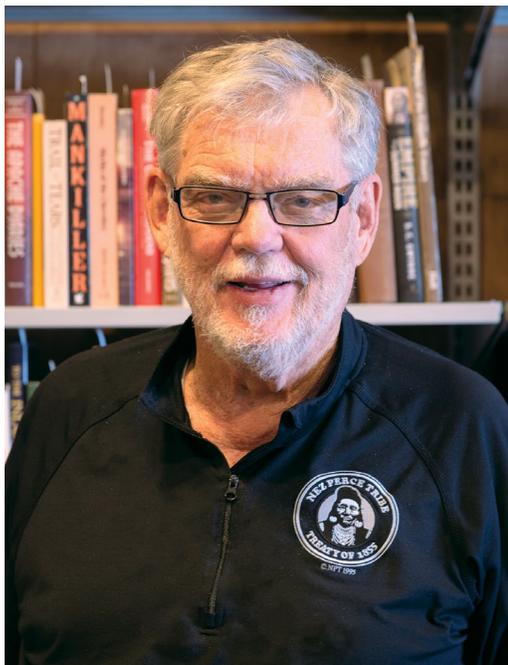
© 2018 by the author(s).

*OLA Quarterly* is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

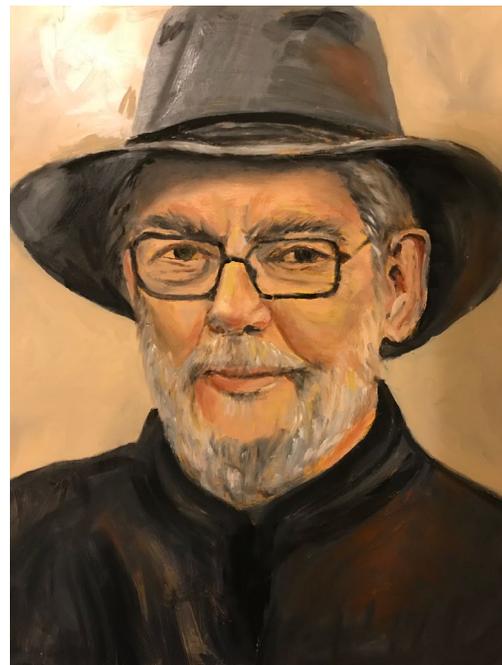
# The Alvin M. and Betty Josephy Library of Western History and Culture

by **Rich Wandschneider**

Director,  
Josephy Library of Western  
History and Culture  
[rich.wandschneider@gmail.com](mailto:rich.wandschneider@gmail.com)



RICH WANDSCHNEIDER



*Portrait painting of Rich by Mark Saunders.*

Rich came to the Willamette Valley in 1971, after five years as a Peace Corps Volunteer and staff member in Turkey and Washington D.C. In Willamette County, he worked for the OSU Extension Service for five years, then opened an Enterprise bookstore, the Bookloft, where he met Alvin and Betty Josephy.

In 1988 Alvin, Kim Stafford, Peter Sears, and Rich launched Fishtrap. Over his 20 years as director, Fishtrap brought hundreds of Oregon and Northwest writers and readers together in conferences, workshops, retreats, and residencies. The Bookloft turned 40 under owner Mary Swanson, and Fishtrap lives on under current director Shannon McNerney, still bringing the best writers in the West to Northeast Oregon.

In 2008, Wandschneider stepped aside as Fishtrap director to work on the library project that Alvin, who had become mentor and friend, left on his passing. In addition to the normal build-a-library tasks, the job includes exploring, promoting, and extending the work and legacy of Alvin Josephy. In 2015, longtime Josephy friend and editor Marc Jaffe and Wandschneider put together a Josephy reader for Vintage Books, *The Longest Trail: Writings on American Indian History, Culture, and Politics*. The book is intended to be an introduction to American Indian studies for students and for lay readers who want to understand what has been misunderstood or neglected completely in the standard narrative of American history. A library blog, workshops and talks by Indian artists and elders bring additional attention to this work.



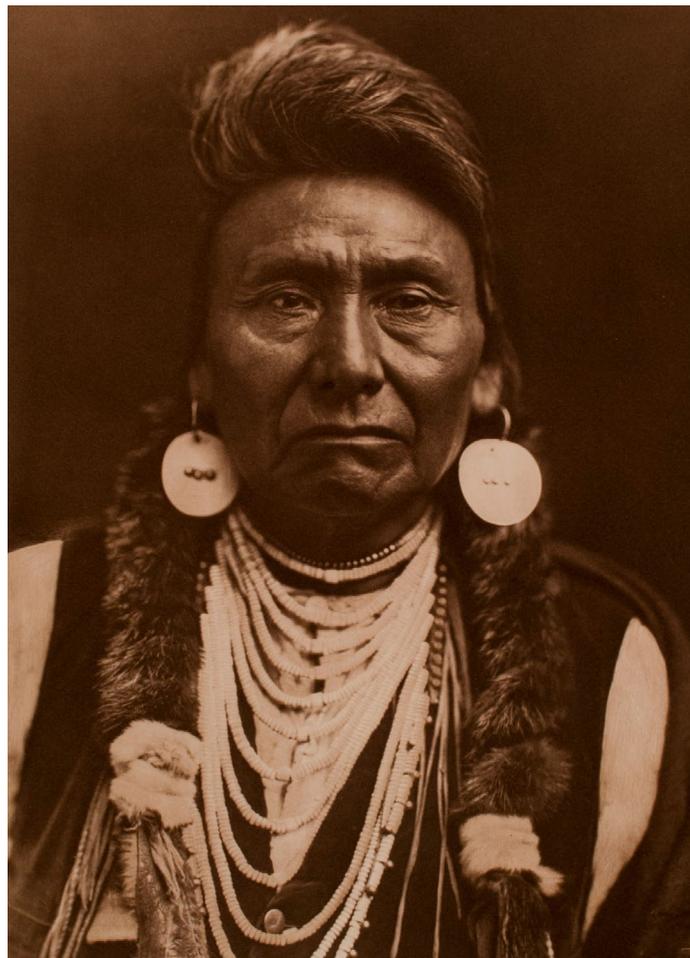
Wandschneider has served on boards at Oregon Humanities, Friends of William Stafford, and the Wallowa Nez Perce Homeland project. He has written a regular column for the Wallowa County Chieftain for 30 years, and published essays and stories in High Country News, the Oregonian, Oregon Humanities Magazine, and others. Currently his most important work is raising two grandkids, now aged 17 and 18.

### Introduction

Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce died in exile on the Colville Indian Reservation in Washington State in 1904, after being rebuffed on two trips to Wallowa County, Oregon, to convince the local citizenry to allow him to buy land. He asked to be allowed to live out his days in the “land of winding waters” that held the bones of his father and his people. Denied, he lived out his days on the Colville, befriended by University of Washington professor Edmond Meany, and famously photographed by Meany’s friend, Edward Sheriff Curtis. A few short years after that Wallowa visit, living in a tipi on the Colville Reservation, Chief Joseph—Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt—“died of a broken heart.” *The New York Sun*

announced that “the most famous Indian in America” was gone.

In 1965, Alvin M. Josephy Jr.’s *Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest* brought Joseph and the Nez Perce back to national attention. While working on that book, Josephy and his family fell in love with the Wallowa Country and bought a small ranch. Throughout his long working career, boxes of books and research material would be packed and shipped from the Josephy home in Greenwich, Connecticut to Joseph, Oregon, and then back the other way. The Josephy Library is based on material from those home libraries in Greenwich and Joseph, with special attention to Joseph’s own writings and to the history and culture of Indians and the West.



Chief Joseph, by Edward S. Curtis.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006685964/>



The library is housed in the Josephy Center for Arts and Culture on Main Street in the town of Joseph (“Joseph” and “Josephy” are only accidentally and serendipitously related). We tell the Nez Perce story—and other stories of Indian and Western history—with books and journals, guest speakers, blog posts, private conversations and presentations to local students, residents, guests, and groups from across the world.

### More on Alvin Josephy

Alvin M. Josephy Jr. was born in New York, went to Horace Mann School and for two years to Harvard. Publisher Alfred A. Knopf was his maternal uncle, and some thought he would follow the business end of publishing. But Alvin had smelled the ink on the student newspaper at Horace Mann and written for *The Harvard Crimson* while in Cambridge. When the Depression broke the bank that held the Josephy college account, Alvin went west for a year and worked as a junior scriptwriter in Hollywood. Back in New York, he took a low level job at the *New York Herald Tribune*. He talked the paper into a press pass, and, hitching a ride to Mexico with a Harvard friend, the 22-year-old Josephy scored an interview with Leon Trotsky, and another with the new President of Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas. Cardenas was nationalizing the oil industry, and would not talk with the *New York Times*, which opposed the nationalization. Trotsky would be assassinated in the home of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera in 1940, just three years after Josephy interviewed him there. The Trotsky interview appeared in *Ken Magazine*, and when the famous revolutionary wrote back to complain about some of Josephy’s lines, the editor noted that the Stalinists had also complained, so Josephy must have been pretty close to the truth.

*The Tribune* had ties with New York radio station WOR, where Alvin worked as a reporter and editor on his return from Mexico. When war broke out, he moved to Washington DC and worked with Archibald MacLeish at the Office of War Information—FDR’s wartime propaganda machine. From there Alvin enlisted in the Marine Corps, where, as a journalist, he sent back more than 60 audio recordings and hundreds of newspaper stories about Marines in action in the Pacific.

At WWII’s end, Alvin took another turn as a Hollywood scriptwriter, moonlighting as an editor and writer for small newspapers, until he was hired by *Time Magazine* to edit the regular “News of the Week” column and produce a monthly color special. Legendary Time publisher Henry Luce sent him to Idaho to do one of the color specials. Alvin flew over Hells Canyon and toured with the Lewiston mayor, who had a meeting on the Nez Perce Reservation. While Alvin waited, a young Indian learned that he was with Time, and asked him what he knew about the Nez Perce. Nothing—at the time.

But that started a 12-year research project that ended with *The Nez Perce Indians and the Opening of the Northwest*. Along the way, an article about Chief Joseph in *American Heritage Magazine* prompted editors at Viking Books to ask for more. More would be *Patriot Chiefs*, published in 1961. The Nez Perce book followed in 1965, and *Indian Heritage of America*, an encyclopedic look at American Indians, was nominated for an American Book Award in 1969. Praise for the books came swiftly, but sales were modest until the Civil Rights movement caught up with Indians. In 1969, *Patriot Chiefs* was an “everybody reads” book on the Western Washington University campus, as the college hosted a meeting for Indian students across the region. Many of them went from there to Alcatraz.

Alvin moved from Time, Inc. to American Heritage in the 1960s, increasingly became involved with Indian affairs, and eventually with the environmental movement as he plead-



ed with its leaders to combine forces with Indians. He wrote for *Audubon* on Four Corners in the Southwest and the Kinzua Dam in Pennsylvania, worked briefly for Stuart Udall in the Kennedy Administration, wrote a 93-page “white paper” on the “American Indian and the Bureau of Indian Affairs” for the Nixon Administration, and, eventually, served as founding board chair of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian.

Along the way, Alvin helped Kim Stafford and me start Fishtrap, the non-profit promoting writing in and about the West based then and still in Wallowa County. At the first Fishtrap event, in 1988, Alvin brought Naomi Bliven from *The New Yorker*, and the next year it was editor-at-large Herb Mitgang from *The New York Times*. Fishtrap was another way to express his passion for Indian and Western history and affairs, to further the work—and to show pieces of the West and Westerners to his friends from the East.

Speaking engagements, books, articles, documentary interviews with the BBC, Ric and Ken Burns, and for CBS’s “500 Nations,” and awards—including an Honorary Doctorate at Idaho College, a Stegner Award at the University of Colorado, an Oregon Governor’s Arts Award, and a retrospective award from Oregon Literary Arts—would tumble after Josephy until his death in 2005.

We had started talking about his books some time before that. Like many prolific researchers and writers, he wanted to keep things together, so that others could really follow his tracks. In the end, that didn’t work: the Smithsonian took some of the books; The Knight Library at the University of Oregon got the bulk of his papers; but the new Josephy Library of Western History and Culture has most of the books and journals from the Greenwich and Joseph bookshelves that had served him so long and well.

### The Nez Perce Story

Most people come to the Nez Perce story, as Alvin did, through the War, an 1877 affair that began with Joseph and his band of 200–300 Indians, thousands of horses and hundreds of cows trying to move to a diminished Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. They crossed the Snake River at Dug Bar in spring run-off, conflict with settlers erupted immediately in Idaho, and it all ended 1,300–1,400 miles later in a cold October surrender to US troops in the Bears Paw Mountains in Montana. Josephy began with that story, and traced it back with prodigious research to pre-contact, fur trade, missionary, treaty, and settler periods. Over fifty years later, the book is still the acknowledged starting point for Nez Perce research.

The Nez Perce were a powerful tribe that ranged over present-day Northeast Oregon, Southeast Washington, and Northern Idaho. The Nez Perce famously saved Lewis and Clark, who estimated their numbers at about 5,000 (elders say there were more; that diseases preceded the Corps of Discovery in the 1780s and took over half of the population), and were noted horse breeders who traveled from their homelands to fishing at Celilo and buffalo grounds east of the Rockies.

The Nez Perce lived semi-nomadically, following the seasons from river bottoms to high mountains to fish, hunt, and gather roots and berries. Bands identified with leaders and places—e.g., the “people of Wallowa” or the “Joseph Band.” When white fur traders and missionaries and then the first settlers came, the Nez Perce helped them, and when treaty makers came they cooperated. At first. The Walla Walla Treaty of 1855 left the Nez Perce most of their traditional territory, and the only reservation reserved for one tribe. The others—Umatilla and Yakama—were “confederated,” comprised of different Indian tribes and bands.



But in 1860, gold was discovered on the Nez Perce Reservation, and soon 18,000 illegal white miners poured onto the land. Abraham Lincoln and the North needed the gold, and how would they have removed 18,000 miners even without a Civil War commandeering so many troops? The answer was a new treaty, one that shrunk the land by 90 percent! Some chiefs signed for their bands; others, including Joseph, did not, and the tribe was then divided into “treaty” and “non-treaty” bands, who called it the “liars’ treaty.”

At the time, no gold was found in the Wallowa, and Old Joseph brought his band home to live peacefully for a few more years. But surveying and the Homestead Act, which all happened during the Civil War, and the arrival of settlers in the early 1870s brought conflict. Old Joseph passed, and his son, who becomes the famous Chief Joseph, like so many Indian leaders before him, agreed finally to move his people to that smaller reservation. That was in 1877, just a year after Custer’s debacle at Little Big Horn sent the public into panic about a pan-Indian uprising. In hindsight, the Nez Perce War seems inevitable.

In the surrender at Bears Paw, Joseph said that his chiefs were all gone, his children lost and starving. In fact, some had escaped to Canada, but the rest, although promised a return to Idaho, were sent to Kansas, and then to Indian Territory. They called it “the hot country” and many, including, we’re told, every baby born there, died. In 1885, they were allowed to return to the West, but Joseph and those close to him were not allowed to go to Oregon or Idaho, but sent to the Colville Reservation in Washington.

Now, more than 100 years after that return, the Nez Perce live scattered on the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho, with their cousins on the Umatilla Reservation in Oregon, and some still on the Colville in Washington. For the remnants of Joseph’s band in Colville, it is a kind of exile still, one determined by a long-ago war and decades of history and shifting government policies. In recent years visits by Nez Perce and their Plateau relatives to the Wallowa Country have become more frequent and Nez Perce Fisheries now maintains an office in Joseph.

### Library Holdings and Operations

The library is comprised of books from the Josephy home libraries in Greenwich and Joseph; additional books and materials are being purchased and donated on a continuing basis. It includes all the books and most of the journal and magazine articles written by Alvin, and it centers on Nez Perce and Western history and culture by many writers.

At present, the library is non-circulating, although we have a small lending shelf of duplicates, and we regularly make Xerox copies or scan pages for people. Eventually it would be wonderful to become a circulating library, holding back only those rare items of intrinsic value or those valued for marginal notes or dedications left by Alvin and his friends. Staffing and finances are not in place to do that at this time.

The Josephy Library is part of the Sage system of libraries in Eastern Oregon. Books are cataloged on Sage in Library of Congress format. The majority of cataloging is done by Lynda Swarts, a very competent volunteer with a literature background. Lynda works with Sage and nearby university librarians to get books and government documents in their proper places. Anand Arupo works part-time, helping visitors and organizing newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and ephemera on Josephy, the Nez Perce, and eastern Oregon history into file boxes with indexes. Her spreadsheets are available on the Josephy Center website— <http://josephy.org/> —under “library.”



Alvin's recording of the Guam landing, and local rancher Jack McClaran's recollections on the liberation of Buchenwald are also digitally available on the website. Jack and Alvin were WWII vets and friends; Alvin's memoir and personal encouragement led to Jack's emotional public talk on Buchenwald.

In the summer of 2017, intern Sarah Madsen did a bibliography of twenty years of fiction and poetry relating to the Nez Perce. She limited it to twenty years and fiction and poetry because the field is so large. New historic works and existing teaching materials on the Nez Perce people are candidates for future bibliographies—and future interns. Sarah, who is a student at Portland State University, is now pursuing a summer internship at the Library of Congress!

The library will continue its focus on Nez Perce history and literature. Alvin, fresh from War and finding a “great American epic,” helped reintroduce Americans to the Nez Perce story, and a parade of writers, singers, and artists continue to be compelled by it. The latest book, *Thunder in the Mountains: Chief Joseph, Oliver Otis Howard, and the Nez Perce War*, written by history and law professor Daniel Sharfstein of Vanderbilt University, explores the story, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. William Vollman's recent *The Dying Grass: A Novel of the Nez Perce War*, runs more than 1,300 pages with footnotes. It's part of a series of books exploring the European conquest of America. David Osborn's *The Coming*, another novel, imagines William Clark's Nez Perce son—a true historical figure—as a man trying to unite white and Indian worlds, ultimately having to make a choice. The Nez Perce story is now “an American Odyssey” that is generating its own literary trail.



Alvin M. Josephy Jr and Nez Perce Elder Allen Pinkham, Sr., co-author of *Lewis and Clark among the Nez Perce*. The photo was taken in 2004 at the memorial for Betty Josephy at the Josephy Ranch.



The library is also involved with overall Josephy Center programming, especially when it comes to Indians. We have had gallery exhibits from the Nez Perce National Historical Park and from Crows Shadow on the Umatilla Reservation. A recent grant from Oregon Community Foundation has us on a yearlong project to hire a Plateau Indian artist to add to the City of Joseph's art streetscape. Nez Perce artist Allen Pinkham, Jr. is working on a dugout canoe project. A small, 16-foot dugout floated on Wallowa Lake in October 2017; two 30-foot logs await his carving tools. In each case these projects invite speakers, books, documentaries, and workshops that we host and show in the Josephy Center.

Most importantly, several Nez Perce artists and elders are working with us to put up a small, permanent exhibit in the Josephy Center about who lived here and how they lived. We know from previous exhibits and from the continuing publication of historical material and new interpretation that there is an audience.

Sitting in the library chair, I see them, people from across the world who relate in one way or another to the Nez Perce story—they've come to it through a book, a roadside sign, a Curtis photo, movie, or one of the thousands of statues of Chief Joseph found across the land. They are sometimes angry over the treatment of Indians, and they sometimes cry as they read one of Joseph's speeches. I know that they will take whatever they get from this library—or from a film or speaker or beading workshop—and churn it into their own work and world. And many will retell the Nez Perce story in a classroom, or in a bedroom as their child or grandchild goes to sleep.

One cannot know this story and let it go. 



From left, Herb Mitgang, New York Times, a very young Rich Wandschneider, a young writer Craig Lesley, and Alvin Josephy, circa 1989.



### Additional Resources

Chief Joseph. (1879). An Indian's View of Indian Affairs. *North American Review*, 128(269), 412–433. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <https://tinyurl.com/9jkrus4>.

Alvin Josephy Interactive Exhibit. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2018, from <http://josephy.org/library/alvin-josephy-exhibit/>

Alvin Josephy's Magazine Articles. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2018, from <http://josephy.org/library/alvin-josephys-magazine-articles/>

Josephy, A. M., Jr. (1991). *The Indian heritage of America*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Josephy, A. M., Jr. (1993). *The Patriot Chiefs: A chronicle of American Indian resistance*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Josephy, A. M., Jr. (1997). *The Nez Perce Indians and the opening of the Northwest*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Osbourne, D. (2017). *The coming: A novel*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA.

Sharfstein, D. J. (2017). *Thunder in the mountains: Chief Joseph, Oliver Otis Howard, and the Nez Perce War*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Video & Audio Archives. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2018, from <http://josephy.org/library/video-archive/>.

Vollmann, W. T. (2015). *The Dying Grass: A Novel of the Nez Perce War*. London, UK: Viking.

