

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### SINEACATEEN AND THE WILD HORSE TRAIL

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Long before white explorers came to the Pend d'Oreille country, an old Indian trail from Spokane River ran through Rathdrum prairie and crossed the Pend d'Oreille at Sineacateen, located close to the present site of Laclede. Then the trail continued northward across the Kootenai at Bonner's Ferry. In 1810, a year after David Thompson established a North West Company fur trade post on Lake Pend d'Oreille, some of his trappers came down this trail to found Spokane House west of Spokane Falls where the later city of Spokane was built. Thompson's Pend d'Oreille post (Kullyspell, or Kalispell, House) proved to be an unfortunate location: on November 14, 1811, Thompson decided to abandon it because the Kalispell (or Pend d'Oreille) Indians did "not hunt, but only gamble & keep the men starving. . . ." So he sent his trappers back to Spokane House.

But Finnan MacDonald (who had a Pend d'Oreille wife) continued to work with the Pend d'Oreille band, which often camped at Sineacateen. By the spring of 1813, rival Astorian fur traders were on hand at MacDonald's Pend d'Oreille camp at Sineacateen. In an effort to rush in a stock of tobacco for more effective competition for furs in the Pend d'Oreille camp, the Astorian gained a temporary advantage. But MacDonald, who regularly helped his Pend d'Oreille associates fight the Blackfeet, came out ahead in the long run. The North West Company emerged in control of the Spokane--Pend d'Oreille country, and MacDonald spent many years enjoying "the fascinating pleasures of the far-famed Spokane House." Whenever he took his wife to see their Pend d'Oreille relatives, he still traveled over the old Indian trail past Sineacateen.

In the years after the fur trade, the Indians continued to camp on their travels at Sineacateen--a name which comes from the Kalispell or Pend d'Oreille word for crossing. When the international boundary survey party traced the forty-ninth parallel north of there in 1859, they had base camp at Sineacateen. Then in 1864, with the Kootenay gold rush, miners and supply trains came from Walla Walla up the old Indian trail past Sineacateen. A wagon road went as far as Sineacateen, where a ferry was installed to accommodate traffic. Miles Moore, later governor of Washington, had one of the trading posts there during the gold rush. From Sineacateen ferry, a pack trail (known thereafter as the Wild Horse Trail) followed the old Indian route

to Bonner's Ferry (also established on the Kootenai in 1864) and on to the Wild Horse mines near later Fort Steele, British Columbia. By 1866, Sineacateen had two saloons, two stores, and a hotel. Traffic from the Pacific Northwest to the Montana mines at Helena came by Sineacateen in 1866, since the Mullan Road (actually only a pack trail across Idaho) had fallen into poor condition. Sineacateen still served as an important base when the Northern Pacific Railway was built nearby in 1881-1882. Surveyors who located the line camped there prior to construction, but the Northern Pacific came through a few miles away. New communities emerged with rail transportation, and Sineacateen no longer occupied a strategic site after transportation routes changed with new bridges and new lines of communication. Sandpoint on Lake Pend d'Oreille replaced Sineacateen as the major center for that part of the country.