

LITERATURE REVIEW: MOUNT ST. HELENS' HISTORY

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Mount St. Helens is one of the many volcanoes in the Cascades Mountain Range, which is a section of the Ring of Fire. The Ring of Fire is a horseshoe shape belt of volcanoes that encompasses the Pacific Ocean. The belt extends upward from the bottom of the western coast of South America to the west coast of North America, then past the Arctic Circle, back down the eastern coast of Asia, and continuing downward off the coast of Australia. Mount St. Helens is the youngest volcano in the Cascades and has erupted several times during recorded history. The fiery mountain has attracted attention from various groups of people throughout time. Native Americans, settlers, mountain climbing enthusiasts, scholars, and scientists have all written books, articles, and papers, or told stories about the volcano. Historians in particular have incorporated Mount St. Helens into their respective fields. Environmental historians have especially viewed Mount St. Helens as one of the many significant volcanoes in human history mostly because of the 1980 eruption that completely dismantled the north side of the volcano after blasting laterally. This eruption has been compared to many other unique or large volcanic eruptions that have happened in recorded history.

Although Mount St. Helens is included in the field of volcanic history, the field of Mount St. Helens' history has different themes and is mostly limited to three distinct focal points: the people who have inhabited the area around Mount St. Helens, the 1980 eruption of the volcano, and natural disaster history. Despite these various themes covering much of Mount St. Helens' history in various ways, it becomes apparent that there are no sources that tie the various focal points, as well as the deep history of Mount St. Helens together in a concrete manner. Moreover the relationship between the American public and the volcano is hardly touched on in spite of the fact that Mount St. Helens is a National Volcanic Monument and tourist destination. *Mount St. Helens: A Tourist Hotspot* aims to contribute the relationship between the American public and

the volcano not only after the 1980 eruption, but before the eruption as well. In addition, *Mount St. Helens: A Tourist Hotspot* will also describe the volcano's deep history as well as juxtapose the American public's interaction with the volcano with the interaction between the scientists and Native Americans with the volcano since people have played a distinct role in Mount St. Helens' history.

People are important subjects in the field of the history of Mount St. Helens since they directly interact with and observe the volcano. There are two major categories that scholars chose from when looking the people who have lived in the area around Mount St. Helens: Native Americans and residents. The scholars who write about the Native Americans that have lived around Mount St. Helens tend to focus on not only which tribes were around the volcano, but also the importance of Mount St. Helens in the culture of various tribes. Scholars writing about the residents who live around Mount St. Helens tend to center in on various different themes. Instead of focusing on how the volcano is a part of residents' culture, scholars tie the residents to the aftermath of the 1980 eruption of the volcano and look at the responses to the eruption and the scars it left.¹

Native Americans are a crucial element in the field of the history of Mount St. Helens. They were the first ones to interact with the volcano and attempt to explain why it erupts. Scholars writing about the Native Americans around Mount St. Helens have three ways of tackling the history. First, there are general histories that explore which tribes inhabited the land near Mount St. Helens. Second, scholars compile and analyze Native American legends about Mount St. Helens. Lastly, the idea of place names and the importance of Mount St. Helens to the various Native American tribes' culture and identity is another focal point by scholars. As the field of Mount St. Helens' history progresses, scholars strive to add narrowed and detailed

contributions to the field in order to enrich the history of Mount St. Helens, and add in perspectives not covered by other scholars in the field.

Indians of the Pacific Northwest: A History by Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown is a great example of a rich general history of all of the different Native American tribes that lived in the Pacific Northwest. Although his book was published in 1981, Ruby and Brown include many more tribes than more recent general histories of the Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest. The Klickitat and Cowlitz Native Americans, which were two major tribes that incorporated Mount St. Helens into their culture, occasionally make appearances in current general histories of the Pacific Northwest Native Americans, but in *Indians of the Pacific Northwest: A History*, both of these tribes have several passages describing how and where they lived, and their relationship to settlers. Ruby and Brown also try to make the Native Americans the subjects rather than objects of historical research. In addition to older general histories, the myths and legends regarding Mount St. Helens also give information about the Klickitat and Cowlitz Native Americans.

Compiling the myths and legends of the Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest is another method of researching the Native Americans who inhabited the region around Mount St. Helens. The myths and legends are themselves a part of the history of Mount St. Helens, but it is the commentary by the compilers that contributes to the field. In *Indian Legends of the Pacific Northwest*, published in 2003, Ella Elizabeth Clark provides a brief explanation before each story as well as puts the legends into context and describes the importance of legend to the particular tribe. As a result, she shows how the myths and legends are significant to tribes' culture and how the different elements in their stories, such as Mount St. Helens are crucial to the tribes' history. Somewhat similarly, in *Salish Myths and Legends: One People's Stories*, published in 2008, M.

Terry Thompson and Steven M. Egesdal provide their commentary about the various compilers and storytellers of myths and legends of the Salish Native Americans (which include the Cowlitz tribes) in their book. Some of the legends are about Mount St. Helens, and include the tribe's explanation for how the volcano came to be and why it erupts. The introduction of the book contributes brief histories of the Salish people's cultures and oral traditions, an explanation of the different contexts in which these legends were told, and the different genres of the myths and legends that are compiled in the book. Furthermore, there is additional extensive commentary about the individual stories in the footnotes by the compilers and editors. The footnotes added in depth context and explanation to the events that are happening within the myths and legends, which further tie the myths and legends of the Salish people to the history of Mount St. Helens. Through both Clark's compilation, and Thompson and Egesdal's compilations, it becomes evident that Mount St. Helens is a part of the identity of some of the Native American tribes in the Pacific Northwest, like the Klickitat and Cowlitz. In addition to the Native American tribes, other residents were also drawn to Mount St. Helens. Scholars have chosen to focus on these two groups of people when researching in the field of Mount St. Helens' history.

There are two sources within the field of the History of Mount St. Helens that focus on the groups of people around Mount St. Helens before the 1980 eruption. The groups of people are the Native Americans tribes with oral traditions heavily influenced by Mount St. Helens, and the Spirit Lake residents and tourists. Christine Dupres hones in on the Cowlitz Native Americans and the significance of the volcano to their culture in "Landscape and Identity: Continuity of Identity and Attachment to Place in the Cowlitz Indian Tribe." In this journal article, which was published in 2010 in *Fabula*, an international journal for historical and comparative folk narratives, Dupres analyzes the process of the Cowlitz summoning Mount St.

Helens and how Mount St. Helens is a crucial aspect of their attachment to their land. She argues that the Cowlitz's attachment to their land is significant to understanding why and how they used certain genres for their oral histories, and because the tribe has modeled themselves off of their surroundings. For example, Dupres describes the Cowlitz's struggle to keep their land, and importance of place names to Native American tribes. The Cowlitz try to remain strong and enduring like Mount St. Helens does as a volcano. Additionally, Dupres includes how Mount St. Helens was a daily topic in discourse amongst the Cowlitz and how each of the various Cowlitz bands had distinct names for the volcano. The different names for Mount St. Helens could very well be just different names for the volcano, but as Dupres mentions, according to scholar Eugene Hunn, place names were also given to events and to places where events happened, such as volcanic eruptions. Therefore, Mount St. Helens having multiple native place names means the bands of Cowlitz people could have seen various eruptions from Mount St. Helens that are not documented by early Americans. By mentioning this, Dupres's journal article further provides history about the volcano that is not mentioned in any of books about the history of Mount St. Helens. Lastly, Dupres' article also provides the basis for how Mount St. Helens obtained a spot on the list of National Register of Historic Places in 2013, as significant Traditional Cultural Property to the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.² This was a monumental achievement by the Cowlitz and Yakama since it showed that the United States recognized the natives as culturally significant.

In conjunction with Dupres' article, Christine Colasurdo's article, "Oregon Voices: Recollecting a Landscape: Oral Histories of Spirit Lake and Mount St. Helens," published in 2000, focuses on the Spirit Lake community made up of tourists and residents on the lake before the 1980 eruption. The Spirit Lake Community was also deeply connected to that land around

Mount St. Helens, so between the insights on the Cowlitz dedication to the Mount St. Helens region and the Spirit Lake Community's love for the lake and wilderness near Mount St. Helens, Dupres and Colasurdo fill in the gaps that general histories of the Pacific Northwest Native Americans and the commentary in the Pacific Northwest Native Americans' myths and legend compilations have excluded, such as the explicit cultural significance of specific places or events to tribes.

In addition to Native Americans, the inhabitants in the area surrounding Mount St. Helens have included residents of the towns near the volcano. However, the scientists and journalists who write about the residents who live around Mount St. Helens have a different focus for their literature. Instead of focusing on the residents' deep cultural ties to volcano, they focus on how the residents have been deeply scarred by the volcano's 1980 eruption and what their responses were to the 1980 eruption. Many of these works were written in the 1980s when fear from the volcano's eruption was still embedded in the residents, but this area within the history of Mount St. Helens continues as anniversary pieces in newspapers every time a decade anniversary of the 1980 eruption occurs. In 1985, Bruce Bower published an article entitled "Emotional Scars Near Mount St. Helens" in *Science News* magazine in which he notes that residents suffered psychiatric disorders, especially those who had lost property due to the effects of Mount St. Helens' 1980 eruption. Similarly, Ronald W. Perry and Marjorie Greene published their book *Citizen Response to Volcanic Eruptions: The Case of Mt. St. Helens* in 1983, which reports the results of two studies they performed involving citizen responses to the Mount St. Helens eruptions in 1980. Perry and Greene wanted to know if the residents were well informed on the possibility of an eruption, how much damage they thought an eruption would cause, if there were warnings of eruptions in place, and the overall emergency preparedness amongst the

citizens living near Mount St. Helens. They found that the majority of residents were aware of the threats and dangers that an eruption could pose since they had received information on the hazards of the volcano. Furthermore, the perceptions of various risks of an eruption by residents largely varied by proximity to Mount St. Helens.

Lastly, newspapers revive May 18th, 1980, the day in which Mount St. Helens erupted, writing anniversary pieces that involve residents' memories.³ Ross Anderson, a writer for *The Seattle Times*, wrote an article in 2000 called "Residents Remember Force of Mount St. Helens 20 Years Later" that includes the accounts of people recalling the day that Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980. Although the articles spin off the traumatic memories with how the community has come together since the eruption and spend the anniversaries together, it is evident that the residents around Mount St. Helens have had this event permanently engrained in their lives. This further shows how monumental the 1980 eruption was, which is why in the field of Mount St. Helens' history, the 1980 eruption itself is extensively covered and is the sole topic of many scholarly works.

The eruption of Mount St. Helens in 1980 was a key event in the volcano's history thus far. It was the first continental U.S. volcano to erupt in nearly half a century, and as such, it has inspired many scholars in the field of the history of Mount St. Helens to focus their works on the days before, during, and after the 1980 eruption.⁴ Scholars such as Bruce L. Foxworthy and Mary Hill published their works about the eruption in the following decade since the hype over the eruption had still not subsided. In 1986, Foxworthy and Hill published a Geological Survey Professional Paper entitled *Volcanic Eruptions of 1980 at Mount St. Helens: The First 100 Days* which provides the details from March 20th, fifty-nine days before the first eruption to June 27th, forty days after the first eruption. However, more than two decades later, scholars were still

fascinated the 1980 eruption, and so it continued to be the main issue in their works on the volcano. For example, Frank Parchman published *Echoes of Fury: The 1980 Eruption of Mount St. Helens and the Lives it Changed Forever* in 2005. Similar to Foxworthy and Hill's professional paper, Parchman goes into great detail about the days Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980, but instead of going by days, Parchman starts at the eruption and then follows the aftermath month by month.

In addition to written works, there are several documentary films centered on the 1980 eruptions of Mount St. Helens. *Fire Mountain: The Eruption and Rebirth of Mount St. Helens* released in 2006 by Total Content and *Mount St. Helens: Back From The Dead* released in 2010 by PBS. The documentaries visually express the events during the 1980 eruption and show footage and photographs from the eruption as well. Although all of these sources focus on the 1980 eruption, they also try to include the lasting effects from eruption in 1980. Moreover, the documentaries attempt to explain the eruptive history of Mount St. Helens. In *Mount St. Helens: Back From The Dead*, Jon Major and John Pallister describe Mount St. Helen's eruptive history as somewhat sporadic but also very destructive, and without a pattern. Mount St. Helens seems to have a major eruption once every thousand years. Overall, these sources enhance a dangerous time in Mount St. Helens' history and show the hazards of living near an active volcano.⁵ Naturally, the hazards of Mount St. Helens are also a large part of the field in researching the volcano, which is why the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens is often a part of the field of natural disaster history.

Since the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens complies with what we consider to be a natural disaster it is consequently mentioned by scholars within the field of natural disaster history. Published in 2010, *Megadisasters: The Science of Predicting the Next Catastrophe* is

written by Florin Diacu, a mathematician interested in predicting natural disasters. In the work, she examines multiple kinds of natural disasters, such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes, but most importantly, she dedicates a chapter to volcanic eruptions and does use the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens as an example of a natural disaster that not only changed the field of volcanology but also showed that predictions can be made when it comes to mapping out natural disasters. Her chapter on volcanoes shows that within Mount St. Helens' history is a key moment in the history of volcanology. Likewise, *The Dynamics of Disaster* by Susan W. Kieffer, also recently published in 2013, explains what causes natural disasters and argues that all of the different processes that take place on Earth are connected. However, unlike Diacu, Kieffer dedicates a chapter to Mount St. Helens' eruption in 1980 because she was there to experience it. Nonetheless, Kieffer's chapter about the eruption is not just a personal account. She has analysis and commentary on the event and ties it together with how it compares to other volcanic eruptions around the globe. Kieffer frames the eruption as a disaster instead of a natural phenomenon that also happened to be destructive. In comparison, the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens was not as catastrophic as other volcanic eruptions that have happened in recorded history. It is for this reason that some natural disaster history scholars do not even include Mount St. Helens in their works. For example, Ted Steinberg, a U.S. environmental historian, published a book in 2006 entitled *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* that features several natural disasters but not the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. Nevertheless, Mount St. Helens' history is definitely a portion within natural disaster history.⁶

The field of the history of Mount St. Helens is vast and has many different components to it. From the inhabitants in Washington State that have interacted with Mount St. Helens, to the incredible 1980 eruption, and to natural disaster history, Mount St. Helens appears in a wide

range of historical and scientific scholarly works. However, aside from works that are centered on the 1980 eruption, Mount St. Helens is rarely the sole feature in scholars' pieces.

Furthermore, the volcano's full story from a historical viewpoint has not been completely tied together. There is more to the volcano than the destruction it has caused and its place in myths and legends. The volcano is also significant to the greater American public as a tourist destination. Although there have been a few newspaper articles and one PhD dissertation about Mount St. Helens and tourism, there are no scholarly arguments about how tourism is the basis of the relationship between Mount St. Helens and the American public.⁷ This is the gap that needs to be addressed in the field of Mount St. Helens' history, since it is the interest of the average American layman that spurs contributions to its research and monitoring. Thus, filling this void in Mount St. Helens' history will not only strengthen the field of Mount St. Helens' history overall but will also strengthen its significance to the American public.

Endnotes:

¹ However two scholars have covered the response of both Native Americans and American residents to Mount St. Helens. Katherine V. Cahsman and Shane J. Cronin wrote an article published in the *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* in October of 2008 entitled "Welcoming a Monster to the World: Myths, Oral Tradition and Modern Societal Responses to Volcanic Disasters," in which reactions to the eruptions of Mount Saint Helens is included.

² For more about Mount St. Helens on the National Register of Historic Places, visit the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service's webpage, "Mount St. Helens Recognized for Historic Cultural Significance" (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/mountsthelens/news-events/?cid=STELPRDB5436550>).

³ Some examples of these anniversary newspaper articles are "Mount St. Helens 20 Years Later: What We've Learned," by Robert I. Tilling, published in *Geotimes* in May of 2000 (<http://www.agiweb.org/geotimes/may00/featurestory.html>) and "Explosive Lessons of 25 Years Ago," by Blaine Harden, published in *The Washington Post* on May 18, 2005 (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/17/AR2005051701275.html>).

⁴ The U.S. Geological Survey has a webpage called "1980 Cataclysmic Eruption" (http://volcanoes.usgs.gov/volcanoes/st_helens/st_helens_geo_hist_99.html), Steve Nash wrote "Making Sense of Mount St. Helens," an article published in 2010 in the journal *BioScience*, and

David Bressan wrote a blog post in 2012 on the *Scientific American Blog Network* entitled “May 18, 1980: The Eruption of Mount St. Helens” (<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/history-of-geology/2012/05/18/may-18-1980-the-eruption-of-mount-st-helens/>)

⁵ Further information about Mount St. Helens’ hazards can be found in Stephen Harris’s *Fire Mountains of the West: The Cascade and Mono Lake Volcanoes*, published in 2005, and Richard Hill’s *Volcanoes of the Cascades: Their Rise and Their Risks*, published in 2005.

⁶ An additional scholar that has included Mount Saint Helens in their natural disaster history works is Kevin Rozario who wrote *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America*, which was published in 2007.

⁷ The few newspaper articles about Mount St. Helens are “Mount St. Helens: A Debate Smolders: Part One: 30 Years after Eruption, We Still Don’t Know What to Do with Volcanic Monument” by Erik Robinson, published in *The Columbian* on May 16, 2010, and “*Mount St. Helens: A View Worth the Effort*” by Craig Hill published by the Associated Press DBA Press Association on September 14, 2013. The one scholarly work on tourism and Mount St. Helens is “Tourism and Community Perceptions: An Examination of Mount St. Helens’ Tourism as Perceived by Local Residents,” which was a PhD dissertation for Oregon State University written by Randal G. Baker in 1993.

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