

National Native American Hall of Fame  
2019 Inductee

**LUCY COVINGTON**  
**COLVILLE TRIBES**



**ADVOCACY**  
**ACTIVIST FIGHTING TERMINATION**  
**POLICY**

1 - 2 50-minute class periods

## **SELECTED COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

### **CCSS Literacy SL 10-1**

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### **CCSS Literacy SL 10-1d**

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3

Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

## **GOALS FOR UNDERSTANDING**

### **Students will understand**

- Lucy Covington was a great leader for the Colville Nation during an era when the Tribe was nearly terminated.
- Lucy Covington was a passionate advocate for Native American people and Native Nations.

- Lucy Covington won debates in her own community, as many tribal leaders wanted to terminate their status as Native Americans.

## **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

What two major groups did Lucy Covington have to negotiate with to achieve her goal of keeping her tribes' nation status intact?

Why was Lucy Covington's success such a remarkable breakthrough?

What is Lucy Covington's legacy and how can contemporary Native people honor it?

## **ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE**

### **Suggested Formative Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

Active listening through note taking

Small group discussion

Class discussion

### **Culminating Performance Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

- Students will finish their own small group K/W/H/L charts
- Participate in a small group discussion
- Answer the essential questions when reporting out as a group to the class

## **ENTRY QUESTIONS**

Who is Lucy Covington?

What type of achievements did Lucy Covington accumulate during her career to be inducted into the National Native American Hall of Fame?

Of which Native American Nation was Lucy Covington a member?

## MATERIALS

Computer and internet access for the following videos is required. Additional written materials for printing are at the end of this lesson.

6-minute video about Lucy Covington’s life achievements, contributions and legacy  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=28&v=uKkeV3uzO6A&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=28&v=uKkeV3uzO6A&feature=emb_logo)

23-minute National Native American Hall of Fame “Inspirational Leadership” interview with Grand-niece, Yvette Joseph <https://vimeo.com/465499169> The interview is also accessible by scanning the Quick Response (QR) code below with a smartphone or QR Reader.



## LEARNING MODALITIES

Audio/Visual: Students will watch the 6-minute video about the legacy of Lucy Covington. This will give learners an opportunity to hear Lucy’s voice and see interviews with people who knew Lucy and can speak to the legacy she left behind.

Writing/Recording: Students will take notes while observing the films, identifying key concepts and other issues that can be used to complete the K/W/H/L chart in the small groups.

## OVERT INSTRUCTION

- 1) The instructor divides the class into groups of four and asks each person and each group to begin making a “K/W/H/L” Chart, which stands roughly for “What they Know/What they Want to Know/How to Research this topic/What they Learned”  
The teacher can introduce Lucy Covington by playing the video which is linked here:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=28&v=uKkeV3uzO6A&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=28&v=uKkeV3uzO6A&feature=emb_logo)
- 2) After showing the *Legacy of Lucy Covington*, the instructor will ask the class to read the biographies provided in the addendum. Using the information in the bios, the students will begin completing their learning graphic organizer charts.

3) Students will spend about 25 – 30 minutes reading and gathering information from the written materials to complete the group K/W/H/L chart and answer the following questions.

### Questions

- a. How did Lucy Covington distinguish herself as a Native American, as a woman and as a citizen of the Colville Nation?
- b. What did Lucy Covington achieve as a leader for her nation and for Native Americans throughout the country?
- c. Why is Lucy Covington considered to be a legendary leader?
- d. What types of challenges did Lucy Covington overcome on her path to saving her nation from termination?

4) Following the small group discussions, each group will report out on their answers, and the answers will be included into a class K/W/H/L chart organized by the instructor on a smartboard or projector.

5) The instructor will open the discussion to include any final thoughts, questions or insights about Lucy Covington and her career and legacy.

### This concludes the first 50 minutes of the Lesson

## LUCY COVINGTON'S FIGHT AGAINST TERMINATION OF COLVILLE RESERVATION

- ✦ B. 1910 Colville Indian Tribe, Washington
  - ✦ Confederated tribe – Included Salish-speaking tribes like Nespalem, Sanpoil, Wenatchi and Chief Joseph's band of Nez Perce
- ✦ Sold cattle to fight termination
  - ✦ Pay for lawyers and airline tickets to Washington D.C.
- ✦ Ran in 1968 tribal election on an anti-termination slate → won
- ✦ Covington held referendum for or against termination
  - ✦ Reservation residents to vote against it
- ✦ Stopped the Colville Indian Reservation termination bill in 1971
- ✦ Significance: movement toward Self-Determination
- ✦ Died – 1982



## **Extension Exercises**

Students who wish to continue their research on Lucy Covington can research her on the web for other articles and research publications that speak to her legacy. Then they can write an essay that attempts to answer the following questions:

What are the unique qualities and background that gave Lucy Covington the foundation to achieve great things?

Lucy Covington attended Indian boarding school, which was designed to strip children of their language and culture, do you think that experience motivated her as an adult?

Is Lucy Covington part of the “Red Power” movement? Why or why not?

## **CRITICAL FRAMING**

Lucy Covington was born into what is known by many as “America’s Greatest Generation” (those that were born between the years 1901 – 1924). She was forced into Indian boarding schools as a child and became an adult just as the Great Depression began. She saw hard times and understood that injustice must be challenged head on, through legal means and social change. Her legacy is large today, as she achieved her goal of keeping her beloved Colville Nation alive, as well as many other nations who chose to fight against termination. Although she was not young when the cultural revolution of the 1960’s occurred, her leadership was indispensable in the fight for tribal survival in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### **Lucy Covington Long Biography**

**By Laurie Arnold, PhD Posted 7/28/17**

**Lucy Friedlander Covington** (1910-1982) was born in Nespelem on the Colville Indian Reservation and was a lifelong advocate for Colville tribal rights and land, becoming well-known and nationally respected for her fight against the federal policy of termination. The Colville Tribes are a confederation of twelve distinct bands of Indians; Lucy was descended from five of those bands as well as from a German Jewish merchant. After attending school in Nespelem she transferred to the Haskell Institute in Kansas, where she graduated from high school. Lucy returned to Washington and in 1933, during the Great Depression, went to work as a cook in a Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division forestry camp on the Colville Reservation. There she met John Covington (1913-1958), and the two married in 1936. In the 1940s they moved to Portland to work in shipbuilding, and after the war returned to the

reservation and bought a ranch. By 1954 Lucy had replaced her ailing brother George (1904-1977) on the Colville Business Council. Lucy's legacy reaches across time and place; in 2015 Eastern Washington University posthumously conferred an honorary doctorate on her and announced the creation of a tribal research and student center in her name.



*Lucy F. Covington Government Center located in Nespelem, Washington*

## **Deep Tribal Roots**

Lucy Friedlander Covington was a member of the Colville Confederated Tribes and a leader, both culturally and as an elected official on the Colville Tribal Business Council, where she was the first woman to hold the position of chair. After a dynamic life fostering tribal people and protecting tribal sovereignty, she passed away on September 20, 1982, on her family's ranch, very near where she had arrived into the world on November 24, 1910, an infant with deep roots in the tribal community.

In the following genealogy the tribal affiliations of the named persons are in brackets. Lucy's father, Louis T. Friedlander, Sr. [Nez Perce/Okanagan] also had German Jewish ancestry. Louis's father, Hermann, married Skn-wheulks [Entiat], who was baptized as Elizabeth by Father Urban Grassi, a Jesuit priest. Lucy's mother was Nellie Moses, a granddaughter of Chief Moses (1829-1899) [Columbia/Sinkiuse] and a granddaughter-in-law of Chief Kamiakin (1800?-1877) [Yakama/Palus]. Nellie was named Sinsinq't, for a sister of Chief Moses who had died in an accident on the Columbia River near the mouth of Moses Coulee. Nellie's mother also carried the name Sinsinq't and the name would be passed down to Lucy as well, as is common with family names among Columbia Plateau tribes.

Chief Moses, Lucy's great-grandfather, had five wives in his lifetime, a common practice among prominent Columbia Plateau tribal families. By cultural custom, children of Moses, regardless of their birth mother, considered all of his wives as their mothers, and his grandchildren considered all of his wives their grandmothers. Mary Owhi (d. 1937), daughter of Chief Owhi (d. 1858) [Yakama], married Chief Moses, but had no children who lived into adulthood. Lucy recalled that when she was small, Mary Moses asked that Lucy come and live with her, and Nellie "turned [me] over to Mary Moses to be her companion" (Encyclopedia Britannica video). Mary,

who was effectively Lucy's great-grandmother, became her primary caretaker and teacher. Through that relationship Lucy learned about her heritage and her history, and why the land and traditions were so important for their people.

Lucy later attended reservation schools in Nespelem before enrolling in the Haskell Institute (now Haskell Indian Nations University) in Lawrence, Kansas. She graduated from there in 1931 and returned home to Washington state, where she enrolled in classes at Kinman Business University in Spokane.

### **The Great Depression and War**

As the Great Depression deepened, the federal government in 1933 created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and an Indian Division within it. Lucy was hired as a cook for an Indian CCC forestry camp on the Colville Reservation. While serving meals to the workers she met John Covington, a Colville tribal member of San Poil/Columbia heritage, working in the camp. They married three years later, in 1936.

In the early 1940s the Covingtons moved to Portland, Oregon, where they worked in the Kaiser Shipyards as welders. The Portland-area shipyards produced Liberty Ships, troop transports, and tank-landing ships, 455 vessels in all. Lucy Covington was used to hard work from her time harvesting foods in the ancestral tradition and from working in the CCC-Indian Division, and she was also used to seeing women in her community divide labor equally with men. As a result, she may not have been as surprised as other women shipyard workers to learn that they comprised 30 percent of the workforce and earned equal pay.

Once the U.S. entered the war, John Covington joined the newly established Navy Seabees, a battalion dedicated to construction of all kinds, from military bases to airstrips to roadways. Covington's experience operating heavy machinery in the CCC's Indian Division camp and welding in the shipyards made him a natural candidate for the Seabees, but when World War II ended he elected not to reenlist.

John and Lucy returned to Nespelem after the war and started a cattle ranch, which would be operated by the family into the 1980s. Lucy was happy to be back home, where her fondest childhood memories were of feeling safe and secure on her family's land. She noted that they used to say to themselves, "Aren't we happy? Aren't we glad? Aren't we proud we're Indian? God was good to us. He made us Indians" (Encyclopedia Britannica video).

### **The Threat of Termination**

Lucy's brother George Friedlander was serving on the Colville Business Council in the 1950s when the federal Indian policy of termination was introduced. Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108, also called the termination bill, in 1953. The legislation provided the foundation for ending, or "terminating," federal recognition of tribes, a policy which had devastating cultural, political, and economic impacts on the tribes that were terminated (67 Stat. B132).

George Friedlander and other tribal members grew increasingly concerned as the business council and other independent groups on the Colville Reservation began to view termination as a

desirable option. The Colville Confederated Tribes had land and natural-resource assets, but the income produced was uneven, as is common with extractive industries. The Colville Reservation consistently experienced seasonal periods of high unemployment, and the prospect of termination -- which included a calculation of assets and then an equal division of them among all tribal members -- appealed to many tribal members who were in difficult financial straits.

Friedlander recognized the inherent dangers inherent of the policy, and he felt that the tribe must hold on to its land at all costs. However, he was in poor health due to a heart condition, and his doctor suggested he step down from the business council. He asked Lucy to run for his council position to continue the fight. She initially resisted because operating the cattle ranch was labor intensive, but she relented when Friedlander offered to help John Covington with the ranch.

### **Lucy Leads the Fight**

Lucy ran for George's council seat for the Nespelem district and was elected in 1954, a victory that initiated one of the most significant chapters of her life and of Colville tribal history. More than 10 years later, in 1965, she testified in a Congressional hearing on termination. She wanted to communicate to members of Congress the importance of the reservation land base and tribal members' commitments to the United States, saying, "During WW II, Nespelem was deserted. Many were quickly trained and held jobs, and after the war those same people found themselves unemployed and back on their homeland, where they feel at ease" (Arnold, 88). It was important for people to have a place to return to, for security, for restoration, for matters of heritage.

Lucy Covington emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent anti-terminationists on the business council, a stance which left her in the minority until she gathered enough momentum among Colville tribal members to organize a slate of anti-terminationist candidates for the 1968 election. Scholar Charles Wilkinson observed, "Covington's slate swept the 1968 Colville tribal election, and the vote, resounding throughout Indian country and on Capitol Hill, dealt a death blow to termination" (Wilkinson, 182).

Frequently during her years on the council, Covington spent her own money as she worked to end termination. Drawing upon the resources of the family ranch, selling a cow from time to time, as well as "precious bloodline horses descending from Chief Moses" (Colville Business Council Resolution 2015-719) to fund her trips to Washington, D.C., Covington gained the respect of members of Congress for her determination and her commitment to Colville lands and people. In 1969 the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians passed a resolution honoring Covington's work against termination, noting that "she fought an uphill battle against the incumbent terminationists. They had control of the tribal organization with its newspaper and means of communication. She had to work the roads, the streets, and the fields, searching out and talking to tribal members" (Fahey, 195).

In arguing against termination, Lucy Covington emphasized new government programs designed to educate tribes on economic planning and resource development, and she argued that it would be a shame to end federal supervision before utilizing these programs to the fullest extent. She also noted that the tribe had been making great strides toward higher education for tribal members, that it and the government had allocated more money for education, and that many tribal members embraced the opportunity to go to school. Covington considered it a waste if improvements that forecast a brighter future resulted in nothing.

## Spreading the Word

In addition to traveling to Washington and working the fields, Covington also founded a newspaper, *Our Heritage*, as an alternative to the tribally owned and operated *Tribal Tribune*. She worked with the nascent American Indian Press Association after she heard its founder, Charles Trimble [Oglala Lakota], speak at the National Congress of American Indians meeting in 1970. Of Lucy, Trimble observed, "She wanted a newspaper that would tell what a tribe means to its people, and its true worth to them in terms of land, natural resources, and most of all their cultural heritage. She ... even described the logo she wanted for the masthead. It would be a pair of hands holding together the shape of the Colville Reservation. The logo would signify that the future of their reservation, indeed their nation, was in the hands of the people, not in the U.S. Government or the State of Washington, or anyone else" ("Unsung Heroes: Lucy Covington ...")

Lucy Covington sought to impress upon her fellow tribal members the importance of their land and their ancestry. "Termination is something no Indian should ever dream about ... It's giving up all your Indian heritage ... It's giving your eagle feather away" (Encyclopedia Britannica video). By 1971, she was elected a regional vice president for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), an organization that had joined the fight against Colville termination. This was particularly significant because the business council had withdrawn the tribe from membership in NCAI and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) because both organizations opposed termination. Covington's election by NCAI regional member tribes also reinforced Indian Country support for her and, even if the business council did not view it as such, support for the Colville Tribe as a whole.



*Lucy Covington (right) with fellow Colville Confederated Tribes members Shirley Palmer and Mel Tonasket. Courtesy Mel Tonasket*

Lucy Covington mentored several young Colville tribal members, including Mel Tonasket (b. 1940), guiding them to listen and learn in political settings, and always reminding them of their responsibilities to the tribe. Tonasket recalled how on their trips to Washington, D.C., it wasn't only members of Congress and their aides who respected Lucy. She was such a frequent flyer that one day she and Tonasket arrived at the Spokane International Airport a few minutes late for their flight.

The pilots and airline crew were so used to seeing her that the pilots turned the plane around to pick up Lucy and Tonasket for their trip.

## Winning the Termination Battle

The decisive 1968 anti-termination election was solidified in subsequent elections, and in 1971 an anti-termination majority won the business council. Before the end of the year, Lucy Covington would oversee the passage of a council resolution nullifying further consideration of

termination. She had fought termination since the beginning, and she remained determined to protect the tribe from any further attempts after she left office. By this time, Congress had reversed its position on termination, focusing instead on self-determination through passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975.

Covington's legacy on the business council extended beyond termination to include economic development, land use and planning, education, and inter-tribal cooperation -- including restoration of the Colville Tribe's memberships in NCAI and ATNI. She served 22 years on the council, including one term as chair, the first woman to do so.

Although she had no plans to stop serving the tribe as an elected official, her health began to deteriorate in 1980 and she lost her reelection bid that year. She was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis, hospitalized for a time, but returned to her ranch in Nespelem -- where she had been happiest as a child and where her family had observed that God had been good to them because he made them Indians -- before her passing on September 20, 1982. Her husband, John Covington, had predeceased her nearly 25 years earlier, in 1958. Lucy never remarried and the pair did not have children; instead, they cared for friends and family members as their own.



## Remembering Lucy Covington

Lucy's niece Barb Aripa (b. 1932) noted that Lucy did not do her work only for her own family, but for everyone. "She had no children, and all these [Colville] people were her children. She loved them" ("Lucy Covington Legacy" video). Hundreds of mourners attended her services (both a Catholic service and an ancestral Seven Drum service), including tribal, state, and national officials, as well as people who knew they could depend on Grandma Lucy or Auntie Lucy when they needed help.

Covington's legacy pervades the Colville Reservation and the region. Colville business council member Mel Tonasket observed, "Without Lucy, we'd be done. She influenced a lot of other young leaders" (Camden). In 2015, by a unanimous vote, the business council named its new government center in her honor. The previous government center had been lost in a fire, and Lucy would have celebrated the opportunity to build in its place a new modern structure,

designed to echo Columbia Plateau basketry. The center embodies values of the past -- home, community, serving Colville people -- while illustrating how far the Colville Tribe has come and how it works to define new directions for the future.

### **The Lucy Covington Center**

In 2015, Eastern Washington University recognized Lucy Covington's impact with the posthumous award of an honorary doctorate of humane letters. As a tangible acknowledgement of her contributions, EWU opened the Lucy Covington Center to create a place of education for the next generation of Native American leaders, provide a community of scholars and tribal leaders, and serve as a gathering place for Native students, faculty, and communities. Jo Ann Kaufman, former EWU Board of Trustees chairperson observed, "Her work happened in such a humble way, and yet, when you walk around Eastern Washington ... you say 'here is the legacy of this woman'" (Caudell).

EWU noted that the initiative to create the Lucy Covington Center further demonstrates the university's commitment to Native American communities in the Pacific Northwest and across the nation. With the center, the university aims to enhance its practices to recruit, nurture, and retain Native American students, and to prepare Native American students for careers and for leadership. "The Lucy Covington Center will be instrumental in shaping the next generation of tribal leaders who will continue, in the spirit of Lucy Covington, to protect and enhance the welfare of their tribes" ("About Eastern Washington University").

Lucy Friedlander Covington was raised by two generations of parents, and her commitment to family, community, and homeland will inform generations of Native American students and leaders who can continue Lucy's work to preserve and protect tribal rights and tribal lives. She was proud to be Indian, and those who fulfill her legacy would make her proud, too.



**Outline map, Colville Confederated Tribes reservation boundaries**  
Courtesy Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservations



**Map, aboriginal range of 12 Colville Confederated Tribes**

Courtesy U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs

**Sources:**

Laurie Arnold, *Bartering with the Bones of Their Dead: The Colville Confederated Tribes and Termination* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 114, 124; Jim Camden, "EWU to Build Campus Center Named for Native American Activist Lucy Covington," *The Spokesman-Review*, November 25, 2015 (<http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2015/nov/25/ewu-to-build-campus-center-named-for-native-american/#/0>); Justus Caudell, "Honoring Lucy Covington 'Who Changed the Course of American Indian History through Courageous and Selfless Style of Leadership,'" *Tribal Tribune*, November 24, 2015 ([http://www.tribaltribune.com/news/article\\_29c658b4-931f-11e5-abe3-3b6e6a421f1f.html](http://www.tribaltribune.com/news/article_29c658b4-931f-11e5-abe3-3b6e6a421f1f.html)); Resolution 2015-719, Colville Confederated Tribes, Colville Business Council, Special Session, December 3, 2015, (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/572d09c54c2f85ddda868946/t/57aca586d2b857d3904db43d/1470932359482/Resolution+Index+12-03-15.pdf>); "About Eastern Washington University," Eastern Washington University Foundation website accessed June 25, 2017 (<https://sites.ewu.edu/foundation/2015/08/24/lucy-covington-center/>); "Lucy Covington Legacy" (video), Eastern Washington University Foundation website accessed June 15, 2017 (<https://sites.ewu.edu/foundation/2015/08/24/lucy-covington-center/>); "Lucy Covington: Native American Indian" (video), Encyclopedia Britannica Education Corporation (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwQ9Wxk7JWyQcIFIS3RncmVOMEU/view>); John Fahey, *Saving the Reservation: Joe Garry and the Battle to Be Indian* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 195; Alexandra Harmon, "Covington, Lucy Friedlander," in *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary, Completing the Twentieth Century* ed. by Susan Ware (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Jerry Klinger, "Lucy Friedlander Covington Preserved Native American Life," *San Diego Jewish World*, December 11, 2016

(<http://www.sdjewishworld.com/2016/12/11/colville-reservation-owes-its-continued-existence-to-jewish-descendant-lucy-friedlander-covington/>); Arthur Herman, *Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II* (New York: Random House, 2012), 176-91; Donald L. Parman, "The Indian and the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (February 1971), pp. 39-56; Don Popejoy and Penny Hutten, *Early Spokane* (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2010); Paulette Running Wolf and Lucy Banks, "Covington, Lucy Friedlande," in *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* ed. by Gretchen Bataille and Laurie Lisa (New York: Routledge, 2001); Richard Scheuerman and Michael Finley, "Columbia Plateau Family Lineages, 2008," R. D. Scheuerman Wordpress website accessed June 15, 2017 (<https://rdscheuerman.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/columbia-plateau-family-lineages.pdf>); "Women in the Shipyards," Oregon History Project website accessed June 22, 2017 (<https://oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/african-american-and-women-workers-in-world-war-ii/#.WVS0I98a1s2w>); Charles Trimble, "Unsung Heroes: Lucy Covington, Termination Dragon Slayer ..." *Lakota Country Times*, June 10, 2010 ([http://www.lakotacountrytimes.com/news/2010-10-06/Voices/Unsung\\_Heroes\\_Lucy\\_Covington\\_Termination\\_dragon\\_sl.html](http://www.lakotacountrytimes.com/news/2010-10-06/Voices/Unsung_Heroes_Lucy_Covington_Termination_dragon_sl.html)); *Indians: Freedom from Federal Supervision*, 67 Stat. B132 (1953); Charles F. Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006) 180-81; *Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act*, 88 Stat. 2203, 25 U.S.C. ch. 14 (1975).

## Lucy Covington Short Bio

# EWU to name campus center for Native American activist

By Jim Camden-review, Associated Press | Posted - Nov. 26, 2015 at 8:10 a.m.

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Without Lucy Covington, there would probably be no Colville Confederated Tribes today, and no Eastern Washington reservation for the 12 bands that make up the confederation. Some other reservations in the United States might be gone, too, and their tribal members scattered.

Covington, whose name will be on a new center for Native American students at Eastern Washington University, rose from a reluctant candidate for the Colville Tribal Business Council to a nationally recognized leader for Indian rights and sovereignty and an advocate who had the ear of powerful congressmen. Along the way she encouraged young Native American men and women to stay in school to get the kind of education they'd need to be future leaders.

She led the fight against a federal policy called termination, which offered members of Native American tribe's cash payments in exchange for their reservation lands. And she won.

"Without Lucy, we'd be done," said Mel Tonasket, a former Colville tribal chairman and longtime council member. "She not only saved us, she influenced a lot of other young leaders."

Among those young leaders was Tonasket himself, who tried to decline when Covington asked him to run for tribal council, saying he was no politician and had even been too shy to speak up in class as a boy. She recruited him anyway. He won that race in 1970, and would go on to be tribal chief, learn to lobby state and national officials and head the National Congress of American Indians.

Born Lucy Friedlander in Nespelem in 1910, she grew up on the reservation, attending the local school and learning from her parents to harvest the bounty of the area's berries, roots, fish and game. She remained home when an older brother and sister attended a school for Native American children in Tacoma, but later went to the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. In the early 1930s, she hired on as a cook for Civilian Conservation Corps crews building roads on the reservation, her niece Barbara Aripa said.

She was serving meals to workers at a big table in a CCC camp when she met John Covington, another tribal member who was being taught to operate heavy equipment by her brother, George Friedlander. Lucy and John were married in 1936, and settled in Nespelem until World War II started, when they moved to the Portland area to work as welders in the shipyards. John eventually joined the Seabees, but after the war they returned to the reservation and started a ranch.

George Friedlander was a member of the tribal business council in the 1950s when Congress was pushing the termination concept. If a majority of the members of a recognized tribe would agree to give up their reservation and programs from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service, the federal government would give each member a cash payment. With unemployment running high on the reservation, many Colville members talked of taking the payment, including a majority of the tribal council; Friedlander and some of the elders argued against it.

But George Friedlander had a bad heart, said his daughter Aripa, and the doctor said he should step away from the council. Friedlander asked his sister Lucy to take his place. At first, she said no, there was too much work on the ranch. After Friedlander promised to help with the ranch, Lucy Covington agreed to run. She won and continued to argue against termination.

In the beginning, she was in the minority. When the council was invited to testify before Congress, pro-terminators went at tribal expense, but they wouldn't pay for Covington. She sold cows from the ranch to pay her own way.

In 1969, she recruited Tonasket and some other anti-terminators to run for council, and they won, too. The 14-member council was split 7-7 on termination, and Covington told Tonasket they would nominate one of the pro-terminators as chairman. Why would we do that? he asked.

Because the chairman only votes in case of a tie, so the anti-terminators would have a 7-6 majority on those matters, she explained. They staved off termination until Congress did away with the policy in 1975.

"Our land is like our body," Tonasket remembers her saying. It provides sustenance and healing. "Why would we give that up for money?"

After a year on the council, Covington convinced Tonasket to run for chairman, and when he won, had him spend time in Olympia learning about state government and making contacts with legislators. Later, she took him to Washington, D.C., with orders to bring a notebook and pencil. She had him take notes as they met with congressmen and federal officials. At the end of each day, she'd go over the notes with him and point out things he had missed.

"She said, 'You sit, you listen, you learn. Someday your people will have to depend on it,'" Tonasket recalled.

They followed that pattern for two years during trips to the nation's capital. He recalls at one point they arrived late for a hearing being chaired by Warren Magnuson, then the powerful senior senator from Washington. Maggie interrupted the speaker to welcome Covington to the room, and the two bantered for a while, almost flirting, before the hearing resumed.

On the third year she told Tonasket to put his notebook away because he was ready and "I'm not always going to be here."

Covington was a force in the regional tribal alliance and active in the National Congress of American Indians. She never served as president, but she was a commanding presence at the meetings.

One year, a group from the more radical American Indian Movement came to the national meeting, went to the stage and seized the microphone. They talked for about 10 minutes before Covington walked to the stage and took the microphone, telling them "OK, you've had your talk. We've got to get to business," Tonasket recalled. They said thank you and left.

"Even AIM respected Lucy's battles," he said.

On the reservation, Covington served a stint as tribal chairman, the first woman to hold that post. A board member for the National American Indian Scholarship Committee, Covington worked with young people, urging them to stay in school, get the training for the jobs the tribes would need. She had a big heart, and young people with sad stories would often stop by the ranch asking "Mama Lucy" for a handout, Aripa said. She'd give them money even when she knew they weren't likely to pay her back or return for the promised work.

"She could be so gentle and kind to people," recalled Aripa, who served as her secretary for years. "But if she needed, she could put them in their place."

Her lungs, however, began to give out. In 1980, her breathing was labored and she sometimes struggled to speak. She lost her re-election to her council seat and was later hospitalized. Tribal leaders brought her home to Nespelem, where she died in 1982.

Aripa and Tonasket think Covington would be proud that EWU is honoring her legacy by naming its center for Native American students after her.

"Not very many people like this come around in your lifetime," Tonasket said.