



HistoryLink

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About HistoryLink

Our mission is to pioneer innovative approaches to history. Our primary product is HistoryLink.org, a free, authoritative, and easily accessible local-history resource serving students, teachers, journalists, scholars, researchers, and the general public.

Innovative approaches

At our founding in 1997, there was no such thing as an online encyclopedia of regional history—so we invented one. From the start, HistoryLink has worked to develop new and dynamic ways of presenting history. Earlier this year, HistoryLink produced an immersive theater and dance event, recreating the first documented jazz performance by local musicians in Washington, held in the very same venue the original it took place 98 years before.

HistoryLink has always been interested in using the arts (music, theater and visual arts) to make history come alive. Though we have worked with musicians and theater groups in the past, HistoryLink has sought an opportunity to work with a visual artist.

About Don Fels

A meeting between visual artist Don Fels (www.artisthinker.com) and HistoryLink co-founder Marie McCaffrey sparked a conversation about how they might work together on a project that could combine history and visual art to tell a story in a different way.

Fels has been a Fulbright Fellow in Italy and a Fulbright Senior Research Scholar in India; completed artist residencies in places as diverse as Paris, Phnom Penh, and Penang; and helped to inaugurate the Artists and Machine Intelligence program at Google. He was also the first artist in residence at Seattle's MOHAI, and has created major artworks along the Duwamish and Willamette rivers.

Fels has worked around the world since the 1970s to follow the trade of commodities. Because rivers often act as major nodes in trade networks, Fels finds the confluence of connections represented in those networks, and how the connections play out in place, a theme rich for art-making.

Why Spokane

Fels's interaction with HistoryLink materials sparked a curiosity about the Spokane River, its eventual pollution, and the subsequent cleanup efforts. Drawing on HistoryLink.org to continue his research, Fels discovered Bill Youngs's superb *The Fair and the Falls*, which suggests that the real legacy of Spokane's Expo '74 might be the alliance of people and organizations that came together to clean up the river.

Inspired by this thought, Fels found the work of the Spokane River Regional Toxics Task Force. He interviewed several task-force participants, as well as others recommended by the participants. The first result of his research was published in 2015 as an acclaimed two-part article for Crosscut.com. Fels followed up with a related installation in Mumbai this past spring, and has begun writing a book, *Turning Blue*, which will conclude on the subject of the Spokane River.

Why we want to meet with you

Marie and Don are interested in exploring the opportunities of site-specific art to animate local history in new and innovative ways. They believe that the Spokane River offers a fascinating and important story, and an ideal platform for collaboration. We would like to meet with you—because of your specialized knowledge and experience—to talk about the river, its history, and what both might mean to the world—with no agenda other than to discuss the subject together. This trip will also offer an opportunity to strengthen HistoryLink's ties with our Spokane team.

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